



ARACIS

Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

External Institutional Evaluation

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila"

Bucharest, Romania

Foreign Expert Report

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1. Introduction

Early this year (2010) was I invited to participate in the External Institutional Evaluation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” in Bucharest, Romania, and I accepted the invitation with great pleasure, as I have been involved in other evaluations in Romania for the National University Research Council and furthermore has done a series of different university evaluations in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Lithuania, Slovak Republic, Cyprus and Turkey.

In March I received from ARACIS a guide on “External Evaluation of Academic Quality in Accredited Higher Education Institutions (External Institutional Evaluation) dated December 2006. This guide follows the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, and I think the procedure is well defined and illustrates that a competent agency is running this type of evaluations.

In early June I received the Self-evaluation Report from the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila”, a document of more that 150 pages and with more that 300 annexes in the form of links to documents from the university and various external authorities.

My visit to the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” was well organised and well taken care of all the way from transportation internationally, nationally and between meetings to installation in the guest house of the university where comfortable rooms and excellent service was available.

The meetings in and with the ARACIS team of evaluation were generally performed in the Romanian language, and for this matter I was during the whole process attended by competent interpreters who gave me a first hand feeling for the various presentations and discussions going on around the table and in the various lecture halls which we were visiting.

I thus feel that I during the 2½ days of visiting the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” and through my preparation done in the available documents have got a fair notion of the standards and performances of the Management, the Professors and the students. On basis of my experiences I will not hesitate to declare this university of

high degree of confidence

and with potential for developing into a competitive European university provided the right amount of resources are given to the university in the years to come and provided the Management of the university follows a well defined line of development within European Standards in both teaching and research.

2. Language

In small countries with a specific language of its own like *e.g.* Denmark and Romania it is of utmost importance that knowledge of and competences in foreign languages is a wide spread phenomenon. When we are dealing with universities proficiency in the English language is very important as this language today is the lingua franca of science. If you cannot communicate, write, speak and publish in English you have a major problem in advancing in your subject and be competitive on the international scene.

I do not know which policy the Romanian government has on language knowledge and intercultural competences for the Romanian population – and especially for the children and youth under education - but I noticed that English is a compulsory subject for students in the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” for the first two years of study and that one of the Professors (who was my interpreter during sessions in the evaluation committee) was indeed very competent and proficient in English.

The students with which I was confronted on various occasions and situations were also very good in expressing themselves in English and there was very few communication problems during the meetings. I thus think that the students are ready for the challenges connected with globalisation and possible free movements in the European Union and for that sake in the rest of the World.

However, in relation to the Management and the Professors of this university I must confess a certain frustration in relation to their competences in English. Out of the 20 – 25 persons I met during my 2½ days at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” only a handful were capable of perform a conversation and discussion in English.

Thus the entire dialog during meetings in the evaluation committee and during lunches and dinners went on in Romanian, and everything was interpretation for me if I had not had the luck of sitting next to a person who could speak English.

I judge this situation as being severe for the university in its ambitions to become international recognised and a trusted partner in various research programmes financed by international agencies *e.g.* the European Union.

I thus recommend:

- a. that the University for Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” continue to teach its students language as a compulsory subject for the two first years of their studies
- b. that the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” defines a policy and sets up a program with the aim of improving considerably the language capabilities in English for staff at the university in general.

3. Exchange and credit transfer.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been used in the Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry since year 2000 and for the Faculty of Pharmacy since the academic year 2008 – 9, and this procedure is of course essential in relation to exchange of students which for a greater part is arranged through the Erasmus Mobility Program of the European Union.

In the material given to us in connection with this external institutional evaluation no statistics on student exchanges and exchange programs with other universities were to be found. I was during my talks with representatives from the university informed about the fact that Romanian students from this institution do use the Erasmus Mobility Program, but not in which quantities. Further I was informed that the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” has app. 40 exchange agreements with other universities mainly within the European Union specifically to span a platform for the use of the Erasmus Mobility Program.

