Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities

Ten priorities for Romanian Higher Education

Andrée Sursock

Project co-financed through European Social Fund by Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013

Table of contents

Foreword

This report analyses and synthesises the findings and recommendations of 70 evaluations undertaken by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) in Romania between 2012 and 2014.

The evaluations were undertaken in the context of a set of reforms introduced by the Romanian government, particularly a new classification of universities into three different bands as follows: 1) advanced research and teaching universities, 2) teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities) and 3) teaching and learning universities. The government required that the classification exercise be followed by an independent, international evaluation carried out by a quality assurance agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). IEP was selected to do this work.

In keeping with IEP's philosophy of a voluntary approach, universities were invited to register to the Programme: 70 did so. It was agreed that IEP would evaluate all registered universities over a three-year period, that a cluster report would be produced after each evaluation round and that a system-wide report would identify shared challenges and issues and propose recommendations to policy makers and institutional leaders.

The IEP has conducted similar, coordinated evaluation exercises before – in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catalonia, Ireland, and Slovakia, to name a few – but the scale of the Romanian exercise makes it stand out as special in the history of IEP. The ambitious exercise was carried out successfully but depended on a drastic expansion of the IEP expert pool. It also required the IEP secretariat to strengthen its internal quality processes in order to ensure consistency of judgement across the evaluation reports and it has bolstered confidence in IEP's ability to tackle large-scale projects with ease.

We sincerely hope that the exercise will contribute to the development of each of the institutions that were evaluated and that this particular report will contribute to future policy discussions in Romania.

Prof. Lothar Zechlin
Chairman, IEP Steering Committee

Acknowledgments

This system-wide report is based upon 70 evaluation reports carried out in Romania. On average, each of the evaluations involved four to five IEP experts and an average of 100 colleagues from each evaluated university who agreed to meet with the IEP teams. Let them all be thanked most heartily for their commitment and contributions. Without their work, this report would not have seen the light of day.

Special thanks are extended to the IEP Steering Committee members and Henrik Toft Jensen who provided comments on some of the four cluster reports or of this system-wide report. My sincere words of appreciation go also to Tia Loukkola and Crina Moșneagu who read carefully all five reports. Caroline Marissal provided crucial administrative support: without her, the analysis of the 70 evaluation reports would have been considerably more difficult.

Whilst IEP worked independently, the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) organised the travel, accommodation, and related arrangements for the team members and ensured the presence of interpreters during the site visits. UEFISCDI also provided local support for the organisations of eight workshops for the institutions, three training sessions for IEP experts, and the final conference that took place in Bucharest. On behalf of the IEP expert pool, I would like to thank all the UEFISCDI colleagues who went to great lengths to ensure optimal working conditions for these evaluations and to acknowledge most particularly the leadership of UEFISCDI Director, Adrian Curaj. I am also grateful to Adrian Curaj and Lazar Vlasceanu for the factual check they provided on the cluster reports and the system-wide report. I particularly appreciated that both refrained from interfering in the analysis thus respecting the independence of IEP.

I would be remiss in not mentioning how privileged I have felt working on this project, which has given me the opportunity to understand better the complexity of Romania and Romanian higher education and to appreciate the strong commitment of Romanian colleagues to their students and their institutions.

Dr Andrée Sursock
Senior advisor

Executive summary

In 2011, the Romanian authorities grouped 90 universities into three classification bands: 1) "advanced research and teaching universities", 2) "teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities)" and 3) "teaching and learning universities".

The classification exercise was followed by international evaluations carried out by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), a quality assurance agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA).

This report is the result of the evaluation of 70 institutions in Romania that were carried out by IEP between January 2012 and August 2014. Its purpose is to identify common challenges and propose recommendations. The key findings arising from the 70 evaluation reports are as follows:

- Despite the high commitment of senior leaders and academic and administrative staff to their institutions, the long-term strategic capacity of institutions is limited by the narrow scope of their autonomy, constant legislative change and financial uncertainties.
- The detailed regulatory framework and the way that the national quality assurance process is carried out reinforce institutional isomorphism across the sector, particularly because these aspects are combined with a strong tendency toward academic inbreeding and limited internationalisation in a number of universities.
- The higher education system in Romania is characterised by its fragmentation due to the existence of many small institutions, a pervasive lack of institutional cooperation and a variance in the sustainability and quality of the institutions.

Among the 30 recommendations that are set out in this report some are addressed to the higher education institutions and others to national authorities. These recommendations have been grouped together under ten priorities:

1. Stimulate institutional change

Many features of the legal framework limit the institutions' capacity for self-steering. The strategic development of the institutions would be strengthened if certain legal dispositions were changed, such as the respective roles of the Senate and the Administrative Board. Furthermore, the external quality assurance system and the detailed and prescriptive legal framework should be revised so that it supports institutional differentiation.

In order to support an agile decision-making process and the dynamism of their academic activities, institutions are advised to review their structures and decision-making bodies, clarify the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership and key university committees and provide leadership training to senior staff.

2. Secure sustainable funding

Legal dispositions discourage institutions from developing multi-year institutional planning. National authorities are advised to review current arrangements in order to expand the institutions' budgetary and financial autonomy.

Institutions should develop their capacity to calculate full costs and use risk-assessment instruments. Their internal allocation mechanisms should be seen as a strategic tool for the long-term development of the institutions.

3. Invest in people

There is a need to address the ageing of the professoriate in Romania and to ensure the attractiveness of academic salaries and working conditions. Better salaries would also minimise the current tendency of academics to carry heavy teaching and administrative responsibilities. The pervasiveness of academic inbreeding should be addressed as a matter of priority.

The evaluation reports identified bureaucratisation as an obstacle to further development of such core activities as research, service to society and internationalisation. Thus, it is of strategic importance to address it, in part through the up-skilling of administrative staff. The representative student associations should be strengthened in order to improve their contribution to the development of the institutions.

4. Assure quality

The detailed and inspectorial approach to external quality assurance served a valuable purpose in Romania. It may be time, however, to move toward a trust-based, improvement-oriented and context-sensitive external quality assurance process that would support the development of a quality culture in institutions. In parallel, it is essential that institutions review their internal quality processes to ensure that they do promote quality and a quality culture.

The universities, the national accreditation agency ARACIS and the national authorities should be congratulated for their efforts to address issues of corruption. Universities should continue to be vigilant in ensuring academic standards and preventing corruption and academic misconduct.

5. Promote access and success

Participation rates have increased in Romania and legal dispositions are in place to address the need of underrepresented student groups but national statistics show a wide achievement gap in relation to socioeconomic backgrounds. Although some institutions were attentive to specific student populations (e.g., ethnic minorities) and academic staff was concerned about student success, a very high dropout rate in the first year was being ignored. There is a need to stress social cohesion through improved access and student support.

6. Shift to student-centred learning

The shift to student-centred learning needs to be supported by a range of national and institutional initiatives that would introduce more flexibility and promote the development of new teaching methods and course content. Developing a learning-outcome approach requires more attention in order to ensure that Romanian institutions progress at the same pace as their European partners.

7. Increase research capacity

The recent economic context in Romania has been very challenging and few public and private resources are available to support research activities and doctoral studies. Romania should seek to fund doctoral candidates, create adequate research infrastructures, increase the level of competitive research funding and provide incentives for private investment in public research (e.g., through tax incentives).

The "advanced research and teaching universities" and "teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities)" should develop research strategies. If the smallest of the "teaching and learning universities" wish to develop research capacity, this should be done in a realistic and step-by-step fashion, through applied research and with a view of strengthening the link between research and teaching.

8. Engage with society

Many good examples of institutional engagement with society could be found across the evaluation reports but few universities had created the required suite of structures to support activities in this area. National authorities could promote the regional role of universities by increasing institutional autonomy, particularly regarding the financial and budgetary processes.

Institutions need to look strategically at their local and regional engagement, including cooperation with neighbouring universities and with regional and private actors, as the starting points for strengthening their research and teaching.

9. Internationalise

Internationalisation was an important strategic objective for the majority of the Romanian institutions that were evaluated and a range of achievements were identified in their evaluation reports. Most institutions, however, were advised to develop a detailed strategy and staff expertise in this area.

National authorities should consider developing a national strategy for international outreach that would promote Romanian higher education and research in targeted geographical areas.

10. Rethink the higher education landscape

Given the sharp demographic decline in Romania and the limited financial resources, the shape and size of the higher education system should be reviewed in order to ensure its responsiveness to current challenges. At the very least, it is important to establish a threshold for the minimum size of institutions (particularly when they hold the university title). In addition, it would be advisable to develop incentives for greater inter-institutional cooperation and, in some appropriate cases, institutional consolidation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Project background

In 2011, the Romanian authorities grouped 90 universities into three classification bands:

- 12 advanced research and teaching universities
- 30 teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities)
- 48 teaching and learning universities.[1]

It was expected that the classification exercise would be followed by an independent, international evaluation carried out by a quality assurance agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA), was selected for this task.

It was agreed that IEP teams would evaluate each category of universities in Romania, over a three-year period, and that a cluster report would be produced after each round. This final report should synthesise these cluster reports and feed into a national discussion about higher education reform. It is the result of the evaluation of 70 universities[2] in Romania that were carried out between January 2012 and August 2014 in the framework of the following two projects:

1. *Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities*, involved 41 universities: 11 were classified as "advanced research and teaching universities" and 30 as "teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities)".

2. *Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities,* involved 29 universities that belonged to the group of teaching and learning universities.

The two projects had the same aim: to strengthen core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency. In addition, as discussed in Appendix 1, a similar evaluation approach and method were used across all evaluations. For ease of reading, although there were two evaluation rounds under each of the two projects, this report treats the four rounds as if they were part of a single project.

[1] This number was reduced to 47 when the North University Baia Mare, from this group, merged with the Technical University of Cluj Napoca, from the group of advanced research and teaching universities.

[2] Most of the evaluated institutions hold the university title. Therefore, this report uses the words institutions and universities interchangeably.

1.2. Overview of the participating institutions

The two projects involved a total of 70 universities rather than the 90 that had been invited to participate; 20 universities decided not to engage in the process. With one exception, these were small, private universities in the third classification band (cf. Annex 3 for the names of the institutions that participated in each round).

Table 1: Overview of participating universities

			First project		2nd project		Total
	The universities		**1st round**	**2nd round**	**1st round**	**2nd round**	**All rounds**
Size	< 5 000 students		–	17	9	12	38
	5 000 to 10 000 students		3	6	4	_	13
	10 000 to 20 000 students		3	6	4	_	13
	> 20 000 students		5	1	–	_	6
Type	Multidisciplinary		3	7	15	3	28
	Specialised		8	23	2	9	42
		Artistic/creative institutions	–	7	–	_	7
		Agricultural/veterinary sciences	1	3	–	_	4
		Medicine and allied health	3	3	–	_	6
		Police/military/intelligence	–	7	–	_	7
		Others	4	3	2		9
Status	Private		–	–	9	11	20
	Public		11	30	8	1	50

The 70 universities that were evaluated varied significantly in terms of size, type and status as captured in Table 1. Nonetheless, the findings of the four evaluation rounds were strikingly similar even though the IEP evaluation teams did not have access to the cluster reports produced after

each round and did not know how similar their findings were. This similarity was due to two sets of factors that are detailed in sections 1.3 and 1.4.

1.3. The constitutive elements of a good higher education system

Although the IEP team members come from different national horizons, there is an implicit consensus in the IEP pool about the constitutive elements of a good higher education system and of a European university.

1) At system level,
   - The government, the ministries, any buffer body, the quality assurance agencies, etc., should ensure the appropriate framework conditions that would enable institutions to function in a way that is congruent with national priorities whilst respecting institutional autonomy.
   - A good higher education system does not let some institutions lag too far behind because these would drag the whole system down; charges of corruption threaten the reputation of the whole system and cast doubt on the good institutions.

2) At institutional level,
   - A European university has the following characteristics: (1) its teaching and learning mission must be shaped by the Bologna reforms and integrate the shift to student-centred learning; (2) some research activity is vital in order to ensure good teaching; (3) regional engagement is pivotal in developing teaching and learning and research; (4) national and international partnerships ensure the quality of activities.
   - There is also a shared view of good governance principles. Particularly, IEP strives to ensure that institutions are able to take timely decisions and to respond strategically to evolving societal needs. This requires a fluid decision-making process that finds the optimal equilibrium between collegiality and institutional leadership, and that the institutions are capable of self-steering by utilising their internal quality assurance procedures.

1.4. A common policy context

The coherent conclusions found across the 70 evaluation reports were also due to the international, European and national context in which the evaluated institutions operated.

1.4.1. Policy reforms

Universities, worldwide, have had to address intensified global competition and the conditions of knowledge-based economies. This has resulted in pressure to become more strategic, to sharpen the definition of their institutional profile and to be more effective and efficient in their leadership

and management. European — and therefore Romanian — universities have not been insulated from these requirements.

These trends have prompted the European Commission to develop a "modernisation" agenda for universities; in parallel, many European governments, including in Romania, have introduced a range of reforms that have affected primarily institutional autonomy and diversification, quality assurance arrangements and funding. Thus, a new law was adopted in Romania (January 2011) to respond to several related challenges, such as those generated by the rapid and unplanned growth of the higher education system after December 1989; demographic decline; weaknesses in research production; institutional isomorphism; inability to fund a wide number of institutions with the same stated profile from the public purse; and the perceived need to improve the management and leadership of universities.

In addition, two major change drivers of the past decade in Europe have been the Bologna process affecting higher education and European-wide policies affecting research. The Bologna process had particularly far-reaching effects. As the *Trends 2010* report states[3] (2010: 28),

> … the Bologna Process has mobilised the energies of students, staff members, institutional leaders and policy makers…to achieve the following objectives: mobility, employability, quality, improved synergies between the EHEA and the ERA[4] in a perspective that stresses social cohesion through access to higher education and lifelong learning.

Notably, the Bologna process has placed the quality of Europe's higher education as the cornerstone of a strategy to build the competiveness and attractiveness of Europe. As a result, quality assurance developments have been very extensive in Europe as demonstrated by the establishment of quality assurance agencies in many European countries, including in Romania. The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) was created in 2005 to conduct accreditations and evaluations of programmes and institutions. At about the same time, universities were required to develop their own internal quality assurance procedures. ARACIS was instrumental in clamping down on diploma mills; a range of measures to strengthen the integrity of higher education and research were also introduced.

In addition, several organisations were created to advise the Ministry in charge of higher education on some aspects of the Romanian system. These include the National Council for Higher Education Financing (CNFIS), the National University Research Council (CNCSIS) and the

[3] Sursock, A. and H. Smidt (2010) *Trends 2012: A Decade of Change in European Higher Education*; Belgium: European University Association, http://www.eua.be/Publications.aspx; last retrieved 1 September 2014.

