ŞTEFAN CEL MARE UNIVERSITY

Suceava Romania

EVALUATION REPORT

June 2011

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Ştefan cel Mare University, Suceava, Romania. The evaluation took place in March and June 2011.

2. 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 distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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

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

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

3. Ştefan cel Mare University (USV) and the National Context

In 1963 a Pedagogical Institute was established in Suceava, continuing the traditions of higher education based on Moldavian Higher Education Institutions. More recently the institution went through a number of manifestations including *The Institute of Pedagogical and*

Technical Education (1976), *The Institute for Sub-Engineers* (1984) - operating as a subsidiary of the Polytechnic Institute in Iaşi, until its establishment in 1990 as the current University, commonly referred to as the University of Suceava (USV). It is located in what was previously the capital of Moldavia but is now part of the North Eastern region of Romania in a town of approximately 106,000 people. Two other State Universities are situated in the region at Iaşi and Bacău.

The region (comprising six counties) borders Ukraine and Moldavia. The County of Suceava is known for its wood, construction, tourism, food, textiles, mechanical engineering, IT and electrical industries. According to the Self Evaluation Report (SER), the regional GDP is the lowest in the EU region.

A new Law of National Education has recently been introduced. This is relevant to the Higher Education sector to a considerable degree, but at the time of the visit the accompanying guidelines giving interpretation to the legislation by the Ministry had not been fully published. There was therefore some uncertainty regarding the legislative framework within which the University was working.

The University of Ştefan cel Mare at Suceava, which in 2009 had a student population of 13,201 and 440 full and part-time staff, became a member of the EUA in 2001.

4. The Self-Evaluation Process

The self-evaluation process was overseen by a *Coordinating Board of Institutional Self-evaluation* comprising: the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs (Teaching and Research), the Vice Rector for Student Affairs and Facilities, the General Administrative Manager, the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Public Administration, the Chair of the Department of Communication and Information Technologies, the Chair and Secretary of the Quality Assurance and Evaluation Commission, the Chair of the Public Relations and Communications Department (also liaison person), the Chief Accountant, the Secretary of the International Relations and Community Programmes Department and two students (a Senate representative and one from the Student Entrepreneurship club).

This group met weekly and, working through various sub-groups, drew upon input from faculties and departments. Drafts were posted on the University's website for discussion. The final version was signed off by the Rector. In the view of the Group, the self–evaluation report (SER) gave an accurate reflection of the views of the wider University and this was confirmed by the IEP Team in discussion at faculty level and with students. The IEP Team wishes to

congratulate the University on the quality of the SER which presented a clear description of the University and its policies. The SWOT had been undertaken in an open and transparent manner and the IEP Team concurred with much that had been written there.

5. The Evaluation Team

The self-evaluation report of 1 February, along with appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in February 2011. The visits of the evaluation team to the University took place in March and June 2011. In between the visits the University provided the IEP team with some additional documentation. The evaluation team comprised:

Professor Kerstin Norén, chair (Rector, Karlstad University, Sweden)

Professor Ivan Leban (Former Vice Rector, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Ms Kristine Bak Nielsen (Student, Roskilde University Copenhagen, Denmark)

Professor Noel Whelan (Former Vice President/Dean University of Limerick, Ireland, and Professor Emeritus)

Professor Robin Smith, team coordinator (Former Pro Vice Chancellor Anglia Ruskin University, Emeritus Professor and Director Arethusa Projects Ltd. UK).

The Team wishes to thank the Rector Professor Adrian Graur, the staff and students of the University for the hospitality and cooperation shown throughout the two visits. Thanks especially to Associate Professor Mihai Dimian, the University's liaison person, for his efficient and effective organisation, essential for successful visits.

6. Context

Staff characterised the local/regional economy as depressed with many communist-era industries close to bankruptcy and with a low GDP. The University therefore saw itself as being an important lever in regeneration. Staff stressed the negative effect of the 2008 economic crisis which had impacted upon them personally, especially in terms of frozen salaries, promotions and related matters.

The Rector informed the IEP Team that new legislation had been introduced which aimed to reform education in Romania. Although published, its precise impact was not yet clear since several papers were still expected from the Ministry providing an interpretation of the legislation. The Law, which aimed to reform the Higher Education (HE) sector as a whole (including both private and public institutions) would eventually result in three categories of university: those which were research intensive, those which were both teaching and

research oriented and those mainly focussing on teaching. Universities were being asked to evaluate themselves in relation to these three categories and to supply, or validate, existing information held by the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency (ARACIS), and the Romanian Funding and Research Councils. The visit by the IEP Team was therefore seen as timely by the Rector. The aim of the University was to achieve the highest level classification (research intensive) although there was a great deal of concern about the reliability of the procedures and the validity of the data that was being used to rank institutions. Although the current evaluation by the IEP Team did not aim to facilitate the categorisation process, the new Law of National Education became an important theme throughout the visits. Concern had been expressed by staff that criteria had been imposed retrospectively; the weightings were unknown and the interpretation of the Law still remained problematic in the absence of the awaited clarification from the Ministry.

7. Strategic Planning and Development

Within the context of the Strategic Plan and Annual Operating Statement the University has set itself certain objectives, namely to:

- expand and improve the process of education
- increase the capacity for research, development and innovation
- enhance international visibility and prestige
- consolidate collaboration with the business environment
- render human resource management more efficient
- diversify funding sources
- promote and extend the services provided by the University for the regional national and international community
- consolidate the entrepreneurial dimension of the University

The Rector summarised these as three priorities:

- Diversification
- Internationalisation
- Enterprise

A further objective was added by the Rector, namely to achieve *Research Intensive* status following the publication of the new law.

