



A R A C I S

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

E x t e r n a l I n s t i t u t i o n a l E v a l u a t i o n

Universitatea “Hyperion” din București, România

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

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Peer of several
European National Quality Assurance Agencies

Member of the Pool of Experts
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1. Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as Foreign Expert from the visit to the “Hyperion” University (UHB) in Bucharest for an external institutional evaluation by ARACIS from May 20 to 22, 2015. Beside the institutional evaluation, the five Bachelor study programmes “Informatică”, “Geografie”, “Științe politice”, “Economia comerțului, turismului și serviciilor” and “Finanțe și bănci – distance learning” of UHB were selected for assessment too. This was the second institutional evaluation of UHB by ARACIS after the ARACIS-visit in 2011. As I was also a member of the ARACIS-team during the first visit, I will specially observe in this report the changes and improvements realized by UHB during the last four years. Thereby my focus is on the institution as a whole and not so much on the individual study programmes.

During the last six years I have participated already in fifteen ARACIS-evaluations. As a member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) I have participated in more than 20 evaluations in 8 European countries, in Colombia and in Nigeria. Furthermore, I have also worked as a peer for the Lithuanian Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (CQAHE). Hence the following observations and comments will also reflect European and international perspectives.

I am very grateful to the Mission Director Prof.univ.dr. Luca Iamandi and to the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.dr. Ioan Călin Roșca for conducting this evaluation process in a very efficient way. I also thank Prof.univ.dr. Gheorghe Solomon and all other members of the ARACIS team for their constructive and fruitful discussions during the visit. My special thanks go to the Technical Secretary Ms. Marilena Dobre from ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation and for her friendly way of holding contact with me, providing all necessary information and support for the visit.

I also give my cordial thanks to the Rector Prof.univ.dr. Sever-Irin Spânulescu and to the President of the Senate Prof.univ.dr. Anca Gheorghiu from the “Hyperion” University in Bucharest for the friendly welcome and perfect organisation of my visit.

I also want to express my appreciation to the various representatives of UHB including students, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their discussions to a good understanding of the institution.

2. Organisational Details of the “Hyperion” University

The “Hyperion” University is one of the oldest private universities in Romania founded in 1990 and accredited by law in 2002. Consequently it was integrated in the national education system. UHB is a juridical entity under private law and of public utility.

The mission of UHB is didactic and scientific research in the frame of the study programmes within the University. The special situation of UHB is that it is one of the few private universities offering beside other study programmes with physics also an expensive technical programme. On the other end UHB offers with arts another very expensive subject.

The University is led by the Rector (elected according to the Law 2011, son of the founder) together with two Prorectors (educational affairs, academic preparation and social problems; quality issues, distance learning, connection with ARACIS), the Senate (19 teachers + 7 students) and the Administrative Board.

The University is well organized and owns four buildings in Bucharest. All buildings are in good state, but further renovations and adaptations will be needed e.g. in some labs and in the student dormitory in order to reach European quality standards. The main campus with the Rectorate is in the Calea Calarașilor in Bucharest.

The total budget of UHB in 2014 was 14.200.000 Lei with 10.700.000 Lei coming from tuition fees. The amount of 8.340.000 Lei (60% of all expenses) was necessary to cover staff salaries. UHB is structured in 6 Faculties (Faculty of Exact Sciences and Engineering; Faculty of Social, Humanities and Natural Sciences; Faculty of Law; Faculty of Journalism, Psychology and Education Sciences; Faculty of Economic Sciences; Faculty of Art), 8 Departments, one Institutional Research Centre, Research Centres at each Department, the Central Library and the necessary administrative bodies.

Presently UHB provides 18 Bachelor programmes (some of them offered also in the form of distance learning) and 14 Master programmes in the areas of the six Faculties.

At present UHB has 3.928 students (2.397 Bachelor, 596 Master and 935 distance learning Bachelor students), 212 teachers and researchers and 95 administrative staff.

There are many competitors in higher education also in the Bucharest area offering similar study programmes. The main advantage of UHB against its competitors is that it has some well-known teachers and personal contacts between students and teachers are excellent. Moreover, the cultural sciences at UHB (e.g. journalism, theatre, film and media) have certainly some effect on the local and regional TV, magazines and newspapers scene.