[4] The EHEA and the ERA refer to the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, respectively. Both are meant to reinforce the cohesion and strength of Europe. The first is a continent-wide process whilst the second is focused on European Union member states.

Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI). Starting in 2009, UEFISCDI has been implementing several strategic projects, funded by the EU Structural Funds, to enhance the quality, leadership and management of universities.

1.4.2. The economic context

Whilst all these changes point in the right direction, it is worth emphasising that, at the time of these evaluations, the universities were operating in a very uncertain context. The economic crisis that started in 2008 has had a significant impact on European higher education. This was still felt at the time of these evaluations.[5] Although the worst period of austerity seems over in Romania, the length of the economic crisis, combined with a declining demographic trend [6] and the reduced intake of secondary school students (because of the higher standards that were recently set for the baccalaureate examination), meant that the financial situation of some of the universities was reported as becoming critical particularly, but not only, for the private institutions.

Romania is one of the countries where the economic crisis led to important financial cuts in public expenditure. National research funding was drastically reduced and restrictions regarding the recruitment and promotion of academic and administrative staff in universities were in effect at the beginning of the first evaluation round. This hiring and promotion moratorium was relaxed in 2012 (when universities were allowed to replace one in seven vacancies); it was lifted in 2013.

1.4.3. The legislative context

Legislative change seemed to be an ongoing process in Romania. A new law was passed in 2011 but aspects of the legal context continued to change over the lifetime of the evaluation projects. Thus, the universities were implementing some changes, anticipating others that they knew would be coming and trying to guess whether some articles of law would be further changed or removed. As examples, some of the following decisions cancelled or changed previous dispositions of the 2011 law:

- Academic staff could continue to hold leadership functions, even after reaching retirement age at 65.

[5] EUA has been monitoring closely the impact of the economic crisis on universities, cf. http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/governance-autonomy-and-funding/public-funding-observatory.aspx; last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

[6] According to a recent report, "Since 1990, the total population decreased year by year, to an average annual rate of 0.2%. During 1992-2002, the population decreased by 1.1 million people. Furthermore, in 2002-2010, the population aged 15-24 years decreased by 13.8% and the population aged 25-34 fell by 8.2% while the population 55-64 years increased by 18.7%." Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making, *Equity in the Romanian Higher Education System*, p. 3, http://www.politici-edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Equity-in-the-Romanian-Higher-Education-System_policy-document.pdf; last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

- The requirements for PhD supervisors were changed: the "co-tutelle" requirement for PhD supervisors over the age of 65 was dropped; whilst the 2011 law limited the maximum number of PhD students for each PhD supervisor to eight, a new regulation specified that the number was now subject to the approval of the university senates.
- Habilitation was no longer required for the position of full professor, although it continued to be required for PhD supervisors.

Although the legal change process slowed by the time of the third round, observing it allowed the IEP teams to gain full appreciation of the challenges that a very fluid legal environment poses to the Romanian universities, particularly because it weakens their capacity to project themselves in the future.

1.2.4. Institutional isomorphism

These features of the national context, as well as European policies and international trends meant that the evaluated universities shared a large number of common issues and challenges: particularly in relation to the key areas that are the focus of IEP: governance, strategic planning and internal quality assurance; achieving their missions (learning and teaching, research, and service to society); and internationalisation.

The classification scheme introduced in 2011 was meant to increase the diversification of the system through funding concentration. However, the intended financial effect of the classification was blunted by the economic crisis that reduced the public higher education budget across all universities.[7] Furthermore, the tendencies for the Romanian system to reproduce itself and to encourage mission drift and institutional isomorphism were maintained through the detailed legislative framework, a punctilious and standardised quality assurance approach, and a propensity toward academic inbreeding.

[7] According to a decision announced in December 2013, higher education funding would no longer be based on the classification but revert back to the indicators used before 2011.

2. Ten priorities

2.1. Stimulate institutional change

A number of reports noted the leadership quality of the top senior staff members, particularly the rectors, but a range of factors limited their capacity to steer their institutions.

2.1.1. Improve governance

The 2011 law required universities to set up two key bodies: the Senate and an Administrative Board, chaired by the rector. Whilst the 2011 law gave the rector the responsibility for all strategic, financial and managerial decisions, it also gave the Senate the foremost decision-making power and the authority to supervise the rector. In other words, the Administrative Board was in effect a body that executed the Senate's decisions. Generally speaking, where senates exist in Europe, they are used as a consultative body as part of the current trend to reinforce the responsibilities of the top executive teams. A key finding of the IEP evaluations in Romania, however, was that the relationship between the Senate and the leadership team was precisely the reverse of this.

Many evaluation reports noted that the scope of the Senate's responsibilities was too broad; this body should not be dealing with all decisions but only with academic ones, particularly those that touch upon academic integrity and standards. The broad remit of the Senate meant that it dealt with management issues even though it was not meant to be a management body. This, in combination with the overlapping responsibilities between the Senate commissions and the vice-rectors' remits (cf. 2.1.2), slowed down decision-making, notably that concerned with new policies.

The division of labour, which gave foremost responsibility to the rector but seemed to provide veto power to the Senate, could lead to paralysis in the university if the Senate and the Administrative Board cannot come to an agreement. The structural relationship between the Senate and the rector encouraged universities to seek consensus and restricted their strategic capacity to respond to change in a timely manner. Thus, in an attempt to avoid conflicts, the organisational cultures favoured consensus building, which resulted in taking broadly accepted or acceptable decisions as opposed to tough ones that might upset an internal constituency.

Furthermore, the governance of private universities failed to provide the appropriate set of checks and balances. There was a clear need for these private institutions to better distinguish the membership and the roles of the various decision-making bodies and to avoid overlapping memberships between their Founders' Council, Senate and Administrative Boards. In other words, they needed to differentiate clearly between administrative *vs.* academic decisions, and between external *vs.* internal decision-making bodies.

2.1.2. Increase institutional efficiency

Several features of Romanian universities decreased their efficiencies:

- Many evaluation reports noted the widespread acceptance that many decisions should go through several layers of approval. This stress on collegiality could result in a lack of ownership of decisions at the appropriate level and did not avoid misunderstandings (e.g., including about the role of key decision-making bodies and their decisions) or disagreement about key issues, such as a strategic plan, even after they were decided.

- The layered decision-making was associated with lack of clarity regarding the distribution of roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership (e.g., lack of clear division of responsibilities amongst vice-rectors and between the deans and the heads of departments) and the overlapping responsibilities between some of the Senate commissions and the remits of various vice-rectors.

- The 2011 law provided the framework for the structural organisation of universities (e.g., faculties, departments, research institutes and research centres) and left the choice to the universities of selecting their own structures. All institutions, however, even those that were very small, included both faculties and departments and seemed quite attached to this even if it meant that sometimes one faculty comprised a single department or that an institution would have a single faculty with a single department. The universities explained that these multiple structures were the results of the ARACIS reviewers' insistence on seeing faculties and departments regardless of institutional size. In addition, the organisation of the faculties often mirrored the bifurcated university structures – with faculty councils and faculty boards, department councils and department boards – leading almost all the evaluation reports to observe that the governance of the universities needed to be streamlined.

- Many universities had faculties in excess of what is considered optimal; the current trend in Europe is to have fewer but bigger faculties in order to increase interdisciplinarity and strengthen the academic profile. In some of the Romanian universities, however, the level of decentralisation appeared to be too great thus leading to a fortress mentality within the faculties, particularly – but not only – in the larger institutions.

- The IEP evaluation teams were struck by the large number of research centres in relation to the size of some universities. The institutions explained that it was required to have a research centre in each faculty in order to channel research funding and to accredit Masters' programmes.

- Some of the larger universities were found to have too many decentralised administrative support units, including for student admission, alumni, marketing, IT systems,

industry/employer relations, research support, etc.

- A few (mostly private) universities had several satellite campuses across Romania, which raised questions of critical mass and effective coordination that would ensure academic standards across all campuses. Whilst these satellite campuses could be useful if they are able to respond to local needs, their fate should be closely monitored given the demographic decline. Public universities seemed less likely to have such strategies.

By and large, many universities – both large and small – complained of red tape as a key obstacle to achieving effective governance. The evaluation reports identified the level of decentralisation and fragmentation as a central aspect of bureaucratisation. By increasing the workloads on academics, this also affected core activities negatively, including teaching and research.

These characteristics were not found to the same degree in some of the smaller and specialised universities. Indeed, some of these were specifically praised for an effective organisation that avoided duplication and redundancy. Other institutions were reported to have restructured their faculties or departments to increase effectiveness or the visibility of some disciplinary areas.

2.1.3. Strengthen strategic capacity

The 2011 law advised the universities to come up with a vision and mission statement and a strategy. It should be noted that, across the world, universities have difficulties in producing differentiated mission statements because there is a hegemonic model of the ideal university that most institutions will try to emulate. Appropriate legal frameworks and other features of the system – such as quality assurance for instance – can minimise this isomorphic tendency.[8] This is not the case in Romania.

Păunescu *et al.* confirmed that the way in which external QA has been implemented in Romania has led to perverse effects such as institutional isomorphism through the use of a single set of criteria and a homogeneous expert pool that lacks diversity of views and experiences.[9] Indeed, it is a leitmotiv of this report that practically all recommendations apply to all universities even though the institutions had been classified in three different bands by the Romanian authorities.

Despite evidence of political will to increase institutional diversification, the 2011 law contained detailed prescriptions about organisational structures that apply to all institutions. Such legal dispositions reinforced mission drift and raised the issue of the suitability of a single model for the

[8] Cf. Sybille Reichert's report on *Institutional Diversities in European Universities* (2009, EUA publication, http://www.eua.be/publications/eua-reports-studies-and-occasional-papers.aspx; last retrieved on 1 September 2014).

[9] Păunescu, M., B. Florian and G.-M. Hâncean (2012), Internalizing quality assurance in higher education: challenges of transition in enhancing the institutional responsibility for quality, Curaj A., P. Scott, L. Vlasceanu and L. Wilson (eds.) *European Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms*, Vol. I, pp. 317-337, Springer.

decision-making bodies, regardless of a university's status and size. The legal framework was so prescriptive that it left very little room for designing decision-making structures and processes that are adapted to the specificities of institutions. This resulted in lack of ownership of these processes and structures, which in some cases, seemed to be created to comply with the legislative framework rather than spring from an analysis of institutional requirements. As a result, there were reported cases of discrepancies between a university charter and the way it was carried out in daily practice. In addition, in the case of the smaller institutions, the legislative requirements (at least as understood by the universities) put a great administrative burden on a relatively small number of staff.

Importantly, the constantly changing legal framework had a negative impact on the universities' ability and capacity to develop long-term strategies.

Unsurprisingly in such a context, institutional strategies tended to be based on aspirations and ambitions rather than on a solid analysis. Although there was a clear need to strengthen strategic capacity, a number of evaluation reports noted that the university leadership discussed their future priorities cogently during the site visits but that the ideas expressed did not necessarily find their way into the strategic and planning documents. Perhaps this was because the universities' strategic orientations had to be enshrined in a contract between the rector and the Senate when the rector took office. This encouraged the universities to view their strategy as a list of items to be ticked off rather than a document requiring regular updates.

As a result, the process of strategic development did not seem to have been mastered yet. SWOT analyses (or similar tools) were not always thorough or used as a basis for the strategic plans and the strategic documents of universities failed to address two key threats: how to cope with the financial uncertainties and the demographic decline. Most strategic plans were missing some important elements such as timelines, responsibilities, performance indicators, etc.

Several reports noted that there is a need to monitor the institutions' action plans and to measure progress in order to underpin the strategic development of universities. This requires a good data information system, professional staff to analyse these data and the senior leadership team to act on these analyses. Thus, information and communication technology (ICT) has a central role to play in supporting universities' strategies. A number of evaluation reports mentioned ICT solutions, particularly with respect to internal quality assurance by recommending, for instance, the use of an integrated communication system to monitor key performance indicators, thus improving the self-steering capacity of institutions.

In brief, the role of ICT is to support the following key functions in the institution:

- Ensuring the quality of services and activities (e.g., use of performance indicators to monitor quality of provision);
- Supporting teaching and learning facilities (e.g., recording lectures and making them

available to students, streaming lectures across campuses, flipping the classrooms, etc.);
- Supporting researchers (e.g., scientific databases and collections, with easily retrievable data and objects that can be analysed);
- Supporting administrative functions and information flows within the institution;
- Improving the student experience (Internet/Intranet access through wire/Wi-Fi, access to one's student record, etc.);
- Supporting the libraries.

Recommendation N° 1: National authorities are advised to review the legal framework, including the external quality assurance approach, with a view to stimulating institutional differentiation. This will require less detailed legal frameworks and a quality assurance approach that is context-sensitive and that encourages institutions to develop their own profiles and strategies. They would then be evaluated against these strategic goals. It might be necessary that ARACIS, the Romanian accreditation agency, use to a greater extent international peers in order to limit the possibility of reinforcing the current organisational cultures.

Recommendation N° 2: National authorities are advised to review the current legal framework to ensure a clearer distribution of roles and responsibilities in the universities in order to foster a more dynamic decision-making process. Some examples of aspects requiring attention include:

- Ensuring that the Administrative Board is able to take decisions in a timely manner, after a reasonable period of consultation; this requires limiting the remit of the Senate to core academic issues of integrity and standards;

- Reassessing the role of the rector and his/her accountability to the Senate. The notion of a contract between the Senate and the rector should be reviewed to ensure that the universities are able to respond to changing contexts and that the implementation of the institutional strategy is translated into a rolling action plan that would be updated annually.

- Ensuring that private universities draw a clear boundary between their Board of Trustees/Founders' Council as the keeper of the university vision and values and the Administrative Board as the responsible body for day-to-day operations. This would ensure the independence of the former and its role as a guide to the latter.

Recommendation N° 3: National authorities are encouraged to find a way to provide legal and financial stability to the universities, for instance, via a non-partisan buffer body such as a Higher Education Council that would be entrusted to govern the system on behalf of the ministry.

Recommendation N° 4: It is advisable to find ways to assist universities in developing their mission statements, strategic documents and action plans.

Recommendation N° 5: The universities are advised:

- To provide leadership training to all senior staff.
- To review:
  - The balance between centralised and decentralised services by taking into account the specific functions of each administrative unit and the institution's size;
  - Their structures by reducing the faculties, departments and administrative units to an optimal number whilst keeping in mind that interdisciplinarity and critical mass should be key objectives;
  - Their leadership functions by streamlining the roles of vice-rectors, clarifying the functions and responsibilities of the senior posts and their accountability, and strengthening the coordination role of the central administration;
  - Their decision-making approach by reviewing and reducing the number of Senate committees and shifting away from a slow, multi-layered decision-making model that is neither transparent nor effective.

