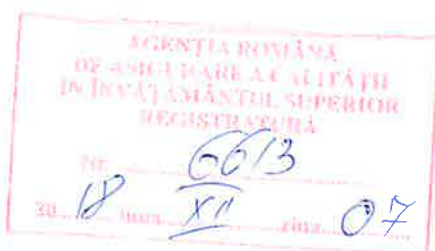


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Warsaw, 12 November 2018

Foreign expert Report

1. Introductory remarks

This report intends to impart observations relating to the Internal Quality Assurance System seen from the perspective of a foreign expert. It must be emphasised that the role of the foreign expert in the evaluation of AVU was severely limited for two reasons: Firstly, only a few documents, apart from the Self-Assessment Report, were available in English. They were: the Quality Assurance Policy and Quality Handbook, Internationalization Strategy, Research Policy as well as two reports prepared by the EUA panel evaluating the University in 2014 and 2018. Therefore, documents of paramount importance for understanding the direction in which the University is developing - AVU strategic and operational plans, Rector's reports and those prepared by specialised Senate commissions - were out of my reach. The English version of the Quality Handbook contains only a brief description of the Internal Quality Assurance System, and even there one can find diagrams essential for understanding the Internal Quality Assurance System but offering no explanation, for example Fig. 1 depicting the "*Structure model and QMS process interconnection*". Secondly, especially in its part presenting the degree to which the ARACIS standards have been fulfilled, that very extensive Self-Assessment Report (SAR) containing nearly 100 pages offers brief, sometimes two- or three-phrase references to countless source materials. These are contained in as many as 210 annexes to the Self-Assessment Report. Almost all of them were available in Romanian. Apart from providing information, the Self-Assessment Report contains few attempts to describe individual mechanisms and processes as well as their outcomes, and even fewer analyses. Therefore, it is difficult, just by reading, to realise how far the implementation of solutions included in internal regulations has progressed. This difficulty might be less of a hindrance if there were internal reports prepared by the Rector, University committees and University units. Regrettably, almost all of them are available in Romanian only. Therefore, during my site visit I participated in 17 additional meetings with various academic community groups, and that was apart from my plenary panel meetings with students, academic teachers, graduates and employers. The meetings were attended by the Rector and Vice-Rectors, representatives of the Commission for Strategy and Reform, Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation, Commissions for Quality evaluation at the Faculty level, Commission for Monitoring, Coordinating and Methodological guidance in developing the internal managerial control system, Commission for Scientific Research and Quality, Quality Supervisor, Quality Management Representatives, Ligii Studenților, Department for Quality Assurance and Improvement, Department of International Relations, Programs and Projects, Department of Communication and Institutional Transparency Assurance, IT, Information and Public Relations, Centre for Career Guidance and Counselling. Bearing all those limitations in mind, in this Report I shall seek to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Where is the University heading, and in particular - what is the role of the quality policy in the implementation of its strategic development plans?
2. In what way are stakeholders involved in designing, implementation and evaluation of the Quality Assurance Policy (QAP)?
3. Which system provides support to the implementation of Quality Assurance strategic plans?

4. To what extent does the Internal Quality Assurance System contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning?
5. What is the role of internationalisation in improving teaching and research quality?
6. Which platforms for reflecting on the development of IQA, its results and the development of quality culture operate at AVU?
7. How are AVU's stakeholders and the general public informed about education and research quality?

As my access to quite an amount of primary information was limited and the Self-Assessment report had certain weaknesses, the observations described below do not purport to be extensive analysis of the issues discussed.

I would like to take this opportunity and give my heartfelt thanks to the management of ARACIS for inviting me to participate in this site visit, and I am extremely grateful to all University representatives for creating a friendly atmosphere during the site visit and for an open and honest discussion. My particular thanks for patience in explaining a number of issues and for the readiness to provide additional material go to Vice-Rector Teodor Cilan and to Mr. Toma Sava for accurate interpreting at many meetings.


2. The Quality Assurance Policy in the Mission and Strategy of the University

Findings:

The University has a mission and strategic plan for 2016-2020 as well as annual operational plans. *"The university's mission is to generate and transfer knowledge towards society, additionally to producing valuable scientific research; furthermore, development, innovation and technological transfer as well as artistic creation are amongst the university's paramount objectives"*. Knowledge transfer is understood as educating students in line with programmes offered by the University in three cycles and the dissemination of knowledge by graduates. AVU's Mission emphasises the integrity of the quality of education, research and University governance. In relation to the quality of education and research, there is a commitment to achieve European standards, although this notion was not elaborated on. The social role of the University is also emphasised. *"AVU assumes its "engine for regional development" fundamental role and acknowledges its important cultural and civic function within the community it belongs to"*. The University Strategy and its annual operational plans identify 10 medium-term strategic objectives.

