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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

*Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and  
Innovation in Romanian Universities Project*

## University of Oradea

### ***EVALUATION REPORT***

*APRIL 2013*

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## Table of Contents

|           |   |           |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| <b>1.</b> | <b>Introduction</b>                                 | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>Governance and Institutional Decision Making</b> | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>Teaching and Learning</b>                        | <b>13</b> |
| <b>4.</b> | <b>Research</b>                                     | <b>17</b> |
| <b>5.</b> | <b>Service to Society</b>                           | <b>20</b> |
| <b>6.</b> | <b>Quality Culture</b>                              | <b>22</b> |
| <b>7.</b> | <b>Internationalisation</b>                         | <b>24</b> |
| <b>8.</b> | <b>Conclusion</b>                                   | <b>26</b> |



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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of an evaluation of the University of Oradea. The evaluation took place in 2012-2013 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities”, which aims to strengthen core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

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

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

### 1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). IEP evaluation teams have carried out more than 300 evaluations and follow-up evaluations of diverse higher education institutions in 45 countries worldwide.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management



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- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

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

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

## 1.2. University of Oradea’s Profile

Higher education in Oradea has a long tradition. Already in 1780 a higher institution for philosophic teaching was founded in Oradea. Out of this institution arose the first Romanian faculty of law in 1788. Although a university has existed in Oradea for over 200 years, it practically closed down because of transfers of its functions to Cluj-Napoca. In 1983 only an institute of engineers remained, but since then remarkable progress has been made. Today there is a thriving university, a comprehensive and complex institution covering the main fields of knowledge, encompassing 15 faculties, 47 departments and 32 research centres. The University of Oradea (UO) has almost 23 500 students (of whom around 7 100 are enrolled in non-formal graduate or postgraduate training) and is supported by a total of nearly 1 130 academic staff and 570 technical and administrative staff.

UO is a public higher education institution with legal personality, governed according to the provisions of the Romanian Constitution and observing the national education laws. The organisation and operation of UO is guaranteed by its university Charter, a fundamental document approved and updated by the university Senate. UO is the only existing public university in Oradea, having its main campus located in the western part of the city, although some faculties have offices in the city centre. UO owns and administers buildings whose area totals 143,200 square meters, including an Aula Magna, two theatres, 184 lecture and seminar rooms, 350 laboratories and a central library. In addition, UO owns eight sport halls and 11 sport fields, four accommodation places for students and a canteen.

The city of Oradea is the capital of Bihor county and an important centre of economic, social and cultural activities. Bihor, which has a population of about 550,000, is one of the wealthiest counties in Romania, with a GDP per capita above the national average and a comparatively low unemployment rate. Oradea’s economy, which is largely sustained by small and medium-sized businesses, has recently experienced an expansion of the services sector, such as trade and tourism. Its main industries are furniture, textiles and clothing, footwear and food



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processing. A new industrial park is also attracting industries to the city. Bihor county is an important constituent of the north-western region of Romania, also including the counties of Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Statu Mare and Sălaj. According to a study published in 2005,<sup>1</sup> this Romanian region has a moderate capacity of developing and attracting investments (measured by aggregate Regional Attractiveness Index - RAI), ranked in second position after Bucharest-Ilfov.

The mission of the university is “to train specialists in various fields of science and culture and to generate new knowledge”,<sup>2</sup> aiming to contribute to the economic and social progress of the geographical area covered by the institution and the country. UO’s contribution to the past, present and future development of Bihor county is unquestionable. Accordingly, the institution is very highly regarded by the most important actors of the region it serves.

In recent years UO has made great progress in many domains. In May 2007 UO was subjected to an institutional evaluation by the Romanian Agency for the Higher Education Quality Assurance (ARACIS) and was rated with the classification of “limited confidence”. In 2011, a new external institutional assessment concluded that “the 2007 deficiencies have been largely remedied; the recommendations made at that time by the quality assurance department belonging to ARACIS have been taken into consideration and the university acted accordingly ever since”.<sup>3</sup> All of the 26 assessed study programmes were graded with “trust”. The same grade, “trust” (or, using the ARACIS terminology, “confidence”), was attributed to the University of Oradea itself, below the maximum level of “high confidence”. But the 2011 report of the ARACIS’s quality assurance department states that “the proposal for trust in the case of the institution ... is due to the fact that the University of Oradea still has some criteria on which action should be taken. ... The University of Oradea could be the object of an assessment for a higher qualification (high trust) in a year or two”.<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence of the new Education Law, in 2011 Romanian universities were classified into the three following clusters: “advanced research and teaching universities”, “teaching and scientific research universities (including the sub-category of teaching and artistic/creative universities)” and “teaching and learning universities”. UO was classified as a teaching and scientific research institution. But the University does not feel comfortable with this result, aiming “to become a university of excellence among universities entering the area of advanced research and teaching universities”.<sup>5</sup>

Under the 2011 reforms, 1 074 Romanian study programmes belonging to 59 study domains were graded into five specific categories: A, B, C, D, E and F (not approved), A being better

<sup>1</sup> Regions and Development – the Regional Attractiveness Index 2005, PricewaterhouseCoopers Management Consultants, [http://crib.mae.ro/upload/docs/6168\\_price\\_art\\_sec.pdf](http://crib.mae.ro/upload/docs/6168_price_art_sec.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Self-Evaluating Report (SER), pg.6

<sup>3</sup> SER, Annex 26, Report of ARACIS Council regarding the external evaluation of academic quality in UO 2011, pg. 48

<sup>4</sup> Idem, pg. 20

<sup>5</sup> Idem, pg.6



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than B, and so on. Out of UO's 46 study domains, two were classified level A, seven classified B, 25 classified C, eight classified D, and four in E.<sup>6</sup> Especially regarding the first two categories, this result does not compare favourably with the national global profile: indeed, UO has obtained less than half of the national percentage of study domains classified under the labels A plus B (20% against 42%). At the national level, the proportion of study domains labelled with A is 20% (vs. 4% in UO) and 22% with B (vs. 15% in UO).<sup>7</sup> This outcome had negative consequences in terms of self-esteem, prestige and funding. Naturally, one of the priorities of UO is to improve the study programmes' grades.

### 1.3. The Evaluation Process

This EUA evaluation commenced with a self-evaluation process which was undertaken by a self-evaluation group of ten members chaired by Professor Stefan Nagy, the Head of the quality assurance department, and included five vice-rectors, two vice-deans (faculty of management and technological engineering, and faculty of social and human sciences), the president of the students representatives in the Senate, plus an academic secretary.