3. Outline of the Visit

3.1 The Self-Evaluation Process

The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (SER) provided by UHB consists of two parts of together 60 pages with references to 123 Annexes. It gives a description of the development of the institution since its foundation in 1990. The juridical framework, the management, human resources, financial activities, teaching and learning as well as research are described. Special importance is given to procedures of quality assurance and other topics observed by ARACIS. But the SER is redundant in many points. The different parts have been elaborated evidently by different persons and not been homogenised (e.g. the staff number is given on page 4, 14, 36 and 55 of the English SER). Furthermore, some important data such as the number of members of the Senate or the total annual budget are not listed in the SER and can be found only in the Annexes. The SER is also not very self-critical and does not contain any real critical Swot Analysis. Nevertheless, the SER provided for the present evaluation was better than the SER provided for the 2011 visit. It was definitely helpful in preparing the visit and to identify the changes and improvements made since 2011.

But by my opinion UHB has missed again the opportunity to use this evaluation for a broad internal discussion of its present state and its future. The elaboration of a compact Self Evaluation Report of 25 to 30 pages, concentrating on the important facts as well as improvements and changes since the last ARACIS visit in 2011 would have been a very fruitful procedure providing a good base for further strategic planning.

3.2 The Evaluation Visit

The institutional evaluation visit to the “Hyperion” University in Bucharest began in the evening of May 19, 2015, with the arrival of some ARACIS-team members at the Capitol Hotel in Bucharest.

During this second visit to UHB I had the impression that the general climate was much better and more open than it was four years ago. In 2011 UHB had to manage severe problems like the considerable cut of the student numbers, had to implement the new university Law 2011 and was looking into an uncertain future. Now UHB seems to have mastered these difficult challenges and is looking into a more sustainable future. Progress has been made with respect to many important areas, but there are also still some tasks to work on.

During the evaluation visit I participated in the meetings of the main ARACIS team, but did also arrange my own interviews and examinations.

The official evaluation procedure started on May 19 at 9:00 in the Senate Meeting Room of UHB. Rector Prof.univ.dr. Sever-Irin Spânulescu welcomed the ARACIS delegation. After a short internal meeting of the ARACIS-team an assembly of all university representatives and the evaluation team was arranged. The Rector and the Mission Scientific Coordinator introduced all persons present.

In the course of the first day the ARACIS-team performed the usual activities. We visited for more than one hour the installations in the main building (labs, computer rooms, lecture rooms, seminar rooms, central library, cafeteria, etc.). Some of the labs and also of the computer rooms have been recently renewed by means of European research projects and are very well equipped.

In the afternoon of the first day I attended the meetings of the ARACIS-team with about 100 students and about 70 graduates (most of them Master students). A meeting with more than 40 employers concluded the first day.

The meetings with the huge groups of students, graduates and employers did not really disclose any big problems. As usual students and graduates did not have severe complaints. The main points of discussion were strengthening of the praxis relevance of education, increase of internships and improvements in the library. Graduates and employers appreciated the quality of education at UHB.

Beside the ARACIS-meetings I arranged individual meetings with the Rector and with the President of the Senate.

On the second day before lunch all team members gave a first report to the Mission Director Prof.univ.dr. Luca Iamandi. No severe problems were disclosed.

In the afternoon I had an individual meeting with Prorector Conf.univ.dr. Corina-Maria Ene. The evaluation visit ended on Friday, May 22, at lunch time with an oral presentation of the impressions and results to the leaders of UHB. The Rector of UHB thanked the ARACIS team for their intensive and constructive work.

4. Governance and Institution

The leadership and staff of the University show very high identification with the institution and are strongly committed. The governing bodies of UHB have developed an amicable way to govern the institution. There exists a culture of consensus and co-operation which makes it possible to take also difficult and complex decisions within short time. But there is a certain

risk that the governing persons become more and more isolated from the rest of the University and lose the sensibility for necessary changes and innovations. The institution appears like a nice family where all family members wait what the father (Rector) wants. The current Rector is a very open person and is aware of this problem. He has included a young Prorector into his team. The Rector would like to have more constructive, critical contributions before taking decisions. By my impression the Rector has also concentrated too many tasks on himself.

During the last four years important structural changes simplifying the organizational structure have been realized (e.g. reduction from 11 Faculties and 15 Departments to 6 Faculties and 8 Departments, reduction from three to two Prorectors). But there seems still to be room for further simplifications. The differentiation of areas between the Faculty of Exact Sciences and Engineering, Faculty of Social, Humanities and Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Journalism, Psychology and Education Sciences is not very clear.

The financial management of UHB was and is excellent. The Rector supported by his administration controls personally all incomes and all expenses.