The objectives of AVU's development mentioned in the Mission are further explained in specific strategies and policies such as the Quality Assurance Policy, Internationalization Strategy, Research Strategy, Human Resources Policy, Doctoral School Strategy, Information Policy. Individual departments - that is the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation and AVU's administrative units - have their own strategies (also concerning research) for the period from 2016 to 2020.

The quality policy outlined by the Rector in a short document dated 2015 is to be seen as an element of strategic governance. It emphasises AVU's commitment to continuous quality improvement. The Strategy of the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation provides 10 strategic objectives involving such areas as the designing and implementation of study programmes, raising the competences of the teaching staff and students by conducting research, regular evaluation of services offered by the University including user satisfaction surveys, identification of new methods of more active student participation in the process of education



and research as well as the continuous improvement of the manager control system, including regular risk assessments.

Comments:

The fact that the University has so many documents concerning the Mission and strategic objectives and that it operates policies supporting their implementation must be seen in a positive light. It is highly commendable that the University's strategic plans include a comprehensive approach to its three areas of its functioning, that is education, research and governance. The University's statements focussing on the significant role of the quality policy and internationalisation in its development and modernisation should be properly appreciated.

However, they give rise to certain critical observations. Firstly, despite a decline in the number of students and problems with recruitment for teaching and research posts, the University wishes to continue providing education as part of all current programmes and also add new doctoral programmes. It is worth mentioning that within 2012-2018 the number of students has dropped by and vacancies constitute substantial percentage of all posts. In the same way, research is being extensively developed as evidenced by the existence of 4 scientific institutes and 14 research centres. SWOT analysis and other documents do not offer reflection on the practical implication of the dropping number of students for the University's future. This begs the question whether it would not be more advisable to concentrate means on those programmes and scientific disciplines where AVU's comparative advantage is clear. No clear determination of AVU's position on the national and international education markets was noticed - among others - by EUA experts. Secondly, the University is closely linked to the development of the region and city in which it is situated. It is from there that most students come from and research is largely geared towards the needs of companies and institutions operating in the region. It seems that this function of AVU should be more pronounced in the University's Mission and long-term strategic plans. Nota bene, the University operates no strategy going beyond five-year-long periods. Moreover, the development of strategic plans is linked to rector elections, that is University strategy proposals are prepared by potential candidates and announced before elections. That kind of approach to strategic planning seems highly problematic for a number of reasons. Thirdly, documents made available to the expert and the interviews that were held give no clear picture of the extent to which strategic objectives are implemented. It seems that more attention is given to the evaluation of the implementation of annual operational plans than to reflecting on a holistic approach to the dynamics of the implementation of AVU's medium-term strategic objectives.

Fourthly, it is not clear what the quality policy intends to achieve. There is a reference to Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement in the Mission but there is no mention of Quality Culture. However, this notion is used in other documents. When University representatives were interviewed, this issue was not clearly explained. It seems that the understanding of the notion of Quality Culture in AVU's context is poor even among representatives of bodies shaping the quality policy. No wonder that my interviewees took no unequivocal position on transiting from quality control and quality assurance to quality culture.

Ideas included in the European Standards and Guidelines, especially in their modified 2015 version, are conspicuous by their absence from documents presenting the quality assurance policy and the internal quality assurance system. This is partly due to the adoption of the ISO system as the basis for internal quality assurance.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Revise the Mission of the University by emphasising its links with the region.



- Strengthen the links between the Quality Assurance Policy and Quality Culture. In Quality Assurance Policy Statement show, how AVU understands (interprets) Quality Improvement and Quality Culture.
- Perform a comprehensive evaluation of the medium-term strategic objectives.
- Make the formulation of strategic plans more independent of rector elections.
- Consider the preparation of a long-term strategy encompassing a period of at least 10 years.