The Self-evaluation Report (SER) of the University of Oradea (UO) along with the appendices was provided to the evaluation team (team) on 9 November 2012. UO followed closely the guidelines provided by IEP for the format of the SER and the documentation received was of very good quality. The SER is concise and readable, including an honest and open description of UO's organisation, processes and priorities, providing enough material to brief the team and to enable it to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the development and current situation of UO. In short, the team considers the SER a very good and helpful analysis of UO. However, in some areas the SER tends to be more descriptive than analytical, it does not always reflect critically and it is not always explicit about how OU will achieve its objectives.

According to the SER, the members of the self-evaluation group made partial reports based on the findings resulting from the dialogue established with key actors of the educational, research and administrative processes of the university. Proposals were submitted to the self-assessment group, processed centrally, synthesised and included in the SER. Finally, after being completed, the SER was disclosed and discussed by the Administrative Board, by the Senate, and particularly by its Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission.

The team considers the elaboration of the SER an important step in building and strengthening a quality culture within UO. The self-evaluation group itself stated that, during the process, documents and data were updated, internal regulations and processes clarified and the insight of the institution was considerably improved. Communication problems between different bodies and layers and problems of synchronisation of materials that occurred at the beginning were solved.

<sup>6</sup> SER, Annex 1, MECTS Order 5262 - 2011 on the institution's position in the ranking process of universities

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Curaj, Director of UEFISCDI, "Romanian Higher Education System", IEP Annual Seminar, 04-10-2012, Bucharest



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The team appreciates the significant effort of the self-evaluation group in developing the SER during a particularly busy period. In fact, during 2012 UO experienced a very full agenda, including elections, implementing new management concepts and adapting to new national regulations.

The visits of the team to UO took place on 6 and 7 December 2012 (first visit) and from 18 to 20 March 2013 (second visit). In between the visits UO provided the team with some additional documentation as requested. During the two visits, the team had the opportunity to openly discuss the situation of UO with many actors and stakeholders.

The evaluation team (team) consisted of:

- Professor Winfried Müller, former Rector, University of Klagenfurt, Austria - Team Chair.
- Professor Ingegerd Palmér, former Rector of Luleå University of Technology and of Mälardalen University, Sweden.
- Professor Frank McMahon, Ireland Bologna Expert, former Director of Academic Affairs at the Dublin Institute of Technology, and former Chairman of the Dublin Institute of Technology Academic Quality Assurance Committee, Ireland.
- Ieva Baltiņa, student at the University of Latvia, former member of the Executive Committee (International Affairs officer) of the Student Union of Latvia, Latvia.
- Professor José Cabral, Pro Rector and Head of the Continuous Improvement Office at the University of Porto, Portugal - Team Coordinator.

The team thanks the Rector Prof. Constantin Bungău from UO for the warm welcome and generous hospitality as well as for the useful and open discussions. Our special thanks go to Prof. Ștefan Nagy, Head of the Quality Assurance Department, who was UO's liaison person and who prepared and organised all our meetings during the two visits in a perfect way. The team also thanks Prof. Anca Deac who helped as an interpreter during most of the meetings, and Mr. Octavian Popa and Ms. Ioana Trif from UEFISCDI for assisting the team with respect to many organisational details.



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## 2. Governance and Institutional Decision-Making

UO has a clear and realistic mission statement: it is committed to the training of specialists in various fields of science and culture and of generating new knowledge. This statement is realised through two main lines: (1) the educational processes - “initial and continuous training at university level, aiming at personal development, professional insertion and meeting the need for competence of the socio-economic environment”; and (2) scientific research - “scientific research, development, innovation and technology transfer, through individual and collective creation in the field of science, arts and letters, by ensuring performance, sports and physical development as well as harnessing and disseminating their results”.<sup>8</sup>

As already mentioned, following the 2007 assessment the university has made significant improvements, being currently graded with “confidence”. Even so, this classification has negative consequences on the university budget, since public funding depends on the classification grade, being bigger for “high confidence” institutions. This fact induces the management of the university to improve its institutional performance and to seek new alternatives for attracting additional financial resources. Not surprisingly “the priority of UO management is performance and continuous improvement”.<sup>9</sup>

The recent positive evolution was supported by a Strategic Development Plan (2008-2013) and well-defined strategic objectives. These objectives were deployed into annual operational plans, which include the actions intended to achieve the defined goals, the respective performance indicators, costs and funding, the person or unit in charge and the deadlines.

The 2008-2013 Strategic Development Plan was conceived by the former rector. However, the current leadership of the university, Rector Constantin Bungău and his team, show a great commitment to strive for the same goals, despite the high uncertainty and the difficulties conveyed by the current economic crisis and also by the frequent changes of the national legislation, regulations and performance criteria. The lines of action defined by the current rector are well expressed in the 2012-2016 Management Plan, which is “structured after the most important processes that characterise the academic activity, the process of educational, the process of scientific research, and last but not least, the quality management, the relations with local and national socio-economic structures, the relations with students, the international collaboration”.<sup>10</sup> These lines of action were deployed into seven main objectives detailed in the operational plan of University of Oradea for 2013.

The operational plans of UO are robust and effective management instruments. Even so, the team thinks that some indicators included in those plans could be more explicit or detailed, allowing a better assessment of the level of achievement of the respective objectives. The

<sup>8</sup> SER, Annex 12, Summary of the Management Plan, pg. 1

<sup>9</sup> SER, pg. 21

<sup>10</sup> SER, Annex 12, Summary of the Management Plan, pg. 1



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team recommends that benchmarks and performance indicators drawn from comparable institutions are also clearly identified. Furthermore, the team thinks that it could be useful for UO to outline a vision for the year 2020 or 2025.

The team recognises that UO's leaders are working under extremely difficult conditions. In fact, the number of students enrolled each year is dropping as a result of demography, the financial and economic situation led to a decrease in government funding from year to year (in 2012 the government funding to UO was reduced by 14% in relation to 2011), and the crisis has made alternative funding scarce. This situation "significantly affects the budget of the institution's core activity"<sup>11</sup> and puts more pressure on the financial management of the university. Increasing the institution's efficiency, the reduction of costs and the search for extra-budgetary resources are obviously priorities for UO.

The team thinks that the current government funding model for teaching programmes over-emphasises research output. Accordingly, the team recommends that UO, in cooperation with other universities, should lobby the government for a change in the funding model in order to give appropriate weight to regional development and services to society. Meanwhile, UO should concentrate efforts in cutting internal costs and operating more effectively.

