

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca
External Evaluation Report
Doctoral study domain: Philosophy

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I. Introduction

This report is oriented to inform about the institutional evaluation process of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The assessment was conducted from July 12th and July 20th, 2021, in the online modality because of the restrictions related to the COVID19 pandemic. It is based on the activities of the Experts Committee of the Philosophy Domain and the common meetings. The doctoral studies of Philosophy of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca were established in the Nord University of Baia Mare in 2007. Since that date, the program had sustained growth leading to the current situation.

II. Methods used

The assessment was focused on the Philosophy domain. It was based on the analysis of the internal evaluation report and its Annexes conducted before the contact with the University and the interviews with the representatives of the Technical University of Cluj Napoca and the Council for Academic Doctoral Studies, the Ethics Commission, representatives of the Quality Assurance area, and, in the Philosophy area, the officers in charge of the internal evaluation report, the academic staff, a group of PhD students, a group of Graduates of the PhD programme, representatives of the research area, and employers of some doctoral graduates. In all the cases, the interviews were carried out together with a national expert and a PhD student also designated by ARACIS, appealing to a set of questionnaires apt to get information relevant to analysing performance indicators. Due to the blended format of the evaluation, all the interviews have been conducted online. Still, relevant data about functioning and infrastructure were included in the questionnaires to obtain an overall view of the institutional capacities.

III. Analysis of performance indicators

A. Institutional capacities

Under this criterion, the quality of the institutional structures is taken into account, paying attention to managerial procedures, the profile and abilities of the academic staff, and the situation of research and internationalisation within the PhD programme.

A.1. Administrative and managerial institutional structures

The Technical University of Cluj Napoca has a clear regulatory framework to allow the proper advancement of academic activities. Its mission is clearly stated in the Charter of the Technical

University Cluj Napoca. It is suitably oriented to the development of people, processes and products, emphasising training and scientific research, the connection with the national and international contexts, and dissemination and communication in society at large. The vision is also clearly established and combines academic excellence and contribution to the social environment, in line with Horizon 2020 strategies and internationalisation goals. The general regulations of the Doctoral level are explicit and operative, including normative and administrative structures according to current binding standards.

In this framework, the PhD programme in Philosophy is fully aligned with these guidelines. It is clear from its functioning and from the research projects developed during the last years that deal with knowledge-based society, innovation and development in doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships, and theoretical issues related to the Romanian context. This coincidence shows an interesting theoretical contribution to the overall functioning of Doctoral studies and the University in general.

The organisation of the Doctoral level fulfils the requirements of the Law of National Education, and the Philosophy program follows them adequately. In the same line, the management measures are based on fitting internal regulations, with effective protocols for the functioning of the different areas. These procedures allow proper monitoring and follow-up of the students, including appropriate tools for the anti-plagiarism check.

The indicator is fulfilled.

A.2. Research infrastructure

Research infrastructure is suitable and covers the needs of the program. According to the internal evaluation report and the information obtained from the interviews, academic staff and the students have adequate access to the Computer Lab, which has modern equipment in enough quantity to support research and teaching activities. During the interview, the administrator in charge of the area described adequately the services and the measures implemented during the COVID19 crisis to ensure the continuity of the academic activities. He provided information about the ongoing plans to expand the Lab's capacity.

There is also a proper coverage of library services, with specific funding for acquiring new items according to periodical consultation to the teaching staff, and adequate procedures for interlibrary loans are at disposal. If these procedures were insufficient to locate the required books or papers, different actors agree that there are active networks within the PhD programme community that help with these issues. In general, there seems to be a very good institutional response in this field.

Recommendation:

- Creating a research unit oriented to promote investigation and internationalisation of the local outcomes could be a proper tool.

The indicator is fulfilled.

A.3. Quality of Human Resources

The teaching staff has good profiles to conduct appropriate instruction and research and lead younger scholars' training. Their track record is fully aligned with the topics and objectives of the PhD programme. However, some of them have not yet maximal qualification, which is a point to be improved. The ratio of students by supervisor is high, even if the program is hiring an additional staff member, which shows the growth of the program and the adequate

institutional response. This ratio should be corrected to avoid a drop off in quality. The conditions of full-time employment are adequate, but as in the case of the number of supervisors, it should be elevated, and it will be essential to keep this proportion.

