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Titlul proiectului „Dezvoltarea și consolidarea culturii calității la nivelul sistemului de învățământ superior românesc - QUALITAS”

Contract POSDRU 155/1.2/S/141894

**REPORT
of the foreign evaluator for the
University of Petroșani**

AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR REGISTRATURĂ	
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ETS – FOREIGN EVALUATOR EXPERT

Name: Benas Ulevicius

Signature:



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PARTENER



CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN
NETWORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

On 21 January 2015 I was assigned by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter – ARACIS) as a foreign expert in the panel nominated for the institutional evaluation of the University of Petrosani (hereinafter – UPET). The visit and audit of the University took place during the period 26 March 2015 – 28 March 2015. The Team was composed of: Prof. Lucian Puiu Georgescu (Mission director), Prof. Dumitru Miron (Coordinator), Prof. Marius Gabriel Petrescu, Prof. Mircea Nicoara, Prof. Stefan-Gheorghe Pentiu, Prof. Maria Vintan, Prof. Leonardo Manescu, Prof. Aurel Alecu, Prof. Chipea Floarea, Assoc. Prof. Benas Ulevicius (foreign expert), Petcu Adrian (student), Alina Bosanceanu (student).

ARACIS was represented by Oana Sarbu.

The University of Petrosani was represented by the Rector Prof. Aron Poanta. Vice-Rector Codruta Dura was the coordinator and the contact person to the team of evaluators.

I am very satisfied with the quality of organization of the whole procedure by ARACIS, and the level of collaboration by the University of Petrosani. ARACIS informed me about all the procedures timely, the communication was excellent. I received all documentation and help needed to carry my task efficiently. Also, during the visit I was provided with opportunities to get more acquainted with materials, and meet relevant members of UPET community, who answered my questions.

I was able to gather sufficient information from the Self-evaluation report (hereinafter – SER), and meetings with various stakeholders to get a general picture of the academic situation in the University of Petrosani, and draw up this final Report. The report is divided into eight sections: introduction; general remarks on the self-evaluation report; remarks on meetings that took place during the site visit; current situation of the University; managerial structures and quality management; studies; research; material resources.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

UPET prepared the SER according the required procedures. The SER is the result of a process of internal evaluation that began when the UPET first internal team meeting was convened, and ended with the approval of the definitive version of the text (which was also translated into English).

The SER is well written and clear. It provides all the information needed to understand the real situation of the University. Analysis provided in SER is thorough, comprehensive and adequate, no required parts are missing. The SER consists of two major parts: 1. Institution presentation; 2. The process of curricula quality assurance. The main document was accompanied by two annexes which included more than hundred documents. Due to the fact that all these documents were written in Romanian, I couldn't make informative analysis of them. Yet, from the way these

documents were arranged and catalogued, I got an impression about the consistency and serious attitude of the University towards the regulations of academic procedures.

REMARKS ON MEETINGS THAT TOOK PLACE DURING THE SITE VISIT

During its visit, the evaluation team had separate meetings with the management, students, graduates, and employers. Also, while visiting sites at the University, evaluation team had opportunities to meet and talk with members of staff responsible for various areas of university life (e.g. librarian, supervising personnel of laboratories, coordinators of international activities, teaching staff, etc.). The panel was able to clarify details, acquire lacking information, and hear the opinions of parties mentioned above.

It is significant, that so many stakeholders responded to the invitation by the University and came to meet with the team of experts. There are many outstanding members of society (e.g. high officials of local government, and heads of successful companies) among the partners and alumni of UPET. Their willingness to stand with the University during institutional evaluation must be noticed. It is a proof of the importance of UPET to the development of the region. I also appreciated outspokenness of students and their active engagement into discussions. Students answered experts' questions and openly commented on their life at UPET. The atmosphere of meeting with students was lively and convincingly revealed that students find UPET to be a place of optimism and hope.