3. Stakeholders' participation in the quality processes

Findings:

The Quality Handbook identifies the University's main stakeholders but there are no AVU's academic teachers, researchers and administrative workers among them. From the formal point of view, internal stakeholders, that is employees and students, participate in the work of the University's collegial bodies. For example, students have their representatives in the Administrative Council, top-level executive body, quality commissions operating at the level of the University and its faculties. Student reports presenting the position of the student community on quality assurance are truly commendable. The Self-Assessment Report also provides information about numerous initiatives focussing on explaining the University's policies to its students. Students can voice their opinion not only on the quality of their academic teachers' work, but they also have access to survey results. A relatively high questionnaire response rate - over 60% - is really striking.

The University's list of over 2000 local and national business partners as well as international corporations is truly impressive. However, the participation of external stakeholders in University governance and the implementation of its policies - including the quality policy - is more limited. Employer representatives are involved in the work of certain commissions, although only in one at faculty level (Faculty of Physical Education and Sport). They are also invited to participate in occasional meetings. Cooperation with graduates is dealt with by the Alumni Department. Both groups influence the operation of the University by expressing their views in questionnaires. The University also develops cooperation with secondary schools.

Comments:

Basing on the documents analysed and interviews held it is to be concluded that the University's cooperation with internal stakeholders is quite well developed. Students emphasised a friendly atmosphere, no distance between academic staff and students and the readiness of the authorities to solve problems reported by students. Academic teachers' high rating in student questionnaires as well as very few cases put before the Ethic Commission seem to confirm this opinion. During their interviews, students had no objections as to the ways in which information about the work of collegial bodies involving their representatives was disseminated. Almost half of University employees are involved in the work of various collegial bodies and task commissions, therefore, they can exert real influence on the functioning of AVU and the units in which they are employed. Employers had a very high opinion of their cooperation with the University. Among other things, they emphasised their participation in the shaping of study programmes and the University's research and teaching. In a survey they expressed their great satisfaction with graduates and learning outcomes. On a five-point rating scale, the level of satisfaction oscillated between 3.91 and 4.88.

However, a closer look at practical cooperation with stakeholders reveals some problems. For example, Student Union representatives did not know to what extent their community had



participated in the development of the strategy and quality policy nor to what degree their observations had been included in the final version of the Self-Assessment Report. Nota bene, the final version of the Self-Assessment Report is not made available to the academic community, for example through an internal electronic platform. According to information provided by representatives of the Centre for Career Guidance and Counselling, when filling in questionnaires graduates give mainly their opinion on their status on the labour market and their workplace but not about study programmes and learning outcomes. Foreign stakeholders have practically no influence on the University's life, apart from a group of visiting professors.

Suggestions for improvement

- Develop a policy/strategy of cooperation with local businesses and the local government.
- Formalise the existing forms of cooperation with the socio-economic environment.
- Establish a social council of the University, with participation of representatives of external stakeholders advising the authorities on strategic issues.
- Extend the involvement of employers representatives in commissions formulating intended learning outcomes and curricula and in the teaching process as lecturers.

4. University governance and Internal Quality Assurance organization

Findings:

The ideas that are included in the Mission are reflected in the University's structure and internal quality assurance. A brief description of IQA is included in the English version of the Handbook of QA, otherwise known as the Quality Manual. This document contains the Mission of the University (but not QAP), a description of quality procedures, some processes and tools used for the purpose of the quality policy. The document identifies four processes: the activity management process, resources assurance process, production and support process and the control and improvement process. The organisation of IQA is based on the theoretical concept of TQM and ISO. Quality assurance tasks are divided between Senate commissions (Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation and its equivalents operating at faculties) and administrative units where the most important role is played by the Department for Quality Assurance and Improvement. Each department has its own quality supervisor. They take part in internal audits and identify risks, also those relating to students. The management of the system is shared by the Rector and Vice-Rector for Quality Matters. The former supervises: the latter, Quality Management representative (who is responsible for supervising the implementation of the ISO system at department level) and the Department for Quality Assurance and Improvement, to which research institutes and quality supervisors are directly accountable. The Vice-Rector for Education and Quality Assurance coordinates the work of quality assurance commissions at university and faculty level, faculties, teaching at institute level and quality supervisors, probably in the field of teaching. It could seem that the Rector mainly supervises research quality and the Vice-Rector - teaching quality. However, the second Vice-Rector and research commissions are not included in the IQA organisational chart.