There exists a good Strategic Plan accompanied by an Operational Plan.

In order to create a Quality Culture inside UHB a Quality Assurance Manual has been elaborated and several Quality Commissions have been established.

According to a general view a European university should have at least 5.000 students in order to establish the necessary infrastructure for students (e.g. student service and advising centre) and to develop an academic atmosphere with cultural, social and other activities. Hence UHB should struggle for more students not only for financial reasons but also for academic reasons.

Recommendations:

- Try to motivate young staff and students to take more responsibility and ownership for the further development of UHB.
- Extend the Operational Plan by adding costs to the different actions where appropriate.
- Proceed simplifying and clarifying the organizational structure of UHB.
- Try to attract more students by intensifying contact to schools and promoting UHB's unique characteristic covering art and engineering under "one roof".
- The existence of an Ethic Commission has to be commended. But as I have already stated in the past, UHB is a small institution where everybody knows everybody. Hence, I strongly recommend to install – if necessary informally - an inter-university commission with half members coming from UHB and the other half from other universities. Only such a body will be able to discuss sensitive cases.

5. Quality Culture

UHB has set up important activities and procedures for quality assurance. At central level a Quality Council of the Administrative Board, a Department for Quality Assurance, a Commission of Evaluation and Quality Assurance of the Bachelor's and Master's Programmes and Relations with ARACIS of the Senate and an Internal Audit Department of Quality have been installed. There also exists a Quality Assurance Manual. The majority of staff members at UHB already considers quality as a benefit and necessity for the institution.

Recommendation:

- Promote more clearly to staff and students the benefits and improvements deriving from quality assurance procedures in order to increase motivation of staff and students for taking ownership of quality assurance. (Shift from inspection and control to an improve-oriented approach providing support to staff and students.)

6. Teaching and Learning

The quality of the formation at UHB was recognized in the meetings with employers, graduates and students. As already mentioned, neither the meeting with about 100 students nor the meeting with about 70 graduates disclosed any severe problems. The students have founded a Student Association and communicate via email and Facebook. But there is still an information deficit within the student community. Students are hardly informed on mobility programmes, on possible internships or other services offered by UHB.

Students and graduates want to expand internships and more practical training.

The involvement of stakeholders into curricula discussions seems to be very informal based on personal relations.

Recommendations:

- Formalise the involvement of stakeholders and employers in order to monitor and improve the quality of education.
- Enforce relations of the University with the region to create more possibilities for internships and praxis places for students.
- Increase assistance for students looking for an internship and strengthen the activities in order to facilitate the start of graduates in the working world.
- Further increase autonomous student work and self-learning parts in curricula.

7. Research and Service to Society

UHB has made considerable progress strengthening research during the last years. The University has to be commended for the recent research report giving a good view of the research activities. UHB has to be also praised for several acquired European research projects. But research at UHB is still performed only by a small part of the academic staff. The majority of publications is in Romanian language.

Co-operations and activities with the region (society, industry, economy) are mainly based on individual contacts and could be considerably higher. All scientific areas of UHB should be able to offer services for the region.

Recommendations:

- Increase visibility of research by increasing international activities (e.g. participation in international research groups, publication in international recognised journals)

- Strengthen and extend relations with the region. Present examples of good consultancies and services to potential partners. Try to sign mutual contracts of co-operation in order to create sustainable income from collaborations.

8. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is one of the weak points of UHB but essential for modern universities. Internationalisation is a multi-dimensional task taking into account mobility programmes, language policy, curricula, joint study and double degree programmes, collaborative research, conference attendance etc. Intentions to be internationally more visible and better known should be made.

Recommendations:

- Define clear goals for internationalisation activities (strategic partnerships, language policy, mobility of staff and students, research collaborations).
- Strengthen the foreign language policy inside UHB (use of English literature and text books, courses given in English language, etc.).
- Increase information on international agreements, programmes and grants and support mobility of students and staff (e.g. Erasmus, AIESEC)
- Try to attract also international students by providing information in English (handbook for international students) on UHB's homepage.

9. Final Remarks

The "Hyperion" University in Bucharest offers with education in art and in engineering a unique combination of study programmes. It is the only private university in Bucharest offering these subjects under one "roof". During the last years UHB has already realized important changes in order to master challenges and problems. But UHB has to continue these efforts for improvement and competitiveness. My remarks and recommendations should assist UHB to pursue a successful way into the future.



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