DIMITRIE CANTEMIR" CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY IN BUCHAREST

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the *"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University* (DCCU) in 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 for Education (Law 1/2011) 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 and international 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.

Rather than using a standardised, externally defined set of criteria, 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 the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University's profile

"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University (DCCU) was founded in 1990 as a private non-profit university under the name "'Dimitrie Cantemir' Independent University". In 1994, it changed its name to "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University. DCCU was accredited on 30 April 2002 by Law No. 238/2002 as a higher education institution, a legal entity of private law with public utility status. DCCU operates under the auspices of the "Dimitrie Cantemir" Culture Association.

Important point to note is that private universities in Romania do not receive any public funding for their operation; their income is based on the student fees, on the financial contribution of their founders and on any other external revenues. However, they are allowed to apply for grants from public funds (i.e. for research). In general, the specificities of the private universities in Romania are outlined in articles 227-231 of the Romanian Law for Education (Law 1/2011).

DCCU has been developed over the years as a network-type institution which now includes 16 faculties in six Romanian cities: nine faculties in Bucharest and seven faculties in five other Romanian cities, Cluj-Napoca (2), Braşov (2), Timişoara (1), Constanţa (1) and Sibiu (1). The reason for this development has not been analysed in any of the official documents of DCCU or in the SER. The only reference to it was made by the top management of the institution in its meeting with the evaluation team. The stated aim is to provide academic staff with motivation and opportunity to engage in new (private) initiatives in their home towns – i.e. in other campuses than the one in Bucharest – and young people to pursue higher education near their homes.

According to the SER (Appendix 3), the 16 faculties currently provide 27 Bachelor programmes in 19 majors and 30 Master programmes in 23 majors. The Bachelor programmes can be done both full-time and part-time, while the Master programmes are only full-time. Furthermore (SER, p. 4), three PhD programmes in law, accounting, and history were submitted to ARACIS for accreditation with the aim to start operating in 2013. However, in the meeting with the vice-rectors, the evaluation team was informed that they were rejected. Further analysis on the establishment of doctoral schools and the development of PhD programmes will follow in the corresponding chapter in sub-section 2.2 of the present report.

One of the characteristics of the above faculties and study programmes is the duplication of scientific disciplines in many cases. There are three Faculties of Tourism and Commercial Management in Bucharest, Constanţa and Timişoara (plus one more Faculty of Geography of

Tourism in Sibiu). There are also two Law Faculties (Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca), two Faculties of Finance, Banking and Accounting (Bucharest and Braşov) and two Faculties of International Economic Relations (Bucharest and Braşov). Similarly, many of the abovementioned 19 Bachelor majors are also duplicated within the 27 Bachelor programmes and many of the 23 Master majors are duplicated within the 30 Master programmes.

Eighteen out of the above 27 Bachelor programmes are accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), while eight others are temporarily authorised (according to the Law 1/2011, article 120, clause 2). The remaining Bachelor programme is accredited as full-time and temporarily authorised as part-time. All 30 Master programmes are accredited.

In parallel, in 2011 the Bachelor programmes that existed by that time were subject to the ranking procedure of all study programmes in Romania according to the Law 1/2011 and were ranked in categories C and D (third and fourth from the top out of a total of five categories). Furthermore, in 2011 DCCU was subject to the classification procedure of all Romanian universities as required by the Law 1/2011, and was classified in the category of "universities mainly for education". Meanwhile, the institutional accreditation of DCCU was reconfirmed by ARACIS in 2010 rating DCCU for the period 2010-2015 as a "university of high confidence rating" which is the highest distinction granted to universities.

According to the SER (Appendices 6 and 7), there were 12,764 Bachelor students (7 337 full-time and 5 427 part-time) and 2 526 Master students in the academic year 2012-2013 in DCCU. Out of these students, 3 465 Bachelor students (27.1%) and 815 Master students (32.2%) were studying in faculties that were not located in Bucharest. The percentage of full-time Bachelor students studying in faculties not located in Bucharest was lower (23.9%) than the one of the respective part-time students (31.5%).

The number of Bachelor students of DCCU has decreased in the five-year period from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013 from 16,652 to 12,764 (23.3%). On the contrary, the number of Master students has slightly increased from 2 343 to 2 526 (7.8%). The decrease in the number of Bachelor students comes mainly from the decrease in the number of part-time students (35.5%). Furthermore, a significant decrease (54.9%) in the overall number of Bachelor students in faculties not located in Bucharest was observed, while the Bachelor students studying in Bucharest slightly increased by 3.5%. Similarly, the increase in the number of Master students comes from the number of Master students studying in Bucharest (22.9%), while the Master students in faculties not located in Bucharest decreased by 14.3%.

According to the same Appendices 6 and 7 of the SER, in the academic year 2012-2013, the number of teaching staff was 830 (572 for Bachelor programmes and 258 for the Master programmes). Reliable conclusions on the "students to teaching staff ratios" cannot be deduced from the above data because of the significant number of part-time teaching staff (about 35%), called "associate teaching staff" according to Romanian legislation. However, it

is worth noting that the number of teaching staff has increased since 2008-2009 from 512 to 572 (11.2%) for Bachelor programmes and from 116 to 258 (122.4%) for Master programmes, resulting in an overall increase of 32.2% of teaching staff in the corresponding five-year period.

As mentioned previously in this section, one of the reasons for DCCU to develop regionally as a network-type institution was to offer the opportunity to young population for higher studies in their own places. In this regard, the attractiveness of the various faculties of DCCU to students from the same geographical area is an important indicator for assessing the achievement of the above goal. In Appendices 5.1-5.6 data are given for the attractiveness of the faculties in each one of the six areas where DCCU operates. These data refer to the number of first-year Bachelor students enrolled in 2008-2009 and in 2012-2013. From these data it can be derived that the percentage of students who have enrolled in the place of their origin is high enough (over 65% with the exception of Sibiu where it is 56%). However, this percentage shows a decline between 2008-2009 and 2012-2013 for all regions except Bucharest (e.g. from 71.3% to 52.5% in Cluj-Napoca, from 83.9% to 64.9% in Timişoara or from 90.1% to 79.5% in Constanţa, while in Bucharest the enrollment remained at 66%).

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the self-evaluation group consisting of eleven members who prepared the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which was made available to the team with the related annexes on 22 April 2013, in due time before the first evaluation visit.

The evaluation team appreciated the work done in the SER, which covered almost all issues and was supplemented with appendixes and annexes also including the SWOT analysis for the university. The evaluation team considered the SER a comprehensive, informative, frank and critical analysis, which reflected the strong commitment of DCCU to improvement, presenting at the same time the vision and the expectations of DCCU for the future.

The two site visits

The two site visits of the evaluation team to DCCU took place from 20 to 22 May 2013 and from 27 to 30 October 2013. During the visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of DCCU with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders, namely:

- The leadership of DCCU;
- The leadership, members of the academic staff and students from six (out of the 17) faculties of DCCU, all located in Bucharest, but also with representatives of two faculties located in Timişoara and Constanţa;
- Members of the Senate;
- The deans of all faculties;

- Student representatives from the Senate and the faculty councils;
- Representatives from all research institutes and research centres;
- Key persons from all quality assurance structures of the institution;
- Key persons from basic administration departments;
- Mobile and international students (both incoming and outgoing);
- External partners.

There were also intense and in-depth discussions with the Rector, Professor Corina Adriana Dumitrescu, with the President of the University and the Administration Board, Professor Momcilo Luburici, and with the self-evaluation group. Therefore, the evaluation team had the opportunity to meet the broad spectrum of actors at DCCU. All meetings and discussions were efficiently organised by the vice-rector for education, Prof. Victor Munteanu, who acted as the liaison person between the university and the evaluation team.

The evaluation team would like to express its gratitude to the people of DCCU for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues during our meetings. Finally, the evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Professor Corina Adriana Dumitrescu, and her team for the organisation before and during our visits and for their warm hospitality.

