

**External Evaluator's Report**  
**to the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education**  
**(ARACIS)**  
**about the Institution Organizing Doctoral Study Programmes**  
**(IOSUD) of the Education Sciences domain within the Doctoral**  
**School of Psychology**  
**at West University of Timisoara**  
**2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

I was appointed as an International Expert of ARACIS and was invited to join the evaluation team for the assessment of the doctoral study domain in Education Sciences at West University of Timisoara (WUT). The evaluation process was conducted online. The period of the audit: 11-15 October 2021. The evaluation team had a preliminary meeting (Zoom) Monday 8 September in the afternoon to discuss the main methodological aspects related to evaluation and establish the details of the visit.

Many experts took part in the evaluation process as WUT has 12 Doctoral Schools with 22 doctoral domains carried out in four fundamental fields. The composition of the team in the doctoral study domain of Education Sciences: Prof. dr. Alois Ghergut (coordinator) – “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Prof. dr. Péter Várnagy (International expert) – University of Pécs, Valeria-Maria Paraschiva (PhD student) – Transilvania University of Braşov. Our cooperation with professor Ghergut was very fruitful. We were in touch before, during and after the institutional evaluation visit. He helped me a lot to clarify a few uncertain issues.

The evaluation process began on Monday 11 October at 9 a.m. at Zoom platform with the introductory statements of Prof. dr. Adrian Opre (mission director) and Prof.dr. Adriana Giurgiu (coordinator of the IOSUD committee). Next prof. univ. dr. prof. dr. Marilen Pirtea I (rector of WUT) welcomed the evaluation team.

## **METHOD**

In my role as an International Expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview about the doctoral study domain of Education Sciences.

Therefore

- I previously studied the Internal Self-evaluation Report of the doctoral study domain of Education Sciences and its' Annexes;
- I also studied the websites of WUT, which were available in English;
- I attended most of the common sessions according to the timetable of the institutional evaluation visit (11-15 October) as an observer (simultaneous translation was available);
- I addressed written questions to the stakeholders, which I could not discover in the documents in advance or could not follow during the online meetings.

My findings and comments are based on the studied documents, the information I have gained from the websites of TUIASI and I have heard during the meetings. Some quality indicators are used according to Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) to carry out the diagnosis.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

### **The administrative, managerial institutional structures and the financial resources**

The Doctoral Schools are organised disciplinary, linked to fundamental domains. The doctoral study domain of Education Sciences operates in framework of Doctoral School of Psychology (DSP). DSP was established in 2014 and doctoral training programme in the field of Education Sciences started in 2018. Two other doctoral programmes (Psychology, since 2014; Sports Science and Physical Education, since 2019) are conducted within the framework DSP.

DSP has 50 students out of which 25 students follow the Doctoral Training Program in the field of Psychology; 15 students follow the Doctoral Training Program in the

field of Sports Science and Physical Education; 10 students follow the Doctoral Training Program in the field of Education Sciences.

Five coordinators (2 Professors, 3 Associate Professors) can be found in the field of Education Sciences out of which four meet the habilitation standards in force. Most of the affiliated coordinators (3 out of 5) are tenured within the WUT.

WUT is a public higher education institution and its Doctoral Schools seem to operate according to the legal provisions that govern the higher education system in Romania and in compliance with the university's own internal regulations. The general frameworks for the functioning of doctoral studies within IOSUD-WUT are stipulated in two main documents: 1. the Charter of WUT, 2. the Institutional Regulation on the organization and development of doctoral studies and the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the Doctoral School of Psychology.

The Regulation on the organization and functioning of the Doctoral School of Psychology was recently revised and complies with all mandatory requirements regarding the provisions art.17, paragraph 5 of GD 681 of 2011.

UCT use appropriate software application (University Management System) for the record of doctoral students. All PhD students of the Doctoral School of Psychology are managed through this UMS software.

Scientific research is continuously monitored and evaluated annually. UCT also uses a dedicated software to check the similarity index of all doctoral theses. All doctoral theses within the DSP are compulsorily verified with software called iThenticate (<https://www.ithenticate.com/>).

### **Research infrastructure**

It is very difficult to gauge that the research infrastructure of DSP fulfil all the requirements (research and development units, laboratories, libraries etc.) without being present myself on site. I was convinced by my colleague, who took part in the site visit, that the research facilities are good for the doctoral students of DSP.

