

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of a follow-up evaluation of Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad. The European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) originally evaluated Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad in 2013, and the report was submitted to the university in January 2014. In 2017 the university subsequently requested that IEP carry out a follow-up evaluation.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme and follow-up evaluation process

IEP is an independent membership service of the EUA that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. 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).

In line with the IEP philosophy, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the institution itself to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the original evaluation. However, the follow-up process is understood to specifically consider the way in which the university has addressed the observations and recommendations made in the previous IEP evaluation. At the same time, the process is not limited to consideration of previous recommendations but may also take into account new observations arising during the course of the follow-up evaluation. In order to prepare the site visit, the institution is expected to submit a self-evaluation report, with particular regard to describing the progress made, and possibly indicating barriers to change.

The rationale is that the follow-up evaluation can assist the institution in evaluating the changes that have been made since the original evaluation: What was the impact of the original evaluation? What use has the institution made of the original evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up evaluation is also an opportunity for the institution to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

As for the original evaluation, all aspects of the follow-up process are also 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 Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad's profile

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad (hereafter AVU) dates back to 1972, when a sub-engineering institute, part of the University of Timisoara, was established in Arad. In the aftermath of the societal and political changes of 1989, the sub-engineering institute was established as an independent institution and renamed the Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad.

AVU is located in the western-most part of Romania, close to the Hungarian border. Arad is the capital of Arad county, and the second largest city in the western region after Timisoara. Arad is an economically strong area, with an established industrial base especially in the automobile industry. The region has a very low unemployment rate.

AVU is a comprehensive university with nine faculties and over 5 000 students at bachelor and master levels. Currently, the only doctoral programmes offered by the University are in philology and theology, and have very few students. The university's student population has declined sharply in the past ten years as a result of shrinking demographics in the country. This, along with the national budget constraints, has limited the institution's available resources.

The higher education system in Romania is highly regulated through legislation as well as through the Ministry of Education and the Romanian accreditation agency ARACIS. The universities have formal autonomy, but it is strongly qualified by the national framework of governance.

As a relatively young university, AVU seeks to further establish itself amongst Romanian universities and society. The university hopes that the follow-up evaluation will enable it to further assess its progress towards the goals it has set for itself.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was carried out by a team of five, comprising largely the university's administrative council. The self-evaluation group was chaired by Professor Florentina-Daniela Munteanu, and was composed of the Rector, Professor Ramona Lile; Vice-Rector, Associate Professor Teodor Florin Cilan; and Dean, Associate Professor Dan Ovidiu Glăvan; as well as the chair of the student league, Roxana Barna.

The self-evaluation report was drafted by the self-evaluation group, some of whom had been part of the self-evaluation group of the previous IEP evaluation in 2014. The group analysed the previous recommendations, collected information about the different activities of the university, and assessed how it performed in relation to the recommendations from the previous round. They were supported in the data collection by the university's new information management system and ISO certification. The self-evaluation group then drafted the report, circulated it in the university community through the deans and collected and incorporated their suggestions into the final report. However, it was the team's impression that little attempt was made to ensure that the report was seen by all staff. The chair of the students' league also

used her own channels to collect feedback from students on the draft. The self-evaluation report was accompanied by a set of further documents, such as the university's strategic plan and internationalisation strategy, organisational chart and student figures.

The self-evaluation report of AVU, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team on 25 January 2018. The visit of the evaluation team to AVU took place on 25-28 February 2018.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Jürgen Kohler, former Rector, University of Greifswald, Germany, team chair
- David Vincent, former Pro-Vice Chancellor, Open University, United Kingdom
- Arus Harutyunyan, student, Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia
- Terhi Nokkala, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, team coordinator

David Vincent and Terhi Nokkala were part of the team that conducted the initial evaluation at AVU in 2014.

The team thanks the leadership team of the Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad for welcoming them to the university, and for the open and cordial discussions throughout the evaluation process.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

In the following sections, the team addresses each of the recommendations made by in the evaluation report of 2014. The team presents an analysis of the progress made against each of the recommendations, and offers new recommendations as a result. Finally, the team may offer entirely new observations and recommendations arising from the discussions with the university during the follow-up evaluation.

2.1 Previous recommendations

2014: The university should identify targets and benchmarks for strategic priorities. Similarly, an assessment of the risks associated with strategic priorities should be conducted.