Recommendations:

Having in mind openness and willingness of partners and alumni of UPET to stay connected with the University, I would recommend considering much broader inclusion of them (both formally and non-formally) into the various bodies of planning and governing. Also, it is very important to make constant effort to stay in touch with most prominent representatives of alumni, to use their success stories as an inspiring example for new students and society, and to help alumni continuously in their career according to their needs. It is a praiseworthy fact that UPET already keeps up to date list of alumni, and in number of cases students have opportunity to carry their practices in organizations governed by alumni of UPET.

At the meeting with students it appeared that the system of students' representatives can work more efficiently at UPET. The University should make more effort to ensure that students know how they are represented in decision making bodies of the University and who their representatives are.

CURRENT SITUATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

UPET is a solid academic institution with clearly expressed profile of technical sciences. The University carries its mission in accordance with European and national regulations. The University successfully implemented the main requirements of the



Bologna process (e.g. transfer to ECTS, and three levels structure of studies). UPET offers high range of Undergraduate, Master, and Doctorate programs. It also offers post-graduate courses, and some distance learning possibilities. At present UPET consists of three faculties: Faculty of Mining Engineering, Faculty of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Sciences.

It should be pointed out that the previous institutional evaluation of the UPET by ARACIS was successfully completed in 2009 with the result of UPET qualified as "high confidence" institution. University paid attention to recommendations by experts' team of 2009 evaluation, and improved accordingly since then (list of most important improvements is presented in SER).

The mission of UPET is education and research within the European context. This mission is clarified and elaborated in Strategic plan for 2013-2016, which contains a set of strategic objectives in areas of education, scientific research, human resources management, infrastructure, information, national and international partnerships.

UPET has very good material base and human resources, needed for continuing with its mission. Also, the University has strong relationships with both local partners and foreign institutions of higher education. Historically the University has experience of receiving students from abroad. At present UPET promotes a policy of openness to the European experience by developing international relationships and supporting students and staff exchange programs (Erasmus, Gruntvig, Cost, etc.). University has very good coordinators of international affairs. In 2009-2014 it had 19 bilateral Erasmus agreements with foreign Universities. Significant number of students from Moldova chooses UPET for their studies and carrier development.

The importance of the University for development of the region is evident, and was confirmed by local government, partners and alumni during the meetings with the panel. UPET provides an important regional service in providing a centre of academic life in this part of Romania. Thanks to UPET, the dialogue between science, culture and local society can be maintained and developed.

Some challenges to the mission of the University should be also mentioned.

Historically, UPET was dependant on mining industry which was the main industry in the region. Naturally, the greatest challenge to the University's continuity was closing of mining business with which mining industry practically disappeared from the region. In this situation the University had to develop new strategies and raise new questions about its identity.

Number of candidates for studies has decreased in recent few years due to the broadening of other universities' offer for studies, high rates of immigration and demographic decline in Romania which results in decrease in the number of high school graduates. This situation is common to most former Soviet bloc countries, and is not a result of bad performance by the University. Nevertheless, it challenges the future of the University in very direct way. UPET managerial staff realises this threat and puts effort into finding ways to continue with the mission of the University in

changing situation, to attract good candidates for studies (e.g. diversifying studies offer, advertising study programs, creating quality website, etc.).

Recommendations:

Despite of disappearance of mining business and the decline of students because of social and economic changes, UPET remains very important Institution in the area. It provides sense of stability and continuity, offers job opportunities, adds significantly to the cultural life of local society; it spreads the message of importance of education, and enriches local discourse. It is clear that in the area UPET is not just a fortress of academia, but also an important symbol of hope in the midst of economic and societal changes.

