

**UNIVERSITY OF PITEȘTI**  
**EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT**  
**2017**

**Introduction**

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the University of Pitești as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 15 November and Friday 17 November 2017. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview, focusing on the main points of improvement of quality, development and the present and future challenges of the university. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of the institution. During my stay in Pitești with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to insight the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and collect information about the institution. My report is following the structure of the self evaluation report of the university.

**Legal Framework, Mission, Objectives and Managerial Structures**

The University of Pitești (UPIT) operates in the national system of the Romanian higher education. Higher education in Pitești started in 1962, when the Pedagogical Institute of Pitești was established with the faculties of Philology, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. In the next decades, parallel with the development of the automotive industry in the county Argeș, higher education became more and more important and resulted a permanent evolution of educational programs that have met the needs of the public. The university with its 55-year experience and prestige in higher education, plays a significant economic, social and cultural role in the South Muntenia Region. Although the headquarters of the university is in Pitești, for its didactic activities, the institution has branches in Alexandria, Câmpulung, Râmnicu Vâlcea and Slatina, so the programs could be also attractive for those who want to get knowledge, skills and competencies in their hometown. UPIT functions on

the basis of university autonomy, in accordance with the provisions of the current legislation, UPIT Charter, and the own regulations of the institution.

The UPIT Charter, approved by the University Senate, is the fundamental document that regulates all aspects of the life of the UPIT academic community. According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, the vision, the missions and strategic objectives are focusing on the maintenance of the present good position and competitiveness in education and knowledge transfer, provide future development, improve institutional quality assurance and management, ensure a high quality level meet with European requirements, promoting local, regional, national and international cooperation and developing and improving professional competences. Beside these aims there is a strong orientation towards the needs of the local and regional community, internacionalization, transparency, effective management and financial efficiency.

The managerial structures of the faculties of the university, the departments, centers and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution relies on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of the different types of programs, teaching staff and other personnel of the university.

It is important to point out that University of Pitești has to cope with the challenges of a competitive higher education market, national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields and it has to offer attractive study programs which are based on the demands of the students. It seems that the present answers of University of Pitești for these permanently appearing challenges are generally successful, and it is important to point out that parallel with maintaining the present situation the university also should find other market niches where it could operate successfully in the future.

## **Quality Assurance**

The development of quality management and culture is a highly important aspect within the University of Pitești. The quality management is based on politics, strategies, techniques and operations. University of Pitești permanently evaluates its capacity of quality assurance and identifies means of enhancing the quality of education by using tools and systems of

collecting and analysing information which prove the results that have been achieved in learning and research.

The Committee for the Quality Evaluation and Assurance at university level is constituted in accordance with the legal provisions and functions on the grounds of its own set of regulations, which are approved by the University Senate. Within the University of Pitești, the involvement of all interested parties is highly observed (undergraduates, graduates, teaching staff, representatives of the socio-economic environment) in order to reach an ongoing enhancement of the quality standards at institutional level.

### **Students, student services**

UPIT's material body has developed continuously in terms of needs, modernization of existing premises and investment activities. The University is constantly concerned with investing in increasing the degree of comfort in student hostels. University of Pitești has two student hostels with a total capacity of 700 places. In the academic year 2016-2017, the number of students enrolled was 391. The investment is permanent to meet the needs of the students although it would be important to attract more students to choose to live in hostels. The university also has a canteen at one of the locations, and there have been some steps made to establish another one at the headquarters of the university. The institution also has a good infrastructural base for sport activities.

The Counselling and Career Guidance Center provides career counselling and guidance services to facilitate the socio-professional integration of the beneficiaries (UPIT students and graduates and pupils of high schools). UPIT has special programs to ensure qualitative student life, social, cultural, sport and entertainment activities as well as other support services provided to university students and academics are held in different locations.

The university operates printing house, where university books, periodicals, scientific papers are published. Also, UPIT organizes yearly the UPIT students' job fair and supports student associations in organizing the Ball of the UPIT. The University offers spaces for the activities undertaken within student associations. According to the received information, it is also an important priority to give scholarships, grants and other financial support to the students and significant number of students have the possibility to receive this help. As a result of the relations developed by UPIT with the social and economic environment,

students also benefit from other types of scholarships: merit scholarships granted by the Pitești Local Council, social scholarships granted by the Argeș County Council, and private scholarships granted by economic actors. In the period 2012-2016, scholarships and other forms of financial support (grants, prizes, etc.) were awarded to a number of 1726 students, coming from non-reimbursable funds, amounting to 2.205.325,00 lei.

UPIT students can also access learning materials through the Moodle Education Platform, designed to support classroom teaching, distance learning and other teaching, learning and assessment activities. Moodle is a popular and flexible online learning tool, which provides students variety of learning resources, giving them access to those resources, as well as tutorials, exercises, learning tasks, questionnaires, discussion forums, etc. These initiatives and knowledge could be a perfect base for developing e-learning programs, MOOCs in the future.