Analysis and recommendation

Since the previous evaluation, the university has paid attention to aligning the strategy and annual action plans. The team notes that the university does have a strategic plan and an action plan which are formally available. The mission statement is prepared by the rector and her team for the period 2016-2020, and formally approved by the senate. The action plan is decided upon annually and it includes the names of those responsible, resources, deadlines and milestones. The strategy focuses on five key areas: human resources, education process, research process, financial resources and alumni.

The team finds the documents to be extensive; however, there do not seem to be clear priorities between the targets, which the team finds may be necessary in view of the extent of the items listed. The action plan focuses on legal rather than operational responsibilities, and it does not contain operational tools to reach the objectives. The team was not able to fully ascertain the extent to which the setting of the different targets and action lines were accompanied by systematic risk analysis and thorough validation of the defined objectives. The team takes note of the SWOT analysis provided by the university, which seems rather ephemeral; for example, the SWOT does not contain any mention of the sudden reduction in student numbers.

- The team recommends that the university continue to sharpen its strategic planning process, prioritisation and risk assessment, and that it ensures proper operationalisation of the strategic goals into an action plan with explicit, clear operational responsibilities, tools and prescribed accomplishment levels. Furthermore, the team recommends that the university should reassess its SWOT analysis, identifying both accomplishments and challenges.

2014: Defining a distinctive image for the institution will help the institution to be recognised amongst the large Romanian higher education system, as well as for acquiring international partners.

Analysis and recommendation

The team asked various university constituents what constitutes the university's distinct image. Instead of a single brand, the university community has multiple interpretations of the university, such as 'comprehensiveness', 'unity', 'matching benchmarks', and 'striving high'.

The team recognises that given the specific operational and cultural context of the university, there may be a pressure for standardisation rather than profiling. The team also understands that there are both cultural and financial constraints to student mobility inside the country, and thus the university's student market is strongly based in the county of Arad and the western region in Romania. With such a local market approach, finding a student market segment for the university may depend less on developing and communicating a distinctive hallmark.

- The team nevertheless recommends that the university conducts a thorough analysis of the status quo as well as of the opportunities with regards to the student population. The university should rekindle its search for a distinctive image, e.g. through the analysis of its strengths, local needs, and through identification of its specific educational features. The university should also make use of internal and external communication and brainstorming to ensure ownership and support among the university constituents and external stakeholders.

2014: Strengthen the participation of, and feedback from the constituents of the university community in the implementation of the university strategy.

Analysis and recommendation

The team was told that the university strategy is developed and implemented as an interaction between the top-down and bottom-up processes, and that all university constituents are able to raise their concerns in the relevant representative bodies. The team was not able to ascertain the extent to which this principle works in practice. The team gained the impression that the university's communication process seems to be focused on imparting information in a formalised sense, e.g. either posting information items, such as a report or minutes of a meeting, onto the university website, or imparting information down from the top as a cascading process. Furthermore, it may be that discussion is compartmentalised into representative bodies, while open 'blue skies' discussion is missing. An indication of this is the limited knowledge of the 2014 IEP report and/or the current self-evaluation report amongst the people met by the team.

- The team encourages the university to explore the possible benefits of an open all-inclusive platform which fosters a debating culture to draw inspiration from the views of the university constituents.

2014: The team recommends that the university consider extending the Academic Council to include employer representatives, in order to formalise and consolidate stakeholder representation and gain valuable knowledge about the needs of the region's employers.

Analysis and recommendation

At the time of the previous evaluation, the university had recently established an academic council as an advisory body for the university's leadership team, through which the law allows universities to formally include external stakeholders in the governance of the university. The academic council, which is an optional rather than mandatory body for the university, has since been abolished. The Romanian law on higher education, which regulates the university's decision-making bodies such as the senate and the administrative council, does not allow external stakeholders to be included in these bodies.

The university has extensive contacts with local stakeholders, including international companies operating in the region. The contacts take place both through formal agreements concerning internships, regular discussions concerning curriculum needs, as well as various events organised by the university to connect local companies and students or to foster joint research ideas. These interactions, although manifold, are unregulated and partially organised on an *ad hoc* basis.

- The team recommends that the university establishes a more formal recurring strategic consultation process with external stakeholders to inform high-level strategic planning and decision-making in the university.

2014: The team recommends that the university provide training to students to effectively participate in the decision-making process.

Analysis and recommendation

The students make up 25% of the representatives of the university's decision-making bodies: the senate, faculty and departmental councils. Additionally, there is one student representative in the administrative council. During the visit, the team learned that the local and national student unions provide some training for student representatives to enable them to function effectively in their representative roles. The students seemed satisfied with the training. Therefore, the team assumes that, while the university may not be directly engaged in offering training, the need for such training is met by other suitable means such as the self-governing student body and quality assurance commissions.

