



A R A C I S

Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

External Institutional Evaluation

“Bogdan Voda” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Foreign Expert Report

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1 July 2010

1. Introduction

1.1. Appointment as 'Foreign Expert' on Evaluation Commission

At the request of the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (ARACIS), the European University Association (EUA) nominated me as a 'foreign expert' for the External Institutional Evaluation of the 'Bogdan Voda University (BVU) in Cluj-Napoca. With the Evaluation team I visited BVU from June 16–18, 2010.

Ms Oana SARBU of the ARACIS Experts Department contacted me on 15 March 2010. Ms SARBU efficiently made all the travel arrangements, and on 20 April sent the University's Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER).

On June 13, I requested from Ms SARBU further details of arrangements for the visit and was quickly contacted by Public Relations Specialist Daniela PIPAS of BVU. Ms PIPAS later kindly supplied me with the names and roles of the other members (all male) of the Evaluation Commission as follows:

1. Director of Mission	Prof. PhD. Mihai Octavian POPESCU of Polytechnic University of Bucharest
2. Coordinator of Mission	Prof.univ.dr. Viorel CORNESCU of Universitatea din București
3. Scientific Secretary	Lecturer PhD Ionut LUNGU, of Romanian-American University of Bucharest
4. Student Evaluator 1	Adrian SOCACIU of Polytechnic University of Timișoara
5. Student Evaluator 2	Alexandru DINE of Building Technical University of Bucharest
6. Expert Consultative Commission	Prof. PhD Emilian STANCU of University of București
7. Expert Institutional Commission	Prof. PhD Nicolae ILIAȘ of University of Petroșani
8. Expert Management Programme of BVU Cluj-Napoca	Prof. PhD Cosmin DOBRIN of Academy of Economical Science of Bucharest
9. Expert Law Programme of BVU Baia Mare	Prof. PhD Viorel PAȘCA of West University of Timișoara
10. Expert Physical Education and Sports Programme of BVU Baia Mare	Prof. PhD NEAMȚU Mircea of Transilvania University of Brașov

1.2. Previous Experience of Quality Evaluation

In 1995 I was assigned a responsibility for internal university quality processes at NUI Galway. Simultaneously, I began to work nationally with others on the development of coherence in quality systems in the Irish Universities, which led in 2003 to the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). I became full-time 'Director of Quality' at NUI Galway in 1999–1008. Overall, I organized over 100 reviews (all with self evaluation and a visit with international participation) of internal departments and services, including the University

Management Team and external colleges affiliated to NUI Galway. In 2004 I coordinated the University's self study exercise in preparation for the institutional review of NUI Galway by the EUA. Nationally, I have chaired or participated in reviews of/or/at three institutes of technology and the University of Limerick. I have worked, and continue to work, with the IUQB, being a principal contributor to projects giving rise to national guidelines on: evaluations of quality in Irish universities, the Administration of PhD Programmes (first and second editions), Institutional Research, and the accreditation and monitoring of study programmes (ongoing).

Internationally, in 1998 I participated fully as an observer in the 'ten-year re-accreditation' review of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, USA. In 2006 I was recruited by the EUA to the panel of experts that it uses when review teams are formed for the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). Since then I have acted as Team Coordinator for reviews and a follow-up review of universities in Portugal, Turkey and Slovenia.

1.3. Contextual elements related to this Report

Institutional evaluations under IEP stress the importance of the institution having a 'self-critical' and participative self-evaluation process and report. They have a strong international perspective and the key questions posed are related to the institution's capacity for improvement and change. In spirit and in many details, there are great similarities between IEP and the institutional evaluation systems in the USA and in Ireland. This Report will reflect these backgrounds in tone and emphases. In particular, IEP does not rank nor accredit institutions or study programs. In contrast, ARACIS evaluations, while performed in correspondence with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), have a clear focus in the evaluation of study programmes and on accreditation.