Recommendation N° 6: Institutions should ensure that tailored and up-to-date ICT solutions contribute to improving their core functions (teaching and learning, research, administration) and serve their different constituencies (leadership, academic and administrative staff, students).

2.2. Secure sustainable funding

Funding regulations in Romania seemed to be set up to prevent corrupt and irresponsible practice. However necessary, these financial controls were found to be heavy and to bridle the agility of institutions and their long-term strategic capacity.

In addition, Romanian universities had been subjected to declining public funding for several years and a number of evaluation reports mentioned that the situation had become critical for some of them. To the extent that budgets were based on student numbers in both the private and public institutions, drops in enrolment can be a matter of survival. For example, one public university lost about 25% of its students in two years and another one 46% over a four-year period, meaning that the total disposable income of the latter had been nearly halved between 2008 in 2012. Three private institutions experienced drops in student enrolments of 50%, 61%

and 75%, respectively in the last three years. With their budgets being based almost entirely on student fees, this situation was worrisome, particularly in the absence of risk-assessment instruments.[10]

Some universities had financial reserves. These had been used to soften the impact of austerity measures and were shrinking (with the notable exception of a private university whose endowment corresponded to five times its annual budget). Some stopped investing in capital improvement of infrastructures, thus compromising their long-term development.

Some universities were actively searching for other sources of income, notably contract research, consultancy, lifelong learning activities, renting their facilities, etc. Others were planning to offer new programmes to meet unmet demands even though they did not always have the qualified staff. This left the evaluation teams wondering whether their plans to use staff from other universities were sustainable.

The resilience of both the leadership and staff was noted across the sector. Thus, staff reactions to the tight budgets was mild as captured in the following quote from one evaluation report:

> … most of the staff met by the team expressed little concern about the budget cuts. The SWOT analysis in the self-evaluation report refers under "Threats" to "Profound and chronic underfinancing of the Romanian higher education system" (p. 23) but the team was given little sense of the negative impact of this under financing on the work of the university despite the fact that its total income (in RON) fell by 26% as recently as between 2011 and 2012. Its staff either genuinely believe that the cuts are not hindering the university activities, or they are uneasy voicing their concerns. Only lack of research funding seems to be a concern.

The success of any university in diversifying funding sources is predicated upon its capacity to engage with local external stakeholders (i.e., public and private economic and social players) and to promote a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship within the university community. It also depends on the existing regulations in the area of financial management and these were quite restrictive in Romania.

Current weaknesses included heavy *ex ante* and *ex post* controls. Thus, all income and expenditures of public universities — whatever their source — were submitted to the same control and auditing process by the state authorities. This feature led one IEP report to note the "disparity between the university's autonomy to gain its funding and its constrained autonomy to spend it in the way that best serves its academic project." Since the rector was responsible for all expenditures, the internal process was also very exacting and limited the capacity of faculties and

[10] The IEP teams examine the sustainability of the universities' budgets in a cursory fashion; they are not asked to conduct a financial audit and the reports do not comment in any depth on the financial health of institutions.

departments to act. This struck the evaluation teams as being too constraining in comparison to the usual European practices.

Despite the regulated framework, the full cost of core activities was not computed and the overregulated framework discouraged multi-annual planning, because no carry-over of public funds was allowed from one year to the next. Remarkably, some of the private universities did not engage in multi-year planning even though they had the requisite autonomy to do so. This was most probably linked to the fact that their budgets were based on student fees, which made long-term planning challenging particularly if, as was the case, there was no evidence of risk management and building different scenarios to anticipate appropriate future actions.

Surprisingly, the departments in Romanian universities had a budget but not the faculties. Moreover, the internal allocation system generally mirrored the national allocation model, by using essentially the same criteria and, therefore, was not linked to strategic priorities and performance results. Nevertheless, there was evidence that some universities were trying to increase efficiency by cutting internal costs.

Recommendation N° 7: It will be important for policy makers and institutional leaders to apply the provisions of the 2011 law that would release an entrepreneurial spirit within the universities. If the intention is to allow universities to diversify their funding sources, then it is essential to increase financial autonomy, whilst ensuring appropriate *ex post* accountability, and to make certain that the universities' structures (including faculties) are both budget and cost units.

In any case, institutional leaders would need to be supported in order to:

- Understand different internal allocation methods, how these can support institutional strategy and planning, and how to implement one that is appropriate to their institution.
- How full costs can be calculated and the implications of such an approach to the financial and strategic management of the institution.
- Develop risk-assessment instruments.

2.3. Invest in people

2.3.1. Managing academic staff

Whilst the evaluation reports noted the high commitment of academic staff, four major aspects of human resources were identified as widely shared challenges:

- Academic staff shortage: by and large, expanding the pool of PhD supervisors was a challenge for the institutions wanting to develop doctoral education, particularly in the context of the ageing professoriate. A significant number of academics will be retiring in the next few years but there was little evidence of institutional planning in this regard. Moreover, some institutions provided an inaccurate and highly inflated number of vacancies (e.g., in 2013, one institution mentioned 700 vacancies in its self-evaluation report). However, the official numbers of vacancies published in the *Official Journal* for that year listed the highest number of vacancies at a single university at 110. The discrepancy between the ways that the government and the institutions calculate vacancies complicated realistic institutional planning and hindered changes.

- Academic inbreeding: there was a pattern of academic inbreeding (particularly – but not only – in the universities with doctoral education) and little sense that this was problematic. Instead the metaphor of a family was used to characterise the academic community. In one (perhaps extreme) case, 100% of all academic staff were alumni of the university. Academic inbreeding might explain the lack of inter-institutional cooperation in Romania as well as the reproduction of the system (cf. section 2.10). A recent article showed that "academic inbreeding is associated with lower scholarly output" because "the academically inbred faculty is relatively more centred on its own institution and less open to the rest of the scientific world".[11] Another study provides evidence that academics who return, after a period away, to the institution where they earned their doctorate have patterns of collaboration and research productivity unlike their "inbred" counterparts.[12]

- Heavy teaching workloads: whilst noting the high commitment of staff, which allowed the universities to continue fulfilling their activities despite financial difficulties, many of the evaluation reports emphasised the heavy teaching loads, particularly for young academics. Having a variety of contracts that would accompany different career development patterns did not seem to be acceptable practice in the public universities; thus, it was not possible to individualise the balance of time spent on teaching/research/service to society/administrative activities over an academic staff member's career and his/her evolving interests and strengths.

[11] Horta, H., Velos, F.M. and Grediaga, R (2010), Navel gazing: academic inbreeding and scientific productivity, *Management Science*, Vol. 56, N° 3, March 2010, pp. 414-429. http://www.academia.edu/263364/Navel_Gazing_Academic_Inbreeding_and_Scientific_Productivity; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

[12] Horta, H (2013), Deepening our understanding of academic inbreeding effects on research information exchange and scientific output: new insights for academic based research, *High Educ*, Vol. 65, pp. 487-510. http://www.academia.edu/1887008/Deepening_our_understanding_of_academic_inbreeding_effects_on_research_information_exchange_and_scientific_output_new_insights_for_academic_based_research; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

- Heavy administrative loads for academics, due to the multiplicity of structures and decision-making bodies and the propensity to place academic staff in many senior administrative posts.

Some of the work overload in the institutions (i.e., extra teaching, administrative responsibilities) have their origins in the low salary levels (average monthly salary of professors is about 750 EUR). For the same reason, academic staff members were left free to engage in consultancy activities on their own terms without the universities enforcing an overhead or requiring that these activities be carried out in the name of the institution.

2.3.2. Focus on administrative staff

Administrative staff seemed to lack the skills required to carry out certain sophisticated functions; they also seemed to be in short supply, requiring academic staff to fill in some of the most senior administrative posts. However, the weaker the administrative staff is, the more likely it will produce cumbersome bureaucratic processes, regardless of the fact that their supervisors are senior academics. The evaluation reports identified bureaucratisation as an obstacle to further development of research, links with society and internationalisation. Thus, it is of strategic importance to address it.

In addition, staff members – whether they are senior or not – who had purely administrative duties seemed to be excluded from the important university discussions. Several reports emphasised that it was essential that the academic and administrative staff worked together to ensure that decisions were understood and executed appropriately by the administration.

2.3.3. Strengthen student leadership

Student representation in Romania was one of the important innovations introduced by the 84/1995 law. It specified that students must represent 20% of members of the managing bodies of universities. The 2011 law raised this participation to 25% in the university Senate.

The impression gained in the evaluations was that formal progress had been achieved in involving students in governance, but that students were more comfortable in their faculty and department rather than at university level and that their voice was not heard on strategic issues. Moreover, some reports noted that although the students were involved in the faculty councils, they were not part of faculty and department commissions, notably the ones dealing with quality assurance and had no access to the minutes of these meetings. Therefore, they had no knowledge of the discussions taking place when council decisions were prepared and could not contribute to them.

It also appeared that student associations in a number of universities were focused on social activities and did not act as representative organisations and that the difference between student clubs and student representation was not always grasped, including by the students themselves.

Many evaluation reports recommended that students' engagement in university life is strengthened and supported.

Recommendation N° 8: There is a national need to plan the renewal of the professoriate in Romania and ensure the attractiveness of academic salaries and working conditions. This could include:

- Ensuring the institution's ability to diversify funding in order to develop a mix of staff incentives and appealing salary packages, which are essential for attracting and retaining staff.
- Allowing universities to work out contractual arrangements with individual faculty members over the course of their careers that would take into account their evolving interests in respect of the three core functions: teaching, research and service to society.
- Changing the culture of academic inbreeding by promoting student mobility between the Bachelor and the Master, and the Master and the Doctorate and avoiding hiring the institutions' own graduates unless they have worked elsewhere for a period.
- Ensuring that the workload of young academics allows them to develop as researchers.

Recommendation N° 9: Institutions should strengthen the capacity of administrative staff to support core academic functions by:

- Providing development opportunities for administrative staff in order to build up capacity to deal with sophisticated administrative issues.
- Including non-academic administrative staff on decision-making bodies in order to ensure that administrative processes support academic objectives.

Recommendation N° 10: Any future legislative change should continue to ensure students' involvement in governance in accordance with good European practice. Particularly, students should be involved on matters that are of particular interest to them and on which they would have views that would be useful to the institutions.

Recommendation N° 11: Institutions should strive to make students feel part of the community. This could be done by:

- Developing the leadership skills of the student representatives so as to enhance their contribution to the deliberations of the Senate and other bodies. The European Student Union (ESU) could assist in such leadership development at the national

level.

- Creating an atmosphere in which students feel that the institution takes their needs seriously: this can be done through strengthened pastoral care, social and cultural activities, and institutionalised support of the student organisations.

2.4. Assure quality

Quality has been a cornerstone of European higher education policies, such as the "Modernisation of universities" and the Bologna process. Initially, quality assurance (QA) was seen as the major responsibility of quality assurance agencies but, with the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the Bologna process shifted the focus to higher education institutions by recognising their primary role in assuring their quality. This has triggered a range of developments of formal quality assurance procedures in European universities, including in Romanian universities. [13]

Most evaluated universities had a Senate committee with a special remit in this area and many had created a quality management office. The most frequently used instruments included the student questionnaires, some versions of ISO (for administrative services only, or across the university) and an annual staff appraisal scheme that included a four-level evaluation process – by self, peers, students and department heads.

Some good practices can be gleaned from the evaluation reports, such as the creation of a vice-rectorship for quality; validating study programmes internally before they undergo an ARACIS accreditation; evaluating administrative services; reviewing the student questionnaires periodically, with the help of student input; encouraging academic staff to develop and administer their own questionnaires; administrating an exit questionnaire to graduating students; creating a unit in charge of curriculum design and development; collecting feedback from employers and alumni; etc.

However, the general impression arising from the evaluation reports is that most universities are still at the beginning of the process of developing quality assurance and embedding a quality culture. By and large, the results of evaluations did not always lead to change and did not feed into the strategic process. Not surprisingly, this was reflected in the imprecise institutional

[13] Three recent EUA studies have examined European QA developments. They are: Loukkola, T. and Zhang, T. (2010) *Examining Quality Culture Part I: Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions*; Sursock, A (2011) *Examining Quality Culture Part II: Processes and Tools – Participation, Ownership and Bureaucracy*; Vettori, O (2012) *Examining Quality Culture Part III: From self-reflection to enhancement*; Belgium: European University Association, http://www.eua.be/Publications.aspx; last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

strategic plans and the relatively weak self-evaluation reports that were received for the IEP evaluations.

In addition, it was clear that the rather heavy and intense national QA programme is leading to evaluation fatigue and was encouraging universities to view internal QA processes as a response to external requirements rather than processes that were self-directed and oriented towards self-improvement. An evaluation report spoke about a university having developed "a 'reporting culture' rather than a quality culture". Most importantly, the external QA approach was not conducive to developing and embedding a quality culture in institutions. The weight of the external requirements meant that there was little room for the institutions to develop their own QA initiatives and, most importantly, the stress on producing data for accountability purposes meant that there was less motivation to use these data for improvement and as the basis for strategic management.

This is confirmed by Păunescu *et al.* who noted that internal QA was decoupled from the core functions of the universities and used to acquire external legitimacy rather than be geared toward improvement.[14] The institutions were in a compliance mode in setting up internal QA arrangements. Păunescu *et al.* characterised the Romanian QA system as being "too much prescriptive, coercive, centralized, control and accreditation oriented and mostly input centered" (2012: 332).

A recent report confirmed these findings by stating that national Romanian legislation creates bureaucratic processes that are disconnected from the academic staff's daily activities.[15] The report argued that there were too many instruments that

> … try to achieve too many things at the same time: applying minimum standards for curricula, matching curricula to labour market needs, introducing pedagogic innovations, improving the management of the universities and faculties, and lifting Romania's scientific production up to Western European standards. And if this is not enough, they also intend to rid the universities of plagiarism and corruption. The combined effect is that these policy instruments achieve very few specific intended results.[16]

[14] Păunescu, M., B. Florian and G.-M. Hâncean (2012), Internalizing quality assurance in higher education: challenges of transition in enhancing the institutional responsibility for quality, Curaj A., P. Scott, L. Vlasceanu and L. Wilson (eds.) *European Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms*, Vol. I, pp. 317-337, Springer.

[15] Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making (2013), *Analysis of the Performance and Fitness for Purpose of Romanian Higher Education Institutions' Internal Quality Assurance systems*, p. 10. http://www.politici-edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Analysis-of-the-performance-and-fitness-for-purpose-of-Romanian-HEIs%E2%80%99-IQA-systems.pdf; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

[16] Ibid, p. 11.