In between the two visits the university provided the evaluation team with requested additional documentation.

The evaluation report

The present evaluation report is harmonised with the aims of IEP as outlined above. In this respect, it focuses on the current strengths and weaknesses of DCCU regarding its capacity for change, in view of the surrounding opportunities and threats; it expresses a number of recommendations that may be taken into account for the future development of the university.

The evaluation report takes into account all the data provided to the evaluation team in the SER and corresponding additional information. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the overall analysis, the comments and the recommendations are based on two intense but rather short site visits to the university: a two-day first visit and a three-day second visit. The recommendations, together with the corresponding reasoning and analysis, appear underlined in the text of the evaluation report, while a summary of recommendations is presented in the last section of the report. Finally, it should be noted that many ideas of the evaluation team appear in bold and italics; these are not all recommendations but reflections that DCCU may wish to consider.

1.4 The evaluation team

The evaluation team (hereinafter "the team") consisted of the following members:

- Virgilio Meira Soares, former Rector, University of Lisbon, Portugal, as team chair
- Vaidotas Viliūnas, Principal, Marijampole College, Lithuania
- Karol I. Wysokiński, former Vice-Rector, Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin, Poland
- Dan Derricott, Master student, University of York, United Kingdom
- Liudvika Leisyte, Senior researcher, CHEPS, University of Twente, The Netherlands, as team coordinator (first site visit)
- Dionyssis Kladis, professor emeritus, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as team coordinator (second site visit)

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Philosophy of the DCCU: Norms and values/Vision - mission - strategy

According to the Strategic Plan 2010-2013 (p. 2),

> The vision of DCCU focuses on excellence, competitiveness and social responsibility, as an important university centred on education and research, holding the role of a leader in promoting sustainable development, fully integrated in the European area of higher education and research, for the benefit of the national and international community.

In this regard (SER, Appendix 11), "DCCU intends to be viewed as one of the strongest higher education and research centres in Romania and appraised for the manner it responds creatively to the significant changes faced by our society, by combining harmoniously and innovatively the important Romanian academic and university values and traditions".

The above are epitomised in the logo of DCCU: "An elite university for elite students" (SER, p. 10).

Based on the above vision,

> DCCU, as a private higher education institution, was designed and structured to meet urgent requirements of political, economic and social significance in the field of human resources development, by training professionals for the public and private sectors whose professional expertise should ensure, according to European standards, the capacity to assume management and leadership responsibilities in the process of reforms and modernisation Romania is undertaking. (SER, Appendix 11)

Consequently,

> The mission of UCDC (DCCU) is to train, specialise and improve higher education professionals, by means of a learning process designed to foster thinking and creativity, and to provide graduates real opportunities in the competition in the free labour market. The mission of the university is to provide high quality education and research in order to train higher education professionals capable to work in national and international companies and bodies according to the occupational standards required by domestic and EU employers. (Strategic plan 2010-2013, p. 2)

Following the above vision and mission statements, DCCU has developed its Strategic Plan 2010-2013, focusing on the following general strategic objectives (SER, Appendix 11):

> "- To pursue continuing modernisation of the education processes by improvement of teaching methodology, education plans and syllabi, closely linked to the society developments and requirements;

- To implement strategic university management and an efficient planning process;

- To assume the quality principle in all activities undertaken within the University;

- To develop scientific research and to foster active involvement of all teaching staff and partnerships with Romanian and foreign universities".

Furthermore, the team notes two additional statements from the SER, which should be considered complementary to the above general strategic objectives:

Academic quality and its permanent enhancement are among the key elements of the Strategic Plan of the university, as well as the main pillar of the university commitment towards academic excellence; (SER, p. 10)

The university aims at an integrated approach, to reach a good balance between the teaching, practical training and research processes. (SER, p. 9)

Finally, a statement from the SER (Appendix 11) outlines that client-orientation is considered to be one of the main priorities of the university.

The mission, the vision and the strategic objectives of DCCU, as outlined above, were discussed in depth during most of the meetings of the team. The overall impression of the team is that DCCU is a young university that developed a set of faculties and programmes that give it a special position among the private universities in Romania. Furthermore, the university has a clear vision and a well-established mission and it is based on values that give it a unique identity that is reflected in the statement appearing in the University Charter (article 5), according to which "in all its activities the University promotes the ideals of the Christian faith, culture and morality in the spirit of the principle of multiculturalism."

DCCU is in the process of developing its new strategic plan. This is an opportunity for reconsidering its strategic objectives and its mission. The context in Romanian society and in the labour market has changed in recent years: the accession to the European Union, the austerity measures that Romania adopted as a response to the economic crisis, its recent prospects of economic growth are all marks of a changing environment. It may happen, therefore, that the stated objectives and mission do not meet external demands in the same way they used to. As a consequence, it is advisable to reconsider the mission in view of the abovementioned changes.

Regarding aspirations for the future, the team was informed during its meetings of some ideas for the new strategic plan. Among them is the establishment of a Faculty of Medicine, which is a major project for any university. It would be based (at least for the beginning) on cooperation with other hospitals. Discussions took place regarding the potential parallel development of Faculties of Pharmacy and Nursing. Other ideas brought up were the development of two or three study programmes that would be taught in English. Also,

building partnerships and the establishment of joint programmes feature among the ideas to be included in the new strategic plan of the university.

These specific ideas should be viewed in accordance and in parallel to the long-term vision of the leadership to transform DCCU into a big European university, an international university that would be oriented to the Eurasian region within the next 10 years, and also to the medium-term vision to be among the best Romanian universities within the next five years.

These ideas complement the vision and mission of the university as outlined earlier in this report. Furthermore, it should be added here that in most meetings during the site visits, a spirit and attitude of wanting to aim for excellence were present.

The team had, therefore, the opportunity to observe the high aspirations that the leadership and the staff of DCCU have for the future. Some of these aspirations seem difficult to achieve in the short- or even medium-term. Although these aspirations are legitimate, it would be advisable to establish a step-by-step approach, setting clear targets, well-defined and measurable milestones, means for monitoring the progress, assessing the risks and estimating the costs, as it will be analysed later in this section of the report. And this approach goes along with the need for prioritisation of objectives and actions, since it may happen that not everything planned is possible. In this regard, the team would recall a statement made by one interviewee: "We want to brand our university in some specific fields. We should identify 3-4 areas in our university to be recognised as areas of excellence, as we cannot be good in everything." The team endorses such an approach.

As mentioned earlier in this section, DCCU has high aspirations for the future. However, the team found that some of these aspirations are over-ambitious. This appears to be the case with research, an issue that seems to be a sensitive one within the DCCU. DCCU considers its assessment in the classification process unfair arguing that it does not reflect its research activity and performance, especially given its "high confidence" qualification granted by ARACIS in 2010, only one year before the classification exercise.

In this context, the team found a statement made by one interviewee particularly interesting as it may explain the overall attitude in DCCU in this regard: "some of the objectives of DCCU may be over-ambitious but this should be considered as an exaggeration caused by the unfair classification".

The team approaches the current evaluation of DCCU in the context of IEP from its own perspective. For the team it is clear that a university cannot exist without research. However, the balance between education and research, the relative weight that each component deserves in the university's operation, as well as the type of research that is performed in a university, are top strategic issues for every university. They define the specific identity and profile of each university and its position within the whole spectrum of institutional differentiation nationwide.

The team considers it necessary for DCCU to clarify its identity and profile as analysed above. As a private non-profit university, for its existence and sustainability, it has to primarily appeal to students (nationally and internationally). Its attractiveness depends mainly on the quality and the diversity of its educational offer. DCCU should primarily aim for excellence in education.