Comments:

An informal quality assurance system plays a significant role in small organisations. It seems that this is the case of AVU. In the course of meetings organised with the participation of stakeholders, there were references to a number of informal initiatives and solutions based on long-term cooperation and direct contact which are not governed by formalised procedures. This refers, for example, to cooperation with business representatives, local government institutions as well as to monitoring and making amendments to study programmes.



The organisation of formal IQA is based on the theoretical concept of TQM and ISO which is why certain documents use terms usually reserved for industrial organisations and service providers rather than for higher education institutions, such as customers, supply. Regrettably, the ISO system has not been satisfactorily adapted to the specificity of higher education institutions. Even having read the documents that were made available it is difficult to get a clear picture of the relationship between the Quality Management System and the Quality Assurance System. The relationship between the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation a Department of Quality Assurance and Improvement, and the extremely important Commission for Monitoring, Coordinating and Methodological Guidance in Developing the Internal Managerial Control System is not very clear. There is a certain inconsistency evident in the classification of processes. For example, Fig.1 in the Quality Handbook presenting the third process - Production and Support Processes - basically leaves research out. Fig. 1 which is essential for understanding the relationship between AVU's basic processes offers no description. The chart presenting the structure of IQA includes no Senate commissions dealing with the teaching process, research or management system monitoring. The same goes for the above Commission for Monitoring, Coordinating and Methodological Guidance in Developing the Internal Managerial Control System. However, this Commission evaluates the quality of university governance in accordance with 16 quality standards. Consequently, an external observer may get the impression that the three areas of education, research and University governance are rather separate, although an integrated approach to the quality assurance system is emphasised in AVU's declarations. The contents of the table entitled "Reference indicators for evaluation and constant improvement of didactic quality" is completely incomprehensible. The column entitled "reference indicators" provides no indicators, only some areas of activity. For example, "teaching quality" is linked to "ethical and moral values in teaching" in the neighbouring column. None of those can be made operational when it is in this form.

Generally speaking, the system is overly regulated and there is no consistency in its presentation. It seems that quality control activities dominate over those which can be seen as ones improving and raising the quality of education and research. Repeated emphasis put on the issue of the compliance of study programmes and intended learning outcomes with the requirements contained in the ARCIS regulation is a good example thereof. Various groups of stakeholders had lots of problems with identifying benefits resulting from IQA, especially after the introduction of the ISO system. Basically, secondary benefits were quoted, such as the organisation of document circulation. The English version of the Strategic Plan Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation contains 10 strategic objectives and none of them focusses on a comprehensive evaluation of IQA. According to the Self-Assessment Report and oral information, the University operates an electronic data collection system containing information about the quality of education and research. As far as I was able to get a picture, reports focussing on quality assurance mainly contain information which is sometimes scant and with no profound self-reflection on the implementation of quality objectives and IQA outcomes. Most of the time, attempts to analyse results concentrate on ratings achieved in individual processes, for example student, graduate and employer satisfaction, HR policy, student recruitment, changes to the curriculum and syllabuses, etc.

This, in turn, begs the question whether such an extensive IQA system is necessary from the perspective of AVU's strategic objectives and quality culture. Perhaps it would benefit from streamlining and attracting the attention of the academic community to the dissemination and strengthening of common academic values.



Suggestions for improvement

- Perform a holistic evaluation of the internal quality assurance system from the perspective of the strategic objectives that are included in the quality policy.
- Adapt the solutions of the internal quality assurance system which are based on the ISO system to the specificity of a higher education institution.
- Show how AVU responds to the requirements contained in Chapter One of ESG '15. Consider mapping AVU's quality standards against ESG 15 standards and ARACIS standards.
- Increase the analytical component in quality assurance reports.
- Develop a new version of the Quality Handbook taking the above changes into account and bring the description of the system in line with the PDCA cycle.