In addition, the report noted that there were too many criteria and that these reflected different definitions of quality (e.g., threshold standards, excellence standards, etc.).[17] Among the unintended consequences of this situation was that the complex instruments "reinforce the very gaming behavior that they are meant to address!"

There was scattered evidence of corrupt practices during the evaluations. A couple of institutions had a shaky reputation and had been accused of delivering fake diplomas in the past.[18] ARACIS has acted appropriately in this area and the national authorities have moved swiftly in prosecuting cases and jailing culprits.

The universities themselves seemed to be responding quickly, notably via their Senate ethics committees, when faced with ethical misconduct. In addition to this formal way of controlling behaviour there might be room for avoiding such problems by reviewing how examinations are organised: for instance, avoiding situations where a student faces a single teacher; introducing external examiners; favouring written examinations that are easier to control than oral ones; etc.

Now that important national and institutional steps have been taken to clamp down on corrupt practices, it may be opportune to review the division of responsibilities between the institutions, on the one hand, and ARACIS, on the other hand, as the following set of recommendations suggests.

Recommendation N° 12: It is advisable to review the current national quality assurance (QA) arrangements in order to determine if it is time to shift to a trust-based, improvement-oriented and context-sensitive external QA approach and to move away from methodologies based on inspection, control and threshold standards.

Recommendation N° 13: A national network of QA officers could be established (e.g., by the national rectors' conference) to discuss issues of common interest, benchmark the universities' activities in this area and develop expertise on such aspects as:

- The key internal QA instruments, both *ex ante* and *ex post*, formal and informal (how to design them, how to use them, etc.);
- The way to systematise quality assurance arrangements and linking them to decision-making processes and institutional planning;
- How to design supporting structures that would address the results of QA processes, such as professional development for academic and administrative staff and

[17] Ibid, p. 12.

[18] This type of information is not always explicitly mentioned in the evaluation reports but has been conveyed to the IEP secretariat. As a formative evaluation, IEP's mission does not examine this kind of issue. Fighting diploma mills is the responsibility of the national authorities and the national accreditation agency.

information technology;

- How to successfully develop and embed a quality culture.

Recommendation N° 14: Instead of promoting rankings, which are a simplistic and subjective way of measuring the quality of as complex an institution as a university or a study programme, it would be preferable to encourage universities to participate in small regional and European networks of institutions for benchmarking purposes. Promoting internationalisation — in its full meaning (staff and student mobility, research partnerships, internationalisation of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process, etc.) — can be seen as a very important quality-improvement instrument.

Recommendation N° 15: As part of their QA arrangements, institutions should have in place policies, processes and structures to prevent and act upon fraudulent behaviour. Their ethics committees and the national committee dealing with these issues should be used effectively and strengthened to address academic misconduct. One solution could be to install inter-university ethics commissions with half of the members coming from a given university and the other half from another university. National authorities should remain vigilant about these issues, which are critical to the reputation of the whole higher education system.[19]

2.5. Promote student access and success

Student access and success are important goals in order to ensure the social and economic development of Romania.

After the fall of communism, the Romanian higher education system transitioned from an elite system to one that encouraged greater access. A number of universities, including private ones, were created to face the increased demand for higher education. At the time of the evaluations, the Romanian higher education system comprised 92 accredited universities (56 public and 37 private)[20] for a population of 21.33 million (2012); there were a number of other institutions that were accredited for a limited period or have provisional authorisation to operate in a limited way (e.g., adult education).

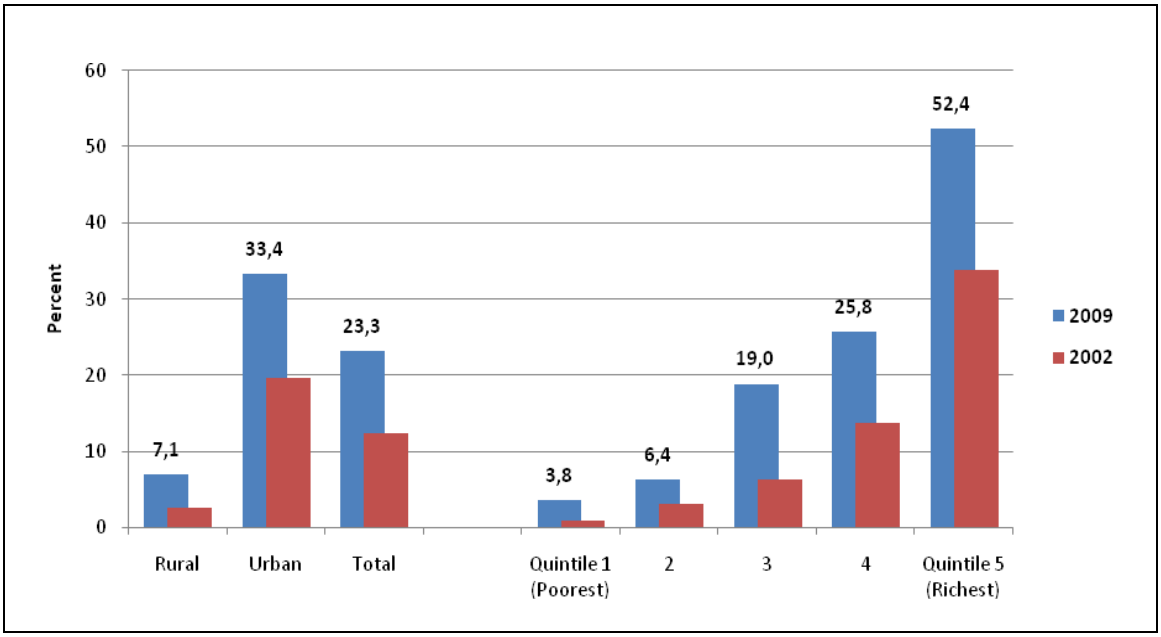
The accredited universities were spread rather evenly across the country, albeit with a high concentration in Bucharest (29 accredited universities) whilst the south and southeast have a lower percentage of students in relation to the regional population. In addition, 50% of the students enrolled in public universities were distributed in four cities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iaşi

[19] Cf. Salmi, Jamil and Robin Matross Helms (2013) Governance instruments to combat corruption in higher education, in Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report*, pp. 108-112, Routledge.

[20] http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/text/3880. Last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

and Timişoara), which are also the largest cities in Romania; 50% of the students who were registered in private universities were located in Bucharest.[21]

Figure 1 – Per cent of 25-29 year olds who have completed a tertiary degree, by income quintile and by location, 2002-2009 (Source: World Bank 2011) [22]



The 2011 law addressed underrepresented groups such as students with physical disabilities, Roma students, economically or socially marginalised populations, etc. The universities can respond to equity concerns in an independent way and some indeed did, for instance by offering full curricula in minority languages (such as Hungarian) and scholarships to underrepresented students. These initiatives were found in both private and public institutions but scholarship funds in the private institutions were at risk because of the lingering impact of the economic crisis.

Nevertheless, as Figure 1 above shows, factors such as social class and geographical location played a powerful role in determining who completed a higher education degree and who was excluded. Although there was progress in the global participation rate between 2002 and 2009,

[21] Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making (2013), *Equity in the Romanian Higher Education System*, p. 29, http://www.politici-edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Equity-in-the-Romanian-Higher-Education-System_policy-document.pdf. For the latest statistics, cf. the official website of the Ministry (http://www.edu.ro) and the National Institute of Statistics (http://www.insse.ro/cms/). Last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

[22] World Bank (2011), *Romania Functional Review: Higher Education Sector*, p. 118, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/12/10/000425962_20121210173022/Rendered/PDF/NonAsciiFileName0.pdf; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

Figure 1 shows that those with the highest income maintained a clear advantage and the rural population (45% of the Romanian population) had very limited chances of completing a higher education degree.

Furthermore, a 2013 report noted that the number of students grew sevenfold between 1998 and 2009 but that this increase led to a number of challenges, including:

> … mismatch between the level of public funding and the rapid expansion of the system, difficult balance between maintaining quality and allowing the system to expand, especially through the emergence of private universities, and a clash between the notions of merit-based participation in higher education and tapping into the full potential of the Romanian population, especially with a view to access, progression and completion of underrepresented groups in higher education.[23]

Nevertheless, the IEP evaluation reports noted that the universities and their academic staff showed evidence of strong commitment to teaching across the sector. Some of the smaller, specialised public universities were highly selective whilst the large, comprehensive institutions wanted to play a role in their region and were more inclusive. Not surprisingly, the picture that emerged concerning teaching and learning was also mixed, with the smaller and highly selective institutions having an easier time ensuring student success, thanks to their small classes, attentive teachers, motivated students, etc. This was particularly true of the specialised institutions but, of course, it did not mean that the non-selective, comprehensive institutions were not attentive to providing a good learning environment.

It is noteworthy, however, that amongst the group of 29 “teaching and learning universities”, 12 wished to be recognised as being more research-active and gain entry into one of the other classification bands (i.e., the “advanced research and teaching universities” or the “teaching and scientific universities”). Perhaps the most distinctive challenge that these institutions faced is to take pride in being primarily teaching institutions and to think of ways to develop research and engagement with society in relation to this primary mission.

A high dropout rate was reported during the first year across the sector and there seemed to be little analysis of its underlying reasons. The picture that emerged from the evaluations carried out in Romania was that a high dropout rate was accepted and attributed to poorly motivated and unprepared students. This diagnosis – widely shared by the academic staff and the successful students – did not encourage the universities to focus on how they could ensure success in the first year.

[23] Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making, *Equity in the Romanian Higher Education System*, p. 4, http://www.politici-edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Equity-in-the-Romanian-Higher-Education-System_policy-document.pdf; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

Private institutions shared this attitude. Thus, academics in one private institution observed that the high dropout rate was a mark of quality. This should not be surprising: in a system that devalues private providers, these will want to avoid charges of being diploma mills even at the cost of failing students. Needless to say, this strategy is harmful to both the students who drop out and to the institutions. Whether public or private, the universities' budgets are based, in whole or in large part, on student fees. The shrinking enrolments are alarming and should prompt institutions to address the root cause of failure in the first year if only as a matter of institutional survival.

In sum, there was relatively little commitment to broadening access to higher education and to ensuring success in the first year through special orientations, bridging courses etc.

Recommendation N° 16: The institutions should stress social cohesion through improved access and student support by strengthening the connections to secondary schools in order to prepare school leavers better for university-level studies, developing pastoral care through the full student cycle (i.e., before students arrive at the university until after they leave), tracking and addressing the dropout rate during the first year and enhancing lifelong learning provision.

2.6. Shift to student-centred learning

For a variety of reasons, the Bologna reforms are still ongoing across Europe. In many countries, the reforms were implemented quickly and the need is felt to review and refine what has been done, notably in shifting to student-centred learning. Romania is part of this general pattern. Thus, the IEP reports noted that the Romanian universities have made the formal changes required by the Bologna process (three-cycle degree structure, ETCS, diploma supplement, etc.) and that these reforms need to be pursued. Most notably, teaching should be planned from the perspective of the learners rather than the teachers and learning outcomes should be the teachers' main concern. Thus, the universities could improve student attainment by shifting to student-centred learning as understood in the Bologna process:

> Student-centred learning refers to pedagogies focused on the learner and on what is learned, rather than on the teacher and what is taught. In other words, the learning process is not just or even primarily about the transfer and reproduction of knowledge, but about deeper understanding and critical thinking. The student-centred approach to learning involves a different relationship between teacher and learner, in which the teacher becomes a facilitator and responsibility for learning is shared – the learning, in other words, is 'negotiated'. The process approaches learners as individuals – taking account of their particular backgrounds, experiences, perceptual frameworks, learning styles and needs. The learners 'construct' their own meaning by pro-active, independent

learning, discovery and reflection. Assessment is generally formative and feedback continuous.[24]

Although there were examples of universities that developed their curricula based on international models, reforming the pedagogies and improving the learning environment should be the focus of further efforts across the sector.

With respect to pedagogies, the *ex cathedra* lecturing style was prevalent and did not stimulate student-to-teacher or student-to-student interactions during classes. Pedagogical change was not widespread and there was little action learning through group work, project-based work, problem-based learning, etc., and insufficient attention paid to soft-skills development. Furthermore, students were required to spend their day in the classrooms as they did in secondary schools. Thus, they did not transition to more autonomous ways of learning and, if they attended all lectures and seminars, some reported that they did not feel the need for private study.

The learning-outcome approach was not fully developed (e.g., objectives were not linked to examinations, which were still focused on knowledge); there was no link to the national qualifications framework and scant evidence of modularisation. This issue will require more attention in the future in order for Romanian institutions to progress at the same pace as their European partners.

The lack of both modularisation and interfaculty cooperation, even in some of the small institutions, contributed to the fragmentation of the course offer.

It might also be useful to review whether medical interns have access to the full range of hospitals in order to acquire the necessary experience.

With respect to the learning environment, student support services were informal in the small institutions and incipient elsewhere, although there was overwhelming evidence that students felt supported by their teachers and their deans. With a few exceptions, tracking students during and after their studies was lacking.

Despite the attention paid to the quality of infrastructure in some universities, the limited financial resources resulted in a learning environment that was not always optimal. Library resources were generally insufficient and out of date. Technology-assisted learning required development, including the development of bibliographic electronic resources.

[24] Sursock, A, Smidt, H., and Korhonen, J. (2011), The Implementation of the Bologna Bachelor: a comparative national analysis. *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*, vol. 1, Berlin: Raabe Academic Publishers.

The stock of residential facilities (i.e., student dormitories) seemed insufficient; this was a concern that many universities were trying to address.

Aside from purely institutional obstacles to change there were also national regulations to take into account. According to Art. 138 of the 2011 law, universities are responsible for developing their study programmes; these must be licenced and accredited by ARACIS and the National Authority for Qualifications. The institutions need to show that they are compliant with the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) and a National Registry of Qualifications in Higher Education. Other forms of regulation include: the accredited and temporarily authorised academic programmes, the classification of the academic programmes and fields, the number of ECTS for each academic programme, the form of education and the language of tuition, as well as the maximum number of students who may enrol in a given programme. These aspects were decided annually through governmental decisions. These national processes seemed to be cumbersome and limit the capacity of institutions to evolve their curricula in a timely manner and promote innovation and change.

Recommendation N° 17: National authorities should provide the conditions that would promote student success by reviewing the legal framework to ensure the following aspects:

- Giving latitude to institutional leaders who should be able to relate the Bologna change agenda outlined above to their institution's specific mission and objectives; this would serve to promote institutional diversity whilst working within a common framework.
- Reviewing the constraints that a national register of career titles entails and whether an effective national qualifications framework could be sufficient.
- Resourcing the change process adequately, particularly because the shift to student-centred learning entails developing new teaching skills, smaller staff-student ratios, adapted classroom infrastructures and the development of technology-assisted learning. This could be supported by a national centre for the development of teaching and learning.[25]
- Ensuring that the external quality assurance process takes into account the Bologna reforms.