The information and documentation resources available to the doctoral students is considerable. The Central University Library among the first four university libraries in Romania. RoEduNet is available for doctoral students through the Central University Library and the access to quite a number of other licensed software are also very beneficial for them.

WUT has the necessary patrimony to carry out doctoral programmes within a process of quality education and scientific research. According to the Self-evaluation Report with its annexes and the information gained from the websites, the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology has five research centres.

### **Quality of Human Resource**

The quality of human resources and the scientific potential at DSP is on a good level. According to the self-evaluation report, DSP has 17 PhD supervisors at the moment. Five of them in the field of Education Sciences of which four meet the minimum CNATDCU standards.

In the field of Education Sciences the number of PhD students are very few at the moment. The supervisors are not coordinating more than 8 doctoral students at the same time. The doctoral supervisors' number is in ratio with the number of students. More than 50% of the doctoral supervisors in the evaluated doctoral field are tenured academics at WUT.

### **EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

#### **The number, quality and diversity of candidates enrolled for the admission contest**

17 candidates entered the admission competition out of which five graduated in a master's programmes at other higher education institutions in the period 2018-2020. Five places financed from the state budget were put up for competition in the evaluated period.

The admission requirements and procedures are well described. The admission criteria and selection procedures are in line with the European standards. Besides the recognition of prior studies results, other scholarly activity such as research and publication records are taken into consideration in the selection process. The admission contest is carried out in accordance with the selection methodology.

The dropout rate is not high. Only two PhD students were expelled out of the 12 enrolled students in field of Education Sciences.

### **The content of doctoral programmes**

WUT is engaged in scientific research also through doctoral programmes. The curriculum for the doctoral students in the field of Education Sciences based on advanced university studies and includes 4 disciplines, of which two disciplines are dedicated to the in-depth study of research methodology (Research methods and scientific authorship) and statistical data processing (Statistics for Behavioural Sciences). The training program also includes the discipline Ethics and academic integrity, which is usually compulsory for all doctoral programmes. WUT pays attention to a special area in the field of Education Sciences as one of the courses is related to adult education and training (Guidelines and trends in the research of lifelong learning).

The level of the curriculum design, teaching and assessment and the academic and professional standards are, in general, in line with the standards expected of a qualification at EQF Level 8. I believe that, in general, the learning outcomes of the Doctoral Programme of Education Sciences is consistent.

### **The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation**

The indicator cannot be evaluated in the doctoral programme of Education Sciences because there are no doctoral students who have completed their doctoral studies during the evaluated period.

## **Quality of doctoral theses**

This indicator cannot be evaluated without doctoral students who have completed their doctoral studies during the evaluated period.

## **QUALITY MANAGEMENT**

### **Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system**

The internal quality management system is well described and regulated detailed at WUT. It has structures, strategies, policies and procedures for quality assurance.

The internal quality assurance system within DSP for doctoral studies in Education Sciences is built according to the internal regulations of WUT.

Internal quality assurance is done through collaboration between the management structure of the DSP and structures dedicated to quality management existing in WUT, especially with the assistance of Department for Quality Management. Monitoring the internal quality assurance system is a permanent process within WUT.

WUT collect feedback from doctoral students. It is mandatory to access the online evaluation module for teachers and support staff by students during the period set for assessments.

### **Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources**

The most important information (e.g. the regulations of the doctoral school; the admission regulation; the regulation for completing the studies, including the procedure for public defence of the thesis etc.) available on the institution's website, but only in Romanian.

The doctoral students have access to academic relevant national/international databases and scientific publications.

Academic misconduct and plagiarism are serious breaches of academic standards. The verification of the originality of the scientific papers, which include doctoral theses is available at WUT, as an internet-based plagiarism detection service is available for doctoral students called iThenticate (<https://www.ithenticate.com/>). Every doctoral student can benefit the availability of this software in the preparation of manuscripts sent for publication, although use of it is not so frequent according to the experience of the online meeting with PhD students. Each PhD student also has access to scientific research laboratories or other facilities in DSP.