The question remains how to attract more good candidates for studies at UPET. It seems that in the near future UPET will have to put much effort into the analysis of market and demand, and act accordingly. Thus constant analysis, creativity, and courage to experiment may be invaluable for the further development of the University. There are many things UPET already did in this respect (e.g. the University expanded the list of study fields by including economy and social studies programs; curriculum was enriched by post-graduate programs; distance learning opportunities were offered to students; Erasmus activities were enhanced; E-learning platform was successfully introduced, etc.). I think, offering programmes in fields of humanities, politics, art, or law may provide chances both for the University and local society for better future. Quite many universities in my country (Lithuania) experienced somewhat similar economic and societal situation as UPET is experiencing today. There are more than few cases when many new students were attracted by offering new opportunities, creating new programs, elaborating on titles of programs (e.g. "Creative industries"), and boosting marketing efforts.

It also seems to me that UPET would gain a lot from introducing some study programs in English (or other relevant foreign language) and then reaching for foreign students with strengthened effort. This would seem like very natural development, as the University already has very good Erasmus coordinators and impressive number of international agreements; also, many teaching staff members and all doctorate students are fluent English speakers. UPET has a lot to offer for foreign study market as it has very solid experience and has reached highest level of expertise in mining technologies and mechanical – electrical engineering. Lack of opportunities to study in English (or other relevant foreign language) may discourage foreign students from choosing UPET as place for their studies and carrier pursuit.

MANAGERIAL STRUCTURES AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The adequate operation of UPET is supported by a complex managerial structure, which includes the academic component (faculties, departments, centers) and the administration component which consists of departments and services with well defined functional and operational roles. The management system is organized and operates in accordance to national legal requirements and UPET regulations. It is based on the principle of collective management, the collective management bodies being the following: The University Senate, the Administration Board, the Faculty

councils, the Department Councils. The students have their representatives in all managerial structures. The University has operative Democratic students union.

The quality of managerial activities is ensured by number of consulting, monitoring and internal evaluation structures (e.g. the Commission of academic ethics, the Commission for Quality Evaluation Assurance at the UPET, the Commission for the monitoring, coordination and methodological guidance of the managerial control system development, Department for Quality and Admission, etc.).

The task of quality assurance is permanent concern at UPET. The University has quality assurance policies with clearly defined and documented performance standards and indicators. Also, the University has prepared SWOT analysis, which is included in SER and reveals the situation adequately. In general, quality assurance is organized according to standard university quality management model. Management structure responsible for the quality assurance consists of Rector, Vice-rectors, Deans, the heads of management and teaching departments, Quality Assessment and Assurance committees on the University and faculty levels, and the Department for Quality and Admission.

Quality of professional performance is a requirement for all teaching staff; proofs of good performance are required for acquiring higher teaching or management position at the University. It can be concluded that promotion of staff members is directly connected to quality of their performance. The evaluation of staff members' research activities is made on grounds of self-evaluation chart for each member of teaching staff, in accordance with the Job Description.

Students are involved in quality assurance via student representatives at managerial bodies and Democratic student union. Every semester students are invited to fill the electronic questionnaires about every study unit. During the meeting with panel of experts students confirmed that system of questionnaires is operative, anonymity of students is granted, although some expressed a wish that students would be more informed about the effect questionnaires have on improving the teaching quality (i.e. "what happens after questionnaires reach the management?").

Overall the system of management and quality management at UPET is adequate and operative.

Recommendations

I would recommend considering inclusion of relevant or prominent partners and alumni into managerial structures for purposes of more efficient quality management, collaboration and marketing.

STUDIES

At present UPET offers broad study possibilities for candidates, especially those interested in technical sciences. Three faculties of the University offer more than 47 study programs in various fields of technical sciences, economy and social sciences: 25 undergraduate study programs within 19 fields; 18 second level study programs within 13 fields, 4 doctoral programs. Although most programs are designed for day



courses, some distance learning programs are also available. In addition to this, UPET offers following study opportunities: postgraduate courses of continuous professional training and development; postgraduate courses for professional conversion (mainly dedicated to pre-academic teaching staff); psycho-pedagogical training programs (levels I and II); training and evaluation programs for pre-academic teaching staff (i.e. for kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers who want to acquire tenure).