5. Admission, study programs review and Student-Centred Learning (SCL)

Findings:

Admission, programme designing and monitoring as well as changes made to their structure are governed by numerous external and internal regulations. This also refers to learning outcomes and their evaluation at individual stages of education as well as the student competence development support system. The University has no formal document clarifying the development of student-centred learning at AVU. The Quality Manual reads that *"the mechanism of teaching and learning is centred on student's development and the development of his/her competences"*. Objectives linked to the process of education are ambitious. For example, according to the provisions of the Internationalisation Strategy, *"educational process is to elevate the pedagogical act to a level comparable to the average European level"*. The Quality Manual includes information indicating the application of benchmarking: *"The study programmes are constantly compared to the ones offered by other national or foreign universities in order to assure competitiveness"*. There is also a structure supporting education quality at university, faculty and study programme level. For example, university-level study programmes are analysed by the Senate Commission and programme coordinators supervise the quality of the curriculum and syllabuses at study programme level. The Quality Handbook lists the Curriculum Council, but this body does not appear in the organisational chart of the University. To some extent, students are able to shape their educational pathway by deciding which elective courses to choose. They may also study part of their programme at other national or foreign universities. AVU recognises time spent on studying elsewhere on the basis of ECTS and in students' opinion the system function well. In a dozen or so phrases, the Self-Assessment Report describes issues relating to student-centred teaching methods, among them a lower percentage of information transfer teaching methods, development of partnership between students and their teachers, application of the latest IT techniques and support in the development of teaching staff's didactic competences.

Comments:

Basing on the material available and the interviewees' opinion, it is difficult to say whether or not AVU has achieved critical mass in the implementation of student-centred learning and whether or not qualitative improvement in teaching and active student involvement in the self-learning process is visible. During their interviews, students said they could not see a radical transition to student-centred learning yet. Moreover, nobody knows to what extent such new teaching methods result from teachers' own initiative and to what degree they are due to the University's policy.



The implementation of the student-centred learning idea in Romania is difficult due to numerous legal restrictions making the education process far less flexible. Romania's national legislation does not allow for launching programmes offering interdisciplinary education at BA level. It is difficult to ensure that students are able to shape their individualised learning pathway as it is the section of compulsory subjects that is dominant, and the percentage of optional/elective subjects is rather low. For example, the Management programme offers only two-three courses in each year. It was explained that the most talented students are unable to graduate earlier as national regulations prevent them from doing so. It is for the same reason that in the absence of relevant procedures the University is unable to recognise learning outcomes achieved outside the higher education system. During the site visit it was said that the University had little room for manoeuvre when defining intended learning outcomes as it had to adapt those proposed by ARACIS. On page 63 of the Self-Assessment Report we read: *"student transfer from one study programme to another, from AVU to a different university (national or foreign) is possible only outside the academic year"*. Information provided by the Vice-Rector for Education and Quality Assurance confirms that despite provisions relating to programme benchmarking the method is not applied in practice.

The University authorities are aware of a certain lack of flexibility in the shaping of its programme offer and the inflexibility of the study programme was perceived as a weakness by SWOT analysis. As the number of students continues to decline, so is the chance to recruit the best candidates because those with secondary school grades being below average are also accepted. However, the University has not developed procedures to identify persons at risk of being taken off the student register as their preparation for studying is insufficient. There are no formal ways of helping that group. Offering full-time programmes only slightly reduces the differentiation of the student population. The proportion between the number of students and one academic teacher is quite high - about 26:8. In the case of professors and associated professors it goes up to 52:5. Moreover, one professor may supervise as many as 10 Master's degree seminar participants and an unspecified number of Bachelor's degree seminar participants. This situation is rarely seen at Western universities and it certainly limits the individualisation of education based on the master-disciple relationship. The site visit also revealed that the percentage of active methods of teaching did not exceed 30% on average. A significant percentage of students participating in groups focussing on research and academic projects reaches 50% and is to be seen in a positive light. A relatively high number of teaching hours and a high level of requirements concerning the number of publications per year do not favour teachers involvement in the development of modern teaching methods. There is no hard evidence that the University has developed systemic solutions encouraging its teaching staff to implement innovative teaching techniques.

So, what is the education quality demonstrated by students during their programme and by graduates on the labour market? The Self-Assessment Report does not offer much information about student achievements in the country or abroad. SWOT analysis does not deal with education quality, either. On the other hand, however, information obtained during the site visit shows that students publish the results of their research work, a platform for assessing the quality of scientific output has been created and student scientific conferences organised every year by each faculty serve the purpose. The quality of theses is hard to assess as no analysis of that kind has been performed. The materials that were made available to me contain neither a grade distribution over a period of time nor do they provide grade distributions across individual courses and programmes. It seems that the evaluation system of learning outcomes may slightly malfunction as their presentation in syllabuses is not very accurate. It is only professional competencies and transversal competencies that are discussed whereas knowledge is sometimes



left out. There are general and specific course outcomes added to some syllabuses (eg. Mathematical Foundations of Computer Science). Sometimes learning outcomes and course outcomes are identical.