The Strategy and Development Committee provides a framework and coordinating function for the development of the strategy of the University. The Team was informed that strategic planning started at departmental level. Plans were then translated into faculty strategic plans and a more concrete operational plan which was renewed every twelve months. These were pulled together into the plans for the University as a whole. The latter containing some 52 items with estimated costs, funding resources, responsibilities, completion dates and performance indicators. The Rector also submitted to the Senate an annual Management Plan.

The University has a management information system, to provide data and information. A great deal of administrative and academic time was taken up at departmental, faculty, and institutional level providing information for onward transmission to the Ministry. However, the IEP Team felt that although a considerable amount of data was available to the management and Senate, the degree to which it was capitalised upon for internal strategic debate was limited. The University has no Strategy or Policy Department to gather and exploit intelligence and to look over the political, social and economic horizon in a University-wide and coordinated manner. This is currently left to individuals at departmental, faculty and of course Rectorate level. *The IEP Team felt that the University might wish to consider the establishment of a Strategic Development Department (or similar) for effective data collection, analysis, planning and intelligence gathering at a senior level in the organisation as it seeks to meet the objectives it has set itself.*

8. Relationships with the Local Community

Relationships with local business, industry and the public sector were clearly very good. The IEP Team had an opportunity to meet local representatives many of whom had been students of USV. They were extremely supportive of the University and the role it played in the region. It was clear that the University and the local stakeholders had shared interests and between them they were in a good position to develop a plan for the region for presentation to the national government. It was noted however, that relationships appeared to have been established at an individual professorial level rather than through any systematic stakeholder forums at faculty or University levels. Whilst existing relationships were to be commended, the IEP Team felt that a more systematic approach at University level would enhance the University's capacity to serve the region's needs and *'consolidate collaboration with the business environment'* more effectively. It would also help to generate radical solutions to the

issues facing the University in a systematic and continuous manner. *The IEP Team therefore recommends that the University establish a formal University-level Stakeholder Forum and identifies a senior University manager to champion this.*

9. Constraints and Institutional Norms

9.1 Governance and Management

The University's capacity for change is limited by external and internal factors. Externally, excessive governmental controls and bureaucracy inhibit the University's ability to manage its affairs in an efficient and effective manner. For example, the University is unable to recruit or promote staff without Ministry involvement. A current embargo on staff recruitment means that it is considerably understaffed academically and administratively. It does not have the authority to replace staff. Promotions have also been inhibited. The University has therefore had to develop informal mechanisms to motivate staff and to overcome staff shortages. Another example is that students' results from PhD examinations need to be confirmed at national level and that all degree certificates need authentication by the Ministry. Certain programme areas could not be developed in distance learning modes since these are not allowed by ARACIS nationally. Other constraints were also apparent which sometimes put the University at a competitive disadvantage with private institutions.

However, a new Law of National Education has been passed. At the point of the visit, secondary information was awaited from the Ministry, interpreting the various clauses. There was no expectation that current bureaucratic requirements would be diminished by this legislation. The general feeling was that the Ministry's interpretation of the law might lead to more rather than less micro management of University affairs. It was speculated that State Universities would continue to have less autonomy than private ones.

However, the new Law offered Universities the possibility of changing the predominant mode of governance and management by allowing the introduction of Boards of Trustees and the appointment of Rectors through competitive interviews rather than by internal election. Boards would also introduce some degree of local external (and therefore considered by some, *political*) oversight. There was a debate within the University about the *pros* and *cons* of each system and a referendum would be held to decide which way to opt. The IEP Team focussed on the current position and made recommendations in the light of its findings, since it was inappropriate for IEP members to concern themselves with the internal referendum issue directly.

In addition to the external constraints, some limiting factors were created by the predominant culture of the University and its *internally* determined ways of operating under the current system in which the Rector and Deans are elected. Although the Rector is able to choose his own Vice Rectors he cannot chose his Deans. Elections are for four years, renewable once. The Rector was elected in 2004 and was therefore near the end of his second and final term of office. This was also the case for some Deans. Heads of Department went through an interview process which enabled the executive to have some influence over outcomes.

The organisational diagram placed the Rector as subservient to the Senate and he confirmed that in all matters the Senate was the decision-making body. (The new legislation might allow for a change in the balance of this relationship but this was currently unclear). The Rector and his Vice Rectors saw themselves as unable to initiate change without having secured a consensus from the Senate. For example, to change the structure of the University (such as reducing the number of faculties or departments or changing the committee structure) would require Senate to endorse the proposals. Leadership had to be exercised through effective persuasion rather than managerially. Senate met every semester, but more recently it had been meeting more regularly to discuss the new legislation and its implications. An Executive Senate Board (chaired by the Rector and comprising Deans and Directors of Departments) met more regularly than the Senate itself and provided the basis for interim consideration within the context of Senate's overall authority. The Rector also met with his Vice Rectors and Scientific Secretary on a weekly basis. This arrangement between Senate, the Senate Board and the Senate Bureau has been, to date, relatively effective in an organisation in which adaptation has been the predominant mode of operation. It might not serve so well with different people in positions of authority and in an increasingly difficult HE context globally.