Nevertheless, a university focusing on education cannot exist without research; even though it can be a good university without excellence in research, research-related activities should play a considerable role in its overall function. Therefore, DCCU should ensure research engagement of its entire academic staff aiming to enhance its educational potential and improve its educational programmes. The university should enhance its capacity to submit competitive research projects that will bring external revenue and enhance its capacity for applied research; it should enhance its capacity for developmental projects and consultancy services that would reinforce its links with its external partners, bringing additional external revenue and ensuring opportunities for its students (e.g. internships) and its graduates (employability). Concluding, the team recommends that DCCU reconsider its strategy so that it aims to be an excellent university for education which, for that purpose, requires developing research activities that will strengthen its educational potential and improve its educational programmes. Section 4 of the present report provides more detailed recommendations to strengthen research activities.

Considering the aspirations and the plans of DCCU as outlined in this section of the report, the evaluation team recommends that DCCU clarify its strategic objectives and adapt them to its real potential and to its real strengths on the one hand and, on the other hand, to the existing conditions and constraints. In other words, DCCU has to combine ambitions with realistic goals.

Apart from its objectives, the strategic plan of a university should also be assessed with regard to its technical characteristics, i.e. its internal structure and the processes that ensure its effective implementation. The abovementioned general strategic objectives are divided into specific objectives, which are outlined in the Strategic Plan 2010-2013 (SER, Appendix 8). The implementation of the strategic objectives is scheduled to be achieved through 12 programmes assimilating all objectives. Apart from the objectives, each programme also includes the means in order to achieve the objectives.

For the year-by-year implementation of the Strategic Plan 2010-2013, the programmes are transformed into an annual operational plan. The 2013 Operational Plan (SER, Appendix 10) contains operational objectives/actions to be implemented in 2013, but it also contains the deadline for every objective/action and the respective responsibilities assumed for the implementation or monitoring of every objective/action within DCCU.

In this respect, it can be said that there is reasonable relevance between the strategic plan and the operational plan. However, the 2013 Operational Plan of DCCU is not a clear action

plan, since it mixes objectives with actions. The implementation of a strategic plan requires an action plan with concrete actions which should be prioritised, cost-estimated, assessed regarding their potential risk and put into a time schedule within the validity period of the strategic plan with well-defined and measurable milestones. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that DCCU develop an action plan with the above characteristics, which furthermore should be associated with properly quantified key performance indicators through which the achievement of the strategic objectives will be monitored.

The team notes with satisfaction the analogous reference in the SER (p. 25) in the context of the SWOT analysis concerning one of the proposed actions to address identified deficiencies:

> to implement and monitor a set of indicators and performance criteria to evaluate the quality of UCDC (DCCU) university management, continuing education and training, scientific research, partnership with students, relationships with the economic and social environment (pursuit of excellence in the individual didactic processes).

Although the team endorses these actions proposed in the SER, it is not sure whether the necessity for this kind of an action plan is fully acknowledged within DCCU. For example, a more simplistic approach was presented to the team by the leadership, describing the implementation of the strategic plan as a more or less routine affair in which the operational plan does not need to contain concrete actions and indicators. In this approach the indicators are obvious, the top management of the university is aware of them and the implementation of the strategic plan is done step-by-step through weekly meetings. For that reason the team insists on the above recommendation.

Furthermore, it is not clear how the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the strategic goals and the key performance indicators are monitored. In the SER (p. 22) it is written that the achievement of the strategic objectives is discussed by the Senate Office (cf. p. 17) and is subject to approval by the University Senate. In the same page, it is written that "the substantiation, development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and adjustment/enhancement of DCCU strategy are constant concerns of the top management."

In this respect,

> there is an annual presentation of reports during a plenary meeting of the Senate, to emphasise to what extent the objectives of the strategy were achieved, the causes generating dysfunctions and deviations, strategic and tactical recommendations related to causes generating strengths and weaknesses.

However, overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the strategic objectives needs to be a continuous and permanent procedure and, of course, monitoring should also cover the achievement of the key performance

indicators. In this regard, the above bodies and processes mentioned in the SER cannot play this monitoring role. <u>The team therefore recommends to DCCU that this task be assigned to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should also have the task of assessing the validity of the strategic goals and the respective key performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.</u>

The last recommendation in this section is linked to DCCU's procedures for strategy development. From its discussions with the university and faculty leadership, the team noted that the Strategic Plan 2010-2013 was developed in a more or less top-down manner. There was some debate, but it was not very intense. The purposes that call for such a top-down approach in a private university are understandable. However, <u>the team recommends that DCCU should consider the establishment of a participatory, bottom-up strategy development, beginning with the development of the new strategic plan. The team believes that DCCU should benefit from this bottom-up approach, which should extend ownership of the strategic goals to the wider university community with the aim to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the achievement of the goals</u>. The establishment of such a participatory bottom-up procedure, in connection with the previously mentioned procedures and structures for the implementation of the strategic plan, would ensure the sustainability of the overall change process of the university.

2.2 Governance and decision-making

The Romanian higher education institutions follow a dual governance model with the parallel existence of two collective management bodies, the Academic Senate and the Administration Board. In this model the Administration Board ensures the operational management of the universities and implements the strategic decisions of the Academic Senate, which is considered the highest decision-making body at university level.

According to the University Charter (article 19), the Administration Board of DCCU consists of up to seven members. The president of the Administration Board is ex-officio the president of the university, while currently the rector is also the vice-president of the Board. It should be noted that the current membership of the Administration Board of DCCU has been determined by the president of the university (University Charter, article 19); only after the term of office of the current members of the Administration Board has been completed, "the members of the new Administration Board of DCCU shall be appointed by its founders and it shall fulfil its prerogatives according to the law in force" (University Charter, article 20).

In terms of the Senate, according to the University Charter (article 13) the maximum number of members of the Senate is 55. According to the Annual Report of Internal Assessment (July 2013), the number of Senate members in the academic year 2012-2013 was 52 — with 14 students among them. The Senate in DCCU has its own operative body, which is called "Senate Office" and comprises the rector, the vice-rectors, the chancellor, the deans and the

president of the Senate Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance in Education (University Charter, article 18). In DCCU the rector is also president of the Senate (University Charter, article 22), which to the team seems to be inconsistent with the Law 1/2011 (article 208, clause 2).

In summary, the current president of the university is at the same time president of the Board (ex-officio) and member of the Senate, while the current rector is at the same time vice-president of the Board and president of the Senate. It should be noted that these two persons are the main founders of DCCU. The concentration of the overall governance power in the hands of two persons has resulted in the establishment of a strong leadership of the university at central level, which has helped it to develop. At the same time, it has prevented potential conflicts between the Senate and the Board and avoided any overlapping, given also the fact that the distinction of the responsibilities of the two bodies according both to the Law and the University Charter seems to be clear enough. However, and despite these positive remarks, the team believes that developing procedures leading to more shared responsibilities would favour cohesion within the university and increase the sense of ownership of staff and students.

Furthermore, the representation of all faculties in the Senate ensures for an effective vertical internal communication and flow of information in both directions (top-down and bottom-up), even though this federation-type composition of the Senate does not facilitate the development of an institutional attitude among its members. In its meeting with the deans of all faculties the team realised that there is good cooperation between them and the central management of the university. The deans have regular meetings with the central management for coordination purposes. It is worth noting that, according to the University Charter (article 25), financial autonomy is assigned to all faculties located in cities other than Bucharest (except the one in Constanţa). In these cases, autonomy is executed through the establishment of an administration board at faculty level complementing the operation of the Faculty Council.

The governance and decision-making potential of DCCU would be reinforced by a more vital involvement of students and external stakeholders. The difference according to the Law 1/2011 between public and private institutions regarding students' participation in governance has to do with the Administration Board where the Law does not provide for students' participation in private institutions. This different approach in the private sector is understandable. However, the team believes that DCCU would benefit from the participation of a student representative in the Administration Board, just as the public universities benefit from such participation as stipulated by the Law.