1.4. The Self Evaluation Report of "Bogdan Voda" University

The English translation of the ISER (45 pages) was accompanied by a separate 40 page 'Executive Summary'. The contents pages of the ISER list 31 apparently substantial appendices (1–26 and A–E) containing formal documents and detailed tables and lists on a separate 'CD presentation'. These were not made available in English translation but probably included much useful extra information.

Comparison of the ISER and the 'Summary' documents indicates, that, while the 'Summary' omits preliminary pages, some detail and many tables, it includes much extra text on some topics, notably on master's programmes, research activities and quality management. The SWOT analysis in the 'Summary' has twice as many bullet points that that in the ISER. Therefore, in many ways, the 'Executive Summary' is much more 'an alternative ISER' than a 'summary' in the usual sense of the word. The preparation, revision (and translation) of these two substantial documents must have taken much more effort and hard work than the

preparation of a single report with a short summary. Two different 'ISER's are also more difficult to use for evaluators than a single source of information.

However, together, the ISER and the 'Executive Summary' provide a very good description of "Bogdan Voda" University since its initial foundation in 1992, through its formal institutional accreditation 13 years later and of its present study programmes, activities and challenges. Much detailed and relevant data on governance, management, teaching, research and quality procedures are included. The Institutional Commission for Assessment of Quality Assurance and the persons more directly responsible, who I understand included the Vice Rector Prof. univ. Dr. Racovitan DAN and Daniela PIPAS, are to be highly complemented for their considerable efforts. These reports were essential in preparing for the visit and continue to provide important insights that are facilitated by knowledge acquired during the visit.

1.5. The Visit

I thank Coordinator of Mission Prof. univ. Dr. Viorel CORNESCU for welcoming me to the team, for encouraging interventions by me at meetings, and for his active interest in my needs and comfort. Director of Mission Prof. PhD. Mihai Octavian POPESCU was also highly supportive. While it was very difficult for me to get to know all ten members of the ARACIS Commission in such a short time, they were universally supportive and friendly.

I thank the President of BVU Prof. univ. Dr Mohammed Hadi JARADAT for frank discussions and generous hospitality, the Rector Prof. univ. Dr. Dumitru PURDEA, the Vice-Rector Prof. Univ. Dr. Racovitan DAN and the Scientific Secretary Janetta SIRBU for open discussion and explanations, and all staff and students at BVU for contributing freely to very useful discussions. Without the professional and courteous help as translators (and sources of general information) of Maria Daniela Pipas, Corina Pacurar, and Eva Acqui (at Baia Mare), I would have been at a great loss when discussions were conducted in Rumanian. I thank Maria PIPAS for welcoming me at the Airport and Managing Director, Cornel CHERECHES for meeting me and seeing me off at inconvenient hours of the day/night.

My visit to Cluj-Napoca started unavoidably late on the evening of Tuesday June 15 when I joined the working dinner of the ARACIS team with BVU representatives. Thus began the process of getting to know some of the large evaluation team and the President, Rector and other representatives of the University.

During most meetings I stayed with the main ARACIS team but took opportunities provided by more technical sessions to have separate meetings with the President, Rector, Vice Rector, Scientific Secretary and the administrator responsible for international matters.

The evaluation formal process started on Wednesday 16 June just after 09.00 h in the Senate Room of the modern University building. The Coordinator Prof. Dr. CORNESCU, acting as chair, presented each member of the Evaluation Commission to the University representatives present. As well as the senior officers, these included the three deans of faculty, Economical Sciences - Prof. univ. Dr. Nicolae PASCA; Law – Lecturer univ. Dr. Gheorghe MOCUTA; and Physical Education and Sports – Prof. univ. Dr. Gheorghe NETA. The Coordinator read out the schedule for the whole visit. Then the team met alone and procedures and issues were discussed. Afterwards the whole team had a guided tour of the building and I had a meeting with the Rector. After lunch there was a valuable meeting with external stakeholders and employers, many of who were graduates of BVU. All were highly supportive of the University and appreciative of the quality of its graduates. I then had a second short meeting with the Rector and a discussion with Daniela PIPAS, who is also the administrator with responsibility for international affairs. Together again, the team discussed progress and concluded that the day's objectives had been achieved.

