

**Quality Evaluation Report: National University of the Arts Bucharest
June 2010**

Purpose of the external institutional evaluation

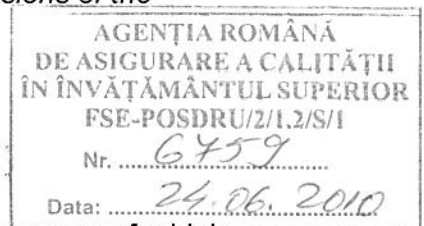
The purpose of the external institutional evaluation is to identify and certify the way higher education institutions meet public interest, as well as the measures taken for quality improvement, in the following components of the academic life:

- *In the teaching-learning process, by assuring an acceptable qualitative level of study programmes, in compliance with the academic reference standards published by the institution itself and which are at least at the level of the standards, reference standards and performance indicators of RQAAHE, in compliance with the provisions of the Romanian Government Decision no. 1418/11.10.2006.*
- *In exercising the legal right of granting diplomas and qualifications.*

Objectives of the external institutional evaluation

The objectives of the external institutional evaluation are the following:

- *To contribute, along with other mechanisms, to the promotion and assurance of a high quality of the teaching-learning process in higher education institutions;*
- *To ensure the students, employers and public a wider and more rapid access to clear, trustful and explicit information about the way each institution offers study programmes, diplomas and qualifications that fulfil the national requirements, according to the European academic standards and quality principles;*
- *To ensure that, in the situations when the study programmes' quality is poor, the external evaluation process creates the conditions to initiate their improvement actions;*
- *To apply external evaluation mechanisms which guarantee the quality of the teaching-learning process, the management transparency and public liability of higher education institutions.*



Main elements of the external institutional evaluation

In order to answer the purpose it is carried out for, the external institutional evaluation has several main elements:

- *Examining the mechanisms and internal procedures of assurance and continuous improvement of the quality and results of their application, especially at the study programmes' level.*
- *The way of using the external references included in the Quality Assurance Methodology, including in the Good Practices Code.*
- *The available public information on the content and quality of study programmes and the standards of issuing diplomas at their graduation.*
- *The internal system of information management and its contribution to the internal monitoring of quality and fulfilment of standards.*
- *Elaborating, using and publishing the information on programmes.*
- *The academic standards proposed by the institution and those achieved by the students in obtaining academic qualifications at the graduation of study programmes.*
- *Students' experience in the learning process.*
- *Ensuring the teaching staff quality, including the evaluation criteria and the way in which the teaching-learning efficiency is monitored, improved and rewarded by the university's management.*
- *The way the institution raises the quality level of all educational, research and managerial activities compared to the levels of performance indicators realised at the accreditation.*

Review Process

The review process as described in the ARACIS Guidelines is thorough and rigorous but as an International Panel member there is always a problem of language and communication. The Mission Director and the Commission did everything to include me in the process and were very supportive, but it is difficult to fully engage when the only document translated into English is the institutional Self-Evaluation Report (SER). When I arrived I was not aware of what disciplines had been selected in advance nor the themes that had been identified to investigate. This limits my access to qualitative and quantitative data that helps me identify issues or strengths and pursue any line of enquiry. The institution did everything they could to help me during my visit and provided me with data that was reasonable to request within this time frame.

The process, involving formal meetings with students, past students and employers, is very good and informative and I was able to fully engage with these groups. On the other hand the process facilitates very little discussion amongst the Commission – the 'experts' after touring the institution appear to go off to their selected disciplines and complete a report in discussion with the staff, which is then returned to the Mission Director to be signed-off. There was little discussion amongst the Commission about their experiences, to discuss strengths, good practice, issues etc, which could lead to identifying common strengths and problems at the institutional level. There was little possibility of a shared, collective position and no real discussion on what the content of the report should be and say. But it is important you understand, that being an experienced institution and subject reviewer, I am always concerned that I have all the appropriate information available so as to feel confident in making observations and recommendations.

I fully applaud ARACIS for involving international 'experts' in their review process and I am definitely not advocating for all material to be translated, as this is totally unfair and expensive for the institution, but it may be necessary to find ways that these members are able to engage more and be provided with clear guidelines on what is required of them and the structure and content of their report.

