



**A R A C I S**  
**Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

**External Institutional Evaluation**  
**Universitatea "Petru Maior" din Tîrگو-Mureș, Romania**

**F o r e i g n E x p e r t R e p o r t**

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## 1. Introduction

When the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (ARACIS) asked the European University Association (EUA) for the nomination of Foreign Experts concerning the round of Institutional Evaluations in Romania during the second half-year of 2009, I was appointed by EUA to attend the External Institutional Evaluation of the University "Petru Maior" in Tirgo-Mureş (UPM) from December 9 to 11, 2009. Immediately after my nomination I received a warm welcome by Ms. Oana Sarbu from the ARACIS Experts Department. Subsequently I was contacted by Dr.ing. Marius Cristian Luculescu, Scientific Secretary of the Mission, who informed me on the link to the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and the evaluation documents on UPM's homepage. I had no problems to open and print all files. When I had fixed my travel details with Ms. Oana Sarbu I was contacted by Prof.dr.ing. Liviu Moldovan, Quality Manager at UPM and Contact Person for the Mission, that the Institution would take care of me during my stay.

I am very grateful to the Mission Coordinating Person Prof.univ.dr. Victor Munteanu for conducting the evaluation process in a superior way and to the Mission Director Prof.univ.dr. Romiţău Iucu for discussing and verifying our findings on the second day of the visit.

My special thank goes to Vice-Rector Prof.dr. Călin Enăchescu from the UPM for his perfect organization of my visit and meeting all my wishes as well as to UPM for its generous hospitality. Furthermore, I also want to express my appreciation to all members of the evaluation team and the various groups of UPM, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their open discussions to a good view of UPM. Last but not least I want to thank Ms. Oana Sarbu from ARACIS for her friendly way of holding contact with me and managing all problems caused by cancelled flights.

## 2. Contextual Framework of this Report

Since the majority of the ARACIS team members and of the representatives of UPM will not know my background I will describe once more briefly the vantage point from which I write this review. I have already more than 8 years of experience as member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of EUA. IEP-evaluations have a strong emphasis on the self evaluation process within the evaluated institution. They are undertaken from an European and international perspective and the key question is the institution's capacity for improvement and change in order to face the current challenges of higher education. Some of the following comments and recommendations will reflect this IEP-background. It has to be emphasized that IEP does not rank nor accreditate institutions or study programs. In difference, ARACIS evaluations are performed in correspondence with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and have a clear focus in the evaluation of study programs.

### 3. Organizational Details of UPM

The University "Petru Maior" in Tirgu Mures is a well established, state-owned university. It is the biggest and most important higher educational institute in the Mures county. UPM was established under the actual name in 1996, but has its origin in the Pedagogical Institute of Tirgu Mures founded in 1960. UPM is a typical regional university. This is also reflected in its slogan "A University for the Community". UPM contributes to the local, regional and national needs of the Romanian society. As an institution of small size and a limited number of study carriers it is easy to overlook. Hence UPM is of interest especially to students who want to have personal contacts with teachers. Based on the UPM Chart, which gives a general description of the institution's mission, the following objectives and goals of UPM are specified in the ISER:

- The permanent enhancement of quality in the educational;
- The active contribution to regional and national wellbeing;
- The promotion of highly trained specialists who are also intellectuals able to assume social responsibilities for the community;
- The necessity of promoting the image of a spiritual and cultural academic institution, open to national and international partnerships, which supports knowledge, research and human rights and preserves natural resources for a genuine durable development.

Actually UPM has three faculties, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Sciences and Letters and the Faculty of Economic, Juridical and Administrative Sciences as well as two divisions, the Division for Part-Time and Distance Learning and the Division for the Preparation of Educational Staff. UPM offers 21 undergraduate study programs, 26 master programs and a doctoral school. The total number of students in 2009-2010 is stated as 5236. The total number of teaching staff is 169, consisting of 22 professors, 35 associate professors, 50 lecturers, 40 assistant professors and 22 graduate assistants.

The University is led by the Rector together with two Vice-Rectors (teaching and research) and the Senate consisting of 48 members. The administration is led by a General Administrative Director.

Starting with 2005 specific organisational units for quality management and quality assurance have been established. These units support the university leadership, faculties and departments in the elaboration and implementation of a quality culture with respect to all activities of the University.

The total budget of UPM in 2008 was about 45.000.000 Lei. UPM owns 7 buildings and 3 student hostels spread over 6 different locations.

## 4. Outline of the Review

The 43 pages ISER plus 17 pages Lists of Appendices provided by UPM gave a partially very good description of the development of the institution since its foundation in 1960. Informative data on the management, teaching and research of UPM was provided. Special focus was taken on quality and evaluation efforts during the recent years. The ISER was helpful in preparing the visit and getting an initial good understanding of UPM. It was edited by a self evaluation team represented by Prof.dr.ing. Liviu Moldovan, quality manager at UPM.