UO has a very democratic and decentralised decision-making structure where everybody is involved. However, the team believes that both the governance model and the decision-making mechanisms of the university should be simplified.

In fact, the Senate, being the highest decision-making and deliberation body of the university and having the duty of "controlling the activity of the rector, of the Administrative Board and of other executive positions and structures",<sup>12</sup> acts as the rector's supervisor and seems too big (76 members, including 19 students). The same applies to the Administrative Board, the operational management body of the institution whose mission is "to implement the strategic decisions of the university Senate",<sup>13</sup> which includes the rector as president, five vice-rectors, 15 deans, the general administrative director and a students' representative (23 members). It should be noticed that all the proposals or initiatives approved by the Administrative Board must be ultimately approved again by the Senate. To a great extent, faculties and departments mirror this model, all being controlled by collective bodies (e.g. Faculty Council, Faculty Board, Department Council and Department Board).

Under these circumstances some shared responsibilities are overlapping, the decision-making process is complicated, and it seems difficult to deploy goals and objectives across the whole institution in an effective way. Additionally, changes and innovation are difficult and can be hindered.

<sup>11</sup> SER, pg.19

<sup>12</sup> SER, Annex 9, The University of Oradea Charter, pg. 16

<sup>13</sup> Idem, pg. 25



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The team is not advocating the abolition of democratic management or even the dismantling of all “checks and balances”, and is aware of the external constraints under which the university operates, namely the limitations imposed by the Romanian higher education regulations. Yet, the team strongly recommends the improvement of the governance model, endorsing more freedom to the rector (together with more responsibility for his decisions), clarifying the organisational structure, avoiding redundancies and diminishing the number and the size of collective bodies. These changes would provide more efficient decision-making processes and reduce the fragmentation within the university, facilitating a better cooperation between individual faculties and between faculties and the central services.

To be more specific, based on the Law 2011 the Senate should reconsider its optimal size and should concentrate on the vital role of ensuring academic standards and integrity, while the rector should be responsible for the operational management of the university. Regulations like the point in Law 2011, art. 213 (2) j, “the Senate controls the activity of the rector ...” do not differentiate between operational and strategic issues and should be clarified. In addition, new responsibilities should be clearly defined, keeping key decisions at the rectorate level, with approval of the Senate where appropriate. The team believes that the rector should have more autonomy over the budget and more power over human resources.

One explicit objective stated in the 2008-2013 Strategic Development Plan was to “restructure the University of Oradea on faculties and departments, their reduction to the optimal number, on the principles of quality maximization and financial efficiency, on the basis of the results of the analysis performed on study programmes and existent chairs and departments”.<sup>14</sup> A similar recommendation was also made by the foreign evaluating expert (Professor Roger Downer) as a result of the 2011 institutional evaluation of the University of Oradea: “it is likely that considerable efficiencies could be achieved by consolidation and reduction of the number of administrative units. ... In addition to the probable efficiencies that would be achieved the restructuring may lead to greater academic collaboration”.<sup>15</sup>

Following that direction, some important changes in UO organisational structure have already been proposed by the rector. Likewise, the university has recently changed its internal composition by reducing the previous 18 faculties to 15. Even so, and according to the team’s view, UO still remains a complex institution, which deserves rationalisation, both in the administrative and education domains.

An example of simplification of the teaching/education structure would be the integration/merging of all the faculties of engineering (faculty of electrical engineering and information technology, faculty of energy engineering and industrial management, and faculty of management and technological engineering) into a single one. It seems reasonable to expect that great synergies would be generated if these three units share academic resources, organisational structures, services, laboratories, study programmes, research centres and

<sup>14</sup> SER, Annex 10, The Strategic Development Plan of UO, pg.13

<sup>15</sup> SER, Annex 26, Report of ARACIS Council on the external evaluation of the academic quality in UO (2011), pg. 99



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projects. The faculty of history, international relations, political sciences and communication sciences, the faculty of letters and the faculty of social humanistic sciences or the faculty of environmental protection and the faculty of sciences are other cases having high potential for integrating/sharing capacities (note that some of those faculties enrol few students). In short, the knowledge areas should be located at one faculty/department. Additionally, more cooperation between faculties/departments should be encouraged, ensuring that competencies are shared across the University and human resources and facilities are not duplicated and distributed over several places.

The simplification of the structure of the university should extend to other areas. The team observed that research centres are spread over faculties and many of them do not have the required critical mass. The team recommends concentrating research capacity by reducing the current number of research centres. Likewise, UO should strengthen existing support units and, where necessary, create new central units for student admission, alumni, marketing activities, IT-systems, industry/employer relations, research support, etc. These units should work with the faculties in the provision of these services. The team observed that there is a non-negligible differentiation amongst faculties, namely in the development/use of online learning platforms, IT-systems or the access to data bases. All this could be managed in a more centralised way, saving resources and benefiting students and research.

Another fact which the team believes to be common to all Romanian universities is carrying over vacant positions from year to year. As UO states having approximately one-third of all positions vacant, this procedure does not really support realistic planning.

Along with the changes in the structure and governing model, the team recommends that UO simplifies its administrative processes in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden as it affects staff productivity.

These changes seem to be important in order to increase the education and research critical mass, to become more effective and efficient and to ease cross-disciplinary interaction. In the team's view, all these are necessary conditions for the University of Oradea to become an "advanced research and teaching university", the major aim of the institution according to the Rector's Management Plan.<sup>16</sup>

UO has another short-term priority goal: to raise the grade of "confidence", which was attributed by ARACIS in 2011, becoming a "high confidence" institution. This goal seems to be attainable because over the last few years the university has been making a great effort to implement a wide range of procedures ensuring compliance with the administrative and educational requirements and regulations established by the Romanian authorities. These achievements provide the realistic expectation that the university can reach its goal in the next evaluation. The team thinks that reaching the grade of "high confidence" is a very important goal and should be valued.

<sup>16</sup> SER, Annex 12, Summary of the Management Plan, pg. 2



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But UO also wishes to raise the rankings of its domains/study programmes. Improving ratings of the study programmes would have the great advantage (among others) of increasing the budget (funding being a critical issue for the university). The actual offering of undergraduate and graduate study programmes is very high and very much diversified (54 undergraduate domains with 101 study programmes, 45 Master domains with 88 study programmes).

Although the diversity of study programmes is considered a “strength”,<sup>17</sup> excessive diversity and specialisation in undergraduate education can also create a problem with respect to employability in the region, where there is only a low demand for specialists and a higher demand for more general graduates. In any case, the big diversification in teaching causes a lack of critical mass in certain programmes and makes it difficult to comply with the ARACIS criteria.