The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The University Self-Evaluation Report presents a clear presentation of its mission, aims, structure, academic content, resources and future ambitions. It contains an appropriate balance between description and evaluative commentary, but I would have liked to see more quantitative data included to substantiate some of the qualitative claims made rather than always having to look at annexes, which in my case was problematic due to language deficiencies on my part. There was also slightly too much emphasis on quality 'assurance/management' than on quality 'enhancement', in fact the word is not mentioned in the SER, which is critical if the university is to look positively at this process and see it as a developmental process.

Quality Management

The University has clear definitions of standards (SER p. 26) and makes reference to the UK QAA for subject 'benchmarks' and the ELIA 'Tuning' documents for the reading grid for a European Qualifications Framework for the Arts as informing their development along with the scheme proposed by ARACIS - illustrating the hierarchical relationship between areas, criteria, standards and indicators. It is important that the University utilises these key documents and selects the most appropriate definitions and models to enhance the distinct institutional, social and cultural values it wants to develop and preserve.

The institution is managed by elected representatives of the University through the Senate and the quality of the University; through the Senate Commission on Quality Assurance at University level by council staff, Dean, scientific secretary; by Heads of Department at Faculty and by Executives and Heads of Department at the administrative level. There are clearly defined quality objectives which address the key elements of the student learning experience including: the development of a 'quality' culture; quality management procedures; definition of standards for each of the three cycles; quality of teaching, artistic activity/research and academic services; curriculum development for the three cycles to meet the changing needs of the professional world and student employability; personnel development to encourage entrepreneurial 'spirit' and increase a sense of responsibility; efficient planning for all educational processes and activities; appropriate policies to assess the quality of the teachers and administrative staff; provision of appropriately well equipped resources and student involvement in the quality process. All these objectives are to be tested annually by specified methodologies and implementation tools.

At faculty level biannual reviews of disciplines involving students have been introduced, with the half-yearly reports being presented to the University Quality Committee. The faculty Quality Committee is periodically elected and includes representation from teachers, students and employers.

The University has many regulations related to quality assurance and enhancement defining policies, structures/committees, membership, responsibilities, curriculum content, procedures and timetables. The University Commission has introduced strategic objectives (SER p.21), which define a very clear strategy to embrace a quality culture and which reference the key elements to making this possible and sustainable. These include: a Quality Manual; clear definitions of what a University means by quality; tools for dissemination of information on quality culture and 'good practice'; initiation of reviews and evaluations; student and employer feedback and objective and subjective analyses of 'resistance' and proposals for solutions to overcome them.

I believe this University has moved a long way in a very short time to introduce a strong quality management structure and culture, but like many institutions in the similar position of implementing the *Bologna* objectives, it will take some time to fully embed them across the University. It will be important for the University to develop its strategic objective (5) and establish the mechanisms to disseminate information on quality culture/best practice as soon as possible.

Students' participation

"Students represent a central element of the external institutional evaluation's objectives... the quality of information provided to them, the way the learning process is facilitated and supported, the academic standards that are expected to be achieved and those practically recorded at obtaining the university qualification" –

The students we met were very positive, articulate and intelligent. They expressed their ideas clearly (commendably mostly in English) and were very objective in their responses; the institution should be proud of them.

They unanimously believed that the printed/on-line information they accessed before they entered the institution to help them select their place of study and material received during their study was a true reflection of their learning experience. None stated they were disappointed or felt cheated or misled through their experiences. There was clear motivation and rationale for choosing the 'capital' institution based on its reputation, location and high profile staff. The majority of the students felt they received good preparation for the professional world.

"within the evaluation process, the students are invited to participate in its main stages".

Whilst most students understood the purpose of the Commission's visit, most students stated they had not seen the University Self Evaluation Report, which is a pity if the University is to be a student-centred institution. The students spoke positively about their representative structures and produced a written report, prior to the evaluation visit, which unfortunately I could not read. I think the biggest issue for the students was the need for better communication between the institution and students and maybe between staff, principally to share ideas, problems and good practice. In the SER the institution talks of BA and MA students being actively encouraged to engage in university research projects, when asked about this students from some disciplines talked very positively of their experiences but the majority were unaware of this possibility. This was one of many examples of good practice across the Departments I visited but there needs to be Quality Enhancement processes put in place to share them.