Recommendation N° 18: The institutions should focus on the following aspects:

- Specify the quality level and standards of their educational offer in an explicit way

[25] Cf. as an example, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Ireland: http://www.hea.ie/en/policy/policy-development/national-forum-enhancement-teaching-and-learning; last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

and use the results of internal and external evaluations to improve teaching and learning.

- Further develop a learning-outcome approach in line with best European practices, notably by offering training on such issues as student-centred learning, learning outcomes, etc., develop examinations in line with the identification of learning outcomes and minimise the use of multiple-choice exams. [26]
- Diversify the learning and teaching methods and develop the capacity of students to become autonomous learners by reducing the number of contact hours.
- Improve the balance between practical and theoretical courses by involving external specialists as teachers; provide "soft skills" development to the students in line with their specialisms; and engage stakeholders in curricular design, internship offers, consultancy work involving students, and evaluations of the curricula.
- Increase interdisciplinarity and flexibility of study programmes by developing optional courses and joint programmes across faculties.
- Offer training on such issues as student-centred learning, learning outcomes, etc., develop examinations in line with the identification of learning outcomes and minimise the use of multiple-choice exams.
- Strengthen students' engagement in the university (through civic, social and cultural activities) as a contributor to their academic success.

2.7. Increase research capacity

The growing European focus on research has been part of a deliberate strategy to make Europe more competitive on a global scale. Several important European policies address various aspects such as young researchers' careers (pipeline and development), institutional research strategies, links with society, entrepreneurship and innovation, creating critical mass through alliances, and interdisciplinary approaches to address the "Great Challenges" (climate change, energy, environment, etc.).

[26] Cf. Kennedy, D. (2006), *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: A Practical Guide*, Quality Promotion Unit, University College Cork, Ireland.

Kennedy D., Hyland, Á. and Ryan, N. (2006) Writing and using Learning Outcomes, *EUA Bologna Handbook*, C 3.4-1, 1-30, Berlin: Raabe Academic Publishers.
http://sss.dcu.ie/afi/docs/bologna/writing_and_using_learning_outcomes.pdf; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

More recently, national research funding levels have been affected negatively by the economic crisis in some European countries, whilst others have decided to concentrate additional or existing research funding in a few universities, based on a strategy of excellence (e.g., *Exzellenzinitiative* in Germany; *Investissements d'avenir* in France).

National research funding to Romanian universities has fluctuated in the past decade or so. Around 2005, research funding was increasingly targeted toward the universities[27], and had a clear impact on their research productivity. However, the funding level was drastically cut during the financial crisis whilst a policy of concentrating research funding was put in place through the classification exercise that sought to strengthen research in the group of universities identified as "advanced research and teaching universities".

Most IEP reports noted the very limited and uncertain national funding opportunities and the national limitation on staffing: these have resulted, for instance, in some poorly equipped laboratories, no sabbatical opportunities, and constrained to non-existent opportunities to offer research-based education to Master students (not to mention to undergraduates), even if the strategic intention for doing so was clearly stated. [28]

The unfavourable economic contexts in many of the regions in which the universities are located meant that the opportunities to find industrial funders were very limited. In addition, a few multinational companies have set up factories in Romania but, as a rule, do not maintain an R&D department there. This meant that the universities must try to reach out internationally to R&D partners and this was vastly more complex and challenging than doing so locally.

It is in this challenging economic context that this report examines doctoral education and research activities in the Romanian universities. The following analysis distinguishes between the three groupings of universities whenever pertinent.

2.7.1. Doctoral education

Three key European developments are worth noting in relation to doctoral education. Firstly, there has been significant and rapid growth of doctoral schools. These structures take various forms but, as a rule, provide opportunities for interdisciplinarity, increase critical mass, develop transferable skills and enhance opportunities for partnerships — be it with other universities, industry, public services, etc. Secondly, greater attention is being paid to the quality of supervision

[27] It is important to note the heritage of the Academies of Science in the region, which concentrated research at the expense of universities.

[28] Amongst the "teaching and learning universities", the scarcity and low level of research funding resulted in a drop in publications starting around 2009. As an example, one university obtained 40 competitive research grants in 2008 but this number fell progressively to 18 in 2012. Research income in another institution dropped sharply between 2008 and 2010 from an average of approximately 3 250 EUR per academic staff member to 1 000 EUR.

through training and monitoring of supervisors. Thirdly, new forms of doctorates are emerging such as professional doctorates that allow those working in the professions to pursue doctorates in relation to their professional practice. There are also examples of doctorates done in collaboration with private-sector partners such as industry. In both cases the core component remains original research but includes time in a non-academic work environment.[29]

Many changes have affected doctoral education in Romania:

- Doctoral schools have been introduced in a large number of institutions (the exceptions are generally found in the group of "teaching and learning universities"): doctoral schools generally offer one year of generic courses (e.g., research methodology, soft skills) and specialist courses; in some of the universities, instead of looking for synergy and to promote an interdisciplinary environment, each faculty had (or wished to have) its own doctoral school. Significantly, the areas of responsibility of the vice rector for research varied.

- Initially, the 2011 law had tightened the rules regarding the profile of supervisors and set a limit on the number of students each can supervise. The rules were relaxed somewhat in 2012.[30] The evaluation reports had commented on the tighter requirements by noting that, whilst in the long term these will ensure academic quality, they can create a demographic gap in the short term, particularly given the ageing professoriate and the more stringent citation requirements that the supervisors must meet; these publications will take time to develop. In addition, doctoral supervision is about more than simply ensuring a threshold number of citations; it is also about effective mentoring and guidance. At the moment, however, no monitoring (or training) of supervisors is in place in the universities.

- The 2011 law eliminated the part-time PhD status. This was perplexing for two reasons. Firstly, as one report noted this rule "excludes the development of PhD programmes closely integrated with the 'world of work' and prevents the innovative development of professional doctorates which exploit knowledge transfer potential." Secondly, in actuality, many of the PhD candidates were working on the side (mostly teaching). Many reports mentioned that despite the very small number of supervisors, some universities were accepting a relatively great number of candidates, including a significant number of unfunded candidates, who had to work to support their studies (e.g., in the case of one university, only two out of 44 doctoral candidates received state funding). This raised

[29] EUA (2009). *Collaborative Doctoral Education: University-Industry Partnerships for Enhancing Knowledge Exchange*, by Lidia Borrell-Damian, Brussels: European University Association, http://www.eua.be/publications/; last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

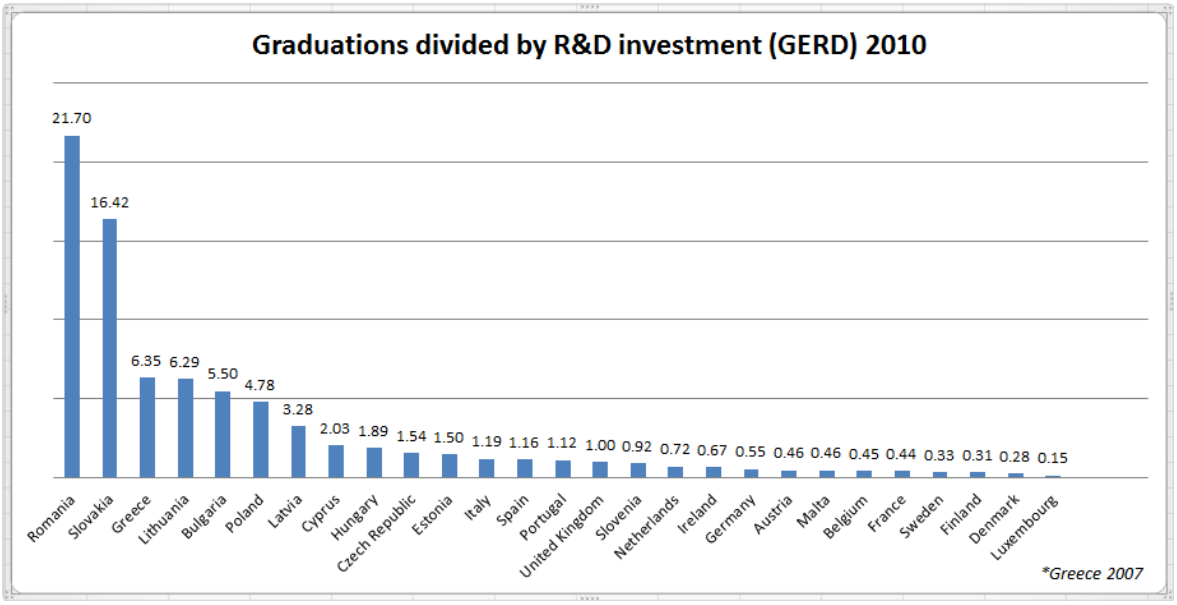
[30] Emergency ordinance O.U. N° 92 / 18 Dec. 2012.

questions about the quality of supervision and cast doubt as to whether the 2011 law has successfully eliminated the part-time PhDs as it had intended to do. Perhaps in recognition of this, a new ordinance was passed in June 2014 to re-establish the possibility for part-time PhDs.[31] It is hoped that this new disposition will allow collaborative doctorates and will contribute to increasing the number of PhD holders in Romania.

- The law provided the possibility of delivering two types of doctorates: scientific and professional (delivered by the artistic and sports institutions). There seems to be some uncertainty as to the acceptance of professional doctorates, and scattered comments that the legal formulation is vague and not helpful to the artistic universities.

It is also worth noting that funding of doctoral candidates appeared to be uncertain and very limited. It is unclear if this was affecting the number of applications to doctoral programmes. The universities that attended one of the post-evaluation workshops mentioned demographic decline and brain drain as other negative factors. Furthermore, the following analysis of Eurydice data (Figure 2 below) relating PhD graduation rates to levels of investment in R&D shows that the effectiveness of Romania in producing PhDs is trailing as compared to the other member states due to weak R&D investment.

Figure 2: PhD graduation rate divided by R&D investment, YR 2010



Recommendation N° 19: There is a general need to continue the reform of doctoral

[31] Emergency ordinance O.U. N° 49 / 30 June 2014.

education by:

- Focusing on the purpose of doctoral schools (e.g., promoting interdisciplinarity, critical mass, etc.) and limiting the tendency to have one school per faculty.
- Making the central university level ultimately responsibility for the admission process, which must be related to the available number of supervisors and funded places.
- Assigning to the vice-rectors for research the management oversight of the doctoral schools, including the training and monitoring of supervisors.

Recommendation N° 20: The financial support of doctoral candidates should be a priority in order to ensure a steady flow of doctoral candidates in the academic pipeline.

2.7.2. Research activities

The classification exercise considered the different degrees of engagement with research as one of the distinguishing factors for grouping the universities into three bands; the general finding arising from the evaluation reports, however, was that research engagement was weak across the sector.

The institutions in the group of "advanced research and teaching universities" were found to have relatively limited research capacity and impact. This is linked to several external constraints, including financial and historical ones. Given the historical prominence of the science academies in Romania, the history of university engagement in research is understandably brief. It is clear that it is still early days.

Amongst the second group of the 30 "teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities)", all but one had created doctoral schools and research centres in the very recent past as required by the 2011 law; many had identified the contours of their research strategy. Their momentum toward building greater research capacity, however, had been curtailed by the 1) lack of funding and the increasingly competitive European funding and 2) the challenge of freeing time for research. Beyond these common characteristics two specific types of institutions within this group faced other issues:

- The artistic institutions were concerned that, as a result of the 2011 law, artistic creation was no longer considered as scientific research for funding purposes. As a result, the institutions struggled with definitions of what constituted artistic research and how to measure it.
- The police and military academies shared the capacity to develop strategic orientations that were very clear and tightly focused and an organisational culture that stressed order and discipline. They worked closely with their beneficiaries to identify research topics and

involve their students in the work. They faced the same challenges as all Romanian universities – such as constrained human and financial resources – but others were specific to them – e.g., publication of research results was not always possible. In addition, these institutions tended to be small, which curtailed their research capacity. At the time of the evaluations, the five military institutions enrolled between 382 and 3 075 students with an average student number of 1 480 (cf. annex 3 for the list of institutions). If they were merged, they would reach the respectable number of 7 400 students, which would increase their research capacity.

Amongst the third group of institutions classified as "teaching and learning universities" (29 of the 48 were evaluated), 12 wanted to change classification by intensifying their research but did not have the key building blocks that would allow them to progress further and increase their research capacity.

This being said, there were a number of excellent initiatives on the part of universities to grow a research culture, such as through the creation of interdisciplinary centres, updating laboratory equipment, establishing an innovative research fund and research performance criteria, etc. However, three main weaknesses were noted.

Firstly, the evaluation reports emphasised the weak links with industry and limited interdisciplinarity. Hazelkorn,[32] who studied how new universities grow research capacity, noted the importance of moving quickly to "Mode 2" research[33] and establishing interdisciplinary teams. This type of research is characterised by new forms of transdisciplinarity and partnerships. It is more socially responsive, accountable and reflexive than is the traditional, "Mode 1" research and eliminates the boundary between applied and basic research.

Secondly, a majority of evaluation reports noted the high number of research centres. The universities explained that these centres helped them gain both research funding and ARACIS accreditation of their Masters' programmes by demonstrating the required research component. However, the requirement of having one research centre per faculty could have been easily met by regrouping all these centres under a couple of research institutes (depending on the institution's size), thus increasing the potential for interdisciplinary and innovative research and the creation of an intellectually dynamic academic community. There were scarce examples of such umbrella structures.

Thirdly, a weak tradition of inter-institutional cooperation at local, regional, national and European level seems to be the norm. A scarce few engaged in such partnerships and this was for

[32] Hazelkorn, E. (2002) Challenges of growing research at new and emerging HEIs, G. Williams (ed.) *The Enterprising University: Reform, Excellence and Quality*. London: SRHE/Open University Press, 69-82.

[33] Cf. Gibbons, M., C. Limoges, H. Nowotny, S. Schwartzman, P. Scott & M. Trow (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage.

PhD supervision rather than research. The universities that attended one of the post-evaluation workshops noted the competitive culture, which also leads to mission drift instead of prioritising distinctive niche strategies. The universities emphasised that a collaborative spirit should be promoted through a strengthened rectors' conference and framework conditions (e.g., funding incentives) that would ensure the diversity of institutional profiles.

Although bringing researchers together is helpful it is not sufficient. Thus, a comparative study of research sites shows that strong scientific research and innovation does not simply depend on proximity and shared research space.[34] Grosetti highlights the key role played by "human mediators" who, having worked in different organisations over time, have the capacity to strengthen the social networks that underpin effective scientific collaboration. This finding bolsters the argument for putting an end to academic inbreeding and ensuring that internal mobility and brain circulation within Romania is encouraged.