### **Human resources, teaching Staff**

The educational activities within the study programs are provided by the teaching staff of the university, represented by a total of 607 positions, of which 406 are occupied by tenured teaching staff. In the last five years there was a 22% drop in the total number of positions (from 775 to 607), although the number of occupied positions hasn't changed that radically. These changes certainly reflect the changes in educational programs and the reorganization steps of the institution.

The University of Pitești has made several necessary steps in the last years in order to stabilize its operation, and some changes affected the management, organizational structures and human resources as well. According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of University of Pitești have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly.

According to the self evaluation documentation of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of University of Pitești is on a good level. The teaching staff in University of Pitești seems to have proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which certainly results a good level of performance in education processes. Some teaching activities are developed by recognized

specialists, from the outside of the university, which bring their important contribution to the teaching programs with their specific knowledge, field expertise and competencies.

### **Educational Programs**

In the academic year 2016-2017, the educational offer of the University of Pitești included 64 bachelor programs (full-time learning 59 and part-time learning 5), 83 master degree programs, and the doctoral studies were conducted for 10 fields in 8 doctoral schools. The present number of students is over 9.500. There are no unauthorized study programs at the University of Pitești. The present, 6 faculties of the University of Pitești are the next:

- The Faculty of Sciences, Physical Education and Informatics
- The Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Technology
- The Faculty of Electronic Engineering, Communications and Computer Engineering
- The Faculty of Economics and Law
- The Faculty of Theology, Letters, History and Arts
- The Faculty of Education Sciences, Social Sciences and Psychology

The students (BA, MA and doctoral students) at the University of Pitești engage in scientific research activities at the level of departments and research centers, participate in scientific clubs, and, respectively, in student scientific events organized by the faculties, as well as in national and international competitions. The training practice conducted by UPIT students is done at companies and institutions. During the period 2012-2016, as many as 1543 students benefited from practical training courses organized and implemented through projects with non-reimbursable funds – although the need to strengthen training practice orientation has appeared on the meetings with the students, graduates and employers during the evaluation. Experimental learning contexts that should offer undergraduate and postgraduate students (BA and MA programs) within the University of Pitești the adequate background that could allow them to acquire entrepreneurial skills by integrating them in interdisciplinary work teams, creating contacts with the industrial and socio-economic environment, stimulating their creativity and developing their communication skills that help their chances of employability on the labor market or in the business environment.

The evolution of educational programs in the last years show that the main focus of the university has remained the developing, perfecting and diversifying of the study programs

with satisfying the demands of the labor market parallel with satisfying the demands of the students. As a result, in the last decades some of the earlier offered education programs had been terminated and new education programs developed. The present BA and MA education programs seem to be marketable and meet the needs of the students and the local community.

Internacionalization is an important priority of the university. Right now there are 8 study programs offered in English and/or French language and the number of foreign students is growing in every year. The university is also participating in ERASMUS program and also has conducted over 100 bilateral agreements with many countries.

### **Financial activity**

At the University of Pitești, the financial and accounting activity focuses on the management of financial resources and their efficient use, according to the legal provisions, being in charge of the Economic Department. The Economic Department operates on the basis of its own organization and functioning regulation, approved by the University Senate and according to the Accounting Law. The main instrument of management, forecasting and analysis of the economic and financial activity of the University of Pitești is the revenue and expenditure budget. The financial management at the university level applies the principle of centralized resource management. The main directions of the economic strategy are related to strengthen, develop and consolidate the funding. The management of the university's financial resources is regularly monitored and evaluated.

The activities of the University of Pitești are financed from state support and own resources: tuition fees, rentals, incomes from interests, scientific research, micro-production, dormitories and canteens, structural funds, sponsorships and donations. According to the data of 2016, budgetary allocations and own revenues financed the operation of the university roughly the same proportion (48%-52%). The main own income is coming from the student fees (34%), and from non-reimbursable funds (15%) and despite of the great number of projects the university is involved, research revenues are not significant (1%). The present economic performance and the financial situation of the institution is stable. It is important to point out that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The university has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies.

## **Scientific research**

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities and state institutions and nonprofit organizations as well. These connections show that the university has an important role in economic, cultural and social aspects.

The importance of research activities seems to be significant at the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. Scientific events, conferences and workshops organized by the institution are very important for the national and international visibility of the institution and beside the ‘outsider’ lecturers and participants it gives possibility for the students and teachers from University of Pitești to present the results of their research activities.

According to the UPIT Charter, the University of Pitești acknowledges its mission to generate and transfer knowledge towards society with scientific research, development, innovation and scientific transfer, individual and creative creation, as well as to capitalize and disseminate the results. For this reason, the University of Pitești boasts a long-term strategy, which has been defined through the UPIT Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 where the objective regarding the development of scientific research is an important priority.

The scientific research activities and university creation are performed within 17 research units (centers and laboratories) which are coordinated by the departments and by a Regional Center for Research-Development for Materials, Processes, and Products designed for the Automobile Industry – CRC&D-Auto which was founded within UPIT.