DCCU would also benefit from a more coordinated participation of students at central level. For example, the student members participate in the Senate representing their faculties. Each faculty has one student representative in the Senate who is elected by the students of the

faculty by a secret vote after presenting his/her programme. This results in student representatives in the Senate having a stronger affiliation to their faculty. However, the team considers it important that their participation at institutional level be characterised by an institutional attitude which should be added to the already existing "faculty attitude". The establishment of a student council at central level would help students in building this institutional attitude and would also help in making the involvement of students more active, substantial and helpful. The team recommends that DCCU encourage and facilitate its students to that aim.

Finally, the team recommends that DCCU pay due consideration to the involvement of external stakeholders in its governance structures and procedures. The involvement of external stakeholders should become normal practice both at faculty level and institutional level. Their involvement at faculty level is needed in order to ensure the relevance of the curricula with the demands of society and in order to provide students with opportunities to participate in internships, placements etc. as well as to prepare future graduates for employment. Their involvement at institutional level will help DCCU to increase its partnerships with society and, furthermore, to improve its visibility and its reputation.

Management and financing

The income of private universities in Romania is based on student fees, the financial contribution of their founders and on any other external revenue. However, they are allowed to apply for grants from public funds (i.e. for research). According to the SER (Appendices 20 and 17), the total income of DCCU in 2011 amounted to 44,104,000 lei, of which 40,589,000 lei (92.0%) came from student fees.

From the above total income, an amount of 36,791,000 lei was used for covering the overall operational expenses of the university, while an amount of 7,313,000 lei was reserved for investments. An amount of 27,112,000 lei (74%) was used for salaries, while 9,043,000 lei (25%) were used for current costs and maintenance. Furthermore, it should be noted that during the period 2008-2013, the teaching staff participated in research and other projects that brought 11,103,000 lei to the university from various external sources (national and international). The distribution of this amount over the five years represents an additional 2,221,000 lei per year. However, it amounts to only 5% of the total income for 2011, which is a very small share for research activities.

Since 92% of the total income of DCCU comes from student fees, the number of students enrolled in the university is very important for its financial situation. The continuous decrease in the number of students since 2009 (as discussed in section 1) is a real threat for DCCU. The number of Bachelor students has decreased from 17,980 in 2009 to 12,764 in 2012, corresponding to a decrease rate of 29%. The crucial and more worrisome issue here is that the decrease rate rises from year to year, being 8.1% from 2009 to 2010, 10.7% from 2010 to 2011 and 13.5% from 2011 to 2012. In the SWOT analysis presented in the SER (pp. 23-25),

the prospect of a decreasing number of students is listed among the threats and is related to five factors: a) to the global economic crisis; b) to decreasing demographic trend; c) to a decrease in the standard of living in Romania; d) to difficult access to higher education for young people from rural low-income families; e) to low number of secondary school graduates.

Considering this context, DCCU should develop a specific strategy to deal with the consequences of this threat. It would imply that it has to consolidate and expand the sources of funding. This can be done by widening its educational activity in order to attract new student categories. The development of alternative educational offers, e.g. short cycle programmes, or even offering courses or entire study programmes in English is one solution. This is something that the leadership has already included in their ideas for the new strategic plan. The development and implementation of an internationalisation strategy for the Eurasia region mentioned previously, can also act as an alternative source of revenue for DCCU in the medium-term.

Furthermore, the team recommends that DCCU increase its efforts to be more competitive in attracting research funds nationally and internationally (overheads included), such as European funds (social, structural, developmental) or to strengthen its contractual partnerships with economic and business entities in Romania and elsewhere. The development of a Faculty of Medicine, as discussed earlier in this report, can also be an alternative source of income for DCCU at least in the long-term, even though it will increase the cost in the short-term. Finally, the team recommends that the university utilise alumni associations to obtain some external support at different levels (promoting the university, diversifying funding, establishing partnerships, etc.)

Apart from the need to find alternative financial resources, the evaluation team proposes for DCCU to consider proceeding to a strategic cost-benefit analysis of its overall functioning, such as looking closer to its overall structure (faculties included).

Academic structure/academic organisation

As mentioned earlier, DCCU has been developed over the years in a decentralised and network-like structure with 16 faculties operating in six Romanian cities. The purpose of this development has been analysed and described earlier in the present report (section 1.2). The evaluation team would like to point out that it is not usual for a university to duplicate its structures and the scientific disciplines addressed by its Bachelor and Master programmes despite their geographical spread.

During the various meetings the team was not informed of any specific problems related to the above situation. It is understandable that this distribution aims to serve the educational profile of DCCU. However, the team would like to raise some issues to be considered regarding the existence of faculties and programmes with the same names. Do these study programmes have the same content? If yes, do they consider the need for coordination? How

are they coordinated? How is good practice exchanged between them? If no, what are the specific characteristics that diversify them? And what is the purpose of their parallel existence?

During its visit to the Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management in Bucharest (with participation of representatives of the parallel faculties from Timişoara and Constanţa), the team was informed that the three faculties have developed a culture of cooperation and sharing. Nevertheless, the team believes that the educational process in such cases should be coordinated in a formal way and formally enforced.. Furthermore, the impact of this dispersion and duplication on research in the respective fields should also be taken into consideration by DCCU. The fragmentation of the human potential and the respective infrastructure is a reality that undoubtedly affects both effectiveness and efficiency of research and it hampers the efforts for a critical mass of researchers to be ensured in all scientific fields. In this regard, the team recommends that DCCU analyse the existence of faculties and study programmes with same names and similar content in the same fields and in different locations with the aims of: (i) ensuring an effective and permanent cooperation between the teachers responsible for those study programmes (ii) facilitating the creation of a critical mass of researchers in as many scientific fields as possible, strengthening, in this way, the scientific potential of the university as a whole and (iii) finding common solutions to shared weaknesses.

PhD programmes and doctoral schools

Another important issue regarding the academic structure and organisation of DCCU is the lack of a doctoral school. According to the Law 1/2011, PhDs should be conducted in a doctoral school, and the precondition for establishing a doctoral school is the existence of at least three professors authorised to supervise PhDs (article 166, clause 1) at the same study domain for which the doctoral school is to be accredited.

In addition, there is a requirement that the Bachelor and Master programmes in the same study domain should be ranked in categories A and B, except if the university is classified as a "university mainly for education" when its respective Bachelor and Master study programmes should be ranked in category A (Ministerial Order No. 3850/02.05.2012 on the methodology for accreditation of doctoral schools, article 8 clause 1).

Currently, there are no PhD programmes operating in DCCU since it has no accredited doctoral schools in any of the study domains. However, in the SER (p. 5) it is mentioned that three PhD programmes (Law, Accounting, History) are waiting to be accredited by ARACIS, so that they can start operating in 2013-2014.

The team is aware that the establishment of doctoral schools and the development of PhD programmes are among the strategic goals of DCCU. This is a legitimate objective, which will allow it to improve its research capacity and reputation. However, the above-mentioned legal requirements are obstacles in the efforts of DCCU to establish doctoral schools and develop

PhD programmes. Therefore, the only thing that the evaluation team would suggest in this regard is that DCCU does its best to overcome the difficulties by all means at its disposal.

3. Teaching and learning

The team met committed students and academic staff in all meetings at both faculty and institutional level. Students appear to be satisfied with their studies, studying conditions, facilities and their relationship with their teachers. The academic staff also appear to be satisfied with the overall working conditions and the opportunities for their professional development. There appears to be a good atmosphere in the overall teaching and learning procedures, which is highly appreciated by the team. The next sections consider key issues related to teaching and learning in more details.

Student-centred learning

One issue is related to the concept of "student-centred learning". This is a top issue in the current debate on higher education policy, and it is a key feature of the European Higher Education Area. The team notes that the SER of DCCU (p. 12) refers repeatedly to "student-centred learning" as follows:

> In DCCU there is permanent concern for the identification, trial, implementation and assessment of didactic strategies, both from the viewpoint of teaching-learning-assessment processes (teamwork, case studies, development of integrated projects, brainstorming, roundtables, role play, simulations, guided discussions, academic debate), and of the means and resources (computer, laptop, beamer, application notebooks, dictionaries, collections of periodical publications).