According to the ARACIS rules, improving ratings of the study programmes requires that, in addition to the implementation of a quality assurance system (already in a consolidation phase within UO), teachers belonging to those domains demonstrate that their research output reaches a predetermined level (defined by ARACIS for each domain), both in quantity and in quality. However, in order to accomplish this objective, the team thinks that UO’s management needs more flexibility with respect to teaching staff allocation, and more funding is required for research activities, equipment and laboratories. A similar difficulty applies to doctoral programmes. Increasing the number of PhD students is important both for funding and for research output, while only accredited professors can supervise PhD students. The University of Oradea wishes to have more PhD students, which, in turn, means assigning extra money and resources for the research activities of those professors wishing to become accredited.

Under these circumstances, a fundamental challenge for UO's management is to find a process of breaking the negative cycle “lack of funding - poor research - poor rankings - lack of funding”. The team commends the actions, programmes and projects defined in the Operational Plan for 2013 under the objective of “Management of Research Processes”, and recommends that a great importance is assigned to increasing the number and the importance of R&D projects in collaboration with local/regional companies and institutions.

Finally, in relation to the three main strategic goals of UO,

1. improve from “confidence” to “high confidence”,
2. raise the grading of the majority of study programmes to A and B levels,
3. change from a “teaching and research university” to an “advanced research and teaching university”,

the team recommends that the university adopts the above order for prioritising its goals.

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<sup>17</sup> SER, pg. 23



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### 3. Teaching and Learning

In the last few years the university has made substantial efforts in order to improve its teaching/learning processes. In regard to the implementation of the Bologna Process for undergraduate, Master and Doctoral studies, UO considers that it is now in a maturity phase “characterized by the functioning of the educational process almost perfectly synchronized with the new European system”.<sup>18</sup> In addition, more effective quality management procedures are currently implemented assuring that the university is complying with internal and external teaching/learning quality standards. On the other hand, both the Strategic Development Plan and the Rector’s Management Plan define mandatory guidelines for the implementation of a student-centred education and the continuous improvement of curricula and course syllabuses.

UO has already taken important steps implementing Bologna ideas: introduction of ECTS, shift to a student-centred education, internationalisation of curricula, student and staff mobility, involvement of students in quality assurance, etc. Apart from the weight that is given to the education activities in all relevant documents of UO (Strategic Development Plan, Management Plan, Operational Plans and SER), the team received many signs, at the various levels of the university management and from many sources, that emphasis is assigned to the teaching/learning process and substantial actions have been taken to move from a teaching approach to a learning approach. Moreover, the improvement of the study programmes’ grades (together with the improvement of programmes’ quality) is a priority for the deans of various faculties visited. Less evidence was found regarding focusing on learning outcomes. The team recommends that UO continues its efforts in implementing all Bologna aspects.

The team also observed that students, graduates and stakeholders value the quality of UO’s education. It must be emphasised that, in general, teaching facilities and other equipment and premises, are adequate and of good quality, although further investment is needed in some areas. The new library offers excellent facilities. Data on the dropout rates of the last academic years included in the SER<sup>19</sup> shows that the dropout rate is around 10%, which can be considered a moderate value.

Teachers seem engaged in offering their students a very good education. The team observed that teachers’ performance is a serious issue in UO. Teaching staff are trained in pedagogy at the faculty level (“efforts to help poor teachers improve the quality of their teaching are practised mainly at the level of the department through the mentorship of senior colleagues”<sup>20</sup>), and some higher level preparation is organised by the teachers training department. Academic staff must undergo two teaching courses before becoming professors. Together with research, the promotion of teaching staff is based on their teaching

<sup>18</sup> SER, Annex 12, Summary of the Management Plan, pg. 1

<sup>19</sup> SER, Annex 7, Number of students and teachers by faculty

<sup>20</sup> SER, Annex 26, Report of ARACIS Council on the external evaluation of the academic quality in UO (2011), pg. 107



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EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

performance, including the development of teaching materials. According to the SER, “faculties have the right to establish minimum criteria for filling teaching positions”.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the team recommends that more weight is given to teaching (in relation to research) for awarding excellent teaching, staff promotion and hiring. The team also recommends that UO should reinforce or design more incentives for promoting and rewarding excellent teaching (for example, using schemes like “the best teacher of the year”).

The team commends the “procedure for the development and approval of curricula”<sup>22</sup> and the “procedure for the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodical evaluation of study programmes”,<sup>23</sup> both recently approved by the Senate (September 2012). In the case of curricula, the head of department is responsible for bringing proposals to the members of the Commission for Curricula Development and usually is its president. The initiative for developing curricula can belong to the department, the dean or the vice-rector for academic affairs. The responsibility for monitoring and continuous improvement of the study programmes belongs to the Quality Office of the faculty and to the programme coordinators. Moreover, each study programme is monitored systematically and controlled according to an internal assessment procedure (approved in December 2011)<sup>24</sup> conducted by a Body of Internal Auditors. This internal audit produces quality data and a set of performance indicators required for improvement activities. In the team’s view all these quality assurance activities are very positive.

The university wants students to play an important role in the education process. This is stated in many UO’s guidelines, for instance “the compulsoriness of dean’s offices and study programmes’ coordinators to present and discuss study programmes and curricula with the students”, and the obligation in establishing “monthly meetings with students’ representatives”.<sup>25</sup> The team observed that relations between students and teachers are very positive. Students stated that their contacts with teachers are easy and open. In general, students are happy with their education, student residences, access to library (despite a few complaints about the opening hours on Saturdays and about a lack of books and journals in foreign languages) and, to a certain extent, with the wireless network. Some students complained about the scarcity of meeting places on campus.

It should be stressed that the performance of teachers is evaluated by students at the end of each semester. Yet, some faculties admit still not having a procedure to give feedback to students on what has been changed as a result of their evaluations. Students’ proposals in Faculty Councils usually have consequences and are welcomed by deans and heads of departments. Faculties are increasing contacts with alumni and with employers in order to adapt study programmes to market requirements. However, the involvement of stakeholders

<sup>21</sup> SER, pg. 12

<sup>22</sup> SER, Annex 24, Procedure for the development and approval of curricula

<sup>23</sup> SER, Annex 23, Procedure for the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodical evaluation of study programs

<sup>24</sup> SER, Annex 25, Audit sheets for internal assessment process

<sup>25</sup> SER, pp. 8-9



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INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

in the discussion of curricula and their feedback are still not formalised. Note that UO is fighting against a dropping demographic trend and, since the number of students enrolled is a crucial element of the funding system of the university, the design of attractive study programmes adjusted to the labour market and with impact at the regional and national level, becomes even more important (particularly for those programmes belonging to less attractive study fields).