The other members of these decision-making bodies, as well as of various specialised preparatory and consultative bodies such as the university and faculty level quality assurance commissions, comprise primarily academic staff members. The team sees that the various

representative bodies are important for engaging in discussions on the improvement of various aspects of university activities. Therefore, all members of such bodies should have up to date knowledge of the mandate and capacities of such bodies to contribute towards the development of the university.

- The team therefore considers that all new representatives of decision-making and consultative bodies would benefit from receiving structured training to be able to function effectively in their representative roles, e.g. by familiarising them with the terms of reference of the respective bodies, their specific roles as representatives within these, and the contextual conditions of their debates and decision-making.

2.2 Additional observations and recommendations

The team would like to offer the following additional observations:

The university is a relatively small institution with less than 6 000 students. It nevertheless has nine faculties, focused primarily on a few broad subject areas. The largest of these is engineering which is split into two faculties, the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection. Along similar lines focusing on hard sciences, the university also has a Faculty of Exact Sciences, which provides the teaching of some basic natural sciences, such as mathematics, throughout the university. Another larger set of disciplinary fields are human sciences such as education, economics, social sciences, psychology and sports. In addition, the university offers degrees in humanities, design and theology. The university's organisational chart appears rather complicated, and the reporting lines and dialogue between the university's administrative and academic management are not immediately clear to the team. However, the team was made aware that the university's administrative personnel are professional and that their competencies are consistently updated.

The high number of faculties means that the university's representative bodies such as the senate and the administrative council, whose composition is determined in relation to the numbers of faculties, are rather large and therefore not necessarily very conducive to strategic discussions. While the university considers the comprehensive educational offer to be one of its strengths, such an administrative breadth may be challenging to manage and constitute an inefficient use of staff resources. The team is aware of the entrenched interests and cultural obstacles to organisational reforms related to faculty structures as well as of transaction costs that accompany attempts to make changes.

- The team does, however, encourage the university to review the faculty structure and its viability in the light of declining student numbers.
- Similarly, the team encourages the university to review the organisational units and reporting lines, ensuring regular consultative interaction between professional

administration and academic bodies. In this way, the capacities of the entire university personnel and the university's policy-making and operational procedures can be steered in the same direction.

3. Quality culture

2014: Increase emphasis on and train staff in quality enhancement.

Analysis and recommendation

Quality has been brought to center stage in the university's strategic plan for 2016-2020. The university strategy states, for example, the following:

“Today's youth are aware that a mere diploma will not suffice in finding a good job, they also require strong practical skills that would allow them an opportunity with large private or state owned corporations. Our duty is not to offer paperwork without a real justification for the gained theoretical knowledge but a diploma that in itself is a guarantee of an excellent training and that allows for a successful career.

To be sure that we are up to this challenge we shall establish a measure plan that should help to correct anomalies and prevent possible failures. Quality control across the university is a four axis approach that includes: curriculum plans, scientific research, human resources and amenities. We shall identify all possible problems in addition to setting up deadlines and measure packs for solving them. Each faculty shall concentrate on increasing the quality standard based on the four axis approach previously mentioned and will aid in creating measure plans that are coordinated with the ones operating at an institutional level. “

In monitoring its quality holistically, the university benefits from a newly implemented information management system (SUMS), which allows the university to collect and synthesise, for example, student feedback and information about teaching, research and administration activities and performance. The information management system improves the quality and availability of information to the students as they can access their own courses, grades and electronic course contents via the SUMS platform. The university acquired an ISO standardisation in 2014 and considers this to greatly benefit the university's overall quality management.

Along with the SUMS platform, the university has also taken other steps to improve the transparency and availability of information, such as improving its website to convey more information to the university community and stakeholders. As mandated by ARACIS, the university also has a vice-rector's portfolio on academic transparency, meaning that this vice-rector is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the information provided by the university to current and prospective students, staff and stakeholders.

The team notes that quality assurance is an ongoing regular process at the university, and that it benefits from relevant administrative and representative units being in place to successfully assess and develop its quality. The university regularly collects information about staff performance on teaching, research and administrative functions, which is based on staff self-evaluation, peer evaluation and student feedback through the SUMS platform. Additionally,

the university collects annual feedback concerning student services and facilities. The students interviewed by the team indicated that sometimes the timeframe for completing the feedback questionnaire, which is provided separately for each course per semester, is very short. The feedback is aggregated and analysed by the faculty quality assurance commissions, and the results are made available to the heads of departments. Overall aggregate reports are also discussed in the university-wide quality commissions. The team was told that the same bodies and persons are also involved in considering improvements in the event that quality deficiencies are discovered.