Curricula of all study programs are structured in accordance with European and national requirements for study programs. During studies the importance of practical aspect and applicability is emphasized. Practices of students are organized in collaboration with numerous partner organizations.

All teaching and learning activities and study procedures are organized in compliance with European and national legal requirements. Teaching positions are occupied through competition with a view to promoting UPET teaching staff and attracting highly competitive graduates. Competition is organized in compliance with legal requirements. Teaching staff with tenure hold a doctoral degree in their specific teaching field; invited teachers also hold doctoral degree and have vast practical and/or research experience.

The members of teaching staff have elaborated courses and other didactic material for the students' use. These materials are available to students in printed or electronic form. UPET uses Course Mill e-Learning platform, which is a convenient tool for distribution of study materials and distance learning.

Students are offered broad Erasmus and other international exchange opportunities. Erasmus opportunities are advertised via prints, on the internet, also by making Erasmus success stories known to students through special booklet.

Overall, during meeting with panel of experts students valued their study experience positively. It may be concluded that teaching and learning situation at the institution is very good.

RESEARCH

In UPET scientific research is organized according to the European and national regulations. The research organizational framework is typical to institutions of higher education, i.e. research is organized by the University departments and the research centers. The strategic coordination of the research activities is the responsibility of the vice-Rector in charge of scientific research, the Department for Research, Projects Management, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer, and of the specialized commissions on the level of the Senate and the Faculty boards.

Research at UPET is carried out according to the defined Strategy of Scientific Research. Also, number of University's priority strategic goals for 2013-2016 are directly connected with research activities (e.g. establishing the priority research fields and tendencies in accordance with the specific structure of the faculties within UPET; the integration of researchers of the university in the national, European and international research system; ensuring the human resources for research; the development of research infrastructure; ensuring the research quality, etc.). The concrete manners of implementing research strategy are included in the documented Research operational plan.



Research is considered to be a priority at UPET and is conceived from the perspective of the integration into the European Research Area. It consists mainly (but not exclusively) of fundamental and applicative studies in various fields of technical sciences. All three faculties of UPET have defined research priorities.

Number of publications, inventions, journals, scientific conferences, national and international grants received for research activities is presented in SER and is very adequate having in mind the size of the University.

MATERIAL BASE

The University has its own campus, which consists of education spaces, research labs, sports grounds, dormitories, canteen, and the students' club. These spaces meet the national legal requirements and standards imposed by the needs of a quality educational process. Learning spaces are in good technical condition. They are equipped with multimedia and other equipment needed for didactic process. During the past years, the condition of laboratories was improved considerably by modernizing the equipment and setting up new spaces destined to practical and research activities. Ratio between number of students and learning (also, laboratories) spaces is adequate. Overall, the situation at UPET in the area of material equipment is very good.

Library

University has both The Central University Library and specialized libraries at the departments. These libraries provide all materials needed for studies and research. If needed, staff and students can order materials from other Romanian or foreign libraries. The Central Library of the University has 200 seats allocated in 3 reading rooms. There are 29 computers with internet access at the Central Library. Besides the printed materials, broad choice of electronic materials is available. The Central Library of the University contains 298,351 volumes that represent 93,553 titles. Out of these 253,663 are in Romanian and 44,688 in foreign languages. This amount of publications is sufficient to completely cover the subjects taught at the University. To stay updated in different scientific fields, the Central Library holds subscriptions to various specialized foreign journals and ensures permanent access to international databases (e.g. Springerlink, ScienceDirect, EBSCO, DOAJ, etc.). All the resources of the Library can be accessed through the „Library on-line“ program, located on the University website.

CONCLUSION

As much as my competence allows, I wholeheartedly recommend qualifying University of Petroșani as “full confidence” institution.

Kaunas, Lithuania, 2015 04 08

Assoc. Prof. Benas Ulevicius