Research capacity could be augmented by strengthened links with society and internationalisation as well as developing a strategy for the use of technology. Horizon 2020, the new EU financial instrument, provides a focus on Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) that could guide national development.[35]

Recommendation N° 21: Romania should seek to create adequate research infrastructures, increase the level of competitive research funding as a matter of priority and provide incentives for private investment in public research (e.g., through tax incentives). The availability of funding for interdisciplinary research and social sciences and humanities should receive greater attention from the national authorities. National priorities based on Horizon 2020 would help leverage Romanian funding. Universities could be assisted in reaching out to the R&D of multinational companies when these departments are located outside Romania.

Recommendation N° 22: Romania should reduce the current fragmentation of research teams by providing incentives for fostering institutional alliances and networking and reviewing the requirement to have research centres for funding and accreditation purposes

Recommendation N° 23: The universities should focus on the following aspects to strengthen their research.

Develop a research strategy based on clear priorities and create funding instruments to bolster it. Strategies should consider existing strengths and their sustainability, the balance

[34] Grosetti, M. (2014) From 18th century chemistry to the 21st century creative class: a sociological perspective on policies intended to promote local economic development based on innovation, in Sternberg, R. and G. Krauss (eds.), *Handbook of research on entrepreneurship and creativity*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, MA, US.A, pp. 275-295. Last retrieved on 8 July 2014

[35] http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/area/key-enabling-technologies. Last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

between theoretical and applied research, the necessary promotion of interdisciplinary research, the areas of potential growth, such as those linked to the third mission: e.g., business interface and technical and knowledge transfer activities; consider applied research as a good way to develop research capacity; and introduce an overhead mechanism to build up an innovative university fund, to reallocate resources internally and to reward outstanding achievements.

Ensure good oversight and appropriate structures:

- Ensure that the vice-rector for research plays the appropriate leadership, oversight and coordination role and is able to develop, carry out and monitor the university research strategy.
- Evaluate the level of activities of the research centres, reconsider their numbers and the opportunity to regroup them.
- Create or strengthen the research support office. Its role should include, at minimum, monitoring and disseminating information on research funding opportunities and providing support during the application process. Ideally, this office should also ensure that the university is aware of international research norms and values, develop a database of research activities, benchmark and measure them, administer seed and reward money, etc. This means hiring qualified administrative staff.

Secure funding and optimise its use:

- Develop alternative sources of funding: alumni, philanthropy and applied research.
- The use of equipment and laboratories should be optimised, at a minimum, through inter-faculty cooperation. Ideally, such cooperation should extend to nearby universities and, when appropriate, to industry. Establishing regional clusters would be an important step forward.

Increase international visibility by joining international and EU research projects, encouraging and supporting those publishing in foreign languages, inviting international researchers and sending staff abroad, and developing and implementing a language policy.

Grow a research culture:

- Organise events to showcase good examples of research at the university.
- Focus on young researchers, by offering training in research methodologies, reducing their teaching load, funding them, and supporting their habilitation.
- If there are in-house journals, they should include a significant proportion of external

contributors, be selective and be evaluated periodically to determine their benefits with regard to their costs.

Evaluate: Use commonly accepted international indicators whilst considering disciplinary differences and the need to assess applied research with different measures than international bibliometric indicators; benchmark.

Recommendation N° 24: The small "teaching and learning universities", with little research capacity, should continue to be focused on improving teaching and learning. If they wish to develop research capacity, this should be done in a realistic and step-by-step fashion, and with a view of strengthening the link between research and teaching. This link is critical to ensure that they do not lose their strengths as they attempt to build up their research.

2.8. Engage with society

Engagement of universities with society seems to have had a short history in Romania. Nevertheless, whilst the universities shared some commonalities this was also an area of interesting divergence amongst them.

The scope of regional activities included some or all of the following: partnerships with local companies; consultancy and delivery of services; internship arrangements and student community work; lifelong learning activities; links to local secondary schools; etc. Some universities organised public sport and cultural events, created an incubator, and had or were planning to develop alumni associations. Others had established stakeholder groups to solicit external input into curricular design and redesign and win company support in the form of scholarships and internships.

Three categories of universities could be identified on the basis of the scope and maturity of their engagement:

- The first category included a few universities that manifested very limited community engagement and had no stated interest in expanding the existing initiatives.
- In the second and largest category, the universities stated that service to society was a relevant part of their mission. These universities had developed a good range of activities to ensure engagement and maintained many links with society but as a result of individual, *ad hoc* initiatives rather than those structured and systematised by the institution. Universities in this category had limited discussions with external stakeholders regarding curricular design and content and limited lifelong learning activities. These activities provided a good start but they needed to be strengthened through institutional commitment in order to ensure their sustainability.

- In the third category, some universities (particularly among the teaching and scientific research institutions) have created leadership roles and some structures to support their engagement; particularly, clear responsibilities for this area given to a vice-rector, to a Senate committee and to support offices (for consultancy and technology transfer); and a variety of forum(s) or advisory board(s) composed of external stakeholders. By and large, however, despite the commitment shown and a good level of activities, strategies for this area were not yet fully developed and, in some cases, responsibilities were distributed over too many administrative units.

Local context

The different patterns of engagement can be related to the local context in which each university is situated because engagement with society must be seen as a two-way partnership; non-university institutions (such as business and industry, local authorities) must also commit to this engagement and promote it. Two conditions seem important:

- Firstly, this requires a community that understands the potential contribution of universities to their community. This factor was highlighted in some of the evaluation reports. Thus, one university had created an advisory board that included VIPs, such as the mayor of the city, but the university acknowledged that the board was not effective because there was no tradition of university-industry partnerships. Neither the university nor the external stakeholders knew how to take the initiative forward and in which direction; therefore, the potential for exploiting the knowledge triangle – education, research and innovation – was left untapped. Importantly, the universities' external stakeholders must understand the multiple ways in which higher education and research can play a role in society. Thus, two reports explicitly mentioned the lukewarm support of external stakeholders for the research activities of the universities. The external stakeholders expressed interest in the institutions' immediate contributions rather than the potential benefits of their research, including applied research.

- Secondly, there is a range of economic conditions that must be met in order to ensure the success of the universities' engagement, particularly in innovation activities. These are principally access to venture capital and a robust economic infrastructure that offers multiple partnership possibilities. In other words, as Zaharia and Dainora (2009) cogently noted, the success of a university's engagement in the community is linked to the economic maturity of the latter.[36] These conditions are lacking in Romania.

[36] Razvan Zaharia and Grundey Dainora (2009) Challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurial university: some lessons from Romania and Lithuania, *Annals of Faculty of Economics*, 2009, vol.4, issue 1, pp. 874-876. http://econpapers.repec.org/article/orajournl/v_3a4_3ay_3a2009_3ai_3a1_3ap_3a874-876.htm; last retrieved on 1 September 2014.

Institutional type

Moreover, institutional type was equally important in shaping engagement in the community. The universities of music/fine arts, engineering, and agricultural and veterinary sciences seemed to have the stronger and richer links to society, regardless of their location. One must assume that their links go back to their founding and have been pursued unabated. This being said, even the more active of these universities received the advice that there were untapped opportunities at their disposal.

A special note must be made concerning the police and military academies. All of them were tied very closely to their beneficiaries who were consulted routinely in developing and adapting their curricula. In addition, there were examples of the police and military academies' involvement in their local community through lifelong learning, events open to the public, community work, crisis intervention, etc.

Public vs. private status

Among the 29 public and private "teaching and learning universities", the institutions with the strongest profile (whether public or private) had a strong community involvement guided by their strong self-identity, although the public universities were more inclined to engage with their communities than the private ones. This was particularly true for the ones located in regions that were losing their industry. However, of the 29 institutions, it was a private university that had developed the greatest number of initiatives in this area thanks to the rector's strong leadership.

By and large, there was scope for further improvement. Thus, all the reports noted the insufficient involvement of external stakeholders whether in curricular design or university governance; alumni networks were incipient to non-existent, although there was clear interest in developing them further; mention was made of bureaucratic procedures in some institutions that constituted obstacles to engagement. Innovation did not appear to be a priority.

In order to bolster university engagement, it would be helpful if the universities viewed their local, regional and international partners as a seamless set of relationships that can reinforce their regional and international positioning and that they focus on strengthening partnerships with neighbouring universities.

Recommendation N° 25: If the national authorities wish to promote entrepreneurship and greater engagement with society, a set of reforms needs to be introduced[37]:

[37] More detailed recommendations could be gleaned in documents published on 10 June 2014 by the European Commission on *Research and Innovation as Sources of Renewed Growth*. http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=keydocs; last retrieved on 8 July 2014. http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/state-of-the-union/2013/research-and-innovation-as-sources-of-renewed-growth-com-2014-339-final.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

- Expand institutional autonomy particularly regarding funding and budget management (as outlined in section 2.2).
- Provide resources for regional clustering initiatives that would include sharing technology centres, incubators, administrative support services, etc.
- Ensure that any legal obstacles to partnerships between society and the university are removed and review intellectual property rights to allow co-sharing of royalties with the funding agency, the university and the researchers.

Recommendation N° 26: The universities should strengthen their contribution to regional development by:

- Scaling up efforts to prepare students for employment (cooperation with employers in defining course provision, courses on entrepreneurship, careers office, internships, etc.); these initiatives need to be generalised and the study programmes reviewed in the light of regional employment patterns. These efforts can be made without becoming influenced by the short-term thinking of some employers.
- Developing further lifelong learning activities and distance learning and ensure that all curricula are providing opportunities for soft-skills developments (leadership, creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, etc.).

Recommendation N° 27: The universities should strengthen their regional partnerships by:

- Mapping existing and potential relationships between academic activities and possible partners in the region in order to monitor progress.
- Coordinating research across the existing university structures and establishing strong links among all those involved in research and outreach activities to broaden and deepen the university's research activities.
- Developing a systematic approach in this area by creating an "entry point" for organisations wishing to cooperate with the institutions, developing an external communication strategy, establishing an external advisory board, maintaining a strong relationship with the local authorities in order to develop a shared understanding of local needs and how the university can meet them and combatting the marked tendency for academics to engage in consultancy activities as individuals rather than in the university's name.
- Ensuring that their local community understands their potential contribution to social, cultural and economic development. This can be done through various means:

organising stakeholders' forums that would meet regularly; offering free, public lectures on topics of interest to the city; working with the local authorities to ensure their support; etc.

- Explaining the benefits of regional engagement to the university community and providing a set of incentives and support to academics.

2.9. Internationalise

Globally, internationalisation in higher education has intensified and changed significantly in the past few years. The emphasis has expanded from a focus on research partnerships and staff and student mobility to all types of international activities including joint degrees and "internationalisation at home" through courses taught in foreign language(s), comparative course content, international guest lecturers, international staff recruitment, etc.

In fact, the International Association of Universities (IAU) 3rd Global Survey report (2012) mentions a shift away from "internationalisation abroad" (mobility of students, staff, programme export, etc.) toward "internationalisation at home". Indeed, the top two rationales for internationalisation in 2012 were "improving student preparedness for a globalized/internationalized world" and "internationalizing the curriculum and improving academic quality".[38] These findings were confirmed by the 4th Global Survey (2014: 52).[39] Thus, internationalisation today goes beyond issues of mobility to affect all core functions of universities and it is essential to view it as an integrated element of the university strategy.

Internationalisation was an important strategic objective for the majority of the Romanian institutions that were evaluated.[40] The universities had high aspirations in this area and have achieved some degree of internationalisation. Thus, the reports noted the following activities:

[38] Cf. Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making (2013), *Internationalisation of Higher Education in Romania*, p. 10. http://www.politici-edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Internationalization-of-HE-in-Romania.pdf; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

[39] Egron-Polak, E. and Hudson, R, (2014) *Internationalization of Higher Education: Growing Expectations, Fundamental Values, IAU 4th Global Survey*, Paris: IAU publications.

[40] Cf. ibid, pp. 20-22, for a brief history of internationalisation in Romania during the 20th Century. The study notes that in 1980-1981 "Romania ranked among the first 15 countries in the world providing academic services for foreign students" and that its international student population peaked at 10% of the global student population (p. 20).

- Some universities offered "sections" (i.e., complete study programmes) in Hungarian, English, French, and German. These were generally started in the 1990s and were well-functioning units.
- A number of universities held memberships in European networks: these tend to be specialised networks (e.g., fine arts, music, veterinary science, engineering).
- The fine arts and performing arts institutions tended to have active visiting lectureship programmes.
- Many institutions have created an international office, responsible for supporting incoming and outgoing students and staff.
- There were some efforts to develop the linguistic skills of students.
- The universities were increasing the number of their institutional agreements, some of which were with very prestigious institutions, notably French.[41]
- The internationalisation of the police and military academies were structured by EU membership (EU requirements for border management) and NATO, respectively. Their students were very fluent in foreign languages albeit not always their staff.

This being said, the institutions faced several challenges. Whilst internationalisation was an important strategic objective and many institutions had identified some goals, none was found to have a full-fledged strategy, with clear targets, success measures, timelines, responsibilities, budget, etc. The lack of an internationalisation strategy resulted in the recurring problem of multiplying partnerships and institutional agreements. According to the institutions, this was compounded by the ARACIS approach that considered the quantity rather than the quality of partnerships as a criterion for internationalisation. Thus, one institution was reported to have increased the number of agreements by 64% between 2008 and 2011. These agreements have had no impact on mobility because they did not address the obstacles to mobility (cf. below). The agreements were sometimes found to be based on unclear selection criteria and no consideration of cost and risks.

A lack of strategic thinking about enrolment figures and the geographical targets in the non-Romanian "sections" resulted, in some cases, in admitting all international students, regardless of the quality of their applications. This can be a high-risk behaviour if the universities are not ready to support their international students. Furthermore, these sections were sometimes isolated academically and socially. The lack of integration of international students constituted a missed opportunity for internationalisation at home.

There was limited to non-existent staff mobility that seemed linked to reduced financial support and staff shortage and workload whilst the adjectives used in the evaluation reports to characterise student mobility were "limited", "declining" and "unbalanced" (more outgoing than

[41] Romania is member of the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie* (www.francophonie.org).

incoming students). A recent report confirmed these finding by highlighting the following aggregate data for Romania:

> … for every 35 students going for a mobility period abroad (outgoing credit mobility), only 10 foreign students choose to study at a Romanian university (incoming mobility). As for degree mobility, there are approximately 26,000 students who choose to study in another country and 10,903 foreign students who come for an entire cycle in Romania. These numbers show that the quota of incoming students is 2.4 times lower than that of outgoing students for an entire cycle.[42]

In addition, in some of the institutions, mobility varied greatly from one faculty to the next, suggesting the lack of central steer in this area. The major obstacles that were cited in the evaluation reports included: financial issues for both staff and students; language barrier for incoming and outgoing students as well as academic and administrative staff; limited programme flexibility; lack of information about international opportunities; limited to no international visibility and marketing (often no website in English); credit recognition problems and limited human resources in the international offices.