Employer's perception

At the meeting with employers there perception was generally very positive about the overall standard of the students, but there was some criticism of the specialist skills students exited the University with especially around transferring ideas/drawings into product and professional marketing skills.

The majority would welcome better communication between the sectors and stated they would be happy to support the university to develop the student's skills for the workplace.

Curriculum

The academic programmes conform to the *Bologna* three cycles, with a three-year

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(180 ECTS) Bachelor programme, a two-year (120 ECTS) Masters programme and a PhD (180 ECTS) compulsory and non-compulsory attendance programme. The ratio between application-practical and the theoretical courses, between synthesis and in-depth courses conform to the standards proposed by the Rumanian national QA agency ARACIS.

The University states in the SER (p.31) *“Development of programs of study at the university level is done through inter-faculty cooperation and through facilitating mobility of students within the university. The structure of the study programs is flexible and allows each student to choose one’s own learning path according to skills and interests.”* This is a major movement towards student-centred learning and reflects the changing practices in the art and design professional world. I am not sure how far this is embedded in the Bachelor programme and in discussion with the students not many stated that they had participated or experienced this possibility. Similarly the SER states *“Collaboration between the research department and the departments FAP-FADD-FITA is active, students, and master and doctoral candidates are involved in all research projects developed in the university and their contributions and the results of research projects are disseminated, published, and integrated into the content of study programs. - that there are good opportunities for Bachelor and Masters students to be engaged in these projects.”* This is an excellent practice, one that is very rare across Europe and should be applauded, but at our meeting with the students very few had received this experience and were unaware of the opportunity – another example of where disseminating good practice and sharing experiences should be happening.

That programmes of study are regularly reviewed by the Departments with staff, student and employer input is a very positive and excellent practice – but for most of the employers we met at our meeting during the review that was their first opportunity to comment on the quality of student skills and the ‘currentness’ of the programme. Most of the employers stated they would welcome being engaged in supporting the programmes to develop and advise them to ensure the students have the appropriate skills.

Fine Art (Graphics) Department

- Good mixture of traditional and new technology processes;
- Revitalized area with increase in demand by students;
- Good balance of young and experienced staff;
- Developing research culture with publications.

Conservation and Restoration

- Very well equipped, latest technology laboratories;
- Good balance of science, biology and arts practice;
- Well-qualified and experienced staff with great enthusiasm and passion for their subject;
- Students have the rare opportunity to work on ‘live’ projects in both 2D and 3D practice on historical and contemporary works and materials;
- Excellent opportunity for students to work alongside experienced professionals

- who have a studio in the Department;
- Very good studios and workshops.

Fashion Design

- A large and dynamic department;
- A very new research centre, with one PhD student supervised by the Head of Department;
- Extensive external collaborations;
- A strong MA programme with a diverse range of interdisciplinary projects;
- Strong leadership.

Textile Arts – Fashion Design

- Three main strands: Print/Construction for Fashion, Print for Interior Design and Tapestry;
- Good balance between traditional practices and new technology;
- Very good research project – a collaboration between a small business (silk farm), the University and other agencies – a good example of knowledge transfer with very successful outputs – should be encouraged, developed and promoted by the University.

Bachelor programme

There are currently (2009-10) 1038 students studying on the Bachelor programmes across the University, which has been fairly steady for the past four years - showing a slight increase on 2008-09 but lower than the previous two years. In the disciplines selected for this review Fine Arts (Graphics) [FAG]; Fine Arts (Photography-Computer Image Video Processing) [FAPCIVP]; Fashion Design [FD]; Textile Arts-Fashion Design [TAFD] and Conservation and Restoration [C&R] there are 409 Bachelor students, which similarly has shown a slight reduction in recent years – but most notably in fee-paying students in Textile Arts, and Conservation non fee-paying numbers have virtually halved. I am sure the University is aware of these statistics and there are strategic reasons for them. All selected disciplines show exceptionally high percentage completion rates with 95.95% - 97.85% students graduating over the past four years, a very notable achievement. The failure rates are very low (1% 2009-10) and the withdrawal rates (2% 2009-10) slightly higher.