I have the impression that exchange for this university is very much a one-way thing (out of Romania). I also think I know why: A demand for being an exchange student in the University for Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” is to have a good knowledge of the Romanian language which has to be verified by an exam in Bucharest. Such demands will certainly not have a positive effect on the number of foreigners in an university.

From my discussions with students I understood that Germany was a much preferred country for going on internships and programs under the Erasmus Mobility Program. The reason for this preference is related to the fact that a fair share of graduates from medical schools in Romania want to go to Germany after graduation because of the much better conditions there in relation to salaries and general living conditions.

I thus recommend:

- a. that key figures in relationship to student and staff exchanges are collected , published and used as platforms for formulating policies on internationalisation of the study programmes of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila”
- b. that instruments such as “students’ international days”, international advisors and publishing on the university website and newspaper articles on exchange students’ experiences and reflections on the outcome of staying a semester or more abroad are being activated.
- c. that the university in order to increase the number of foreign students create packages of study programmes given in English and being at the same time transferable with respect to credit points in partner universities abroad.

4. Premises and Infrastructure

As an institution dating back to 1857 the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” obviously has had chances to establish itself under the different reigns which Romania has been exposed to over the institution’s more than 150 years of existing.

The various buildings and halls of which the university consists is quite impressive, and also the training facility which were presented to us illustrates a university putting a big effort into training its students also in the practical aspects of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

Especially was the medical museum, the dissection facilities and the libraries in the main building of the university impressive and represented a magnificent illustration of the solid basis in anatomy and the functions of the human body which the students of this university are exposed to. Also a brand new operation unit with transmission facilities to a close-by lecture room shows the commitment of the university to medicine not only from a theoretical angle but also its practices through training facilities.

Combined with the fact that the educational program at this university also includes periods of hospital training under guidance of professional doctors it is clearly demonstrated which excellent capabilities graduates from “Carol Davila” possess and thus also why they are so well accepted abroad as it is obviously the case.

During visits to the hospitals associated with the university I was confronted with a number of student groups who complained over the possibilities they had for training and theoretical instruction in hospitals under reconstruction. I tend to agree with them, but I obviously also know the difficulties related to improving their situation: The present economical situation in the university and in Romania taken into consideration.

I thus recommend:

- a. that despite economical difficulties the university should look into how the situation for students in training at hospitals under reconstruction can be improved.
- b. that the university continues its policy of having experimental facilities which introduces to the students the modern and ever developing possibilities for treatment of deceases by surgery, therapy and pharmaceuticals.

5. Benchmarking.

During a conversation with one of the Professors from the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” he declared without hesitation, when I asked about the standing of his university, that this was the oldest, the biggest and the best of the medical schools in Romania. As far as the questions about age and size are concerned these can easily be verified, however whether “Carol Davila” is best in the country and where it is placed on an international scale is quite another question.

I am pretty sure that the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” is a very good one, and I judge this from what I have seen and heard during my visit at the university for 2½ days. I have also listen to friends and professionals from the scientific community in Romania where I get the same message about the character and quality of what is going on in “Carol Davila”. However, as an engineer to be sure about my judgements I normally rely on number and key figures which can be compared nationally and/or internationally.

This is then exactly the material I miss in the case of “Carol Davila”.

Maybe the figures are there and maybe they have been compared with similar figures from other institutions in Romania and/or other medical schools in Europe, but I have not been able to find them. And again it may be my fault, and if it is I apologize for it, but at least the information is then not easy to find in the material received.

For me the following are examples which are central in connection with evaluations of institutions doing research and delivering higher education:

Student intake – graduate output

Student drop-out rates at various levels of studies

Employability of graduates

Founding mechanisms for research groups

Composition of research groups with respect to tenured staff, visiting Professors,

Ph.D - students etc.

Number of publications in various journals

I thus recommend:

- a. that either the university, the Rectors' Conference of Romania or ARACIS discuss and define how benchmarking and ranking of Romanian universities shall be performed in the future.
- b. that the university reflects over which key figures they consider relevant in connection with self evaluation of the performance of the institution and in judging how available resources are to be spend most efficiently.