> DCCU supports faculties to enhance their student-centred approaches and improve the teaching-learning-assessment processes by feedback records and monitoring student satisfaction with the learning environment and by yearly benchmarking.

> The main responsibility of the teaching staff is to create a student-centred environment. To this purpose, the teaching staff is permanently concerned with the traditional activities of communicating knowledge/information to the students, but also with training competences and skills.

These references present a rather clear and precise perception of "student-centred learning". However, the team was not in a position to evaluate whether the "student-centred learning" approach is implemented in a widespread and thorough manner, but the documentation demonstrates that the topic is high on the institutional agenda. The challenge is that "student-centred learning" cannot be approached as simply a technocratic issue of didactic methodology; attitudes must also change. Academic staff should be encouraged to apply the new approach, but it also requires changing the students' attitudes. The team recommends that DCCU build on the experience gained so far from the implementation of "student-centred learning", develop a basis for sharing any existing good practices and further improve its capacity and its performance in this regard.

Organisation of studies

Apart from "student-centred learning", a modern university should also consider the overall spectrum of Bologna reforms in teaching and learning. The implementation of the triptych "ECTS - learning outcomes - competences" is of key importance. It connects the teaching and learning processes with the content of the study programmes as well as ensuring that programmes respond to job market demands. In the SER (p. 12) it is mentioned that ECTS is properly used in the study programmes. It is also mentioned that the number of ECTS credits is part of information included in the syllabi. However, there is no reference at all to learning outcomes or competences and to their connection with ECTS credits. The team recommends that DCCU attach importance to the proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload in all study programmes.

The team would like to raise the issue of high dropout rates after the first year of Bachelor studies (average 30% according to SER, Appendix 6.5), which eventually reduces the educational efficiency of DCCU. The dropout phenomenon is present also in later years of studies, but not at the same rate. It was listed among the weaknesses in its SWOT analysis (SER, p. 24). In the various meetings, several reasons and explanations were put forward, but irrespective of the reasons for high dropout rates, DCCU has to cope with the problem, firstly by analysing the reasons and secondly by seeking effective solutions. The team recommends that DCCU analyse the causes and develop an effective, global and comprehensive policy in order to cope with the phenomenon of high dropout rates especially after the first year of studies and address them.

Curricula development

"Student-centred learning" is not only important for improving the quality of the educational offer, but also for redesigning it. The proper implementation of "student-centred learning" will provide the opportunity for curricular development and innovation on the basis of the learning outcomes approach, aiming for the enrichment of competences and skills (especially the generic ones) of graduates. Nowadays, curricular development and innovation is of utmost importance for DCCU in order for it to be in a position to meet the demands of the labour market (long-term or medium-term) but also of the potential students. Taking this into account, the team recommends that DCCU continuously develop and innovate its curricula adapting them to the demands of the labour market (long-term or medium-term), but also to the demands of the potential students, using as guiding elements the required competences and skills of the graduates on the basis of the appropriate learning outcomes. In addition, the team recommends that DCCU involve external stakeholders in developing, periodical reviewing and monitoring of study programmes. Stakeholder participation is an underpinning principle of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance, but it also can offer valuable information and indications regarding the relevance of curricula with employment.

The students in all their meetings with the evaluation team showed enthusiasm regarding the high quality of study programmes. The team noted the views expressed by the students and encourages the university to continue its efforts in ensuring the relevance of its curricula. The team recommends that DCCU initiate a benchmarking process against other institutions in Romania and Europe in order to continuously improve its study programmes.

Linking with alumni

Finally, the team recommends that DCCU involve its graduates in redesigning its educational offer and in curricular development and innovation to encourage the creation of an alumni culture. The establishment of an effective system of graduate tracking is a prerequisite to that end. DCCU may benefit in various ways from the creation of an alumni culture: systematic contact with graduates could be an effective feedback system for the relevance of curricula with employment; alumni can also be a source of revenue; and, finally, alumni can play an important role in the efforts of DCCU to improve its reputation and to increase its visibility.

Staff development

Reinforcing academic staff development is a sine qua non condition for the success of the efforts of DCCU in the field of teaching and learning. Traditional teaching methods may not be sufficient for staff development nowadays. The team recommends that DCCU establish staff development programmes so to support the staff in adopting "student centred learning" approach. These programmes should integrate the already existing programme for training teaching staff in pedagogical skills. Furthermore, the team recommends that one of the aims of these staff development programmes should be to improve the foreign language competences of the academic staff, in particular in English. This aim is linked to the strategic goal of the development of courses or entire programmes in English.

Although not linked to staff development, but to human resources policies, the team would like to question here the recruitment process of academic staff. As it was explained to the team, the general criteria are respected regarding the selection of academic staff. However, it was added by some interviewees that candidates who have graduated from DCCU are given preference in the selection process. This has resulted, according to those interviewees, in a situation where a significant percentage of teaching staff are DCCU graduates. This was presented as a policy giving the university the possibility to rely on its former students. However, this policy was not verified in the meetings with academic staff in the faculties. If it is the case that DCCU hires only its own graduates, then the team does not agree with this since it leads to the phenomenon of "inbreeding" which favours academic isolation of the higher education institutions. The team recommends that DCCU seriously reconsider this practice in order to avoid inbreeding.

4. Research

In the section related to strategic issues, the team discussed the position of research in DCCU from a strategic point of view, in particular the relationship and the balance between research and education. In the same section of the report, the team highlighted the general feeling of DCCU that the results of the 2011 classification process were unfair concerning the overall research activity and performance of the university. The team took into consideration data presented by the university on the funding and research performance of the institution and found that this data demonstrates that there are areas of research in the university that have been rather successful. It also considered the organisation of research at DCCU and the research strategy adopted by the Senate for the period 2009-2013.

The SER (p. 13) presents the main objectives of the research strategy as follows:

> The overall objective of the research strategy adopted by the university is to turn this higher education institution into a research-intensive university according to European standards. In order to achieve this objective, the university adopted the following objectives regarding research and transfer of knowledge:
>
> 1. To be among the top 10 Romanian universities in terms of research and innovation outcomes in 2013;
> 2. To maximise the effects of transfer of knowledge from the academic environment to the economic and social environment;
> 3. To integrate the university in the national and European research area;
> 4. To develop and improve the education process.

The team realises that the above objectives were too ambitious. It is questionable whether and to what extent the above objectives were achieved by the end of the period 2009-2013. Furthermore, from the evidence received and from the various meetings the team was not in a position to identify research-intensive activities. The "insufficient focus on intensive scientific research" was mentioned as one of the weaknesses in its SWOT analysis (SER, p. 24) and it was related to the inadequate involvement of academic staff in research.

The implementation of a research strategy requires resources and the team is aware of the existing restrictions in this regard. From the SER (Appendix 18) it can be seen that during the five-year period 2008-2013 a total amount of 11,702,000 lei (i.e. an average of 2,340,000 lei per year) was spent on research-related activities (including dissemination costs). This amount is slightly higher than the amount of 11,103,000 lei, additional income for the same period from various external sources as mentioned above (sub-section 2.2, chapter on management and financing). This amount of 2,340,000 lei per year on average is only 6.4% of the amount of the 36,791,000 lei used in 2011 for all other expenses. This is a clear indication of the low funding for research. The lack of adequate resources for research was pointed out

in many of the meetings. This means that under these conditions the objectives set in the research strategy seem over ambitious as, very likely, they cannot be achieved.