However, it seems to the team that the university's quality assurance is still oriented more towards quality control rather than quality enhancement, although some movement towards an enhancement focus can be detected. Furthermore, the team was not able to ascertain the extent to which the feedback loop of informing students of changes made on the basis of their feedback actually functions.

During the evaluation visit, the team tried to investigate the university's holistic quality concept. It seems to the team that the quality concept consists of four corner stones: employability, meeting benchmarks, ARACIS requirements (which to a large extent dictate the core curricula) and expected learning outcomes and, when considering the core of AVU's quality assurance practices, teacher performance.

- The university should align its quality policy with the EHEA principles and explore a more holistic quality concept in relation to the quality facets described above. (1) Instead of focusing on graduate employability only as an outcome of educational quality, expand the notion of the outcome of education to include creativity and an inquisitive mind, and to personal development in general as well as to education for democratic citizenship. (2) Instead of being content to just meet benchmarks and comply with minimum standards, design its own qualitative yardsticks (of course, while still meeting national and ARACIS-set standards), and see quality as an infinite spiral of reaching beyond benchmarks rather than the accomplishment of fixed standards. (3) Instead of focusing on individual teacher performance, adopt a quality concept that covers the entire student life cycle from admission, analysis and specific description of desired competencies, matching those with teaching and learning methods, exam policies and practices, internships and mobility opportunities, all the way to graduation and alumni communication. (4) The university should also move towards a stronger notion of quality as fitness of purpose and, deriving from that, fitness for purpose.

2014: Generate efficiencies in quality assurance administration by inspecting the task division of the current bodies engaged in quality assurance and by moving from a paper-based to electronic system of collecting the periodical surveys from students and staff.

Analysis and recommendation

As noted above, the university has implemented an electronic platform through which it is able to collect feedback not only from students, but also from staff. The university has a department

of quality assurance and enhancement, which employs two full-time professional staff members, who also have previous teaching experience. The department is led by an academic staff member who is engaged in quality assurance duties on a part-time basis. The team was told that while the university's quality assurance commission may consult the staff of the quality assurance department when necessary, they are not regular consultative members of the commission.

- The team urges the university to make consistent use of the quality assurance professionals, including in the representative decision-making bodies.

4. Teaching and learning

4.1 Previous recommendations

2014: The university should seek to extend pedagogical training for staff members. If the university chooses, it could for example consider making pedagogical training an additional merit in career progression.

Analysis and recommendation

The team was told that ARACIS requires that all new staff who are promoted to the level of assistant professor or higher receive some pedagogical training. This training usually takes place before individuals apply for positions, but it may also be arranged at the beginning of their employment in the new position. The team understands that the university aspires to go beyond the ARACIS requirements and deliver pedagogical training to all their academic staff, for which the team would like to commend the university. It was not clear to the team, however, whether any continuous training was available or whether the training was a one-off qualification.

The university's human resource department is involved in identifying such training opportunities outside the university and sending staff members to attend them. The team understood that such training is primarily offered by bodies outside the university and occasionally also paid for by the staff members themselves.

- The team recommends that the university continues these efforts. The university should similarly make pedagogical training a recurring feature and ensure the availability of teacher training in the event of unsatisfactory quality assurance findings. The university should also, and in particular, pay attention to providing staff with skills to implement student-centred learning, problem-based learning and e-learning in their teaching.

2014: The university already offers continuous professional development (CPD) programmes to the labour force in Arad, in order to facilitate continuous updating of skills. The team recommends that the university extends this educational offer of CPD courses, which may both contribute additional income stream for the university and enhance the skills level of the labour force available in Arad and its region.

Analysis and recommendation

The team understands that AVU offers eight continuous professional development courses based on demand. Not all of these courses run at any one time. The team commends AVU for organising these as a demand-driven feature, although they were not able to ascertain whether there has been a marked change in demand since the previous evaluation. The university does not seem to have a strategic policy on continuous development courses or life-long learning.

- The team recommends that AVU keep developing life-long learning as a strategic option for the university and as a tool for having an impact on the region, strengthening the university brand and offering a new source of revenue. The university should do this by analysing the university's strengths and by making use of systematic canvassing of the opportunities and needs in the local markets.

2014: The university should seek to expand the e-learning platform to all faculties, and to continuously update it to ensure cost-effective and innovative pedagogy.