The visit to UPM started in the evening of December 8 with a working dinner of the ARACIS team with UPM representatives in order to get to know each other and to discuss some details of the evaluation. During the official meetings I always stayed with the main ARACIS team. The procedure started on December 9 at 9 am by a meeting of one hour with the university leadership. The members of the ARACIS team and the representatives of UPM were presented and the evaluation procedure was explained. Afterwards the ARACIS team had a technical meeting. Subsequently I separated from the team and attended the visit of an ARACIS peer with 20 third year students of Mechanical Engineering, followed by a meeting with 26 second year students of the same discipline. At 12:15 pm I attended a lecture in Computer Science (10 students) and afterwards I had a meeting with 9 researchers from Computer Science and Mathematics. At 16:30 pm the ARACIS team met a group of more than 70 students.

The morning of December 10 was covered by a meeting of the Mission Director Prof.univ.dr. Romiță Iucu with the ARACIS team. All team members including me reported on their preliminary findings to the Director. I also had the opportunity to exchange general observations with the Director. From 12 to 14 pm we made a campus-tour visiting several laboratories, the central library, sports facilities, a guest house and the buildings of the Faculty of Economic, Juridical and Administrative Sciences. The afternoon of December 10 was occupied by meetings with 31 graduates and 27 employers.

During the morning of December 11 some more evaluation documents were completed and open questions discussed with the UPM Contact Person. From 11 am to 1 pm the ARACIS team including me reported to the university leadership on the preliminary results of the evaluation.

## 5. General Observations

The ARACIS institutional evaluation procedure follows the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (QA) defined by ENQA. Hence the focus of the evaluation lies in the authorization and accreditation of study programs. The ARACIS evaluation of Romanian universities is an important step to QA. The procedure is well designed and very qualified peers are on duty. I want to mention positively that in this evaluation considerably time was spent on the interchange of observations and findings within the evaluation team. Nevertheless, too many formal facts and criteria had to be checked by

scientific peers which could have been verified easily also by administrative staff. During this evaluation about half of the time was spent checking formal things and complying with bureaucratic needs. Instead of checking formal data between single peers and coordinators of study programs the time could be better used for interviews with small groups of teachers, students and representatives of the administration. The ARACIS institutional evaluation and accreditation of study programs is certainly a first important step to assure quality in higher education institutions, but should be perhaps modified in a second step in order not to stay only at the "surface" of already accredited institutions but to go more into details of study programs such as content and level of courses, internationalization of curricula, examinations, failure rates, mobility of students and staff, ambient for research and especially situation of young researchers, efficiency of the university management.

### **Recommendations:**

- Reduce the amount of bureaucracy and make better use of the procedure. Enforce meetings with smaller groups and try to create a private atmosphere of trust between team members and university representatives. Meetings with 70 people and more will never disclose real problems and irregularities. I recommend to arrange separate meetings with the university leadership (rector, vice-rectors), with the head of governing bodies (senate), with the head of administration and in selected faculties with the dean, faculty members, research groups as well as students.
- Evaluated institutions should be encouraged to discuss their problems with experienced peers and not try to hide deficiencies. The institutional evaluation procedure should change from only looking into the past of the institution to a look into the future. Challenges as the decreasing student numbers, the embedding into the regional, national and European higher education system, possible co-operations especially in research and the use of synergies with other institutions and even competitors should be discussed.
- Last but not least I recommend ARACIS to agree on a **Code of Conduct** for its evaluation visits. The permanent use of mobile phones during meetings and interviews by peers and representatives of the university brings into discredit the whole procedure. Even during the oral report of the Coordinator of the ARACIS team in front of the university leadership phone calls were received and answered in the room.

## **6. Institution**

UPM has taken the whole evaluation process very seriously. The leadership of UPM shows high motivation and identification with the institution. Thanks to a very active General Administrative Director UPM has made enormous improvements with respect to its building complexes during the last years. All buildings I have visited were very well

preserved. Some installations and laboratories are even in an excellent condition. A new building for Computer Science and another with student dormitories will be finished soon. The elaboration of the ISER and the organization of the visit were very conscientiously made. The ISER describes in great detail selected fields of the University. So, an impressive survey on educational affairs and quality management provisions is given. Nevertheless, some important facts are not mentioned in the ISER itself and have to be checked laboriously within the nearly 400 Appendixes. The university-budget, material resources for research and several structural details such as the number of Vice-Rectors can be found only in the Appendixes. Other information, e.g. the development of the budget during the last years or the position and challenges of UPM in the region and in the Higher Romanian Education Area are not mentioned at all.