## **Internationalization**

Valid collaboration agreements with numerous European universities on the level of doctoral studies in Psychology were mentioned in the self-evaluation report. I could not find any information about similar cooperation in the field of Education Sciences in the internal evaluation report. No exact figures can be found about the involvement of PhD students in mobility (ERASMUS, CEEPUS) or attending international scientific conferences, with the exceptions of a few Erasmus projects (lead by Professor Simona Sava) and the lectures of a few invited specialist in the framework of Erasmus programme. I received additional information at my request about the mobility and international agreements related to the PhD programme of Education Sciences, provided by the Department of International Relations of WUT.

It is encouraging for the future that 4 international students started their studies in the PhD programme of Education Sciences this year.

Involving more foreign professors as co-supervisors and increasing the number of doctoral students' participation in longer mobility is encouraged. It might be beneficial for all stakeholders. Only one supervisor is authorized to conduct doctoral students in English at DSP. WUT has a strategic plan for internationalization, but more efforts are needed.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

### **Strenghts**

- Transparent regulation system and procedures;

- Well developed infrastructure for the doctoral students;
- Adequate human resources;
- The scientific commitment of the academic staff.

### **Weaknesses**

- International visibility;
- The longer mobility of doctoral students;
- The recruitment of (international) PhD students;
- The information at WUT's websites in English is very limited. Much more information in English or other foreign languages are need on websites.
- The election of the students' representatives are not organised very well.

### **Opportunities**

- Stronger European/international cooperation;
- Increasing the number of international students;
- Improving the recruitment of PhD students.

### **Threats**

- Non-competitive wages (maintain the high quality of human resource);
- The low number of PhD students in the Education Sciences programme
- The pandemic situation cause difficulties for mobility

## **OVERVIEW OF JUDGMENTS AWARDED AND OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
1.	PI	A.1.1.1.	fulfilled	
2.	PI	A.1.1.2.	fulfilled	
3.	PI	A.1.2.1.	fulfilled	
4.	PI	A.1.2.2.	fulfilled	
5.	IP	A.1.3.1	fulfilled	
6.	PI *	A.1.3.2.	fulfilled	
7.	PI *	A.1.3.3.	fulfilled	
8.	CPI	A.2.1.1.	fulfilled	



No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
9.	CPI	A.3.1.1.	fulfilled	
10.	PI *	A.3.1.2.	fulfilled	
11.	PI	A.3.1.3	fulfilled	
12.	PI *	A.3.1.4	fulfilled	
13.	CPI	A.3.2.1.	fulfilled	
14.	PI *	A.3.2.2.	fulfilled	
15.	PI *	B.1.1.1.	fulfilled	
16.	PI *	B.1.2.1.	fulfilled	
17.	PI	B.1.2.2.	fulfilled	
18.	PI	B.2.1.1.	fulfilled	
19.	PI	B.2.1.2.	fulfilled	
20.	PI	B.2.1.3	fulfilled	
21.	PI	B.2.1.4.	fulfilled	
22.	CPI	B.2.1.5.	fulfilled	
23.	CPI	B.3.1.1	not applicable	
24.	PI *	B.3.1.2.	not applicable	
25.	PI *	B.3.2.1.	not applicable	
26.	PI *	B.3.2.2.	not applicable	
27.	PI	C.1.1.1.	fulfilled	
28.	PI *	C.1.1.2	fulfilled	
29.	CPI	C.2.1.1.	fulfilled	
30.	PI	C.2.2.1.	fulfilled	
31.	PI	C.2.2.2.	fulfilled	
32.	PI	C.2.2.3.	fulfilled	

No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
33.	PI *	C.3.1.1	fulfilled	
34.	PI	C.3.1.2.	partially fulfilled	More efforts are needed on the internationalization, especially in international co-supervision.
35.	PI	C.3.1.3.	partially fulfilled	International joint doctoral programmes, more courses conducted in English etc. are strongly recommended to speed up internationalization.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

I would like to emphasize that WUT represents a high quality in the Romanian higher education system and the activity reach the requirement of the European standards of education and scientific research. The PhD programme of Education Sciences at WUT is fairly new. They started their operation only a few year ago. They are representing a good quality at this stage of their existence, although some room for improvement can be found, especially what I have mentioned in my report. The doctoral students' motivation, the staff (teachers, researches and administrators) commitments and professionalism are the basis of the success.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to leadership of WUT, all the university staff and each member of the evaluation team, especially professor Ghergut for the support during the evaluation mission. Also thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

Pécs, 22-10-2021