Analysis and recommendation

The university's new SUMS system also functions as an e-learning platform through which information about curriculum, class schedules, reading lists, and lecture notes are distributed. Students can also access their own grades on the platform, and it contains some possibilities for interaction between teachers and students. The team received little information about its capacity to foster innovative pedagogy. The team understood that national regulations mandate that student learning on all courses must be at least in part assessed through exams, and that those exams cannot be taken online.

- The team endorses the university's attempts to advance its portfolio in e-learning and recommends that the university continues this development and explores more sophisticated learning approaches such as interactive learning and formative self-assessment through the e-learning platform. The team encourages the university to be proactive in seeking potential consortium solutions in cooperation with other universities in order to share costs and to ensure that there are relevant human and financial resources in place.

2014: The university should also pay further attention to providing its students with transferable skills that are necessary in today's labour market. These may include, but are not limited to team work, communication or project management skills.

Analysis and recommendation

Transferable skills are one of the categories of transversal skills that any degree course in Romania must include, according to the set national requirements. The team notes that the university has shifted towards student-centred teaching and learning methods that foster the acquisition of transferable skills, such as collaborative learning methods, project work and presentations. Internships also play an important part in imparting transferable skills to students.

- The team recommends that the university explore what constitutes transferable skills in the university's subject areas, and what are the linked competences. Transferable skills should also be viewed as part of a more profound approach to personal development and education for democratic citizenship.

4.2 Additional observations and recommendations

The team takes note that internships are one of the university's key strengths and may provide a unique selling point for the university. The team finds it commendable that the university has an active policy of acquiring internships, especially in engineering. The team was not able to ascertain to what extent this active policy extends throughout all the university's subject areas. The university takes care to ensure that the internships are fit for purpose and it has some structured oversight of the quality of internships.

- The university should maintain and strengthen internships as a quality element of its learning. Internships should also be included in the quality assurance processes in a robust way. The university should ensure that the good practices in terms of internships are broadly applied throughout the university and not limited to engineering only.

The team understands that the course structure comprises both compulsory and optional/elective courses running side by side in periods of one semester. The team was told that this sometimes causes difficulties for those students who would be interested in conducting a mobility period to find a window in which to do so, as they would miss some compulsory courses in the home institution during their time away. The team was similarly not able to ascertain whether the university has a consistent recognition policy and practice at institutional level.

- In the spirit of designing a comprehensive quality concept covering the entire student life cycle as advocated earlier in this report, the team recommends that the university integrates the facilitation of international mobility into it. This can be done by clustering courses differently or by exploiting the full potential of optional subjects to allow for mobility windows.
- Similarly, the university should ensure and implement a consistent recognition policy and procedures in the spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, together with legal oversight of the recognition process.

5. Research

2014: The team encourages that the university should drive research in all areas in order to improve teaching, but continue focusing the main research effort to the limited areas of excellence. The team also recommends that the university seek further support from local industries for research and development projects. Tailor-made projects, as well as sharing facilities with industry may both contribute to income generation and reduce costs.

Analysis and recommendation

The university has recently won two significant research grants, one related to building a new research facility for technical and natural sciences, and the other for conducting specific fundamental research in natural sciences. The university benefits from sharing spaces with several local companies that have provided the university with laboratory equipment in exchange for being able to conduct some of their own activities on university premises.

The university has a scientific council. The team understood that it is primarily engaged with supporting individual research activities, such as applications and publication processes. Its role is therefore more operational than strategic.

It seems to the team that, essentially, the university does not have clear strategic research priorities. The team understands, however, that the financial constraints of the university and in Romania at large, make it challenging for the university to be able to set such strategic priorities for research and provide adequate financial and human resources to support them. The university seems to be engaged in certain local research partnerships with companies located in the region, organising bi-annual conferences which function as a platform for sharing ideas about research for the local sector and, in some cases, for identifying potential for concrete collaboration. Additionally the university organises international research symposia.

- The team recommends that the university create a think-tank to identify promising research areas. This can be done, for example, by broadening the portfolio of the scientific council.

2014: It is very important that the university makes use of research results to innovate teaching. As a primarily teaching-oriented institution, research at its best contributes directly to updating the educational content and methods.