The SER states that UO is conferring a “greater focus on the practical application to promote the concept of learning by doing”.<sup>26</sup> Although efforts were being made to promote interactive teaching styles, namely involving students in research projects, the team observed that there are many students’ complaints about too little practical content in the curricula and too few internship projects. The team recommends UO to strengthen relations with employers by creating contracts for internships and joint projects. Some laboratories also need to upgrade and improve their equipment.

Both students and academics reported that various student-centred learning methods are being practised. However, the implementation of e-learning platforms is at an early stage, only being used in few faculties (for instance, the faculty of management and technological engineering and the faculty of economics). The team recommends that UO provides the same e-learning platform for all faculties. Additionally, the installation of the IT-infrastructure (currently under development) should be finished, covering the whole institution including student residences. A common e-mail address should also be provided to all students and staff members.

Student support services (mobility, career centre, entrepreneurship, etc.) are dispersed among faculties. In order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these services, the team thinks that is important to concentrate them in central units. Regarding support services, the team commends the excellent handbook for international students. On the other hand, the level of student involvement in cultural and sport activities is well below what might be expected from a university of UO’s size (e.g. theatre group, music group, sport groups, home-coming, international day, etc.). Accordingly, the team recommends that UO reinforces the support for cultural and sports activities at the university.

Study programmes are associated with departments, and responsibility for the programmes is delegated to coordinators belonging to those departments. Therefore, in most cases teaching staff teach on programmes of their own department. This practice may have the adverse effect of the duplication of similar disciplines within the university, preventing internal mobility of students and teachers, and making difficult to launch inter-faculty multidisciplinary programmes. This may also impede the development of a critical mass of expertise. Concerning teaching programmes, the team thinks that UO is rather “department centred”, having few cross-department and multi-faculty programmes. The team also observed

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<sup>26</sup> SER, pg. 8



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DEVELOPMENT AND  
INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

difficulties in redistributing teaching resources among the departments and faculties, and a limited offering of free elective disciplines.

It is clear to the team that UO must cover a wide range of teaching domains in order to accomplish regional needs. As already mentioned UO considers the diversity of study programmes one of its “strengths”.<sup>27</sup> But the huge diversity of undergraduate study programmes causes fragmentation of education, hindering the use of synergies and reducing the number of students enrolled per programme. Furthermore, there is the danger that the quality level for admissions may decrease in areas suffering from a lack of demand. Accordingly, the team recommends that UO reduces the fragmentation and specialisation of its undergraduate study programmes (e.g. mathematics and computer mathematics, 23 undergraduate programmes in engineering) in order to produce graduates with more knowledge broadness and job flexibility, making better use of synergies and avoiding small student numbers.

An important threat for UO stems from the difficulty in attracting and promoting young qualified academic staff because of the low level of wages for those wishing to pursue a university career. This factor together with the uncertainty produced by repeated changes to the evaluation criteria for the development of the academic career will certainly affect negatively, for many years, the progress of the university. It should be stressed that only 3.5% of UO’s teaching staff are less than 30 years of age.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the limited number of professors accredited for teaching doctoral programmes is another problem with severe consequences on the number of PhD students enrolled. The team recognises that UO faces substantial constraints for remedying these problems, which are mainly caused by national restrictions. Nevertheless, all possibilities to fill open positions and recruit new staff should be pursued. For reasons already mentioned, the team recommends close attention to issues associated with teachers' careers, particularly in relation to hiring and promotion, although many of the possible solutions depend largely on changes to the national legislation and regulations, and on the institution’s budget.

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<sup>27</sup> SER, pg. 23

<sup>28</sup> SER, Annex 5, Total number of teachers at UO (2010-2012), pg. 1



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## 4. Research

UO aims to become an “advanced research and teaching university”, but it is clear for the team that this is a goal that can only be attainable in a somewhat distant future.

In fact, the team thinks that the overall research output and the number of PhD students is, so far, well below what one would expect of a university which seeks to be classified as “advanced research”. For instance, in the SIR World Report of 2012,<sup>29</sup> which is based on the scientific production indexed in the Elsevier’s Scopus database,<sup>30</sup> UO is ranked 2 829 in the world, 177 in the Eastern Europe region and 18 in Romania. During the five-year period 2006-2010 only 687 documents with reference to UO were published in scholarly journals indexed in Scopus. Moreover, the proportion of UO’s teaching staff having a significant research production is still limited. This fact is indirectly stated in the SWOT analysis presented in the SER: a reported weakness is justly the “small number of teaching staff doctoral supervisors (46 of which 19 are tenured professors and 27 associated professors)”.<sup>31</sup>

However, much good quality research is undertaken at UO, reaching excellent levels in some specific faculties and areas. The team had the opportunity to appreciate some good research projects carried out in collaboration with industry and many examples of peer-reviewed journals (some indexed in prestigious scientific databases like Web of Science) and books published or edited by UO (several in foreign languages, mainly in English). The team recognises that research raised its position in the institutional mission of UO in recent years, and that the scientific output of UO is growing very rapidly over the last years, becoming more visible internationally (212 papers were indexed in Scopus in 2010, while in 2006 the figure was 64).

One of the main strategic objectives of UO, repeatedly stated in the Strategic Development Plan for 2008-2013 and in the Rector’s Management Plan for 2012-2016, is the “development of scientific research in accordance with the strategy and priorities defined at national and European level, for enhancing scientific and financial results obtained from this activity”.<sup>32</sup> Research can be done both in research centres and faculties. There are 32 certified research centres that group together teaching staff and researchers according to their research field. The “coordination and evaluation of the research activity is conducted by the research vice-rector who is also the president of the research council”,<sup>33</sup> and the university wants to modify

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.scimagoir.com/pdf/sir\\_2012\\_world\\_report.pdf](http://www.scimagoir.com/pdf/sir_2012_world_report.pdf). The SCImago Institutions Rankings (SIR) project is a Research Evaluation Platform and Ranking Generator to analyse research outputs of universities and research-focused institutions.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.info.sciverse.com/scopus>

<sup>31</sup> SER, pg.23

<sup>32</sup> SER, pg. 6

<sup>33</sup> SER, pg. 14



EUROPEAN UNION



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INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

the teaching staff activities' profile, assigning more importance to the research (changing the current 30% research and 10% services to society, to 35% and 15%, respectively).