At the outset of the evaluation process there were no direct line-management reports to the Vice Rectors on the organisation chart. The Rector confirmed that 3 Vice Rectors, 9 Deans and 9 Departmental Heads reported directly to him. Subsequently a revised management structure was presented to the Team indicating the Vice Rectors' oversight of certain administrative departments. Nevertheless the reporting burden on the Rector appeared to remain excessive, made worse by the long term absence (through illness and parliamentary duties) of two Vice Rectors who, the IEP Team was informed, could not be replaced *pro tem*. Whilst recognising that acting Vice Rectors were not permitted, IEP Team members advised that some strategy ought to be devised (whatever the name given to the incumbents)

because the current policy of spreading the workload of absent colleagues undermined the coherence of the roles and made them less effective.

Against a backdrop where all key decisions are made in the Senate, over which the University leaders exert limited influence and where consensus is required for action, the potential for the University to operate in a dynamic, innovative and entrepreneurial way appears problematic. Although seen as a strength in the SER (p16) (being '*highly transparent…allowing a democratic participation of faculty members in establishing goals and strategic actions*') in fact the imbalance between executive and Senate authority and responsibility seemed to go beyond the level of setting goals and determining strategy. The IEP Team considered the direct involvement of the Senate in all matters (operational and strategic) pertaining to the running of the University to be counterproductive. In a time of rapid change and uncertainty, the Senate needs to find time for high level strategic debate, and to make difficult decisions regarding how best to face the future corporately. Whilst constitutionally the Senate has responsibility for all matters, both academic and administrative, it needs to rebalance its agenda and delegate discussion and decision-making lower down the organisation.

Similarly, it was difficult for senior managers to focus on strategic development in a situation where the Rector and his Vice Rectors had so much involvement at an operational level. Additionally, the Vice Rectors' remits were not fully aligned with core strategic objectives *per se* which is an essential requirement if they are to champion development in these crucial areas. The issue is reinforced by the inherently unstable nature of the executive itself, based on elected positions and periodic re-election. This is by no means unique as a system for securing the leaders in a European University context, but combined with the:

- concentration of reporting lines focused on the Rector
- extensive bureaucratic administrative/management structures
- reliance on informal organisational processes
- need for Senate involvement in all decision making

means that the *internally* imposed constraints in the University are significant, restricting its capacity to respond to its market context with dynamism. The approach is paralleled at faculty level where the Faculty Academic Council is the major decision-making body in the faculty. An elected dean has executive authority but again much depends on the quality of the individual relationships. Whilst the Team might agree that the University's '*decisional capacity is limited by the overall structure of funding sources*' (SER p16) this reflects a

tendency to look outside the University for causes and hence for solutions to issues. This is not a strong base for long term sustainability. *The IEP Team therefore recommends that the responsibilities of the Rector, Vice Rectors and other senior managers be re-aligned with the core strategic objectives of the University and the span of direct line management control of the Rector be reconsidered. In addition Senate should free itself to engage in discussion and decision-making of a strategic nature through greater delegation to managers at all levels and by making them retrospectively accountable for decisions taken. As part of this, the relationship between the Senate, Senate Bureau and Senate Board should be reviewed to ensure that operational issues are delegated to a suitable level.* This is clearly a challenge to the current culture of USV.

9.2   Structure

Staff characterised the University as having a large, bureaucratic structure which allegedly was the outcome of responses to external and especially legal requirements. It was stated that, although on the surface the organisation appeared inflexible, in reality the quality of the people and the executive in particular was important in developing effective *informal* systems allowing more dynamic organic processes to develop. The IEP Team concurred that the structures were complex, appeared to be over elaborate and were perhaps insufficiently focussed on *future* needs.

There were numerous small administrative departments (some with only one or two staff members) with closely related or overlapping functions which could profitably be brought together in closer alignment or unified. Faculties varied considerably in size (one with only one department and 14 staff members) although the burden on these faculties remained the same (representation on commissions, supporting centralised processes, collecting information, reporting etc.). Considerable resource savings and economies of scale could be achieved. Additionally a more strategic approach to meeting the future requirements of the University through niche development could be accomplished if some consideration is given to the current academic organisation of USV.

The IEP Team recognised that much had been achieved using parallel informal organisational structures and processes. Some of these had understandably arisen to cope with difficulties associated with externally imposed staffing constraints and the tail end of a pre-revolutionary institutional culture which was not naturally entrepreneurial or oriented towards creative problem solving. In the past effective development has been accomplished with the present incumbents in executive positions. It cannot be guaranteed into the future as changes in

senior positions will occur through periodic elections. There appears to be no legal blockage to changing structures within the University, provided that relevant Faculty Academic Councils and ultimately Senate can be persuaded of the need.