5. Course Evaluations

During my visit to "Carol Davila" I had the opportunity to talk with relatively many students. Most of them expressed a high satisfaction with their Professors and the Doctors training them at the hospitals. Actually they felt quite sure that their education was one of quality and that they would easily find a relevant job after graduation either in Romania or abroad.

More specifically I asked about course evaluation procedures at the university and if the students felt that their points of view were heard by the management of the university, faculties and departments. As far as general influence is concerned the students expressed that they have easy access to the Rector, the Vice-rectors, the Deans and Department Heads and they also felt that they were listen to in the senate, where the students occupy 25% of the seats. Further it looked to me as if the student union(s) was well organised and is able to bring forward to the right level of the university management subjects which the students want to discuss and possibly change.

With respect to course evaluations this can be done in many ways and with many purposes and the literature about this subject is quite extended. My personal angle towards course evaluations and whether students think they are worth the effort or not is related to whether the students experience an effect of the evaluations or not.

I discussed this subject with a number of the students I met and many of them said that they participated in the evaluations, but on the other hand they did not see a result of the opinions they had expressed since the evaluations were performed in the end of their courses.

One may of course say that an evaluation has no meaning before the course is in its final stage, However, I have come to the conclusion that course evaluations ought to be taken at mid-term and registered and evaluated with such speed that it has a meaning to discuss the results of the evaluation with the students, make the changes which may appropriate and in then in the final stage of the course again make a short evaluation to check if some of the issues brought up in the first evaluation have actually been changed to the better for the students.

In this way I think that students find more inspiration for the evaluation process, so they want to spend time on giving valuable and detailed comments and then of course also feel that they are listened to as a consequence of their participation in the course evaluation process.

I thus recommend:

- a. that the university evaluates its course evaluation procedures and consider to evaluate based on a questionnaire to be answered by the students at mid-term in stead of at the end of the course
- b. that the results of the course evaluations at mid-term are discussed with the students in relationship to any necessary alterations and so that they really get the feeling of being heard about the quality and content of the courses they are attending during their studies; students are after all the customers of the universities.

6. Final Remarks.

It was a pleasure to participate in the External Institutional Evaluation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila”, and I learned a lot about the situation for universities in Romania, which for the time being is not so profitable. Therefore is also impressing what “Carol Davila” is able to accomplish despite the unfavourable economical conditions which presently exists in Romania.

For further evaluations along the line defined by ARACIS I will suggest to compose smaller evaluation team and to focus on the possibilities for performing a major part of the discussions in English if foreign experts are going to be a part of the evaluations. Even though I was serviced well by a professional interpreter I am sure that I missed a lot of important details in the discussions around the table and thus my in-depth knowledge of what is really going on in the university may be too weak for making recommendations as I have done it above.

I am on the other hand not in doubt about the qualities of this university and I wish the Rector and his entire staff all success in the future and with the task of the developing the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” into a competitive European medical school.

“Carol Davila” is on the right track, and if the proper financial support is given to the university I am sure that this university will succeed in becoming a leading institution within its subjects not only in Romania but also - in the first run - in its region of Europe.

I thus have no doubt in declaring that the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” according to my opinion is - and will also be in the future - an institution with a

high degree of confidence

Appendix about an irrelevant subject to the evaluation:

Smoking!

It is a long time since I have participated in public meetings where smoking was a general accepted habit.

To my big surprise smoking was a general habit at every meeting, lunch and dinner in which I participated during my visit to the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila”.

I will probably not have to repeat the regulations on smoking which has swept over North America and Europe over the last 10 years, but one should have thought that a medical school would have a strict policy against smoking knowing professionally the damage which smoking is inflicting on public health.

I would have expected that a medical school was in the forefront of fighting smoking in general and certainly smoking in the public domains, but this was not at all the case at this university.

I thus recommend:

a. that the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila” discuss and enforce regulations against public smoking on its premises.