The SER states that "all areas of research, life sciences, technical sciences and socio-economic sciences are equally important, are supported equally"<sup>34</sup> but, on the other hand, UO wants to "strengthen research areas in which it is recognized" (these areas are specified in the SER)<sup>35</sup> and to "strengthening scientific research in priority domains declared within national strategy and where the University of Oradea has tradition".<sup>36</sup>

The team believes that a research policy is in place, although priorities with respect to the research areas are not yet really established. Despite the existence of excellent research areas, there is a large thematic diversity and many research groups do not reach critical mass and national or international visibility. Clearly, UO should reduce the number of centres (through mergers, cooperation, etc.) and focus its research. This requires setting appropriate steps to support this goal. For instance, excellent research groups already in place should be supported, interdisciplinary research should be reinforced, and young academic staff should be assisted by offering training in research methodologies, by reducing teaching hours, by offering research grants, etc. In addition, the team encourages UO to further open to the international scientific community. This means stepping up international cooperation, applying for EU funding, setting up a language policy, etc. Unfortunately, UO recognises as one of its weaknesses is the "small budget for amplexness of UO research activities".<sup>37</sup>

In all instances, the team recommends that the UO should follow its goal to raise research activities. Accordingly, UO should continue to stimulate publications in good quality journals (in English), and encourage UO's teachers to be more active in international research groups (collaborative research, projects, conferences and congresses attendance). Despite all constraints, UO should pursue its efforts in attracting and recruiting new staff, not only to fill the needs in teaching but also to strengthen identified research fields.

There is a small number of PhD supervisors, and there are not many PhD students, in part due to the strict and recently changing criteria used in certain fields (determined by national regulations) for obtaining "habilitation" (the right to supervise PhD students). On the other hand, the PhD grants' regulation limiting the financial support to a maximum period of three years favours theoretical work, harms applied research and encourages rushed work and lower quality. UO should lobby the national authorities in order to increase the number of doctoral supervisors and to introduce greater flexibility with respect to the duration of PhD grants. Another difficulty comes from the difficulty in promoting research staff not holding a position at a department corresponding to their research field (e.g. language teacher positioned in an

<sup>34</sup> SER, pg. 8

<sup>35</sup> SER, pg. 14

<sup>36</sup> Operational Plan for 2013, pg. 8

<sup>37</sup> SER, pg. 23



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INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

engineering department). The team thinks that UO should address this problem and try to revise the current practices.

Another route to foster research is to amplify the collaboration with the local, regional and national business community and with public and private non-profit institutions. The team observed that industry-based PhDs have featured in some faculties and recommends that UO increases that practice. Nevertheless, the team found that UO's Technology Transfer Centre, "which supports bidirectional relationship between university and business"<sup>38</sup> is a very good initiative that can bring to the university not only funds but also contacts and national visibility. Taking into account the prevalence of small and medium-sized companies in the region, it is expected that many projects will be directed to solve specific applied problems, implying short-term exercises expected to have some commercial impact without a strong content of research. However, small projects are frequently the seeds for more robust research-driven activities with greater impact. The team is aware that the current financial crisis affecting the private sector strongly restricts opportunities for private partnerships and contracts. But the income resulting from research activity under contract (funded from the state budget or from private and public institutions) represented less than 3% of the total budget of revenues in 2012. The team believes that it is possible to increase that number.

Taking into account that income generated by industry projects can help the low-salary problem of junior faculty, or to be an additional source to finance their participation in conferences or to purchase research equipment, the team recommends the creation of instruments to stimulate UO's academic community to strengthen links with local authorities and with industry, including small and medium enterprises, searching for applied research projects, consultancies, etc. The team also suggests that UO reinforces its policy of "involving students in activities of research, innovation and entrepreneurship",<sup>39</sup> in particular promoting internships in local and regional companies or institutions, and increasing the number of Master theses undertaken in industrial or service settings.

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<sup>38</sup> SER, pg. 15

<sup>39</sup> SER, pg. 9



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DEVELOPMENT AND  
INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

## 5. Service to Society

For UO, the “mission of education and research in higher education is completed by those of entrepreneurship and innovation for social and economic development of the regional community”.<sup>40</sup> In UO’s vision it is also stated the “innovative character of UO to contribute to the gross national income of the geographical area covered by the institution”.<sup>41</sup>

UO is the largest producer of higher education graduates in Bihor county. In turn, the county is the largest employment destination of UO’s graduates. Knowing that highly skilled human resources are a major factor for economic and social development, it is easy to realise the importance of the university in the regional context. Quoting a study annexed to the SER,<sup>42</sup> “... one can say that in the next years the University of Oradea will be an important player in the region’s labour market. Graduates who have completed training during their studies in higher education in Oradea will continue to have a significant contribution to economic dynamics in the region”. Beyond the educational role, the university produces knowledge which is being shared with economic and social agents to produce value in the region.

The team observed that within UO is an awareness of responsibilities and a strong interest in good cooperation with the region, and found abundant evidence of the remarkable contribution of UO to the economic and social progress of the geographical area covered by the institution. The team is also convinced that UO is a key player for the future development of the city and Bihor county. It must be emphasised that the university has developed many useful links with regional institutions and industries, and is highly regarded by relevant politicians, administrative, and economic leaders of the city and county. Accordingly, the actual importance of UO’s role in the community is unquestionable.

This conclusion was clearly confirmed during the team’s meeting with UO’s stakeholders, which occurred during the first site visit: unanimously, the participants, all very important local and regional personalities, including politicians, business managers, hospital managers and tribunal leaders, emphasised the relevant contribution of graduates and post graduates of UO for their institutions and for the development of the region. They also pointed out the existing close collaboration with the university both in curricula definition, continuous education programmes and development projects. The regional communities and enterprises are fully aware of the benefits and possible co-operations with UO. But there is certainly room for intensifying and also formalising these contacts.

The team recommends that UO strengthens and improves the relationship with former students, encouraging them to play an even bigger role in the university, inviting them to revisit their alma mater, to be engaged in the development and evaluation of study

<sup>40</sup> SER, pg. 6

<sup>41</sup> Idem

<sup>42</sup> SER, Annex 4, Study on labour market analysis, pg. 6



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DEVELOPMENT AND  
INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

programmes, as well as to promote a more practical and labour market-based education. The creation of an alumni office with the objective of formalising the relationship with former students, and getting feedback and tracking their professional careers, is likely to be a good initiative to increase the impact of UO in society. The team commends the lifelong learning initiatives of UO and encourages the continuation of existing activity.