The IEP Team proposes to Senate that there is room to consider more radically the precise organisational relationships currently in play. *Thought might usefully be given to how the organisation could be reconfigured with a view to making it slimmer, with clearly focussed line management responsibilities. The Team proposes that organisational structures be reviewed by firstly considering the number of faculties, and administrative departments and secondly considering a realignment of faculties and administrative departments with the core strategic objectives of the university.*

9.3   Resources and Funding

Like all European Universities funding was an important issue at USV as current sources and levels of income have become difficult to maintain into the future. The University's income comprised largely State monies (including for students - for which a student quota operated), and private tuition fees from non-state funded students. About 58% of income came from the government mostly in the form of 'base funding'. However, the Romanian population is declining (a decrease of almost 40% in 18-22 year olds between 2008 and 2011) which will hit future fee income. There has been a reduction in State funding of 33% over the same period (SER p18) which has further strained resources. It was anticipated that the introduction of the new Law of National Education might potentially bring about a considerable further reduction in income. Much depended upon the category into which the University was placed as a result of the ranking exercise. Income was also earned from hostels and refectories and to a much lesser extent from sponsorship and donations. (The anticipated development of this from the current level of 1% to 8-10% in ten years was felt by the IEP Team to be optimistic). The University also had the power to arrange bank loans (although requiring formal approval from the Ministry). Income from research and contract work (e.g. EU, State, World Bank) had risen substantially over the last 10 years and the University should be congratulated for this. The Ministry monitored income and expenditure but institutions were not penalised by reduced funding if they successfully enhanced their income and indeed this sometimes led to matched funding initiatives. Some buildings are owned by the University and can therefore be sold. Others are State owned and cannot, except through negotiation and agreement. A planned new campus will belong to the University based on land transferred to it from another institution.

State based funding flowing into the University is top-sliced to the tune of 30-35% and then passed to faculties largely on a formula basis (30% on the basis of quality recognition). This was distributed within faculties on the same basis with the greater part going towards salaries. In addition, the development and research funding is distributed according to the specific conditions of the contract/grant with the greater part going towards infrastructure development. IEP Team members were informed that some faculties were showing signs of having financial problems but these were still supported, especially where they had a good research profile. There had been no initiative at a strategic level to consider the future viability of these faculties.

Consideration had been given by the University to the manner by which the income could be enhanced, including via an increase in privately funded students and fees, through the establishment of an alumni system, and enhanced acquisition of funds from external sources. The SER focussed on the possible development of lifelong learning and continuing education programmes (p18) including Master and Postgraduate programmes developed for those in work. The IEP Team would wish to encourage the development of a carefully conceived strategy in this area (although external ARACIS constraints might limit its fullest development). However, the expectation that competitive funding from Europe, or receipts from donations and sponsorship, would make a sufficient impact on the decline in central government funding was felt not to be a sufficiently strategic approach. There was clear evidence that some areas of the University were beginning to see their potential in exploiting their intellectual assets. Others had been slower. *The University is faced with some difficult strategic decisions, including the need to become more focussed in its programme and research activities and to identify areas of specialisation (nationally and internationally) into which it should focus its investment as niche areas. The IEP Team would therefore wish to encourage the University to pursue its current initiatives for diversification with more vigour.*

9.4   Human Resources

Staffing levels are determined by the Ministry. Currently there is a moratorium on recruitment which means that the University was operating about 30% short on the academic staff side and 10% on the administrative. Academic promotion in the University is dependent upon a minimum points score level based on clear criteria. Where there is competition for a post, research activity is seen as the key criterion. Informal methods had had to be introduced to maintain morale and motivation at a time when promotions had been put on

hold by the Ministry. This partly explained the proliferation of very small departments which provided a means of incentivising staff and facilitating salary increases.

IEP Team members recognised the severe pressure this placed upon the organisation which made it even more important that the Executive and Senate develop strategies which, although unpalatable in the short term, will enable the University to sustain itself into the future against this difficult economic climate. Consideration should be given to the degree to which changes to the structure at academic, administrative and managerial levels were possible, with a view to rationalisation and making the most effective use of the declining staff base. Further thought might be given to how faculties and administrative departments might be aligned with core strategic objectives.

10. Areas of Institutional Activity

10.1   Research

The Commission for Research and Scientific Events was responsible to Senate for the strategic policy for research, based upon prior consideration at faculty level. There was currently no Vice Rector to provide coordination in this area and therefore the Scientific Secretary had taken on some of the responsibilities. It was recognised by the IEP Team that, given the spread of disciplines across the University, there could not be a single or simple strategy but there was no evidence of strategic prioritisation. The University's approach to research changed approximately five years ago with the introduction of clearer and specific criteria for staff evaluation using research criteria such as book and journal publications. Given the understaffing across the University concern was expressed at meetings with faculty management and staff that teaching loads were very heavy and this militated against effectiveness in many fields of activity. Teaching loads varied according to status with full Professors undertaking less teaching than Assistant and Associate Professors. All staff are expected to engage in research to a minimum level, and given that promotion is dependent upon research outputs this remains an incentive to engage despite the embargo. Staff were encouraged to publish in ISI cited Journals (where this made sense in terms of the discipline) and support given to individuals for patent registrations, attendance at international conferences and similar activities. Consideration was currently being given by the Commission for Research and Scientific Events to going beyond the current criteria and focussing more upon journals with higher impact. Research not only had a clear influence at PhD and Master

level but undergraduate students were sometimes involved in research activity. Research competitions were organised from time to time at university level depending on the university budget, but faculty members were involved regularly in national and international research competitions.

Research income has risen commendably from 184k Euro in 2005 to 1,420k Euro in 2009 being an increase from 2.36% of total University income to 7.98%. This required considerable effort since the success rate for project funding against applications was in the ratio of 1:7. The University was active in pursuing the development of patents, with rights accruing to the University, faculty and the individual on a negotiated basis. Registered patents had averaged about 16 per year since 2007 and in 2010 36 patents were registered in Romania. Equipment funding via the State has been at zero level for two years. The major source of funding is through externally derived project funds although a problem arises when projects come to an end and the University has to find the funds to maintain the equipment.