The team understands that a new research strategy for the period starting from 2014 is underway by the university. In this regard, the university should reconsider its research strategy combining ambitions with realism. It should make choices and set clear priorities regarding research. No university can be good at everything. Prioritisation in research will help the university to further improve and utilise its strong research areas and develop its research profile. The next step would be to build partnerships nationally or internationally in the specific priority areas.

The team would like to refer to the fourth objective of the Research Strategy 2009-2013, namely to develop and improve the education process. The team believes that linking research to education is an objective that DCCU should emphasis. DCCU should develop research activities that will strengthen its educational potential and improve its educational programmes with the engagement of the entire academic staff.

According to the SER (Appendix 17, table I), in the five-year period 2008-2013 there were 42 research projects undertaken in DCCU with a total contract value of around 11,103,000 lei. Ten of these projects were financed from EU funds (5,421,000 lei or 49%) while the remaining projects were financed from national funds (with the exception of one project funded by international company but with negligible value — 22,000 lei). The team could not consider this activity adequate in terms of volume since it covers a five-year period. An average number of two projects are financed from EU funds per year. Matters become even more complicated as it is not clear whether these projects are actual research projects and not developmental ones. There is a difference if EU funds come from the EU Framework Programmes (FP) funds or from other funds (structural, developmental or social). The team recommends that DCCU reinforce its efforts in order to increase research funding from international sources, not only with the aim to raise its income and enhance its research potential, but also with the aim to improve its reputation nationally and internationally. It is a good sign that DCCU is already aware of the need to train people in preparing and submitting projects for funding on a competitive basis and this is something to be further improved. It should also encourage academic staff to publish in the best international journals. This will also improve the visibility of DCCU nationally and internationally. The last point to be mentioned here is that the overall situation concerning research cannot be improved without doctoral schools and the establishment of PhD programmes (see the related chapter in sub-section 2.2 of the report).

The internal organisation of research in DCCU is somehow complex. As the team was informed, it is the combination of legal provisions and requirements for accreditation purposes (requiring at least one research centre in each faculty) and decisions taken by the university regarding the organisation and orientation of its research activities. In this regard,

research activity is carried out in the research centres in the faculties and in five research institutes established at institutional level in compliance with the Romanian law for research. Both research centres and institutes have a management structure. The overall research activity is coordinated by the Council for Scientific Research Coordination and the vice-rector for research.

There are five multidisciplinary institutes:

- Institute for Scientific Multidisciplinary Research
- Institute for History and Cantemir Studies
- International Institute for Human Rights
- Institute for Intercultural Study and Research
- Institute for Political and Security Studies

The team was informed that the academic staff of a faculty may conduct his/her research activity both in the respective research centre as well as in a research institute. However, how the existence of the concrete multidisciplinary and trans-faculty research institutes contributes to the development of DCCU's research identity and whether the above five areas are the ones in which DCCU is strong regarding research activities, remained unclear. For example, in many meetings areas of management and tourism were mentioned as strong areas, however this strength is not reflected in the scientific content of the five institutes.

5. Service to society

Establishing strong and close links with society is one of the major aims of any university nowadays, notably because offering services to society is considered the third mission of modern universities.

The team received positive feedback from the meeting with employers and other external stakeholders about graduates of the university. However, from the meetings and documentation provided, the team has come to the conclusion that DCCU's links with society should be strengthened. The team is aware (SER, p. 21) that in the context of the Quality Management System of DCCU (see below in section 6) a link with the social, economic and cultural environment was developed comprising new structures (department for cooperation with the business and social environment, centre for information, career guidance and counselling). The establishment of graduate tracking mechanisms is among the tasks of these structures.

However, in the SWOT analysis, the following are mentioned among its weaknesses:

> In some study programmes, the adaptation of discipline contents to the labour market requirements is still a matter of individual initiative;

> Insufficient information on the labour market requirements and graduate employment rate;

> Limited involvement of stakeholders in adapting and developing education plans.

Furthermore, the following is mentioned among the threats that the university faces: "Limited interest of the representatives of the economic, social and cultural environment (insufficient cooperation with the business environment)."

The above four points clearly indicate that links with society at large need improvement. In this regard the team recommends that the university pay considerable attention to the improvement of its links with society in the wider sense, establishing links with possible partners and in all possible directions. In this regard, it should further develop its already existing social responsibility. Alumni can be quite a useful factor in establishing links. The team does not recommend concrete actions here since many of the initiatives to be taken in this respect have already been outlined as recommendations earlier in this report in the sections concerning governance and decision-making (sub-section 2.2) and teaching and learning (section 3). However, it can be added that DCCU should build on already existing partnerships and develop them, including also for the diversification of funding sources.

Finally, the team recommends that DCCU consider the establishment of an advisory body consisting of external partners and alumni, in order to assist the rector in the university's relationship with society. This advisory body would help the university to establish closer and

tighter links with its external environment on an advisory (and thus informal) basis, avoiding any conflict with the formal governance bodies, but ensuring at the same time continuity and enhancing efficiency in its relationships.

6. Quality culture

The term "quality culture" defines the overall attitude of a university regarding the concept of "quality", which applies to issues like quality assurance, quality assessment, quality improvement, etc. In the context of the IEP methodology, quality assurance offers the means through which a university is in a position to know whether it is doing well and it is accomplishing its chosen mission and goals. It comes from the necessity of going beyond data, figures, statistics, quantitative elements and it deals with the qualitative dimension. Quality assurance is a central element in European higher education today. Furthermore, it has also assumed a key role in the Bologna Process, while the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG), adopted by the European ministers in Bergen in May 2005, have built a European perspective and a European context for quality assurance in higher education.

In the European Higher Education Area, universities are required to implement their own internal quality assurance mechanisms and to develop a quality culture shared among universities throughout Europe. As stated in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), "consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework".

Quality in a university can be built from different points of view and can be based on different approaches. Two of these approaches, which are based on opposite philosophies, are: the approach that focuses on quality assurance processes that are control-oriented; and the approach that focuses on quality assurance processes that are improvement-oriented.

The first approach controls whether (or to what extent) predefined standards and criteria are met by a university in its various functions and aims to certify whether the university (or the study programme) can or cannot be accredited (the "Yes or No" function of quality assurance as accreditation). The Romanian national framework in which all higher education institutions operate is characterised by this approach. IEP follows the second approach, i.e. is improvement-oriented and its methodology is adapted to this approach as discussed in the introduction.

The team is aware that in the past few years DCCU has undergone many external evaluations of various types, at various levels and for various reasons and therefore has suffered — and still suffers — from an evaluation overload. However, an evaluation overload does not necessarily lead to improvement in quality and does not necessarily help in building a quality culture.

The internal quality assurance system of DCCU aims to meet the requirements and demands set by the Romanian quality assurance system, which is control-oriented. The overall internal

quality assurance procedures are organised within the Quality Management System. As stated in the SER (p. 18),

> DCCU was among the first private universities in Romania that designed and implemented quality assurance processes (a Quality Management System) specific to the ISO 9000 standards. The implementation of such a system provided the grounds for a system and process approach of activities within the university, as well as for promoting a quality culture based on quality management specific rules and values.

The Quality Management System is organised and overseen by the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEAC) of the Senate, which has the overall responsibility for steering and coordinating the quality assurance procedures with the administrative support of the Quality Office. In fact, CEAC consists of sub-commissions that operate at faculty level with the participation of students (SER, p. 18). The role of CEAC is more clearly described in the SER (p. 20), as follows:

> CEAC coordinates all actions aiming at the efficient operation and development of the quality assurance system in the University in line with the policy, mission and objectives of the University and consistent with the national and international standards on quality in higher education.

In the context of the above role, CEAC is also responsible for both the planning and evaluation of quality in DCCU. In this regard, every year CEAC produces a great number of QA documents that are uploaded on the webpage of CEAC, which should be considered an example of good practice. In the evaluation team's opinion, the most important of them are currently the "Quality Assurance Policies and Practices in the University" and the "Quality Manual 2013". Furthermore, CEAC carries out an annual internal audit, which concludes in a self-evaluation report submitted for discussion to the Senate. Similar internal evaluations of study programmes are also conducted every year at the faculties by the faculty management with the support of the sub-commission of CEAC for the respective faculty (SER, p. 19).