Analysis and recommendation

The team was told that the university offers teaching based on research results; however, the team was unable to confirm this beyond these statements. One indication of the university's desire to bring research and teaching closer together is that the university aspires to open more doctoral programmes, in addition to the existing two doctoral programmes in theology and philology. The need is most keenly felt in engineering, which is clearly one of the university's

foremost areas of expertise. In the Romanian context, offering a doctoral programme requires that the university has, in a field in which it already offers bachelor and master degrees, three full professors who have also acquired a habilitation. The team was told that the requirements for achieving a habilitation are both demanding and constantly changing. The university estimates that some additional years are required before the university will acquire adequate capacity to open a doctoral programme in engineering. The team was told that the university strives to open doctoral programmes also in other fields.

- The team endorses the university's aspiration to open more doctoral programmes. Fostering research as an educational objective and integrating research and teaching to enhance students' creativity and inquisitive minds, even at bachelor level, for example by means of teaching methodologies based on problem-based, project-driven and student-centred learning, should continue to be a priority for the university.

6. Service to society

2014: Establish a one-stop office for employers and industry to contact the university. This office should be the low-threshold contact point for any local businesses to approach if they desire collaboration with the university;

and:

2014: Coordinate and integrate at an institutional level the professional development and entrepreneurship services which are currently separately handled by the different faculties. In this way the university will be able to identify more efficiently and facilitate the broader educational offer directed to the community.

Analysis and recommendation

By all accounts, the university enjoys close and fruitful collaboration with local employers and other stakeholders in several areas. The university pays a lot of attention to achieving high quality internships for its students. The university, through its faculties, communicates with local employers about their needs in terms of graduate skills and competences, tracks their alumni in terms of employment, and offers continuous professional training on the basis of demand. Furthermore, the university offers some testing services to local companies and organises events to jointly innovate projects. However, it seems to the team that, overall, the collaboration is largely based on personal networks and informal relations. The team understands that there is no one-stop shop system in place that would allow those companies and other stakeholders who do not know the university staff personally to identify university services, and there is little institutional support for research collaboration. The team was told that there was a national website where the research capacities of Romanian universities are listed, and that this can be used to search for potential collaboration partners. It was not clear to the team whether the university offers entrepreneurship education to students.

- The team takes note of the regular contact with stakeholders, but it also endorses the recommendation of the previous evaluation to establish a single-entry point to the university for local and regional stakeholders. Such an entry point would allow the latter to easily approach the university and be directed to the relevant persons internally, whether their interest is in acquiring testing services or continuing education, establishing research collaboration or offering internships. The team also recommends the university to ensure that there are clear procedures in place to record the results of stakeholder meetings. The team furthermore encourages the university to explore, in conjunction with the local authorities, the opportunities that could arise by establishing a business incubator.
- In terms of the national website, the team recommends that the university ensure the information concerning the university is regularly updated and that the existence of the website is advertised to relevant stakeholders.

7. Internationalisation

2014: The university should establish strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be achievable and a concerted action plan should be drafted to chart the way for achieving those.

Analysis and recommendation

The university has an internationalisation strategy, in which its aspirations are formulated as follows:

“AVU’s general objectives regarding the internationalization process are: a significant increase in AVU’s international visibility, the development and strengthening of EU and international programme participation; the consolidation of the educational, research-development-innovation capacity and its elevation to international standards through a modern, human resources oriented management.”

The team commends the university for the efforts put into writing the internationalisation strategy and following it up with an action plan and targets. The value of internationalisation may lie primarily in enriching the intellectual environment of the university rather than as a significant source of revenue.

- The team therefore cautions the university to take care in balancing the short- and long-term investments in international activities, so as to avoid overinvesting in the field. Finances permitting, the university could explore the possibility of establishing a small number of strong strategic international partnerships, including and indeed concentrating its efforts on research collaboration and joint degrees with strategic partners.

2014: The university should also involve the administrative staff in international activities in order to enable them to learn from best practices abroad.

Analysis and recommendation

The team was told of examples of administrative staff being engaged in short-term Erasmus mobility, for example in Portugal and Spain, in order to exchange best practices and learn from each other. The team was not informed to what extent the experience gained through international visits permeated into AVU and whether other members of the university, apart from those personally taking part in international exchange, were informed about these experiences.

- The university is recommended to maintain opportunities for staff to gain international experience.

2014: The university could rebrand the Erasmus office as an international office and expand its activities to cover all aspects of internationalisation.

Analysis and recommendation

The Erasmus+ office is now one of the three sub-sections of the university's Department of International Relations, Programmes and Projects, the other two being Foreign Students Department, and Programmes and Projects Department.

2014: The university should disseminate best practices inside the institution for encouraging students to study abroad;

and:

2014: Prioritising language training for both staff and students would enable them to fully engage with international activities.