There were 13 specialised Research Centres at departmental level and three at faculty level to encourage interdisciplinarity. In order for a department to establish a Centre, agreement has to be sought from Senate. Research Centres were not actively closed but allowed to fade due to lack of external funding. IEP Team members felt that this was a further example of a strategic planning and decision-making process which failed to grasp difficult issues.

Some 315 students were registered on PhD programmes managed at University level through the Doctorate School which provided mixed multidisciplinary training as well as specialisation via the faculties. The provision is well structured and the Doctoral School provides an effective means of encouraging cross-fertilisation leading to new ideas and innovation. Despite the rigorous internal assessment of PhD candidates, outcomes have to be sent to the Ministry for ratification. It is somewhat difficult to identify the value added of this approach.

The University publishes an annual research report on the internet (although not in English – something it might wish to consider if it wishes to make a greater international impact).

The IEP Team commended the work undertaken to date, especially the pursuit of patents, EU and other external funding and policies on alumni and publications. Despite the difficult resource circumstances *it would encourage the University to continue to develop its research strategy and also to seek solutions to the issues arising from heavy teaching and administrative loads which preclude research activity. The reappraisal of the organisational structure (described above) might go some way towards achieving this.*

10.2   Innovation and Development

It was stated, although not consistently, that the University was currently not allowed to own companies and therefore exploiting the University's intellectual property was problematic. However, the IEP Team suggested that an entrepreneurial University aiming to '*increase the capacity for research, development and innovation*' might be seeking ways of responding to these kinds of external constraints through radical solutions. It was agreed that a key feature in the University's ability to respond effectively to the hostile market environment in which it operates is the extent to which it is able to exploit its intellectual property through the acquisition of funded projects, patents, spin-off companies and joint ventures. The new Law of National Education might well facilitate such developments. Although staff identified the difficult state of the local economy as being a major inhibiting factor in its entrepreneurial endeavours, the University should recognise its potential to exploit its undoubted expertise at both national and international levels (especially if it identifies niche areas in which to invest) thus providing a lever for subsequent local and regional development. There was some evidence that faculties were beginning to consider such possibilities although it was accepted that certain faculties had less opportunity to exploit these initiatives compared to others. Rapid progress will need to be made if the new Law of National Education facilitates such undertakings, which appears likely to be the case (and if it does not, creative solutions will become even more essential). It was noted that the legal department had started to consider these issues through a national forum. IEP Team members advised staff to seek out exemplar documentation from other institutions and bodies in Europe rather than starting afresh.

The Team would recommend that the University exploit any possibilities inherent in the new Law enabling USV/company joint ventures, spin-off companies and similar technological transfer and entrepreneurial activities to the fullest extent. The University has already established a Programmes Management Department which acts to identify funding opportunities, provide a service to staff in applying for project funding, in helping staff monitor on-going projects, identifying opportunities for interdisciplinarity and in data collection. Whilst its remit is more limited than envisaged above it contains the core of a more strategic operation which could help the University exploit its intellectual capital more fully. It is however currently understaffed (due to the moratorium on recruitment) even for its current activities. *The IEP Team recommends that the University might wish to re-engineer and enhance the capacity of the Programmes Management Department, suitably championed at a senior level, to support the development of its diversification initiatives.*

The University has established a department of Distance Learning and Continuous Education liaising closely with faculty representatives. There are some 74 continuous education programmes and 10 distance learning programmes. Currently none of these are at Masters level since this is not permitted by ARACIS. In the view of the IEP Team, lifelong learning and distance education at advanced higher education levels are important for national and regional economic regeneration as well as providing a further income stream to Universities. Distance learning activity was based substantially within the Faculty of Economic Science and Public Administration although three other faculties also engaged in this form of delivery. Nationally, not all areas of the curriculum are allowed to engage in distance delivery. Staff recognised that this form of activity had potential for expansion both nationally and internationally and therefore to play a strategic role in the generation of income. There was also recognition that the current IT platform was inadequate for a substantially increased engagement and technical support required strengthening.

10.3   Quality Assurance

The University has a Quality Evaluation and Assurance Commission which is an independent committee comprising academic staff and students (but no executive membership) set up in conformity to Romanian legislation requirements. It has an extensive remit[1], including overseeing the institution's capacity across the managerial, academic and administrative domains and *inter alia* to maintain effectiveness in delivering study programmes, research, quality monitoring and periodic review. It oversees the quality guidance output from the Quality Department, prepares an annual internal evaluation report, supports the development of the University's quality strategy, analyses the University's performance against quality indicators, appoints panels to evaluate study programmes before provisional authorisation or accreditation or quinquennial review, approves self-evaluation reports of study programmes and many other functions. ARACIS provides the minimum national standards laid down for study programmes in the various academic fields of study, including the mode of study that can be legitimately pursued (Thus, for example, there is no distance learning mode in Engineering or Information Technology nationally). USV has a Quality Assurance Department which provides an administrative service charged mainly with the development and dissemination of regulations and guidelines.

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[1] Details extracted from the *Functioning Regulations of the Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission* - tabled paper.