These statistics show a high standard is being achieved and maintained by all these Departments and the University.

Masters programme

The University has seen a steady increase in the number of Masters' students, more than doubling over the past four years to 554 students in 2009-10. This increase is noticeable across all programmes selected with the exception of Fashion Design. It is also noticeable that the number of fee-paying students remains low and steady across the programmes with the exception of Fine Art (Graphics), which has increased steadily over the four years. I am not sure of the reasons but wonder if this is not a sensible strategy when national funding is under pressure? As with the

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Bachelor programme the Masters' has a very commendable high rate of students satisfactorily completing their programme with 187 (93.5%) completions from 200 enrolments in 2009-10, with 2.5% failing and 4% withdrawing – again showing a similar pattern over the previous three years.

PhD programme

The number of PhD students in Visual Arts has remained fairly steady over the four years with 122 enrolled in 2009-10, which is approximately 10% down on the previous two years. The number of fee-paying with attendance is very low (approx. 6%) and has remained at this level over the four years. The total number of non-fee paying with attendance has risen to 34 in 2009-10, an increase from 8 in 2006-07. For students studying without attendance the situation is the reverse with the number of fee-paying students rising and doubling to 70 over the four years and the number of non fee-paying steadily declining from 72 in 2006-07 to 16 in 2009-10. Without fully understanding the 'local' situation and the financial implications it is difficult to draw any conclusions from these changes. I am sure the University is aware of these changes and has addressed the situation appropriately.

The level of completion for the PhD programme is outstandingly high with approximately 97% achieving their Doctorate and 1.5% failing and 1.5% withdrawing. These statistics are repeated over the previous three years.

Learning & Teaching

Learning

Students were very positive about their learning experience; they believe the courses are up to the standard they expected from the information they had read in printed material and on-line. All felt they were well prepared for the professional world after they leave the University for occupations related to their specialist studies. According to the University statistics >70% are employed within two years, of which 50% is in their specific art field, which indicates the students are being well prepared with the appropriate skills for the work place.

There is an advanced use of learning outcomes in the Bachelor programmes, but I am not sure that for the Masters' programme the Departments have clearly defined the difference in levels, which is a common problem for those countries newly introduced to the Masters cycle and Learning Outcomes. This is exacerbated by there being no common programme within each Department, as each student applies to the Department with their individual MA proposal.

Teaching

The University is committed to providing high quality teaching and has introduced regular assessment for academic and administrative staff. It recognises the need for staff development to meet the changes brought about by IT and understands the different knowledge and intellectual requirements for teaching the three cycles. Students are given questionnaires to evaluate the teaching staff, which currently is the responsibility of the staff, but from student feedback not all staff implement the

process and when it is used it is up to the staff as to how it is used. All students said they welcome this feedback opportunity but would like it implemented across the University and that the outcomes were made more accessible/public and staff were expected to respond through the appropriate University committees to address any issues raised.

Research

The University has developed a clear research mission statement (SER p.14) building on the national strategy of 2007, with the creation of teams and research 'cores'. There are clear strategic goals and a framework to create an infrastructure, supported by good facilities and human resource development to promote young 'scientists' (SER p.15). This has resulted in five research centres being established, two accredited by nationally by CNCIS.

I think a major concern in what is a rapidly developing research culture within the University is the repeated use of the term 'Scientific' when describing arts-based research projects and methodologies; I believe it is too restricting and appears to contradict new developments in research in the institution. The term appears numerous times in the University SER and other documents and I know it is used in Ministry regulations, but as I understand it, you can gain a PhD in a studio practice, which can involve non-scientific research methodologies. This is a major debate globally but it is important that arts-based research is considered equal to and the same value as the sciences and humanities and should be able to attract similar European funding.

2004 -2007 proved to be a very good period for research projects involving external collaborations and funding. The University currently has a rich vein of research projects, but its management must work to ensure all Departments are research active and supported to enable the staff to be 'leaders' in their field and their research outcomes help to underpin and develop the curriculum and attract strong new staff and students. As 70% of all department academic staff have to work full-time in the University, this support is essential to keep them 'current' and 'vital'. During my visit academic staff informed me that it was hard to gain recognition for arts practice research.