### **Recommendation:**

- The self evaluation report should be as much self-containing as possible and readable alone. It should contain all relevant information on the institution (legal framework, structure, governance and management, financial situation and buildings, staff, research, students, study programs), give a description of the efforts with respect to quality assurance, internationalization etc. and discuss problems and challenges for the institution. Appendixes should be used only for the illustration of details.
- As the ISER was kept confidential within a small group and even not known to many institutional leaders and interview partners, a unique chance to use the elaboration of the ISER for a discussion within the institution on its identity and further developments was missed. The self evaluation process could be the most important part of the evaluation procedure starting a positive and effective development within the university. Elaborating the ISER only as a duty for an external evaluation means a waste of time and losing a big chance. ARACIS should encourage institutions to be more self critical in the ISER and to mention problems too. This could lead to a fruitful discussion on improvement and quality for the institution.
- After the evaluation, the knowledge of the self evaluation group on the institution should be used to form a task force for the strategic planning and an advisory group for the governing bodies of the university.
- Define clear procedures how to improve teaching and research by the extensively collected information and the results of different evaluations.
- Increase motivation of young staff members (cf. Recommendations under Research).
- Strengthen relations and information flow with graduates and employers. These groups have mentioned their interest in better contacts with UPM.
- As regional university UPM should establish strong relations with the local city council and the regional government. These authorities could be powerful supporters of the university.

## 7. Teaching

All study programs of UPM have changed to the three cycle Bologna system. The existing old programmes are terminating. The quality of the courses is generally recognized by employers and graduates. Students and teachers are well motivated. The change to the Bologna system was realized in an efficient and successful way. Nevertheless, there seems to be necessary a second step of adaptation, similar as in many European countries.

I have observed the following problems with respect to teaching:

- The implementation of the Bologna system with 28 weekly hours for undergraduates resulted in a school similar system without any time for autonomous student work and self learning parts, respectively a look over the boarder lines of the own discipline. The overloaded programs also obstruct student mobility.
- Students mention that the curricula should pay more attention to practical work. But there lies a contradiction in the fact that students complain on missing practical work but do not attend laboratorial classes.  
Also graduates mentioned a gap between study programs and the world of labour.
- Some of the employers plead for a second foreign language beside English for students of economics.
- The relation 22 professors and 35 associate professors against 5236 students is not very favourable. This problem is enforced by the high amount of hours students have to attend and the small number of students in some classes.

### Recommendations:

- Evaluate the new bachelor- and master-programs with respect to employability, mobility and internationalization. Use a "second Bologna-step" as a chance to reconsider the structure and content of courses in order to decrease work load of students in classes and to increase autonomous student work and self learning parts. Increase practical parts of undergraduate education. Strengthen contacts between the university and enterprises in order to integrate students into project work.
- Reconsider your legal framework which does not entitle some of your professors to supervise doctoral-students in Romania but the same professors can supervise such students abroad at internationally recognized institutions.

## 8. Research

The research report of UPM lists many activities. As a regional university UPM has to comply with demands of the region as well as to follow interests of the Romanian society and the European lines. Nevertheless, I have the impression that there is no clear research

policy. In order to become a visible research institution it is necessary to focus research and enforce certain research areas.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Proceed moving from a teaching university to a teaching university with research.
- Make research at UPM more visible and create critical masses by enforcing co-operations with other institutions.
- Focus research where possible and enforce interdisciplinary research.
- Recruit future academic staff defining concrete teaching and research profiles.
- Support young research staff by reduction of their teaching load and give financial support for teaching staff to participate to national and international conferences, to research collaborations and advanced training courses.
- Support research by the creation of "seed money" for the preparation of new projects and research in the interest of the institution.

## **9. Final Remarks**

The ARACIS external institutional evaluation is an important step for quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The procedure is well designed and works with excellent peers. Nevertheless, for future rounds bureaucracy should be reduced and the institution as a whole should be more in the centre of the review. The actual form of huge interview groups will not disclose irregularities such as the corruption problem mentioned in the Capital/Kienbaum university ranking paper of September 2009. The institutions should be encouraged to be more self-critical and to make better use of the evaluation by looking more into the future than into the past. Based on strategic planning papers of different institutions a "National Romanian Higher Education Map" could be elaborated. The fact that according to "eurostat Statistics in focus - 117/2008" the Tertiary Education Expenditure in Romania is still very low gives hope that after overcoming the actual economical crisis proactive and innovative higher education institutions in Romania might look into a good future.

UPM plays an important role in the North-East of Romania. If the institution succeeds to establish firm relations with public and private organisations in the region and to sharpen its profile in teaching and research as well as to strengthen co-operations with other higher education institutions it will face a promising and fruitful future.