Analysis and recommendation

The team was told that staff and students who return from a period abroad are required to write a report to the international office in order to share their experiences. The team was not able to ascertain the extent to which these reports are distributed more widely in the university community.

- The university is recommended to make sure that any international experience is widely shared and feeds into discussions about the improvement of AVU's strategies and operations.

The team understands that ARACIS requires basic English teaching in the first two years of studies. However, the team was told that the level of such teaching was the same for all students, regardless of their initial proficiency.

- The team recommends that the university embeds internationalisation into the student life cycle in a more holistic manner. This includes familiarising students with the idea of a possible mobility period early on in their studies and linking language teaching to mobility at an early stage of studies with a specific view to qualifying students in the language of their projected host institutions abroad. Similarly, it entails making mobility windows available through the design of curricula, and making sure that a consistent, predictable recognition practice based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention is in place (see earlier in this report).

2014: Finally, the university should establish a strategy for delivering quality-assured courses in English and other languages. The quality, facilities and procedures for courses taught in foreign languages should be the same as for those taught in Romanian. As this is necessarily

an expensive activity, the university should carefully consider those courses for which a foreign language delivery is feasible.

Analysis and recommendation

The team was told that there is a legal obstacle to closing down a programme offered in Romanian and integrating both Romanian and international students into the same classes taught in English. The team understands that the small number of international students may not make doubling programmes in Romanian and a foreign language financially viable.

- The team endorses the overall recommendation of ensuring the quality of provision regardless of the language. The team also particularly recommends the university to expand its internationalisation concept by exploring international internships, which may offer a strong marketing point for the university. In doing this, the university may consider making use of the international companies that have a branch in the region in which the university is located.

8. Conclusions

The team commends the university on its readiness to continue developing its strategy and activities by engaging in a follow-up evaluation. Since the previous IEP evaluation in 2014, the university has taken steps to devise and implement a more consistent strategy, and has strived to expand both its internationalisation and its research activities. The university has also taken some steps to strengthen its information management systems, so as to be better able to monitor the quality of its activities. The team believes that despite the contextual challenges, the university nonetheless has the potential to shape its own future. The university benefits from being located in an economically vibrant region with easy access and good connections to the rest of Europe. The university also has a capacity to work further with stakeholders in the region so as to develop its teaching and research.

The team would like to stress that a balanced blend of direction-setting leadership and bottom-up ownership is vital if the university wants to achieve its goals. The team wishes the university the very best in charting its future, emphasising its conviction that AVU has a vital role to play in the education, research, and societal as well as economic development of western Romania in particular, and also beyond.

Summary of the recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

- The team recommends that the university continue to sharpen its strategic planning process, prioritisation and risk assessment, and that it ensures proper operationalisation of the strategic goals into an action plan with explicit, clear operational responsibilities, tools and prescribed accomplishment levels. Furthermore, the team recommends that the university should reassess its SWOT analysis, identifying both accomplishments and challenges.
- The team nevertheless recommends that the university conducts a thorough analysis of the status quo as well as of the opportunities with regards to the student population. The university should rekindle its search for a distinctive image, e.g. through the analysis of its strengths, local needs, and through identification of its specific educational features. The university should also make use of internal and external communication and brainstorming to ensure the ownership and support among the university constituents and external stakeholders.
- The team encourages the university to explore the possible benefits of an open all-inclusive platform which fosters a debating culture to draw inspiration from the views of the university constituents.

- The team recommends that the university establishes a more formal recurring strategic consultation process with external stakeholders to inform high-level strategic planning and decision-making in the university.
- The team therefore considers that all new representatives of decision-making and consultative bodies would benefit from receiving structured training to be able to function effectively in their representative roles, e.g. by familiarising them with the terms of reference of the respective bodies, their specific roles as representatives within these, and the contextual conditions of their debates and decision-making.
- The team encourages the university to review the faculty structure and its viability in the light of declining student numbers.
- Similarly, the team encourages the university to review the organisational units and reporting lines, ensuring regular consultative interaction between professional administration and academic bodies. In this way the capacities of the entire university personnel and the university's policy-making and operational procedures can be steered in the same direction.