Furthermore, the team suggests that UO defines a centralised strategy for the promotion and marketing of the university. This includes the reinforcement of UO's corporate identity and image, the promotion of its study programmes, the establishment of stable links with high schools and graduates, the production and dissemination of promotional materials and the strengthening of the relationship with media. It should be emphasised that UO is also an attractive employer and important regional player. Good examples of successful collaborative research and development projects should be publicised to potential industry partners.

In short, the team thinks that is very important that the regional strength of UO is supported and further developed. Service to society is a substantial asset of the university, which must be emphasised, nurtured and nationally recognised.



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## 6. Quality Culture

An important issue stated in the 2008-2013 Strategic Plan was the promotion of quality in all the relevant processes of UO and the implementation and consolidation of a quality management system. The current rector has adopted the same direction. This is clearly outlined in his managerial summary that those quality management objectives should be kept. The team noted that quality is a concern and a commitment voiced not only by the top leaders of the university but also by heads of departments, programme leaders and teachers in general. It is clear that quality assurance procedures are becoming rooted in UO's daily life.

According to the SER, since 2012 the quality system of UO (which is titled "System of Evaluation and Quality Assurance") became decentralised.<sup>43</sup> The system is based on the Quality Assurance Code,<sup>44</sup> a document elaborated by the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance of the Senate (which has the ultimate responsibility for the quality of all programmes). The structure of the quality system includes the Department for Quality Assurance (the executive and advisory body), the Quality Council (a specialised council of the Administrative Board), the Quality Commissions of faculties and departments (responsible for quality management at the respective level), and the Body of Internal Auditors (an independent body for internal evaluation activities, consisting of specially qualified teaching staff of UO).

The team acknowledges the action of the Body of Internal Auditors which "performed in 2007-2012 the internal evaluation of 302 study programmes, 261 curricula, 32 research centres and 229 teaching laboratories with visible results in increasing the quality of education and research process".<sup>45</sup> The evaluation activity of the Body of Auditors is a good quality achievement of UO and should be continued in the future.

The quality strategy of UO is defined in the document "Programme of Policies, Strategies and Actions for Quality",<sup>46</sup> annually revised by the Department for Quality Assurance, which also reports the results achieved in the previous year. In 2012, that document established, among others, the objective of the "creation and maintenance of a database on quality of educational services at University of Oradea, designed to assess performance indicators for areas: human resources, financial material and resources, students, graduates".<sup>47</sup> The need for a database has already been mentioned in the report ARACIS 2011, which recommended the "creation of a database, both upgradable and multi-criteria accessible so that through a periodical assessment of performance indicators, the university's quality evolution should be properly

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<sup>43</sup> SER, pg.7

<sup>44</sup> SER, Annex 22

<sup>45</sup> SER, pg.19-20

<sup>46</sup> SER, Annex 13

<sup>47</sup> SER, pg. 20



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DEVELOPMENT AND  
INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

monitored and the quality assurance decisions should be accurately developed and put into practice".<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the implementation of monitoring and follow-up mechanisms is an important step towards the establishment of quality culture all across UO, at all levels. But without a user-friendly information system and the respective databases, it is likely that quality procedures and monitoring become heavy, fastidious and bureaucratic. Additionally, without up-to-date and easy-available data it is difficult and expensive to produce self-evaluation reports, make comparisons or benchmarking and prepare good decisions. Moreover, the disclosure of relevant information about the performance of faculties, departments, programmes, teaching, etc., is in itself an important contribution for improvement. The SER mentions that the results of data collection and analysis activities have had considerable impact.<sup>49</sup> Even though the team is aware that a lot of data is collected at UO (for instance, records obtained by monitoring study programmes), it is unclear how the data is treated and used for improvements and strategic decisions. Accordingly, the team strongly recommends the implementation of such an information system and database.

Many good practices are now in place at UO: academic staff is involved in the implementation of quality assurance for taught study programmes, teachers are evaluated by students and also by their peers who provide feedback. Note that students remarked that the feedback loop on results of evaluations is not always closed effectively. In addition, UO has been very active in developing and adapting its educational programmes according to the Bologna structure. UO is now redirecting the teaching/learning process to a student-centred approach based on learning outcomes, which is a key element of quality culture in higher education. The team recommends that UO intensifies its efforts in order to put in practice this approach, the most difficult component of the Bologna philosophy.

UO should build on the experience of the Department for Quality Assurance to improve and develop services dedicated to quality enhancement that do not only collect data, but also provide advice and support staff in their teaching and research missions. It must be stressed that students say that UO administration has a welcoming attitude towards complaints and suggestions and that it is easy to change things. However, quality culture at UO should be further improved by developing common understanding and ownership, and by promoting the sense of belonging and self-identification. According to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), UO should also enhance students' involvement in quality assurance (QA) procedures. The team also recommends that UO use sound quality processes within all faculties and study programmes for strengthening the institution's reputation.

Finally, the team strongly recommends that UO minimises the bureaucratic burden of QA procedures, giving more emphasis to improvement: QA should be regarded as a self-improvement instrument that permeates the routines of UO.

<sup>48</sup> SER, Annex 26, Report of ARACIS Council on the external evaluation of the academic quality in UO, 2011, pg. 91

<sup>49</sup> SER, pg. 21



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## 7. Internationalisation

UO aims to increase academic collaboration with prestigious universities abroad. To a great extent, this objective is pursued through the mobility of students. The SER states that 274 contract agreements were active in 2012 (for the most part under the Erasmus programme), signed with foreign HE institutions<sup>50</sup> belonging to 34 countries. France (39 contracts), Italy (36), Turkey (35), Poland (20), Spain (19) and Germany (17) are the countries most represented on the agreements list. Besides Erasmus, UO also benefits from the Leonardo, Grundtvig and Jean Monnet programmes.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand and according to the SER, “in recent years, the University of Oradea has developed a series of EU-funded projects through the Lifelong Learning CEEPUS, HURO, FP-7 Programme, in partnership with universities and organisations abroad, especially in the European Community”.<sup>52</sup>

Another element of the internationalisation activity of UO is to attract foreign students who can speak English. For the academic year 2012-2013, UO offered three undergraduate plus three Master programmes in English: the six-year Bachelor in general medicine, the three-year Bachelor in international relations and European studies and in tourism geography, and the two-year Masters in European studies, in advanced mechatronics systems and in tourism, management and planning. Other foreign students not wishing to be enrolled in these programmes must learn and speak Romanian.

It should be pointed out that UO offers good induction information and activities for international students, which could be further developed. International students (and those students who have undertaken exchange programmes) have very positive views about their experiences. Since 2006 there is an Association of International Medical Students (AIMSO)<sup>53</sup> integrated in the association for Romanian medical students in Oradea (ASMO) and representing the international students in the Council of the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy. UO should take advantage of those positive student experiences to promote student exchanges.