Parallel commissions exist in each faculty which also have a Quality Assurance Coordinator to support the University's quality assurance activities. In 2008 an attempt was made to unify and harmonise all faculty procedures at University level. However, there remain some residual differences. There is a system of academic staff evaluation involving:

- peers – through systematic observation by Heads of Department/Deans of Faculty
- research output measures (publications, patents, impact in Journals etc.)
- questionnaires to students.

The latter appear to be welcomed and taken seriously by students and staff alike. Some students confirmed that they had seen changes to teaching styles following comments from the student groups and this was welcomed, although other students felt that they were not fully aware of the outcome of questionnaires or follow-up by the University. *The IEP Team recommends that the University ensures that outcomes from quality assurance activities be communicated effectively to students and followed up systematically and transparently.*

Members of the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance were currently monitoring the potential impact of the new Law of National Education, especially in relation to admissions policies, and professorial promotions. Although it is necessary to follow ARACIS guidelines there is still some degree of freedom in terms of the quality models that can be adopted. Commission members were aware of pertinent European quality framework documentation. Generally speaking, the Commission members felt that staff in faculties understood the processes and quality culture of USV. Although they complained about the internal bureaucracy necessary to meet the requirements of the system, they nevertheless recognised its importance.

The University appears to have an effective approach to quality assurance. Discussions with diverse student groups across the University demonstrated that students were uniformly pleased with their learning experience, facilities and the enhanced reputation of the University which has developed over the past few years.

However, *the University might wish to consider the functions and overlapping relationships between the Commission for Teaching Activities, the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance and the Quality Assurance Department.* The Commission for Teaching Activities, as described to the IEP Team, was responsible, among other duties, for the essentially administrative task of checking study programme documentation against ARACIS requirements prior to submission. This is no doubt an important task but it may not best be undertaken by the Teaching Commission or academic staff. There appeared to be a lack of

clarity even between members of the Commissions and Department regarding who should be undertaking certain tasks to maximum effect. Some rationalisation might enhance efficiency and be more cost effective.

10.4   Teaching and Learning

Faculty staff confirmed that the principles behind the Bologna agreement, most notably the move away from didactic teaching towards more student-centred learning, had been introduced despite pressure on time and resources. Students undertook elements of work experience as appropriate and the Rector stressed that a series of semester-long placements in different companies had been introduced for over 300 students. Business and Industry representatives came in and taught either as one-off guest lecturers or more regularly. Students confirmed that student centred approaches had been adopted by most staff. The Commission for Teaching Activity had assisted faculty staff in the reorientation of content and the staff appraisal system had been important in facilitating the introduction of more student-centredness.

New programmes were considered in the first instance at faculty level prior to submission to the Commission for Teaching Activity for checking that the programme conformed to ARACIS requirements and to ensure an appropriate match between learning outcomes, syllabi and core competencies. The Commission was largely reactive. It did not propose to Senate or faculties what programmes might be developed. It did however propose to faculties how programmes might be improved prior to submission to ARACIS and in this sense the Commission played a key role in the quality processes of the University. Staff confirmed that the Commission did not receive the results of student questionnaires and had little contact with the Quality Department. Commission members stated that their role was dominated by the time-consuming activity of checking the substantial documentation necessary to secure a successful outcome with ARACIS, a task that they had undertaken successfully.

IEP Team members felt that this activity, which was largely administrative in nature, had a symbiotic relationship with the functions of the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance and the Quality Department. It was felt that the University might wish to consider whether some degree of rationalisation was possible. Given that the quality control functions of the Commission for Teaching Activity dominated its activities there appeared to be no forum at University level which focussed effectively on the efficacy of teaching (and learning) and pedagogic development *per se.* It was difficult to identify where the key debates on pedagogy took place and how different disciplines learnt from others in developing teaching

and learning methodologies and assessment practices. The transition to the Bologna concept of student-centred learning had allegedly been accomplished smoothly. *The IEP Team would recommend that the University ensure that teaching and learning processes have an effective forum under Senate.*

10.5   International

In order to meet its objectives of '*enhancing international visibility and prestige'*, '*increasing the capacity for research, development and innovation*' and of '*promoting services provided to...the international community'* the University intends to:

- intensify its cooperation with international academic organisations (including EUA),
- increase international agreements
- increase mobility grants for teachers and students
- increase the number of foreign students completing their studies at the University
- organise scientific and cultural events.

In the absence of a Vice Rector, the International Relations Office was co-ordinated by the Rector, supported by faculty representatives with international remits. Currently the bulk of foreign students (290) were recruited from Ukraine and Moldavia based on 21 partnership arrangements with institutions. Many of these spoke Romanian as a native language (Moldavia). Others learnt Romanian during one supplementary study year. There were 20 Erasmus students this year. Seven Bachelor and one Masters programme were delivered in English. Staff confirmed that there was no clear operational plan in this area or University-wide strategy *per se.* Each faculty had a strategy in the context of the objective of the University to 'internationalise'. Given that the University was aiming to establish itself in the higher *Research Intensive* category, it was stressed by the IEP Team that the international activity should contribute to this key objective in a formal and structured manner. It appeared somewhat opportune at present. There was no Commission overseeing the international activity although there was an International Relations department. Staff accepted that the absence of a Vice Rector, due to parliamentary duties, had affected coherent strategic development. *The IEP Team recommends that the University identify and exploit niche fields in an international context.* This would allow a more cost-effective and penetrating focus thus facilitating more successful policies for sabbaticals, international student transfer (inwards and outwards) and in programme delivery through distance learning.