Quality culture

- The university should align its quality policy with the EHEA principles and explore a more holistic quality concept in relation to the quality facets described above. (1) Instead of focusing on graduate employability only as an outcome of educational quality, expand the notion of the outcome of education to include creativity and an inquisitive mind, and to personal development in general as well as to education for democratic citizenship. (2) Instead of being content to just meet benchmarks and comply with minimum standards, design its own qualitative yardsticks (of course, while still meeting national and ARACIS-set standards), and see quality as an infinite spiral of reaching beyond benchmarks rather than the accomplishment of fixed standards. (3) Instead of focusing on individual teacher performance, adopt a quality concept that covers the entire student life cycle from admission, analysis and specific description of desired competencies, matching those with teaching and learning methods, exam policies and practices, internships and mobility opportunities, all the way to graduation and alumni communication. (4) The university should also move towards a stronger notion of quality as fitness of purpose and, deriving from that, fitness for purpose.
- The team urges the university to make consistent use of the quality assurance professionals, including in the representative decision-making bodies.

Teaching and learning

- The team recommends that the university continues these efforts. The university should similarly make pedagogical training a recurring feature and ensure

the availability of teacher training in the event of unsatisfactory quality assurance findings. The university should also, and in particular, pay attention to providing staff with skills to implement student-centred learning, problem-based learning and e-learning in their teaching.

- The team recommends that AVU keeps developing life-long learning as a strategic option for the university as a tool for having an impact on the region, strengthening the university brand and offering a new source of revenue. The university should do this by analysing the university's strengths and by making use of systematic canvassing of the opportunities and needs in the local markets.
- The team endorses the university's attempts to advance its portfolio in e-learning and recommends that the university continues this development and explores more sophisticated learning approaches such as interactive learning and formative self-assessment through the e-learning platform. The team encourages the university to be proactive in seeking potential consortium solutions in cooperation with other universities in order to share costs and to ensure that there are relevant human and financial resources in place.
- The team recommends that the university explore what constitutes transferable skills in the university's subject areas, and what are the linked competences. Transferable skills should also be viewed as part of a more profound approach to personal development and education for democratic citizenship.
- The university should maintain and strengthen internships as a quality element of its learning. Internships should also be included in the quality assurance processes in a robust way. The university should ensure that the good practices in terms of internships are broadly applied throughout the university and not limited to engineering only.
- In the spirit of designing a comprehensive quality concept covering the entire student life cycle, the team recommends that the university integrates the facilitation of international mobility into it. This can be done by clustering courses differently or exploiting the full potential of optional subjects to allow for mobility windows.
- Similarly, the university should ensure and implement a consistent recognition policy and procedures in the spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, together with legal oversight of the recognition process.

Research

- The team recommends that the university create a think-tank to identify promising research areas. This can be done, for example, by broadening the portfolio of the scientific council.

- The team endorses the university's aspiration to open more doctoral programmes. Fostering research as an educational objective and integrating research and teaching to enhance students' creativity and inquisitive minds, even at bachelor level, for example by means of teaching methodologies based on problem-based, project-driven and student-centred learning, should continue to be a priority for the university.

Service to society

- The team takes note of the regular contact with stakeholders, but it also endorses the recommendation of the previous evaluation to establish a single-entry point to the university for local and regional stakeholders. Such an entry point would allow the latter to easily approach the university and be directed to the relevant persons internally, whether their interest is in acquiring testing services or continuing education, establishing research collaboration or offering internships. The team also recommends the university to ensure that there are clear procedures in place to record the results of stakeholder meetings. The team furthermore encourages the university to explore, in conjunction with the local authorities, the opportunities that could arise by establishing a business incubator.
- In terms of the national website, the team recommends that the university ensure the information concerning the university is regularly updated and that the existence of the website is advertised to relevant stakeholders.

Internationalisation

- The team cautions the university to take care in balancing the short-and long-term investments in international activities, in order to avoid overinvesting in the field. Finances permitting, the university could explore the possibility of establishing a small number of strong strategic international partnerships, including and indeed concentrating its efforts on research collaboration and joint degrees with strategic partners.
- The university is recommended to maintain opportunities for staff to gain international experience.
- The university is recommended to make sure that any international experience is widely shared and considered feeds into discussions about the improvement of AVU's strategies and operations.
- The team recommends that the university embeds internationalisation into the student life cycle more holistic manner. This includes familiarising students with the idea of a possible mobility period early on in their studies and linking language teaching to mobility at an early stage of studies with a specific view to qualifying students in the language of their projected host institutions abroad. Similarly, it

entails making mobility windows available through the design of curricula, and making sure that a consistent, predictable recognition practice based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention is in place.

- The team endorses the overall recommendation of ensuring the quality of provision regardless of the language. The team also particularly recommends the university to expand its internationalisation concept by exploring international internships, which may offer a strong marketing point for the university. In doing this, the university may consider making use of the international companies that have a branch in the region where the university is located.