Report

of the foreign evaluator for

"Universitatea Ștefan cel Mare"
din Suceava

Doctoral field of
Electronic engineering, Telecommunication and Information technology

AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Membră cu drepturi depline în Asociația Europeană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior ENQA
Înscrisă în Registrul European pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior - EQAR
Bd. Mărăști nr.59, sector 1, București, România

Foreword

On June 17th 2021, I received an invitation from ARACIS to participate in the evaluation of USV. My participation was finalized by a contract which was accepted August 17th and renewed August 30th.

My participation is limited to the doctoral field of electronic engineering, telecommunications and information technology.

Personal background

I have been a full member of the French accreditation agency for engineering programmes, Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs – CTI, for two 4-year mandates (which cannot be extended) and one 4-year mandate as an "expert" to CTI, participating in CTI international promotion and helping the full members during the evaluation visits.

I occasionally collaborate with foreign accreditation agencies. My most recent involvements were with Belgian AEQES[1] (2016-2017: intermediate evaluation of computer science programmes in French-speaking universities and institutes), with Spanish ANECA[2] (2015, institutional evaluation of National Polytechnic University of Armenia in Erevan) and with ARACIS (2017, institutional evaluation of Eftimie Murgu university in Reșița).

Preliminary work

The [English] electronics/telecom/information department self-evaluation report is a 40-pages document structured according apparently to some official grid. This is the most relevant document among the collection provided, totaling 7815 pages! Such a volume absolutely prevents reading everything within the delay between assignment and "visit". Some important piece of information might go unnoticed.

> **Recommendation (ARACIS):** *the Agency should change its requirements so that a brief of manageable size is provided to evaluators.*

The self-evaluation report puts a strong emphasis on *Quality Assurance*: it aims at demonstrating in a very rigorous way that all legal criteria are fulfilled. This is required by the Law so that the University can receive its public budgetary funds. There are ample pointers to annexes in the report to describe the constraints and the way they are handled to support and prove the argumentation. But these annexes should not be considered as main constituents of the case.

Unfortunately, from an evaluation point of view, this sheds no light on the intrinsic quality of the doctoral school. In my opinion, a short "strategic statement" should present the University vision of the doctoral

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1   Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité dans l'Enseignement Supérieur, agency for quality evaluation in higher education
2   Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación

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studies. This is even more important when you consider USV had two doctoral schools covering fourteen fields.

> **Recommendation (ARACIS):** *the evaluation framework should require a short statement (no more than 5-10 pages) exposing the vision and goals of doctoral studies.*

This could be complemented with a short note by doctoral domain supervisors explaining how they adhere to the global vision (no more than two pages).

The doctoral field I was assigned to covers three sub-domains which are grouped somewhat artificially. For instance, *tehnologii informaționale* could as well be a sub-domain of *Calculatoare și tehnologia informației*. The vision statement could explain why such grouping was chosen.

Resources

The doctoral field has four professors resulting in an excellent supervisor rate (approx. 2-3 PhD students per professor). This means students can receive optimal support and advice

> **Recommendation:** *USV should continue providing its premium supervisor rate.*

Equipment is state-of-the-art and sometimes bleeding-edge. Partnership with industry/companies seems to be based on a win-win strategy.

Enrollment figures are difficult to interpret by a foreign evaluator not deeply familiar with the Romanian system at doctoral level. Therefore, I cannot assert whether admission is critically competitive or not. Selection could contribute to attracting high profile candidates and pulling university ranking to prominent position.

Side remark: admission criteria require language proficiency. From interview, "language" can be Romanian or some other foreign language usable at USV, generally English, but after agreement can be Ukrainian for example due the the proximity with Ukraine. But the proficiency level is not measured in the scale defined by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. Also, as a measure of promotion of the Romanian higher education system, it could be a good idea to require B1 or B2 level in Romanian at the end of the studies (perhaps more feasible on a complete bachelor + master cycle than on a single doctorate 3-year cycle).

> **Recommendation:** *score language levels in the CEFRL scale.*

The research department has a reputation sufficiently established so as to make it part or lead international programmes and receive its share of funding, increasing own financial resources (complementing those of Goverment origin).

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Interviews

PhD students

They are very satisfied with the general work environment at USV, though they mention some difficulty to support themselves financially in daily life. This is not specific to Suceava. Every doctoral student in Europe faces the same situation. USV, when possible, offers teaching part-time jobs to PhD students to alleviate the problem.

PhD students point out a noteworthy aspect of USV: it is very easy and common to merge contributions from several doctoral fields to make decisive progress in one's own thesis.

> **Recommendation:** *USV should develop more formally the inter-disciplinary collaborations for the higher benefit of graduate PhDs.*

PhD graduates

They are very proud for graduating at USV and grateful to their professors.

The thesis theme was frequently a key factor when getting hired. In the other cases, the intellectual flexibility acquired during their studies (mainly during the PhD cycle) made the decision.

Employers

The primary goal of a doctoral school is not to prepare students to professional life but to create knowledge. However, PhD graduates have no difficulty to be hired or to create their own business. The present research themes address industrial concerns; this facilitates transition to jobs.

Employers praise the skills of the PhDs, their adaptability and flexibility. The latter have no difficulty to integrate company structure. Usually, their first position is directly related to their research.

Employers wish that some specific topics receive further training, considering the present trend towards "big data".

> **Recommendation:** *USV should add training in data analysis and special statistics.*

Quality

As already mentioned, the whole case is *Quality Assurance* oriented to prove that all legal criteria are fulfilled. This is perfect from a legal point of view but not satisfactory for global quality evaluation.

I put aside the "value" of the research conducted at USV as there is ample proof that its "value" is recognized by peers according, among other indicators, to the number of citations.

The annexes hint that USV has implemented a Quality System, but it is not described. Quality System and Quality Assurance are two different, complementary topics. More than often, there is confusion between

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both. The interview with the USV coordinator of the internal evaluation did not clarify the subject as this was not the main reason for the interview and the question itself is global to the university.

Recommendation:	*USV should make sure there is a clear understanding about the goals of Quality and Quality Assurance.*

The self-evaluation report and the annexes make a picture of a "rigid" system, freezing individual initiative. To be caricaturist, a computer collecting the arguments from the report could mechanically grant a "go"/"no go" mark to the university.

A quality system should bring freedom of action to the various agents by providing easy-to-understand, manageable tools automating routine to spare time for creativity and value-added tasks.

A collection of 7815 pages results in a legitimate doubt about a viable quality system. From personal experience, Quality Systems are always too verbose and go too much into details.

A short description of the general quality context would help in making an opinion about the flexibility and responsiveness of the university. Rules must not be the goals but tools to facilitate fulfillment of university missions. Of course, there are issues without discussion, such as admission rules, otherwise the matter could legitimately be taken to the ethics commission. The existence of the ethics commission should not be either an excuse for not changing anything nor experimenting new ways.

Recommendation:	*USV should take great care that its Quality System, if any, or its internal procedures do not result in bureaucracy and loss of initiative.*

Conclusion

Evaluating a doctoral domain is much more difficult than institutional evaluation or programme evaluation. By essence, research is not guided by a set of fixed rules. Creating new knowledge implies freedom and initiative. It cannot be constrained into a rigid framework.

Supervisors have demonstrated they enjoy full freedom in their domains. Remarkable results are a consequence of this freedom.

I have no doubt about the ability of USV to conduct fruitful research in the electronic engineering, telecommunication and information technology field. It has created all the tools necessary for the task. Resources are available and high-quality (e.g. teaching staff).