Students studied foreign languages for the first two years of their undergraduate programmes and had a choice between French and English. There is general recognition that

greater student movement into and out of the University would be facilitated by more effective English language teaching and more especially programmes delivered in English. *The IEP Team would wish to recommend to the University that it improve its provision of programmes in English.*

The University has some 155 agreements with institutions in 55 countries. Where credit transfer arrangements with other European institutions have operated they appear to have worked well. Students felt that the International Office and individual professors in departments had been supportive. Students and staff identified grants for students on Erasmus programmes as being inadequate and this was inhibiting take up especially amongst the less well off. *The IEP Team recommends that the University develop more effective links through to the relevant national agencies and European Commission in Brussels in order to make the Erasmus and similar programmes fit for the Romanian context* and to enhance student grants which currently enables only a few students to benefit from international study.

11. Students

Students were aware of the contents of the SER and to varying degrees had been involved in its production. Students across the University spoke warmly of the staff, their teaching methods and the support given in the learning and pastoral context. They welcomed the interactive style of teaching and encouragement to share ideas. They were uniformly proud of their institution and very supportive.

Students were extremely well represented on all academic committees at faculty and University levels. Thus 25% of the Senate was made up of student representatives. The Rector made a point of seeking the students' views at Senate. Whilst some students, especially those who held representative positions, felt that information technology had been important in providing students with direct access to staff, the more rank and file student community seemed less well informed of current developments in the University, their potential influence on matters of importance and the flow of information and decisions from University Commissions and groups. For example, there is a Centre for Careers Counselling which, in addition to providing psychological profiling, identified job opportunities for students but of which some students had no knowledge.

There was no single organisational structure serving the interests of students as a group. Approximately 14 Faculty/University-based student associations existed serving diverse

functions from voluntary work to religious and sporting activities. Some students found this a confusing set up and IEP Team members felt it inhibited effective dialogue between the student body as a whole and the University. There are many examples of Student organisations across European Universities and the University might wish to examine some of these. *The IEP Team would recommend that the University establish and finance a University level student council (or similar formal mechanism) to enhance student involvement and communications.*

IEP Team members had an opportunity to tour the facilities of the Campus. Students stated that the flexibility built into the time-tables presented opportunities for them to participate effectively in the clubs and sporting activity many of which (including a new swimming pool) were shared with the local community. They were satisfied with the hostel accommodation. They confirmed that the library and IT services worked effectively for them. The Library closed at 8:00pm but students stated that there was provision for access to study areas later than that.

Where problems arose for students they were expected to discuss these with the member of staff and/or dean. Whilst this approach had clear advantages it could nevertheless lead to injustices and variation in response to issues across departments, faculties and the University. *The University is recommended to establish a formal University-wide grievance system for student complaints.*

Students spoke highly of the staff and of their experiences at the University. They were effective advocates for USV and will make good champions in the future. *The IEP Team members would encourage the University to continue with its work on its alumni database, tracking its successful students after graduation and recruiting them as ambassadors.*

12.   Capacity for Change

As indicated above, the University's capacity for change is limited by external and internal factors which in combination severely curtail the University's ability to act competitively in a European and global context. Leadership is exercised through force of personality rather than through an effective managerial structure.

Despite the internal and external constraints operating on the University, there is evidence of good leadership and changes taking place. The most significant of these is the planned development of a second campus on a site in close proximity to the current site in Suceava. Although still to be fully realised, the process adopted (feasibility study, debate, initial

investment and delivery) provides a sound model for other potential initiatives across the University in the future.

Other examples of successful change management include: the high standard at which the current campus has been maintained and developed, the introduction of new programmes (in Health for example) the past growth in student numbers, staff numbers, programme numbers and research outputs etc. Clearly the current Rector and his colleagues have been effective in moving the University forward. Nevertheless the IEP Team felt that this good progress obscures the fact that difficult decisions are less likely to be taken and unpalatable outcomes unlikely to be embraced where leadership is person-dependent and corporate outcomes dependent upon faculty self-interest in a highly democratised system.

Although, on the whole, the SWOT was effective in identifying issues confronting the University, it was less effective in identifying the opportunities for change available to it in order to bring about an alleviation of the threats. Much was focussed externally on macro level initiatives (such as harmonisation with the EU and the expected increase in investments in the North East of the country – SER p26). However, there are matters that are in the hands of the University itself which could bring about reduced costs and more importantly an organisational structure more able to support innovation. *The IEP team would encourage the University to anticipate the potential negative effects of the new Law of National Education, seek creative solutions and exploit the potential opportunities it brings, immediately and more thoroughly than to date.*

13.   Conclusions

The University is fortunate in currently having a Rector and executive team who have achieved a great deal in the context of a relatively difficult external and challenging internal environment. But under the current system, the executive could (and shortly will) change and continuity cannot be guaranteed. There is little doubt that the University is faced with formidable constraints that inhibit it in achieving the objectives set out above and in the development of a truly entrepreneurial and innovative institution. Externally, these include:

- legal restrictions
- ministry imposed staffing policies
- an unstable financial climate
- a struggling local economy
- uncertainty regarding new legislation

Procedures imposed on the University by external agencies do not, in many instances, appear to add any value to the education processes or outcomes. The new Law of National Education may not bring any significant change to this.