Thursday was spent at the Baia Mare campus of BVU but, given the six hour round trip journeys, the time available there was inevitably restricted. However, there was sufficient time for a valuable general meeting, a tour of facilities in BVU's own building (but not the 'leased' or shared sports facilities), a very informative meeting with teaching staff and an equally useful, long, joint meeting with external stakeholders and students.

On Friday morning, June 18, the Director of Mission Prof. Dr. Mihai Octavian POPESCU outlined the reporting procedures to the team. These procedures involve parallel and summary reports related to accreditations, and two independent reports that remain separate, one by the two Student Members and one by the Foreign Expert. I then had a meeting with the President. Starting from about 12.30 h, there were about eight informal, preliminary oral reports/presentations covering all the main areas relevant to the Evaluation. The meeting finished with a response from the President and final words from the Director of Mission.

2. Observations

2.1. "Bogdan Voda" University

Named after the medieval Romanian lord and hero "Bogan Voda" from Maramures, the University started as a private higher education institution and was institutionally accredited in 2005. Administration and Economical Science are located in an inner suburb of Cluj Napoca, while the other two faculties are about 120 km north (3 h by road) in Baia Mare, the county capital of Maramures.

In 2009–10 there are 1622 undergraduate students (923 full time and 699 part time) on six 'licence degree' programmes, being 914, 527 and 181 respectively in the above three faculties. There are also 652 students enrolled on ten master's

programmes (four taking one-year and six two-years). (Data from ISER and BVU website. I cannot find numbers for PhD students at BVM but quoted research outputs included four and five PhD theses in 2008 and 2009, respectively [ISER, table on page 38].) Therefore, without correction to 'full time equivalents' for part time students, the total student number for 2009–10 is about 2274.

In recent years student numbers have fallen in Economical Sciences (a decrease to 914 from 1731 in 2005-06) but are stable in Law (510 in 2005–06) and have increased significantly in Physical Education and Sports Science (a 32% increase to 181, from 137 in 2006–06). Overall student numbers have fallen by nearly 32% (2378 to 1622) in four years. The fall in Economical Science shows no signs yet of reversing as first year numbers continue to fall (down 36%, or 344 to 220, since last year 2008–09).

There are 74 teaching staff in 2009–10 of which 60 are full time 'holder teachers'. Two professors are 'doctorate supervisors', 36 have 'Dr.' titles and 21 are doctorate candidates. Of the 60 'holder teachers' 48 are under 60 years of age. No information on gender balance among staff grades is given in the ISER, but the three members of the Governing Board are all male, as are all three deans and eight of the nine members of the University Senate Office. Five (including three of six student members) of the 21 members of the University Senate are women.

The buildings, grounds and internal facilities of BVU are from 'good to excellent' in condition. All the large classrooms are bright and 'shining' clean, and most of the fittings looked brand new.

Total income to BVU for 2010 is forecast to be about Lei 10,600,000 and a significant surplus of about Lei 3,000,000 is anticipated. If achieved, this will facilitate continuing past practice whereby "at least 30% of the university revenues were used for investment in its physical basis" (Page 7, Executive Summary).

2.2. Over-arching issues

BVU appears to be a well-run institution with a tight management structure that is appropriate to its size and objectives, expert staff, and loyal students and graduates. It has a diverse range of UG and PG programmes in just three academic areas. From the self-evaluation reports and conversations with the President and Rector, a small number of important issues appear to be crucial to a successful future for BVU:

- Stabilising student enrolment on existing study programmes and establishing new attractive programmes, especially in Cluj-Napoca
- Finding ways to enhance international exchanges and mobility
- Obtaining sufficient research funding.