Nevertheless, the SER identified a weakness in promotion marketing for foreign students. In fact, the student body in OU is essentially local (students from other parts of Romania are rare) and, in total, the number of foreign students is very low. Additionally, UO should promote more intensively the mixing of local and international students in academic life, and not just in rare collective events.

<sup>50</sup> SER, Annex 20, Foreign Partners of UO

<sup>51</sup> SER, pg. 10

<sup>52</sup> SER, pg. 14

<sup>53</sup> <http://uoradea.org/main/>



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In what concerns the mobility “out”, the economic situation makes it very difficult to enlarge the number of UO students going abroad. The team met some students who have participated in mobility programmes, but relatively few. A number of students were offered places but could not afford to take them up. The team commends the cooperation with the University of Ingolstadt that every year gives 20 medical students the opportunity to study abroad for a semester. The cooperation also includes teacher exchange.

It was not evident to the team what approach is being taken at UO to increase internationalisation. The current trends in higher education clearly underline the importance of internationalisation in education and research. The team observed that, currently, internationalisation at UO is very much restricted to a few exchanges of students and teachers, participation in some international conferences and several cooperation agreements. In fact, student mobility is not well developed in certain areas and in general is well below the European target of 20% by the year 2020. Likewise, academic staff is not sufficiently internationalised. UO should elaborate a strategy for internationalisation, defining clear goals for institutional collaborations and intensifying efforts with respect to the various aspects of internationalisation (strategic partnerships, research collaborations, mobility programmes, foreign language policy, publications in English, internationalisation of curricula, elaboration of joint study programmes, etc.).

In particular, the team recommends that UO continues its efforts for the internationalisation of study programmes and research, and defines a clear policy for the use of foreign languages, including the provision of courses in English. Likewise, UO should maximise the potential of its international student body using synergies through shared curricula activities.



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## 8. Conclusion

UO is a well-established and comprehensive institution, having a strong leadership, highly motivated academic and administrative staff, and committed students. UO's regional role is so strong and so vital that the team is persuaded that the national funding model in Romania should change in order to give appropriate weight to that dimension. Stakeholders are very supportive and confirm UO's leading position, a unique selling point in the area it serves.

UO has an excellent basis to meet its current challenges and has the capabilities to face the challenges of the future. The team has confidence that UO will strengthen its position as a regional and national player in higher education and contribute to the progress of society by its teaching and research in its fields of excellence.

For these objectives to be fully materialized, in the team's view the following recommendations should be implemented.

### 8.1. Governance and Institutional Decision-Making

- Simplify the governance model and the decision-making procedures.
- As modern effective management structures require small decision-making bodies, the Senate should reconsider its optimal size with a view to its reduction.
- Based on the regulations of the Law 2011, the Senate should concentrate on the vital role of ensuring academic standards and integrity and take the strategic decisions, while the rector should be responsible for the operational management of the university.
- Define clear responsibilities keeping key decisions at the rectorate level with approval of the Senate where appropriate.
- Further reduction of the number of faculties should be considered.
- Try to diversify income streams but also to cut internal costs (i.e. operate more effectively).
- Try to reduce the bureaucracy as it affects staff.
- Elaborate a vision for the year 2020 or 2025.
- Define performance indicators for all goals and objectives in the Strategic Development Plan for the next period and regularly monitor progress detailed in an operational plan.



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- Clearly identify benchmarks and performance indicators drawn from comparable institutions.
- In cooperation with other universities, lobby the government for a change in the funding model, giving appropriate weight to regional development and services to society.

## 8.2. Teaching and Learning

- Follow strategies for implementing all Bologna Process aspects (student-centred learning, involvement of stakeholders, internationalisation, employability etc.).
- Ensure that the principles of excellence in teaching and research apply to all curricula, disciplines and students.
- Give more weight to excellent teaching for staff promotion and hiring.
- Formalise the involvement of stakeholders in the discussion of curricula.
- Strengthen relations with employers by the creation of contracts for internships and joint projects.
- Provide the same e-learning platform to all faculties.
- Finalise the installation of the IT-infrastructure within the whole institution including student residences.
- Provide a common e-mail address to all students and staff members.
- Concentrate student support services in central units (mobility, career centre, entrepreneurship, social welfare, etc.).
- Support cultural and sport activities at the university.
- Reduce the fragmentation and specialisation of undergraduate study programmes in order to educate graduates with a certain broadness and job flexibility, make better use of synergies and avoid very small student numbers.

## 8.3. Research

- Reduce the number of research centres, and focus UO's research activity setting appropriate steps to support this goal.
- Already existing research units of excellence should be strengthened.
- Assist young academic staff by offering training in research methodologies, reducing teaching hours, offering research grants, etc.



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- Further open UO to the international scientific community (mobility programmes, collaborative research, conference attendance, language policy, staff recruitment, etc.)
- Increase visibility of UO research by being more active in international research groups.
- Lobby to increase the number of doctoral supervisors and introduce greater flexibility with respect to the duration of PhD grants.
- Increase the number of industry-based PhDs.
- Create instruments to stimulate the academic community to strengthen links with local authorities, industry, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (applied research projects, internships, consultancies, etc.).

#### 8.4. Service to Society

- Continue offering important services to society, and intensify and formalise the university's relations with the region.
- Strengthen and formalise the relationships with former students, create an alumni office, ask for feedback and track their professional careers.
- Encourages continuation of lifelong learning activities.
- Strengthen the university's relations with schools, media and society (marketing of study programmes, research areas, UO as attractive employer and important regional player).
- Expose examples of good collaborative research and development projects to potential industry partners.

#### 8.5. Quality Culture

- Build on the experience of the Department for QA to improve and further develop services for quality enhancement.
- Use collected data to provide advice and support.
- Promotion of sound quality processes within all faculties and study programmes of UO should be used for strengthening the institution's reputation.
- Students should be involved in the QA procedures according to ESG.
- Quality culture at UO should be further improved by developing common understandings and ownership.



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- Minimise the bureaucratic burden of QA procedures giving more emphasis to improvement. QA should be an instrument of self-improvement that permeates the routines of UO.

## 8.6. Internationalisation

- Utilise positive student experiences to promote student exchanges.
- Continue efforts for internationalisation of study programmes, research and all other aspects of international relevance.
- Define a clear policy for the use of foreign languages including the provision of courses in English.
- Maximise the potential of the international student body through shared curricula activities (use synergies).