In spite of all those weaknesses, employer representatives and graduates present at the meeting with ARACIS did not hesitate to give high ratings to AVU graduates' qualifications. For some years now, the employment rate calculated on the basis of graduate surveys has been oscillating from 46% in the case of the Faculty of Science to 88% in the case of the Faculty of Engineering. There have been years when all graduates of the Faculty of Theology have found a job. But in a region where the unemployment rate is as low as 1% this may not be a major achievement. However, the above statistical data leaves a bit to be desired as - firstly - it does not show the distribution of employment rates per programme (no analyses of that kind are performed) and secondly - we do not know what percentage of graduates undertake a higher cycle programme. Above all, such study should show the NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate, that is how many remain out of employment and higher education, and the unemployment rate per individual programme and not only per faculty.

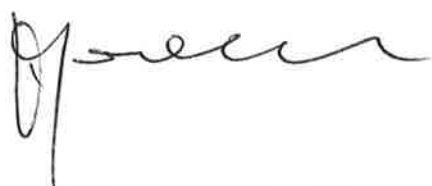
Suggestions for improvement

- Develop a SLC model reflecting the context in which the teaching/learning process takes place at AVU, as well as the policy of achieving the intended outcomes of SCL model.
- Intensify student-centred learning training for teaching staff.
- Develop a system of identifying underperforming students and implement a system of assistance.
- Extend graduate career tracking by adding - for example - views on learning outcomes and study programmes as well as analysis of tracking results.
- Analyse the grades distribution across courses and study programmes and its dynamics over a period of time.
- In the matter of periodic evaluations of the quality of theses and their reviews - consider the establishment of a university commission or entrust this responsibility to one already existing.

6. Internationalization

Findings:

The Internationalisation Strategy adopted in 2015 underpins internationalisation-related measures. The document contains extensive and reliable SWOT analysis, offers a strategic vision of AVU's internationalisation and lists 5 key areas of activity (internationalisation of educational processes, enhancement of scientific research, international mobilities, internationalisation at home and external collaborations), for which objectives and actions have been identified. It has been already said that internationalisation is to improve the quality of education and research, boost the competitiveness of the University and its visibility on international education markets, and attract more foreign students thus generating more income. The promotion of the European dimension of higher education and European cooperation in quality assurance is one of its objectives. The University wants to introduce joint education as part of various dual and joint programmes which also applies to doctoral programmes. Foreign students starting their programme at AVU are given a year to master the Romanian language.



Visiting professors are supposed to fill in the gap created by vacant positions and stimulate research development.

Students and staff participate in mobility programmes, mainly in Erasmus+, and in international scientific conferences. By 2020, the number of students and staff effecting mobilities as part of the relevant programmes is to grow in both groups by 30%. In the case of administrative workers, a 10% grow is to be expected. There is a striking increase in the number of memorandums of understanding and cooperation agreements with foreign partners, mainly with EHEA. In the academic year 2011/2012 there were 50 of them, whereas in 2016/2017 - 96. AVU is a member of regional university networks including EUA. According SAR an insufficient command of English and few classes provided in this language is a weakness of the internationalisation process. Therefore, it is assumed that by the end of 2020 80% of teaching staff and administrative workers will have achieved at least C1 level in English. That's why the Department of the English Language offers free language courses.

Comments

Striving for internationalisation and creating a link between this process and quality is visible in many statements made by the University. The internationalisation strategy is comprehensive as it does not refer to education only but also to research, internationalization abroad and at home, and cooperation with foreign partners. Some objectives and actions are quantitative which facilitates measuring implementation progress. The document has, however, a certain weakness. It defines no time limit for the achievement of its objectives, although there is a time limit for some of them. Its short-, medium- and long-term milestones are grouped together. Moreover, it is quite doubtful that all of them can be achieved. The announcement that each academic teacher will publish at least four articles in prestigious scientific journals is a good example here. It is difficult to plan the launch of joint programmes when the relevant national regulations do not allow it. It will be just as hard to increase the number of visiting professors because of the low salaries that have been offered to them. It is doubtful that foreign students could be interested in being educated in Romanian and extending the duration of their programme by the additional year that has to be spent on studying Romanian.