There is very rigorous process of development and training, firstly to become a full Professor and then to be able to supervise PhD students, which are both valorised by the University and the Rumanian Ministry. Professors must have a PhD and only Professors can supervise PhDs. This can be a problem for many practicing artists and therefore limit the level of study and research in certain disciplines. Currently there are 12 artist/Professors and 5 theory Professors who are able to supervise research out of 192 constituted teaching staff (132 titled), which is a very small, limiting percentage.

Admission

The University has developed a very good, supportive recruitment strategy offering pre-sessional one month training for potential students involving a different Professor

each week to help them prepare for the 20-minute rigorous interview and entrance exam.

Future Developments

Since the last review the University has identified longer-term development strategies over the next four years, which are very appropriate and welcome in a developing European and global economy and workplace. I think the following are clear indicators that the University is building a quality enhance self-evaluative process that is embracing this opportunity for change:

- the development of new study programmes, involving the assimilation of new languages and forms of artistic communication and expression through the reformulation of the curriculum, to include concepts of contemporary language and up-to-date forms of expression;
- during this period specializations open to the contemporary labour market have been developed, such as design, fashion design, advertising graphics and specializations covering digital image processing;
- to approach *e-learning* teaching for most of the theoretical and technical courses – although I would encourage the University to also look how these tools can also support the development of studio/workshop practices;
- to address the increased competition in the educational market, the emergence of private institutions, Romania accession to the European Community, and the Romanian students' opportunity to enroll in any European university under the same conditions as locals residents, we were forced to change our development strategy to include projects and objectives addressing the systematic curriculum update by introducing modern norms of expression and communication.

Good Practice

- Good Quality Policy and Management strategies at institutional level, but needs to be further embedded at department/programme level;
- Collaboration by Bachelor and Masters students on University Research projects, (but not across all Departments);
- Student feedback and evaluation, (but not across all Departments);
- Some Departments engaging in knowledge transfer with small businesses [TAFD];
- The 'list' a communication and teaching tool very much like a virtual learning environment (VLE) developed by the [FAPCIVP] Department – providing a distribution list, archive and 'What's On';
- A very good, supportive recruitment process;
- The accuracy of printed & on-line information about the University and the programmes presenting a true reflection of the student's learning experience;
- Good student preparation for employment and the professional world;
- Good engagement with employers and past students, (but not across all Departments);
- Good preparation for staff supervising PhD students;
- A good Self Evaluation Report with clear self-evaluation on future plans and direction – could have presented more quantitative data to substantiate quality

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statements within the report (may have been in the Appendices but I was not able to access them);

- Very open and articulate staff – acceptable to change and not defensive;
- Excellent intelligent students, who were positive and supportive and demonstrated exceptional communication skills in English.

Recommendations

- To promote greater communication between the academic staff and students;
- To develop and implement University 'tools' for sharing good practice;
- To embed 'Quality Culture and Practice' across all Departments;
- To provide equal support for research for all academic staff;
- To further develop student engagement and feedback on staff and programmes across all Departments and input outcomes into 'Quality Management' procedures;
- To improve the library book stock and journals;
- To develop as quickly as possible a virtual learning environment to support learning and teaching in the theoretical and practical elements of the programmes;
- To discuss with students academic changes to be made and why – better inform them about national and international developments in education (e.g. *Bologna*);
- To further embed Learning Outcomes at the Masters level;
- To promote better communication between employers and the Departments, who stated they would be happy to support the university to develop the student's skills for the workplace.

Conclusion

This is a very good University, positively facing a period of rapid change and challenges and still graduating students of the highest calibre. It is of an equal standard to the major leading arts institutions across Europe. The University has developed a strong Quality Policy and Management structure and is proceeding rapidly to embed an enhancing quality culture. I have a high degree of confidence in the University.



The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'John Butler'. To the right of the signature is an oval-shaped stamp. The stamp contains the text 'BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY' around the top inner edge, 'SCHOOL OF ART' in the center, and 'MARGARET STREET, B'HAM B3 3BX' around the bottom inner edge.

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