But there are also some notable internal constraints which include:

- an extensive, complex and elaborate organisational structure ill-suited to dynamism
- an executive structure and senior staff appointments process which is not wholly suited to an on-going innovative mission
- a heavy reliance on informal organisational processes
- a collective decision-making system which is less able to face corporate level challenges and bring about change in a timely and effective manner.
- a culture which is not wholly at home with change

The University has clearly achieved much over the last 10 years but some of this appears to have been adaptive behaviour, responding and reacting, rather than being proactive and strategic. It is a moot point whether the current structures, processes and systems are an *inevitable* consequence of the current legislation but the University is *recommended to consider the long term strategic positioning of the University and in the light of this take a radical look at its current internal dynamics and to consider afresh what can be adjusted, with some entrepreneurial vision, to meet its future strategic needs.*

There is much to be commended at the University including:

- a good, objective self-evaluation, and an open dialogue with staff and students which demonstrates a sound basis for a self-critical community
- the excellent recent growth and development in many aspects of the University's activity
- effective and adaptive, relationships between the Rectorate, Senate Bureau and Senate which to date have facilitated some developments
- the very positive attitudes of students towards the University and its staff
- the progress that has been made so far in terms of research and entrepreneurial activities
- the attention to quality issues.

The University is in a good position to:

- undertake a strategic review of what USV's sustainable strategic position should be for the future

- consider how it can become a niche institution with competitive advantage which is also advantageous both to the Romanian Government and attractive to the international academic community
- take the lead with the Chamber of Commerce and other regional interests in preparing a regional development plan for submission to the national government.

14.   Recommendations

To support the University in its development, the IEP team offers the following for consideration:

Governance and Management:

  i.   The IEP Team recommends that the responsibilities of the Rector, Vice Rectors and other senior managers be re-aligned with the core strategic objectives of the University, and the span of direct line management control of the Rector be reconsidered.

  ii.   In addition Senate should free itself to engage in discussion and decision-making of a strategic nature through greater delegation to managers at all levels and by making them retrospectively accountable for decisions taken.

  iii.   As part of this, the relationship between the Senate, Senate Bureau and Senate Board should be reviewed to ensure that operational issues are delegated to a suitable level.

Structure

  iv.   Thought might usefully be given to how the organisation could be reconfigured with a view to making it slimmer, with clearly focussed line management responsibilities.

  v.   Organisational structures should be reviewed by firstly considering the number of faculties and administrative departments and secondly considering a realignment of faculties and administrative departments with the core strategic objectives of the university.

Legislation

  vi.   The IEP team would encourage the University to anticipate the potential negative effects of the new Law of National Education, to seek creative solutions and exploit the potential opportunities it brings, immediately and more thoroughly than to date.

Students

vii.   The University is recommended to establish a formal University-wide grievance system for student complaints.

viii.   In addition the IEP Team recommends that the University establish and finance a University level student council (or similar formal mechanism) to enhance student involvement and communications.

Stakeholders

ix.   The University is encouraged to continue with its work on its alumni database, tracking its successful students after graduation and recruiting them as ambassadors.

x.   It is recommended that the University establish a formal University-level Stakeholder Forum and identify a senior University manager to champion this.

Strategic development

xi.   The University should consider the establishment of a Strategic Development Department (or similar) for effective data collection, analysis, planning and intelligence gathering at a senior level in the organisation as it seeks to meet the objectives it has set itself.

Finances

xii.   The IEP Team recommends that the University consider how to re-engineer and enhance the capacity of the Programmes Management Department, suitably championed at a senior level, to support the development of USV's diversification initiatives.

xiii.   The University should seek to exploit any possibilities inherent in the new Law enabling USV/company joint ventures, spin-off companies and similar technological transfer and entrepreneurial activities to the fullest extent.

xiv.   Following on from this, it is considered that the University should pursue its current initiatives for diversification with more vigour, since it faces some difficult strategic decisions, including the need to become more focussed in its programme and research activities and also to identify areas of specialisation (nationally and internationally) into which it should focus its investment as niche areas

Academic

   xv.   The IEP Team would recommend that the University should ensure that teaching and learning processes have an effective forum under Senate.

   xvi.   The University should ensure that outcomes from quality assurance activities such as questionnaires be communicated effectively to students and followed up systematically and transparently.

   xvii.   It is recommended that the University continues to develop its research strategy and also seeks solutions to the issues arising from heavy teaching and administrative loads which preclude research activity. The reappraisal of the organisational structure (described above) might go some way towards achieving this.

xviii.   The University might wish to consider the functions and overlapping relationships between the Commission for Teaching Activities, the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance and the Quality Assurance Department.

International

   xix.   The IEP Team recommends that the University develop more effective links through to the relevant national agencies and European Commission in Brussels in order to make the Erasmus and similar programmes fit for the Romanian context.

   xx.   The IEP Team would wish to recommend to the University that it improve its provision of programmes in English.

   xxi.   The IEP Team recommends that the University identify and exploit niche fields in an international context to include sabbaticals, international students, distance learning and other relevant dimensions.

The Future

xxii.   *The University should consider the long term strategic positioning of the University and, in the light of this, take a radical look at its current internal dynamics and consider afresh what can be adjusted, with some entrepreneurial vision, to meet its future strategic needs.*

15.   Thanks

The team would like to thank the Rector and all his USV colleagues and students for their valuable contributions to this process, the organisation of the visits and their warm hospitality.