Internationalisation is a key strategic area for all universities, and particularly for those that are research-active because it is quasi impossible to do high quality research in isolation and without an international orientation. The long-term goal for Romanian institutions should be to move from an *ad-hoc* approach to an integrated internationalisation strategy[43], supported by a national internationalisation strategy as the set of recommendation below suggests.

Recommendation N° 28: The national authorities should consider developing a national strategy for international outreach that will promote the attractive aspects of Romanian higher education and research, in targeted geographical areas.

Recommendation N° 29: Institutions should develop staff expertise in internationalisation, including language skills, and guidance in the process of thinking about institutional rationales for internationalisation, strategic goals and objectives, geographical targets, the tools to measure success, promotional capacity abroad, the offices and staff required to support the strategy, etc. Institutions should think about how to strengthen their regional positioning as part of a long-term strategy for improving their international presence. This means ensuring the access and success of Romanian students as a first priority before expanding

[42] Ibid, p. 22.

[43] A new project coordinated by UEFISCDI and IAU will assist 20 universities in developing an internationalisation strategy. For an example, cf. http://www.uab.ro/departamente/relatii_internationale/index1.php?compartimentul=1_admin_antet_departamente&limba=ro&cale=noutati&grup=noutati&meniu=departamente&sub_meniu=noutati; last retrieved 1 September 2014.

internationally.

2.10. Rethink the higher education landscape

Based on the evaluations conducted by the Institutional Evaluation Programme, it was clear that there were a number of good universities in Romania but that, overall, the institutions showed variance in size, breadth, quality of offer, infrastructures and viability.

Most institutions carried the title university but some were only universities by name: several were narrowly specialised; others were too small and underfunded to have the capacity to carry out research (six enrol fewer than 500 students).[44] In other parts of Europe, these would be called colleges and institutes, respectively. It is also worth noting that the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER), which includes a set of comparable institutional data, will not list institutions with fewer than 200 students and 30 staff members.[45]

With the degree of fragmentation present in Romania, inter-institutional cooperation would have contributed to creating critical mass. Instead, however, few instances of cooperation were identified. The culture seemed to be rife with competition to the point where inbreeding practices in hiring academics were viewed by some institutions as a competitive advantage.

In many European countries, institutional cooperation has been promoted as a way of increasing critical mass and rationalisation. However, there was rather limited evidence in Romania of such occurrences. Two institutions recently merged and another two were discussing a possible merger. Rectors of universities with a similar specialism (engineering, music and arts, agricultural and veterinary sciences, medical/pharmaceutical/dental) seem to be in close contact with one another; approach the government as a group; benchmark their institutions informally; and interpret and implement new policies in the same way. There also seemed to be some interlibrary cooperation and some staff exchange within that group but little joint research or teaching activities.

There were isolated occurrences of cooperation between neighbouring universities, in which the larger ones would lend staff to the smaller ones to allow them to teach certain courses; or universities without a doctoral school allowed their qualified academic staff to supervise doctoral

[44] The California Institute of Technology is the most often cited example of a very small institution with an outstanding reputation. The number of its students (2 200) is often mentioned but not the considerable number of staff (3 900) relative to its student population or the significant size of its budget (USD 2 billions). http://www.caltech.edu/content/about-caltech; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

[45] The European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) was launched in July 2014 by the European Commission and includes a set of comparable institutional data. http://eter.joanneum.at/imdas-eter/; last retrieved on 8 July 2014

theses elsewhere. However, institutions within the same cities did not seem to share many resources, cooperate actively or approach their local and regional authorities as a group.

Interestingly, the military academies shared a number of important characteristics, but seemed to be isolated from one another. A project to merge these relatively small military institutions had been discussed but no decision had been taken to implement it. From an academic perspective, the proposed merger would have created critical mass, without necessarily sacrificing the need to train specialists for the different branches of the armed forces (also, cf. 2.7).

In addition, there were a number of small, specialised universities (medicine, dentistry, pharmacy; veterinary and agricultural sciences). Their status as stand-alone institutions limited the opportunities to develop biomedical and medical engineering research and to exploit the links between human and animal medicine. Therefore it would be useful to envisage bringing these universities closer to the comprehensive universities in their region.

Furthermore, the lack of vocational education and of institutions committed to serving under-represented populations was striking particularly because there seemed to be consensus that the more stringent baccalaureate examination was excluding many from accessing higher education and that the dropout rate in the first year of university was generally very high (cf. 2.5). Thus, it is worth considering if the system serves effectively the social and economic needs of the country.

Recommendation N° 30: National authorities are advised to review the Romanian system in the context of demographic decline and limited resources, to set a minimum threshold size for institutions that are called universities and provide incentives for structural changes and consolidation at regional level. At minimum, regional cooperation of institutions should be encouraged. Incentives for mergers could be proposed to consolidate some of the smaller institutions. It would also be useful to consider creating a new type of vocational programme targeted at serving a diverse and under-represented population.

3. Conclusions

Whilst acknowledging the great efforts that both universities and the national authorities have been exerting to improve the working conditions in higher education, the evaluation reports noted the still limited autonomy of institutions. They also recognised that the economic crisis that started in 2008 has severely constrained public funding.

The key findings can be summarised as follows:

The detailed regulatory framework, including the way that the external quality assurance was carried out, reinforced institutional isomorphism. Thus, there was very little institutional differentiation across the sector. This was reinforced by a strong tendency toward academic inbreeding and limited internationalisation.

A characteristic of the Romanian higher education sector was the variance in institutional sustainability and quality. Thus, some institutions appeared very fragile and weak. For some, this was due to the impact of the financial crisis; others were organised inefficiently; some other institutions were failing to meet their teaching mission whilst aspiring to be more active in research despite a deficit of human and financial resources. There were occasional charges of corruption. These weaknesses need to be addressed in order to strengthen the quality and reputation of the whole system.

The strategic capacity of institutions was limited by the narrow scope of their autonomy, constant legislative change and financial uncertainties. As a result, in general the universities had difficulties projecting themselves in the future. They showed great resilience and commitment in the face of an adverse situation and tried to manage as best they could, albeit with a day-to-day horizon.

Given the sharp demographic decline in Romania and the limited financial resources, it would be essential to review the shape and size of the system so that it can respond to current challenges in a planned way. This would require, at the very least, deciding on the minimum size of institutions (particularly when they are identified as universities), and providing incentives for greater inter-institutional cooperation and, in some appropriate cases, institutional consolidation.

It is hoped that addressing these four main issues would allow Romania to move ahead in improving its higher education institutions and strengthening their social and economic impact on the country.

Annex 1: Summary of recommendations

1. STIMULATE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

***Recommendation N° 1**:* National authorities are advised to review the legal framework, including the external quality assurance approach, with a view to stimulating institutional differentiation. This will require less detailed legal frameworks and a quality assurance approach that is context-sensitive and that encourages institutions to develop their own profiles and strategies. They would then be evaluated against these strategic goals. It might be necessary that ARACIS, the Romanian accreditation agency, use to a greater extent international peers in order to limit the possibility of reinforcing the current organisational cultures.

Recommendation N° 2: National authorities are advised to review the current legal framework to ensure a clearer distribution of roles and responsibilities in the universities in order to foster a more dynamic decision-making process. Some examples of aspects requiring attention include:

- Ensuring that the Administrative Board is able to take decisions in a timely manner, after a reasonable period of consultation; this requires limiting the remit of the Senate to core academic issues of integrity and standards;
- Reassessing the role of the rector and his/her accountability to the Senate. The notion of a contract between the Senate and the rector should be reviewed to ensure that the universities are able to respond to changing contexts and that the implementation of the institutional strategy is translated into a rolling action plan that would be updated annually.
- Ensuring that private universities draw a clear boundary between their Board of Trustees/Founders' Council as the keeper of the university vision and values and the Administrative Board as the responsible body for day-to-day operations. This would ensure the independence of the former and its role as a guide to the latter.

***Recommendation N° 3*:** National authorities are encouraged to find a way to provide legal and financial stability to the universities, for instance, via a non-partisan buffer body such as a Higher Education Council that would be entrusted to govern the system on behalf of the ministry.

***Recommendation N° 4*:** It is advisable to find ways to assist universities in developing their mission statements, strategic documents and action plans.

***Recommendation N° 5*:** The universities are advised:

- To provide leadership training to all senior staff.
- To review:
  - The balance between centralised and decentralised services by taking into account

the specific functions of each administrative unit and the institution's size;

- Their structures by reducing the faculties, departments and administrative units to an optimal number whilst keeping in mind that interdisciplinarity and critical mass should be key objectives;
- Their leadership functions by streamlining the roles of vice-rectors, clarifying the functions and responsibilities of the senior posts and their accountability, and strengthening the coordination role of the central administration;
- Their decision-making approach by reviewing and reducing the number of Senate committees and shifting away from a slow, multi-layered decision-making model that is neither transparent nor effective.

Recommendation N° 6*:* Institutions should ensure that tailored and up-to-date ICT solutions contribute to improving their core functions (teaching and learning, research, administration) and serve their different constituencies (leadership, academic and administrative staff, students).

2. SECURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Recommendation N° 7: It will be important for policy makers and institutional leaders to apply the provisions of the 2011 law that would release an entrepreneurial spirit within the universities. If the intention is to allow universities to diversify their funding sources, then it is essential to increase financial autonomy, whilst ensuring appropriate *ex post* accountability, and to make certain that the universities' structures (including faculties) are both budget and cost units.

In any case, institutional leaders would need to be supported in order to:

- Understand different internal allocation methods, how these can support institutional strategy and planning, and how to implement one that is appropriate to their institution.
- How full costs can be calculated and the implications of such an approach to the financial and strategic management of the institution.
- Develop risk-assessment instruments.

3. INVEST IN PEOPLE

Recommendation N° 8: There is a national need to plan the renewal of the professoriate in Romania and ensure the attractiveness of academic salaries and working conditions. This could include:

- Ensuring the institution's ability to diversify funding in order to develop a mix of staff incentives and appealing salary packages, which are essential for attracting and retaining staff.

- Allowing universities to work out contractual arrangements with individual faculty members over the course of their careers that would take into account their evolving interests in respect of the three core functions: teaching, research and service to society.

- Changing the culture of academic inbreeding by promoting student mobility between the Bachelor and the Master, and the Master and the Doctorate and avoiding hiring the institutions' own graduates unless they have worked elsewhere for a period.

- Ensuring that the workload of young academics allows them to develop as researchers.

***Recommendation N° 9*:** Institutions should strengthen the capacity of administrative staff to support core academic functions by:

- Providing development opportunities for administrative staff in order to build up capacity to deal with sophisticated administrative issues.

- Including non-academic administrative staff on decision-making bodies in order to ensure that administrative processes support academic objectives.

***Recommendation N° 10*:** Any future legislative change should continue to ensure students' involvement in governance in accordance with good European practice. Particularly, students should be involved on matters that are of particular interest to them and on which they would have views that would be useful to the institutions.

***Recommendation N° 11*:** Institutions should strive to make students feel part of the community. This could be done by:

- Developing the leadership skills of the student representatives so as to enhance their contribution to the deliberations of the Senate and other bodies. The European Student Union (ESU) could assist in such leadership development at the national level.

- Creating an atmosphere in which students feel that the institution takes their needs seriously: this can be done through strengthened pastoral care, social and cultural activities, and institutionalised support of the student organisations.

4. ENSURE QUALITY

Recommendation N° 12: It is advisable to review the current national quality assurance (QA) arrangements in order to determine if it is time to shift to a trust-based, improvement-oriented

and context-sensitive external QA approach and to move away from methodologies based on inspection, control and threshold standards.

Recommendation N° 13: A national network of QA officers could be established (e.g., by the national rectors' conference) to discuss issues of common interest, benchmark the universities' activities in this area and develop expertise on such aspects as:

- The key internal QA instruments, both *ex ante* and *ex post*, formal and informal (how to design them, how to use them, etc.);
- The way to systematise quality assurance arrangements and linking them to decision-making processes and institutional planning;
- How to design supporting structures that would address the results of QA processes, such as professional development for academic and administrative staff and information technology;
- How to successfully develop and embed a quality culture.

Recommendation N° 14*:* Instead of promoting rankings, which are a simplistic and subjective way of measuring the quality of as complex an institution as a university or a study programme, it would be preferable to encourage universities to participate in small regional and European networks of institutions for benchmarking purposes. Promoting internationalisation — in its full meaning (staff and student mobility, research partnerships, internationalisation of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process, etc.) — can be seen as a very important quality-improvement instrument.

Recommendation N° 15**:** As part of their QA arrangements, institutions should have in place policies, processes and structures to prevent and act upon fraudulent behaviour. Their ethics committees and the national committee dealing with these issues should be used effectively and strengthened to address academic misconduct. One solution could be to install inter-university ethics commissions with half of the members coming from a given university and the other half from another university. National authorities should remain vigilant about these issues, which are critical to the reputation of the whole higher education system.

5. PROMOTE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Recommendation N° 16: The institutions should stress social cohesion through improved access and student support by strengthening the connections to secondary schools in order to prepare school leavers better for university-level studies, developing pastoral care through the full student cycle (i.e., before students arrive at the university until after they leave), tracking and addressing the dropout rate during the first year and enhancing lifelong learning provision.

6. SHIFT TO STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

Recommendation N° 17: National authorities should provide the conditions that would promote student success by reviewing the legal framework to ensure the following aspects:

- Giving latitude to institutional leaders who should be able to relate the Bologna change agenda to their institution's specific mission and objectives; this would serve to promote institutional diversity whilst working within a common framework.
- Reviewing the constraints that a national register of career titles entails and whether an effective national qualifications framework could be sufficient.
- Resourcing the change process adequately, particularly because the shift to student-centred learning entails developing new teaching skills, smaller staff-student ratios, adapted classroom infrastructures and the development of technology-assisted learning. This could be supported by a national centre for the development of teaching and learning.

***Recommendation N° 18*:** The institutions should focus on the following aspects:

- Specify the quality level and standards of their educational offer in an explicit way and use the results of internal and external evaluations to improve teaching and learning.
- Further develop a learning-outcome approach in line with best European practices, notably by offering training on such issues as student-centred learning, learning outcomes, etc., develop examinations in line with the identification of learning outcomes and minimise the use of multiple-choice exams.
- Diversify the learning and teaching methods and develop the capacity of students to become autonomous learners by reducing the number of contact hours.
- Improve the balance between practical and theoretical courses by involving external specialists as teachers; provide "soft skills" development to the students in line with their specialisms; and engage stakeholders in curricular design, internship offers, consultancy work involving students, and evaluations of the curricula.
- Increase interdisciplinarity and flexibility of study programmes by developing optional courses and joint programmes across faculties.
- Strengthen students' engagement in the university (through civic, social and cultural activities) as a contributor to their academic success.