The University's progress in the implementation of the objectives of the strategy concerning the above area of education is rather modest. The percentage of foreign students in the total number of students is about 2%, the number of foreign students at AVU being there as part of mobility programmes is also low. Internationalisation at home is where there are relatively few achievements. There are few lectures provided in English and few foreign lecturers. Within the last three or four years, 28 persons from 10 countries have delivered their lectures. There is no evidence of using information technologies allowing students to participate on line in programmes at foreign universities. No steps have been taken towards adding elements of inter-cultural knowledge and competences or work in multi-cultural communities.

The situation in research seems to be slightly better as there is evidence that the scope of cooperation with foreign partners has been growing over last years. As mentioned earlier, foreign partners do not take part in the University governance process.

Suggestions for improvement

- Analyse the effectiveness of the internationalisation policy and amend the provisions of the internationalisation strategy to make them more realistic.



- Consider the establishment of an advisory board with the participation of representatives of foreign partner HEIs providing advice and opinion on the implementation of the internationalisation policy.
- Make the command of a foreign language (English) certified in appropriate documents (C1) an absolute requirement to be met by newly employed teaching and research staff and in the case of those already employed - impose the duty to obtain a document certifying their command of a foreign language at a level not lower than C1.
- Consider the introduction - at least at the beginning - of financial incentives for academic teachers providing courses in English.

7. Public information

The objectives of the information policy are ambitious. On page 72, the Self-Assessment Report reads: *"Public information offered by the university's management shall be comparable, on a quantitative and qualitative level, to that offered by universities in The European Higher Education Area"*. However, the 2016-2020 strategic plan does not contain provisions relating to the information policy. There are dedicated units in place to support the implementation of the information policy. Among them is the Department of Communication and Institutional Transparency Assurance whose role is to coordinate the University's webpage and Moodle - an internal communication platform. An IT unit - Information and Public Relations - operates as part of the University administration system. Communication with external stakeholders is based on various forms such as the website of the University (in two language versions - Romanian and English) and the webpages of its faculties, social media, direct contact (visits to secondary schools, telephone calls, emails), conferences or handbooks for students and separate ones for foreign students, printed advertising material, etc. The website contains basic document such as the Strategy and policies, regulations concerning the organisation of the University and processes of education, educational offer, etc. The fact of publishing reports prepared by various collegial bodies such as the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation is a highly commendable thing. The Romanian version of the website contains folders for students, graduates and the Erasmus+ programme. Basic documents presenting the internal quality assurance system are to be found in the Calitate subfolder (Quality).

Comments

The evaluation of the transparency of AVU's activity and its information policy is difficult for a foreign observer not understanding the Romanian language. My interviews held with University employees revealed that the University operated an information policy, but no formal document was shown. The extensiveness of information about the process of education, research and quality assurance appearing in the Romanian version of the website is a very positive thing. The website would benefit more from creating separate folders for employers and candidates.

Unfortunately, quite a number of critical remarks may be formulated about the English version of the website. The main reservation is that the website does not offer a number of key documents in English and those visiting the English version website are referred to the relevant documents in Romanian. This is in contrast to the above statement and the intention to enhance AVU's international visibility. I was quite unable to find the Internationalisation Strategy. The Alumni folder is no longer available and the Erasmus+ folder is now incorporated in the Students folder. The University has published two EUA's institutional evaluation reports but not those prepared by ARACIS. No self-assessment reports prepared for the purposes of external quality assurance were published. Increasing the number of foreign students is one of



the objectives of the internationalisation policy but nevertheless, there is not much information provided in foreign languages which would present the University and its process of education. Foreign candidates will be able to read information about the curriculum but not about intended learning outcomes of the study program. No stringent procedure assessing the effectiveness of the information policy and using users' views has been developed. However, the website is unofficially evaluated as transpires from information obtained during the site visit. Its results are submitted to the Vice-Rector for Academic Transparency and International Relations. The unit supporting the information policy gives rise to certain doubts. The Department of Communication and Institutional Transparency Assurance is accountable to the above Vice-Rector, and the IT, Information and Public Relations unit - directly to the Rector. The persons interviewed agree that there have been cases of task duplication.

Suggestions for improvement

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the information policy from the perspective of its strategic objectives.
- Harmonise the organisational chart in its part relating to the information policy to ensure consistency of information published.
- Strengthen the monitoring of the website and improve the website and its contents provided in English. To achieve this, the availability of basic documents in English would have to be improved.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Suleu', with a long vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.