The team considers the overall structures, procedures and activities of DCCU with regards to internal quality assurance quite remarkable in the context of the control-oriented approach of internal quality assurance that applies in Romania. The university is aware of the need for quality and it primarily aims at improving quality of teaching, study programmes and learning processes. In this regard, the team would like to especially commend the procedures for the evaluation of teaching staff at faculty level and the involvement of students in the quality assurance procedures. Nevertheless, the team could not form a sound opinion regarding quality assessment of research activities, due to the lack of adequate information both during the meetings and from the available documentation.

Finally, the impression of the team is that there is an overload of internal quality assurance in DCCU. The Quality Management System may be helpful to the university in meeting the demands and the requirements set by the Romanian quality assurance system and the above-

mentioned structures and procedures may be effective in a control-oriented approach of quality. However, the question is whether these structures and procedures are effective in the improvement-oriented approach to quality. The impression of the team is that everybody seems to be happy with the present situation and, therefore, the internal demand for continuous improvement may be at risk, leading to a rather static approach, which does not help in building a real quality culture in the university. This is something that the evaluation team would like to bring to the attention of the university.

Nevertheless, the main task of the present evaluation is to help the university realise how its internal quality assurance system will be effective in terms of the improvement-oriented approach. The team recommends that, in parallel to its already existing structures and procedures, DCCU develop a more bottom-up driven internal quality assurance strategy aiming for the continuous improvement of the university and not simply just meet the standards and criteria set by the national quality assurance system. The effectiveness of this internal strategy would be enhanced if supported and complemented by a procedure of external peer review assessment.

The team paid specific attention to the consistency of the internal quality assurance system with part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The team is aware that almost all standards and guidelines of part 1 of the ESG have been incorporated into the requirements set by ARACIS to the Romanian universities for accreditation purposes. Furthermore, the team found good evidence of consistency with the ESG from the documentation provided regarding internal quality assurance and from the various meetings during both visits.

In conclusion of this section, while appreciating DCCU's efforts to build and consolidate its quality management and quality assurance systems, the team would like to summarise by pointing out that, as mentioned earlier, improvement-oriented quality culture is not about standards, rankings, or classifications; it is about attitudes, mentalities, and values. Improvement-oriented quality culture is not expected to be imposed or regulated or monitored in a top-down approach; but it should be built in a bottom-up approach and include the whole higher education community. The involvement of each individual in this bottom-up procedure requires encouragement — an important task for the leadership of the university at all levels.

7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key issue in the European Higher Education Area; consequently, it should be high on the strategic agenda of any European university today. An internationalisation strategy may be based on the relationships established by a university with international partners at various levels. This relationship may be built at institutional level (e.g., inter-university relationships, relations with international organisations, partnership in international networks and consortia), at faculty level (e.g., joint or dual study programmes and degrees), at the level of research units/activities (e.g., participation in international research projects and financing by international resources) or at the level of individuals (e.g., mobility exchanges of students and staff, attractiveness of international students and staff, involvement of students and staff in international events and activities).

Therefore, an important part of the internationalisation strategy of a university will be to develop the appropriate conditions that will help establish and/or further improve the above relationships. However, it should also be taken into account that the above relationships will be built on and will be facilitated and further improved by the international visibility of the university, its overall profile, its reputation, and the way in which it promotes its qualities internationally. All these should be considered a constituent part of an internationalisation strategy.

The team is aware that internationalisation has a significant position in the strategic plan of DCCU. However, it is extremely important to improve its internationalisation agenda as it does not seem to be among its strengths. In this regard, the team recommends that DCCU develop a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will cover all the above-mentioned dimensions, taking advantage of all opportunities that the existing legislation in Romania allows for. This strategy should aim among others to ensure that requirements for further involvement in international projects are met and to foster new partnerships with universities abroad. The team appreciates the efforts of DCCU to find international partners; however, it must focus on fully exploring the potential of these partnerships. The team was informed of ideas and existing plans to establish strategic relationships with "new" areas like Eurasia and strongly endorses them as they may improve internationalisation dynamics.

Furthermore, an effective internationalisation strategy should be built step-by-step starting within the university, from the entire university community. The development of an internationalisation culture within the university and building an internationalisation attitude among the students, but primarily among the staff, are key preconditions for any internationalisation strategy to be successfully promoted and implemented.

Performance in terms of Erasmus mobility and attracting international students and teaching staff is an example of the need to combine measures with attitudes. In various meetings, the

team was informed that there are problems regarding Erasmus mobility; problems related to the lack of a positive attitude among the students; problems related to recognition issues; and problems related to economic issues. Concerning the attitude of students, DCCU has to more actively promote the benefits of international exchanges among Romanian students. In order to encourage Romanian students to participate in an Erasmus programme, the recognition of the periods of study abroad must be ensured in advance according to the respective learning agreements. However, the results will be poor if the appropriate attitude is not built among professors as well. The team learnt that there is still a significant number of professors who perceive the issue of recognition as an issue of equivalence of courses taught abroad. However, this is against the spirit of Erasmus mobility. The team was also informed that the problems with Erasmus mobility are linked to the low financing from the university to supplement the respective EU funds. This, again, is an issue of attitude; Erasmus mobility should be regarded as an investment and not simply as an expenditure that will further burden the budget of the university.

Finally, in order to attract international students the team recommends DCCU to offer courses taught in English and to incentivise its academic staff to improve their English language skills. Following the above analysis, the team recommends that DCCU establish a comprehensive policy in order to improve its performance regarding Erasmus mobility (both incoming and outgoing) and attractiveness of international students and staff. This policy should contain concrete measures (like those mentioned above) in parallel with the establishment of an internationalisation culture and attitude among students and staff.

8. Conclusions

DCCU is a university under continuous change since its establishment in 1990. Furthermore, the specific situation of Romania and Romanian higher education together with the current trends in European higher education and in conjunction with the current economic crisis, form a rapidly changing and challenging landscape.

DCCU therefore has to adapt its strategy to this new landscape, in order to fulfil its mission and cope with the difficulties and challenges. The team is aware of the strategic plan 2010-2013 and is also aware of the analysis that DCCU has already carried out in its SWOT analysis regarding its strengths and its weaknesses together with the opportunities and the threats deriving from the new landscape. Taking the above into consideration, it can be said that DCCU has the qualities and the potential to respond to changing conditions, and therefore has the capacity for change. As discussed in this report, the evaluation team would like to highlight that changes are already on the way for DCCU. For example, the plans for the creation of a Faculty of Medicine signify a major change for the university.

The clarification of the strategic objectives of DCCU should result in the clarification of its profile and identity. To that aim, DCCU should focus on excellence in education developing the appropriate research activities which will strengthen its educational potential and which, in parallel, will create its specific research profile. It is this profile and identity that will offer DCCU the possibility to increase its visibility and will improve its reputation (nationally and internationally). The team again emphasises the need for participation and for bottom-up processes in directing the future of the university, considering them of utmost importance as they result in sharing responsibility for the future of the university within the entire university community.

In the previous paragraph some key issues have been mentioned, to which the evaluation team attaches greater importance. The recommendations in detail have been outlined in the body of the report. These recommendations are intended to be the evaluation team's own contribution to the process of change and to help DCCU to make the most of the opportunities open to it and to cope with the threats it may face in the future. At the same time, this evaluation report aspires to function as an inspiration for DCCU as a whole, but more specifically for all those people, leadership, students and staff, who are concerned by its future. The evaluation team hopes that the evaluation work done, including the present report, offers a real help to DCCU for its future steps. And it also hopes that DCCU will seize the opportunity to realise and demonstrate its great potential.