7. INCREASE RESEARCH CAPACITY

Recommendation N° 19: There is a general need to continue the reform of doctoral education by:

- Focusing on the purpose of doctoral schools (e.g., promoting interdisciplinarity, critical mass, etc.) and limiting the tendency to have one school per faculty.
- Making the central university level ultimately responsibility for the admission process, which must be related to the available number of supervisors and funded places.
- Assigning to the vice-rectors for research the management oversight of the doctoral schools, including the training and monitoring of supervisors.

Recommendation N° 20*:* The financial support of doctoral candidates should be a priority in order to ensure a steady flow of doctoral candidates in the academic pipeline.

Recommendation N° 21: Romania should seek to create adequate research infrastructures, increase the level of competitive research funding as a matter of priority and provide incentives for private investment in public research (e.g., through tax incentives). The availability of funding for interdisciplinary research and social sciences and humanities should receive greater attention from the national authorities. National priorities based on Horizon 2020 would help leverage Romanian funding. Universities could be assisted in reaching out to the R&D of multinational companies when these departments are located outside Romania.

Recommendation N° 22: Romania should reduce the current fragmentation of research teams by providing incentives for fostering institutional alliances and networking and reviewing the requirement to have research centres for funding and accreditation purposes.

Recommendation N° 23**:** The universities should focus on the following aspects to strengthen their research:

Develop a research strategy based on clear priorities and create funding instruments to bolster it. Strategies should consider the existing strengths and their sustainability, the balance between theoretical and applied research, the necessary promotion of interdisciplinary research, the areas of potential growth, such as those linked to the third mission: e.g., business interface and technical and knowledge transfer activities; consider applied research as a good way to develop research capacity; and introduce an overhead mechanism to build up an innovative university fund, to reallocate resources internally and to reward outstanding achievements.

Ensure good oversight and appropriate structures:

- Ensure that the vice-rector for research plays the appropriate leadership, oversight and coordination role and is able to develop, carry out and monitor the university research strategy.
- Evaluate the level of activities of the research centres, reconsider their numbers and the opportunity to regroup them.

- Create or strengthen the research support office. Its role should include, at minimum, monitoring and disseminating information on research funding opportunities and providing support during the application process. Ideally, this office should also ensure that the university is aware of international research norms and values, develop a database of research activities, benchmark and measure them, administer seed and reward money, etc. This means hiring qualified administrative staff.

Secure funding and optimise its use:

- Develop alternative sources of funding: alumni, philanthropy and applied research.
- The use of equipment and laboratories should be optimised, at a minimum, through inter-faculty cooperation. Ideally, such cooperation should extend to nearby universities and, when appropriate, to industry. Establishing regional clusters would be an important step forward.

Increase international visibility by joining international and EU research projects, encouraging and supporting those publishing in foreign languages, inviting international researchers and sending staff abroad, and developing and implementing a language policy.

Grow a research culture:

- Organise events to showcase good examples of research at the university.
- Focus on young researchers, by offering training in research methodologies, reducing their teaching load, funding them, and supporting their habilitation.
- If there are in-house journals, they should include a significant proportion of external contributors, be selective and be evaluated periodically to determine their benefits with regard to their costs.

Evaluate: Use commonly accepted international indicators whilst considering disciplinary differences and the need to assess applied research with different measures than international bibliometric indicators; benchmark.

Recommendation N° 24: The small "teaching and learning universities", with little research capacity, should continue to be focused on improving teaching and learning. If they wish to develop research capacity, this should be done in a realistic and step-by-step fashion, and with a view of strengthening the link between research and teaching. This link is critical to ensure that they do not lose their strengths as they attempt to build up their research.

8. ENGAGE WITH SOCIETY

Recommendation N° 25: If the national authorities wish to promote entrepreneurship and greater engagement with society, a set of reforms needs to be introduced:

- Expand institutional autonomy particularly regarding funding and budget management.
- Provide resources for regional clustering initiatives that would include sharing technology centres, incubators, administrative support services, etc.
- Ensure that any legal obstacles to partnerships between society and the university are removed and review intellectual property rights to allow co-sharing of royalties with the funding agency, the university and the researchers.

Recommendation N° 26: The universities should strengthen their contribution to regional development by:

- Scaling up efforts to prepare students for employment (cooperation with employers in defining course provision, courses on entrepreneurship, careers office, internships, etc.); these initiatives need to be generalised and the study programmes reviewed in the light of regional employment patterns. These efforts can be made without becoming influenced by the short-term thinking of some employers.
- Developing further lifelong learning activities and distance learning and ensure that all curricula are providing opportunities for soft-skills developments (leadership, creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, etc.).

Recommendation N° 27: The universities should strengthen their regional partnerships by:

- Mapping existing and potential relationships between academic activities and possible partners in the region in order to monitor progress.
- Coordinating research across the existing university structures and establishing strong links among all those involved in research and outreach activities to broaden and deepen the university's research activities.
- Developing a systematic approach in this area by creating an "entry point" for organisations wishing to cooperate with the institutions, developing an external communication strategy, establishing an external advisory board, maintaining a strong relationship with the local authorities in order to develop a shared understanding of local needs and how the university can meet them and combatting the marked tendency for academics to engage in consultancy activities as individuals rather than in the university's name.

- Ensuring that their local community understands their potential contribution to social, cultural and economic development. This can be done through various means: organising stakeholders' forums that would meet regularly; offering free, public lectures on topics of interest to the city; working with the local authorities to ensure their support; etc.

- Explaining the benefits of regional engagement to the university community and providing a set of incentives and support to academics.

9. INTERNATIONALISE

Recommendation N° 28: The national authorities should consider developing a national strategy for international outreach that will promote the attractive aspects of Romanian higher education and research, in targeted geographical areas.

Recommendation N° 29: Institutions should develop staff expertise in internationalisation, including language skills, and guidance in the process of thinking about institutional rationales for internationalisation, strategic goals and objectives, geographical targets, the tools to measure success, promotional capacity abroad, the offices and staff required to support the strategy, etc. Institutions should think about how to strengthen their regional positioning as part of a long-term strategy for improving their international presence. This means ensuring the access and success of Romanian students as a first priority before expanding internationally.

10. RETHINK THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Recommendation N° 30: National authorities are advised to review the Romanian system in the context of demographic decline and limited resources, to set a minimum threshold size for institutions that are called universities and provide incentives for structural changes and consolidation at regional level. At minimum, regional cooperation of institutions should be encouraged. Incentives for mergers could be proposed to consolidate some of the smaller institutions. It would be useful to consider creating a new type of vocational programme targeted at serving a diverse and under-represented population.

Annex 2: The evaluation process

1. The IEP: philosophy and methodological approach

Whilst the institutional evaluations in Romania took place in the context of a recent legal reform, each university was assessed on its own terms by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology. The IEP's distinctive features are:

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

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

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

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

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

Importantly, the evaluations are mission-driven; that is, each university is evaluated in the context of its own mission and objectives. Therefore, the evaluation reports do not compare or rank institutions. The same non-comparative approach is adopted in this report as well.

Whilst IEP worked independently, the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) organised the travel, accommodation, and related arrangements for the team members and ensured the presence of interpreters during the site visits.

2. Steps in the evaluation

Following the registration of the universities, a series of steps was undertaken to ensure the success of the evaluations. Each of the evaluation rounds (cf. 1.1) went through the following five steps.

2.1. Preparatory workshops

Preparatory workshops were organised for:

- The participating universities to introduce them to the *Guidelines for Institutions,* the IEP philosophy and methodology and, importantly, to respond to questions regarding the self-evaluation process and report;
- The evaluators focussing primarily on the Romanian context, particularly the 2011 law and associated legal texts.

2.2. Self-evaluation process and report

Following their first workshop, the universities prepared their self-evaluation report. The IEP Guidelines stressed that the self-evaluation process is as important as the resulting self-evaluation report. The Guidelines provided pointers on how to select the members of the self-evaluation group and ideas on how to involve the university community in the process: from the data collection phase to receiving comments about the draft self-evaluation report.

2.3. Evaluation visits

The IEP teams visited each university twice:

- The first visit lasted a day and a half. The purpose of the first visit is to allow the team to become acquainted with the institution in its local context and to request additional information when necessary. Meetings are held with institutional and faculty leaders, academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders.
- The second visit generally lasted two and a half days (except in some of the smallest universities were the visit was over a day and a half). The purpose of the second visit is to deepen the team's knowledge of the institution and to formulate and confirm its finding. This visit ends with an oral presentation of the evaluation report to the university leadership, the university community and, often, a number of external stakeholders.

2.4. Evaluation reports

The team coordinators prepared the draft evaluation reports, with contribution from their respective team members. It was sent to the institutions for correction of factual errors and the final versions were posted on the project's and IEP's websites.

2.5. Post-evaluation workshops

A post-evaluation workshop was organised after each round to discuss the corresponding draft cluster report and provide the participating institutions with an opportunity to share how they will address the recommendations that they received. Comments received during the workshops were integrated in the final draft of each cluster report.

Annex 3: The participating institutions

The following four tables present the profile and the number of students of each evaluated institution. To note: 1) multidisciplinary is used here loosely to refer to institutions offering subjects in more than one discipline rather than a comprehensive institution. In some cases, the institutions would have only two or three disciplines but are still classified as multidisciplinary; 2) student numbers are approximate and based on the number provided by the institutions, some of which provided the number of undergraduates and others also the number of postgraduates.

Table 1: The 11 institutions in the first project and first round

Name	Profile	Students
Bucharest		
University of Bucharest	Multidisciplinary	34,459
University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila Bucharest	Specialised	9 424
Bucharest University of Economic Studies (*Academia de Studii Economice*)	Specialised	22,031
Cluj Napoca		
University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	Specialised	6 344
Babeş Bolyai University	Multidisciplinary	42,430
Technical University of Cluj Napoca	Specialised	21,000
Iuliu Haţieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy	Specialised	6 517
Iaşi		
University Alexander Ioan Cuza	Multidisciplinary	25,095
Gheorghe Asachi Technical University	Specialised	16,000
University of Medicine and Pharmacy Grigore T. Popa	Specialised	11,106
Timişoara		
Technical University of Timişoara	Specialised	13,557

Table 2: The 30 institutions in the first project and second round

Name	Profile	Students
Bucharest		
"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Police Academy of Bucharest	Specialised	1 927
National University of Theatre and Film "I. L. Caragiale"	Specialised	800
"Carol I" National Defence University of Bucharest	Specialised	1 642
"Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism of Bucharest	Specialised	3 418
"Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy	Specialised	236
Military Technical Academy of Bucharest	Specialised	1 243
National University of Arts Bucharest	Specialised	1 479
National School of Political Science and Administrative Studies Bucharest	Specialised	5 210
National University of Music Bucharest	Specialised	958
Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest	Specialised	8 000
University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest	Specialised	7 000
Brașov		
"Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy of Brașov	Specialised	382
Transylvania University of Brașov	Multidisciplinary	17,830
Cluj Napoca		
"Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy of Cluj Napoca	Specialised	813
University of Art and Design of Cluj Napoca	Specialised	1 007
Constanța		
Mircea Cel Batran Naval Academy Constanța	Specialised	3 075
"Ovidius" University of Constanța	Multidisciplinary	15,000

Craiova		
University of Craiova	Multidisciplinary	22,721
University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova	Specialised	3 419
Galati		
"Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati	Multidisciplinary	12,858
Iaşi		
"Ion Ionescu de la Brad" University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Iaşi	Specialised	3 757
University of Arts "George Enescu" of Iaşi	Specialised	1 365
Oradea		
University of Oradea	Multidisciplinary	16,458
Sibiu		
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu	Multidisciplinary	16,000
Nicolae Balcescu Land Forces Academy Sibiu *	Specialised	1 059
Târgu Mureş		
University of Arts of Târgu Mureş	Specialised	369
University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureş	Specialised	5 944
Timişoara		
University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Timişoara	Specialised	6 116
"Victor Babes" University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Timişoara	Specialised	6 202
West University of Timişoara	Multidisciplinary	16,983

Table 3: The 17 institutions in the second project and first round

Name	Profile	Status	Students
Alba Iulia			
"1 Decembrie 1918" University Of Alba Iulia	Multidisciplinary	Public	4 061
Arad			
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad	Multidisciplinary	Public	8 150
"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad	Multidisciplinary	Private	13,118
Bacău			
"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău	Multidisciplinary	Public	5 195
Bucharest			
"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University	Multidisciplinary	Private	15,316
Ecological University of Bucharest	Multidisciplinary	Private	4 400
National University of Physical Education and Sports from Bucharest	Specialised	Public	1 243
Romanian-American University	Multidisciplinary	Private	4 508
"Spiru Haret" University	Multidisciplinary	Private	17,000
Titu Maiorescu University	Multidisciplinary	Private	5 500
Constanța			
Constanța Maritime University	Specialised	Public	2 212
Iaşi			
University of Iași "Apollonia"	Multidisciplinary	Private	967
Oradea			
"Emanuel" University of Oradea	Multidisciplinary	Private	313
Partium Christian University from Oradea	Multidisciplinary	Private	994

Pitești			
University of Pitești	Multidisciplinary	Public	10,360
Târgoviște			
Valahia University of Târgoviște	Multidisciplinary	Public	7 500
Târgu Jiu			
"Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu Jiu	Multidisciplinary	Public	3 437

Table 4: The 12 institutions in the second project and second round

Name	**Profile**	**Status**	**Students**
Bacău			
"George Bacovia" University of Bacau	Specialised	Private	1187
Bucharest			
"Artifex" University of Bucharest	Specialised	Private	2148
"Bioterra" University of Bucharest	Multidisciplinary	Private	2200
"Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest	Specialised	Private	3828
The Institute for Business Administration of Bucharest	Specialised	Private	65
Cluj Napoca			
Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj-Napoca	Specialised	Private	180
Galati			
"Danubius" University of Galati	Specialised	Private	1743
Lugoj			
"Dragan" European University of Lugoj	Specialised	Private	650

Oradea			
Agora University of Oradea	Specialised	Private	708
Pitești			
"Constantin Brancoveanu" University of Pitești	Specialised	Private	3716
Tîrgu Mureș			
”Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu Mureș	Multidisciplinary	Public	3548
Timişoara			
”Tibiscus” University of Timişoara	Multidisciplinary	Private	1612