While equivalent challenges are common in most universities, the strategies used to meet them at BVU must comply with the capacities of the University, city, region and country. To be successful these strategies must also be broad, coherent and draw support from diverse sources. Therefore, every means available should be used to identify the best options available and, regularly, information and advice should be sought externally.

For example I was informed that annually the University Senate meets in an 'enlarged form' with the participation of a variety of external stakeholders but that such meetings are relatively informal. This may be one of a number of good starting points in identifying the best strategies to meet the most important challenges.

2.3. Planning, measurement and quality assessment

The Mission statement of the University is:

"[The development of] superior education and scientific research activities in order to mould specialists capable of using their skills and knowledge to resolve the ensemble of issues specific to the area of expertise for which they obtained their licence degree."

This mission is supported by 17 main objectives. (ISER, pages 2_4.) The University had a Strategic Plan for 2004–08 and has a current Plan for 2008–12. There are corresponding annual Operational Plans that describe "how to actually implement the [] objectives set out in the Strategic Plan". "The faculties develop their own operational plan." (Executive Summary Page 6–7 and ISER, Appendix 16.)

The ability of organisations and businesses to measure performance and movements towards the achievement of quantitative objectives is often crucial to their continued success. In this respect and evidenced by substantial amounts of well-displayed data in the ISER, BVU clearly has a competent 'institutional research' capability.

BVU clearly gives quality management a high priority. Both the ISER (31/2 pages) and the Executive Summary (5 pages) have substantial sections devoted to this area and there is a University Quality Manual. BVU has undergone a formal auditing process and been certified by the German organisation DEKRA. In addition, BVU's detailed, internal guidelines for administration are based on ISO 9001.

Most importantly, BVU has peer evaluations of teachers as well as a comprehensive system for student feedback on teaching for every teacher. These systems annually provide information to the teachers themselves, and to heads of departments and deans. There are also written annual internal evaluation reports to the University Senate from the Vice Rector and from each of the deans. I was supplied with a translation of the Vice Rector's 1500 word Report on Quality Management for 2008–09. This is comprehensive, describes

many initiatives and measures, and concludes with a six-point action plan that was proposed to the Senate.

2.4. Internationalisation

A strong international dimension is essential to a thriving modern university and one of the consequences of the historical trends that dominated the twentieth century is that the English language is the dominant modern *lingua franca*. Many of the most successful universities in countries where English is not the mother tongue now have extensive academic offerings delivered by staff cohorts who are fully at ease with teaching through English. Often cooperative international research is totally dependent on communications in English. Therefore, whatever about more limited groups of countries with other effective *linguae francae* (e.g. French or Russian), competence in English in university staff and in graduates is near to becoming an absolute requirement.

Given its circumstances and apparent options, expanded internationalization may be key to a successful future for BVU and this is recognised by the University's management. There are already links (or links are being explored) with a number of universities in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. However, internationalisation at BVU is still not nearly sufficient with respect to activities visibility or priority.

2.5. Teaching

As an institution almost entirely dependent of student fees for its income, BVU's main focus is on delivery of its undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes, of which it has a diverse range in just three academic areas. All study programmes are in accord with the Bologna model. New programmes (e.g. a masters in human resource management) are being developed and submitted for accreditation. Graduates and employers of graduates (often graduates themselves) are very positive with respect to BVU's study programmes and the skills of its graduates.

Although design and layout are always very conservative (if not positively 'dull'), teaching spaces and libraries are new, or newly refurbished, and large lecture rooms all have digital projectors, screens and white boards. In Baia Mare, access to physical education and sports facilities at local schools and clubs is supported by stable agreements. Students of criminal law have access to a comprehensive range of sets of equipment for crime scene investigations including 'in field' forensic tests. Computer rooms had apparently modern equipment but apparently some were not connected to the Internet at the time of the evaluation visit.