Summary of recommendations

In this section of the report the main recommendations are summarised as they have appeared underlined in the respective sections of the text. In some cases recommendations

that appear individually in the text of the report have been merged in the following summary for coherence purposes. Furthermore, and in order for the recommendations to be able to stand autonomously in this specific section of the report, a slight rephrasing was necessary in some cases.

1. The stated objectives and mission may no longer meet external demands as before and consequently it is advisable to reconsider the mission in view of the changing context. The team recommends that DCCU reconsider its strategy so that it aims to be an excellent university for education, which for that purpose requires developing research activities that will strengthen its educational potential and improve its educational programmes.

2. DCCU should clarify its strategic objectives and adapt them to its real potential and strengths. DCCU should be realistic in its ambitions.

3. The implementation of a strategic plan requires an action plan with concrete actions which should be prioritised, cost-estimated, assessed regarding their potential risk and put into a time schedule within the validity period of the strategic plan with well-defined and measurable milestones and performance indicators that would assist in monitoring progress in meeting strategic objectives. The team recommends to the creation of a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should be tasked with the monitoring of the strategy, the assessment of the validity of the strategic goals and the respective key performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.

4. The team recommends that DCCU consider the establishment of a participatory, bottom-up strategy development, beginning with the development of the new Strategic Plan. The team believes that DCCU would benefit from this bottom-up approach, which should extend ownership of the strategic goals to the wider university community with the aim to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the achievement of the goals.

5. The team believes that DCCU would benefit from the participation of a student representative in the Administration Board, similarly as the public universities benefit from such participation as stipulated by the Law. Furthermore the team believes that it would benefit from a more coordinated participation of students at central level. However, it is important that their participation at institutional level be characterised by a stronger sense of institutional affiliation on top of their identification with their faculty. The establishment of a student council at central level would help students in building this institutional attitude and would also help in making the involvement of students more active, substantial and helpful. The team recommends that DCCU encourage and support its students to reach that aim.

6. The team recommends that DCCU pay due consideration to the involvement of external stakeholders in its governance structures and procedures. The involvement of the external stakeholders should become normal practice at both faculty and institutional level.

7. DCCU should develop a specific strategy in view of the consequences of decreasing number of students. This implies diversifying its financial resources. This can be achieved by widening its educational activity in order to attract new student categories. The development of alternative educational offers, e.g. short-cycle programmes, or even offering courses or entire study programmes in English is a solution. Furthermore, the development of an internationalisation strategy for the Eurasia region, could also act as an alternative source of revenue for DCCU in the medium-term.

8. DCCU should strengthen its efforts in order to be more competitive in attracting research funds nationally and internationally (also including raising overheads), in order to take advantage of European funds (social, structural, developmental) or in order to improve its contractual partnerships with economic and business entities in Romania and elsewhere. Finally, for the development of a Faculty of Medicine could also be an alternative source of income for DCCU at least in the long-term, even though it will increase the cost in the short-term. The team recommends that DCCU utilise alumni associations to obtain some external support at different levels (promoting university, helping in diversifying funding, establishing partnerships, etc.)

9. Apart from the need to seek alternative financial resources, DCCU should consider proceeding to a strategic cost-benefit analysis of its overall functioning, such as looking closer to its overall structure (faculties included).

10. The team recommends that DCCU review the existence of faculties and study programmes with same names and similar content in the same fields and in different locations with the aims of: (i) ensuring effective and permanent cooperation among the teachers responsible for those study programmes; (ii) facilitating the creation of a critical mass of researchers in as many scientific fields as possible, strengthening, in this way, the scientific potential of the university as a whole and; (iii) developing common solutions to shared weaknesses.

11. The team recommends that DCCU build on the experience gained so far from the implementation of "student-centred learning", develop a basis for sharing any existing good practices and further improve its capacity and its performance in this regard. It should fully implement the ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload in all study programmes.

12. The team recommends that DCCU develop an effective, global and comprehensive policy to deal with the problem of high dropout rates especially after the first year of studies.

13. DCCU should continuously develop and innovate its curricula adapting them to the demands of the labour market (long-term or medium-term), but also to the demands of the potential students, using as guiding elements the required competences and skills of the graduates on the basis of the appropriate learning outcomes. The team recommends that DCCU involve external stakeholders in developing, periodical reviewing and monitoring of study programmes. Stakeholder participation is an underpinning principle of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance, but it also can offer valuable information and indications regarding the relevance of curricula with employment. Finally, the team recommends that DCCU initiate a benchmarking process in Romania and in Europe in order to continuously improve its study programmes.

14. The team recommends that DCCU involve its graduates in redesigning its educational offer and in curricula development and innovation. It should strengthen its links with graduates, encouraging the creation of an alumni culture. The establishment of an effective system of graduate tracking is a prerequisite to that end.

15. The team recommends that DCCU establish staff development programmes for academics to help develop a culture of "student-centred learning". These programmes should also integrate the already existing programme for training teaching staff in pedagogical skills. One of the aims of these staff development programmes should be to improve the foreign language competences of the academic staff, in particular, in English. This aim is linked with the strategic goal of DCCU to develop courses or entire programmes in English. The team recommends that DCCU seriously consider its policy for the selection of academic staff with the aim to avoid inbreeding.

16. The team understands that a new research strategy for the period starting from 2014 is being developed by the university. The university should develop a research strategy realistic in its ambitions. However, the most important thing for the university would be to make choices and set clear priorities regarding research. No university can be good in everything. Prioritisation in research would help the university to further improve and utilise its strong research areas and develop its research profile. The next step would be to build partnerships nationally or internationally in the specific priority areas. In the context of prioritisation, the team recommends that DCCU develop research activities that would strengthen its educational potential and improve its educational programmes by ensuring that the entire academic staff are engaged in research.

17. The team recommends that DCCU reinforce its efforts to increase research funding from international sources, not only with the aim to increase its income and enhance its research potential, but also to improve its reputation nationally and internationally. It is a

good sign that DCCU is already aware of the need to train academic staff in preparing and submitting projects for funding on a competitive basis and this is something to be further improved.

18. The team recommends that DCCU pay attention to encouraging the academic staff to publish in the best possible international journals as a strategy to improve the visibility of DCCU nationally and internationally.

19. The team recommends that DCCU pay considerable attention to the improvement of its links with society in the wider sense, establishing links with all possible partners and in all possible directions. It should further develop its already existing social responsibility. Alumni can be quite useful in establishing links. The university should build on already existing partnerships and develop them further, including also diversification of funding sources. Finally, DCCU should consider the establishment of an advisory body consisting of external partners and alumni, in order to assist the rector in the relationships of the university with society.

20. The team recommends that DCCU, in parallel to its already existing structures and procedures, develop a more bottom-up driven internal quality assurance strategy aiming for the continuous improvement of the university and not simply to meet the standards and criteria set by the Romanian quality assurance system. The effectiveness of this internal strategy would be enhanced if supported and complemented by a procedure of external peer review assessment as an initiative of the university regardless of the typical requirements of the Romanian system.

21. The team recommends that DCCU develop a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will cover all the above-mentioned dimensions, taking advantage of all opportunities that the existing legislation in Romania allows for. This strategy should aim among others to ensure requirements for further involvement in international projects are met and to foster new partnerships with universities abroad. The team appreciates the efforts of DCCU to establish international partnerships; however, it must focus on fully exploiting their potential. The team was informed of ideas and plans to establish strategic relationships with "new" areas like Eurasia and strongly endorses them as they may improve internationalisation dynamics.

22. The team recommends that DCCU establish a comprehensive policy in order to improve its performance regarding Erasmus mobility (both incoming and outgoing) and attracting international students and staff to the university. This policy should contain concrete measures (concerning, for example, the recognition of periods of study abroad, development of courses or entire programmes taught in English, adequate financing of Erasmus mobility) in parallel with the establishment of an internationalisation culture and attitude among students and staff.