In order to boost the academic climate and culture which are based on research, Technological and Business Incubator was founded which allowed the research centers to intensify the collaborations with the socio-economic environment.

As it could be read in the self evaluation of the institution that the results of scientific research are valued within the Pole “Auto Muntenia” (Developed in the POS-CCE 2007-2013 the Operation “The development of support structures for the national- and international-oriented business”), by stimulating and developing new structures of business and investments both at regional and national level, with the purpose of producing motor

vehicles and automobile component parts with a greater added value. Additionally, UPIT, together with the City Hall of Mioveni town, the industrial platform Automobile Dacia, the Institute for Nuclear Research and the University of Constantin Brancoveanu is involved in the project “Industrial, Technological and Scientific Park”, a project with a strong socio-economic impact, which will allow technological transfer, development of new products, development in the infrastructure and community services. Currently, UPIT, with two universities and two research institutes, has developed the CESINA partnership aimed at providing support for the ALFRED national research project in the field of research and education for advanced nuclear systems.

### **Material resources**

University of Pitești is permanently working on reaching a good material base for education. The didactic activities within the University of Pitești meet the needs of the study programs (classrooms, didactic resources, courts, hostel/dormitories, cafeterias) with a total surface of 45,260 square meters. All areas where didactic activities take place are in accordance with the ARACIS standards regarding the number of seats in a lecture room, seminar room, or laboratory as related to the size of the student group. The teaching rooms consist of 51 lecture rooms, 77 seminar rooms, and 141 laboratories. The reconstruction of the central building of the university and the construction of the new cafeteria is in progress and would provide students high-standard conditions from next year.

The University of Pitești Library, with an uninterrupted activity of over 50 years, is an integral part of the institution and support teaching, learning, training and research activities of the students and teachers. The library functions according to its own organisation and functioning regulations.

The social and support services for students have also good material basis at UPIT, including medical services, psychological counselling services, counselling and career guidance.

The University supports student associations by offering the students the opportunity to organize their activities and encouraging their projects.

On the whole it is important to continue the present work to invest permanently and maintain the present good infrastructure of the university.



## **International cooperation and collaboration**

UPIT plays an important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In UPIT, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources, projects and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities.

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of UPIT these connections are in a perfect level as national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual as well as student level. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities and state institutions.

One of the main priorities of the UPIT is the internationalization of the activities of the university. In order to achieve this strategic objective, the University of Pitești has developed international framework agreements with many institutions in Europe and other countries.

The University of Pitești is constantly expanding the network of international higher education institutions in order to achieve mobility of teaching staff and students.

The collaborations with the national and international socio-economic environment have generated many research projects, scientific and cultural events, participation in mobility, organization of national and international competitions. The collaboration with the local economic, governmental and non-governmental actors is also very strong and shows perfectly the high level of regional importance of the university in this part of Romania.

## **Public information**

The communication of the University of Pitești with the main interested groups is achieved through several methods and the university offers clear information about the study programs, diplomas, teaching and research staff, facilities for students and all aspects of public interest. All these categories of information and data are available at ([www.upit.ro](http://www.upit.ro))

which is one of the most important part of the communication with the external environment. Also, all categories of data and information of public interest are available on the websites of the respective faculties. The channels of communication are ensuring the transparency of the public interest information, promoting the global image of the University of Pitești, promoting the educational offer, developing partnerships and cooperation with the socio-economic environment, with other universities in the country and abroad and with other interested groups.

The time schedule of the teaching activities is also available online. The University ensures transparent management by publishing on the homepage all the decisions, reports and other relevant information.

UPIT recruit students through its own admission procedures. It is also an important task to convince the freshly and earlier graduated students to come back and study on MA programs or other educational offerings of the university.

UPIT student involvement in research and competitions as well as the performance in national university sports competitions and national university artistic contests is remarkable, and on these events students have very good results.

During my visit I had the possibility to meet with some students and graduates of the UPIT and I found them very open minded, energetic and intelligent. They seem to be very loyal to their university and pay a lot of attention to their studies.

## **Conclusion**

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. I recommend the level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- Beside the present educational programs offered by the university the institution has to find market niches that reflects to the changing educational needs of the students.
- The university has to focus on maintaining the present good situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work which in an optimal situation meets the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the

university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development (developing new education programs, distance learning and e-learning programs, focusing on other potential target groups, etc.).

- Although the present number of students at university level is good, decline could result a decision making situation when the management of the university would be forced to cope with this challenge as well.
- University of Pitești should maintain and continue to invest in the infrastructure and facilities when own resources or any other funds allow.
- UPIT should maintain the intensive and good collaboration with local, regional, national and international actors, and the university has to keep the present successful sensitivity and adaptation ability for the permanent changes.

Finally, I would like to thank to the Rector of University of Pitești and to the university staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Pitești. At least but not last I would like to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

Pécs, 11-26-2017



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