A major target for an innovative private institution like BVU should be the widespread use in *all* of its study programmes of many of the alternate approaches to teaching and learning used in the most progressive universities, some of which methods are fundamental to a full implementation of the 'spirit' of the Bologna reforms. Widespread, effective use of a variety of teaching methods

requires access to continuous professional development (CDP) resources for all teachers, appropriate equipments and materials, flexible teaching areas, and libraries suited to wide-ranging project work, by individual students *and* by groups.

2.6. Research

BVU supports research by its academic staff and graduate students and two named research centres are listed, one in Cluj-Napoca ('Interdisciplinary Research Centre of the Foundations of Contemporary Society') and one in Baia Mare ('Research Centre for Human Performance'). Each is supported by a designated computer laboratory. The research of masters students takes place in 'circles' coordinated by 'holder teachers'.

However, research at BVU is still at a very early stage of development and the difficulty of obtaining research funding in a state system dominated by public research institutions is cited as a major issue. Clearly all aspects of unsuccessful and successful applications should be examined and documented in detail. This could provide valuable 'advice' when new applications are being prepared and, if necessary, support appeals made on the basis of substantive evidence.

3. BVU may wish to consider the following:

- Establishment of a small group of committed external persons equipped to give advice to BVU (employers of graduates, successful graduates, business leaders, city and regional administrators etc.). This group would criticise and/or provide ideas for strategies/tactics to promote BVU and its development. Membership of this group might or might not be the same or similar to the extra membership of the 'Enlarged Senate' and the group could present the results of its deliberations to meetings of the 'Enlarged Senate' for further discussion.
- Identification of a small number of other equivalent universities/colleges of higher education for BVU to continuously 'benchmark' with. If three were identified one might be Rumanian, one east European and one west European. Every one of these universities/colleges should have faced similar challenges and have already achieved important goals that BVU aspires to.
- Application for ISO accreditation of part of, or the whole of, its administrative processes.
- Continuous active revision (with student representative participation) of its overall quality systems and student feedback mechanism to ensure their continued effectiveness and to prevent 'survey fatigue'. For example, each line on the current survey form has only one clearly negative option out of a total of five.

- Create senior, effective, specialist and prominent functions responsible for strategically important university activities including perhaps 'research', 'quality' and 'internationalisation' and 'marketing'.
- Having an intensive campaign to improve the English language skills of management, administration and all staff. This should be highly visible and go well beyond the simple provision of extra language courses. A small group could be appointed to provide ideas (posters, a book club?) and monitor progress. As they improve, sending key persons on 'total immersion' courses should be considered.
- All teachers expected to make use of pedagogy-related training courses and resources. Many universities also have 'teaching circles' where colleagues exchange lessons learned and new ideas they have tried.
- Every time a new teaching area is to be built (or if an old one is to be refurbished) taking advice from pedagogical experts and from the teachers who will use them.

4. ARACIS may wish to consider the following:

- The role of the 'Foreign Short-term Expert Institutional Evaluator' is not explained in the supplied guidelines for 'Quality Evaluations for Higher Education Institutions Part III: External Institutional Evaluation'. My 'Collaboration Contract' simply listed 'Drafting of [] own Institutional Evaluation Report' as a responsibility.
- Even given the necessity for three 'faculty experts', an eleven-person team of evaluators seems excessive for a college with less than three thousand students. Combining the roles of 'non expert' members could reduce the total by three or four.
- Obligatory provision of basic documents related to the visit (including at least the list of team members and a schedule) in advance of the visit.

5. Envoi

The President, Rector, management, staff and students of "Bogdan Voda" University know their University (with its strengths and weaknesses) much better than any visiting evaluation team and infinitely better than a 'foreign expert' on his first visit to Romania. I ask that my above observations and comments be themselves carefully 'evaluated' in this context.

However, all universities today face a similar set of challenges related to planning, student recruitment, quality and internationalisation.