During the interview, the academic staff representatives described their main tasks and perspectives of the doctoral training, explaining the role of the set of introductory courses within the program. They defined their pedagogical perspective emphasising the significance of interactive lectures and the goal to produce strong engagement in the students. Regarding the topics covered by the program and the possibility to find cases where the interests of the students could go beyond the expertise of the supervisors, they outline suitable measures to balance the main lines of development of the program with the collaboration with a network of experts from other higher education institutions.

The PhD students expressed themselves satisfied with the work of the academic staff both in their courses and their supervising activities. They underlined the quality of the lessons and their participative approach that produced overall engagement and stressed the continuous support they received during their studies. Some of them emphasised the hard work conducted by the academic staff during the COVID19 crisis, which was able to provide support and help them to continue working in a challenging situation.

In view of the current situation of the expansion of the supervisors' staff that will imply in some cases the redistributions of students and the resulting change of supervisor, the response amongst the students was positive. They considered the incorporation of a new teacher as an asset for the whole programme. They claimed that they had already known the teacher, they were informed in due time, and all the reallocations were consensual. For these reasons, there were not ill-fated situations, which is an indication of careful procedures from the management staff.

In agreement with the regulations of the Doctoral studies of Philosophy, research is a clear objective within the PhD programme, and the academic staff contributes to its developments through research projects funded by different sources. Those research projects also include post-doctoral and PhD students, ensuring proper training oriented to the acquisition of investigation skills. The activities are varied and include publications of books, chapters, articles, and the organisation and participation in conferences and workshops in the field. During the interviews, the academic staff showed a sound emphasis on promoting the early development of research activities.

The PhD programme in Philosophy includes internationalisation among its main goals, and its members are well-aware of the University's ongoing programmes and opportunities. During the interviews, all the relevant participants manifested to have received enough information about this point. However, internationalisation experiences are not part of the everyday life of the programme, neither amongst their academic staff nor amongst the students of graduates, showing a point to be improved. Considering that there are active programmes, a good number of students are fluent in English, as was manifest during the interviews, and the topic is installed as a possibility among the different actors, a step further seems at hand. It should be incorporated among the following primary institutional objectives.

Recommendation:

- The PhD programme should promote the maximum qualifications of the supervisors that do not have them today to improve the quality of teaching staff.

The indicator is fulfilled.

B. Educational effectiveness

Under this criterion, the quality of the PhD programme is taken into account, paying attention to the enrolment procedures, the content of the programme, the outcomes and evaluation protocols, and the quality of the doctoral theses.

B.1. The number, quality and diversity of candidates enrolled for the admission contest

The PhD programme in Philosophy has clear and suitable procedures for recruitment. The students come from different kinds of MA studies, and only some of them have previously conducted specific studies in philosophy. To face this situation, the programme has sound measures to provide adequate tools and the critical mass of knowledge sufficient to ensure proper disciplinary abilities as well as appropriate means to enhance the skills of those with previous experience in the area.

The institutional origin is not broad and tends to be concentrated in few establishments. This situation should be enhanced through adequate actions to attract new students. The candidates are diverse in age, track record and socio-economic origin, which is taken into account by the management procedures, and proper measures to support the disadvantaged students are regularly implemented. During the interview with the administrator of the Computer Lab, he described specific mitigating measures to solve the lack of proper equipment that impede the students to follow virtual classes that were executed. The retention ratio is adequate and indicates effective overall measures.

Recommendation:

- Given that the students come from different disciplines, more attention to the difficulties in academic writing is desirable through the incorporation of spaces for reinforcing these competencies.

The indicator is fulfilled.

B.2. Content of the doctoral programme

The training programme is thematically adequate, up-to-date and open to include cutting-edge topics. As specific features, it contemplates the attention to upgradability of contents, the enhancement of interdisciplinary studies, the broadening of lines of philosophical reflection oriented to their impact on the society at large and the partnership with other institutions. It is based on the guidance of a supervisor and a guiding committee on the basis of full-time training that leads to a PhD thesis. It includes a set of relevant courses oriented to the primary fields of Philosophy, with regular monitoring and supervision.

It also comprises suitable attention to method focusing on adequate procedures to improve the PhD students research skills. The courses also pay due attention to academic ethics, which is addressed through a particular course, following the institutional guidelines described in the institutional documents and exposed during the interview with the officer in charge of the Ethics Committee. This correlate ensures a proper application of the general guidelines and is likely to promote good practices. Participation in academic activities is encouraged together with the publication of papers.

During the interviews, the students manifested satisfaction with the structure and content of the PhD programme, considering that it provides adequate knowledge of the primary disciplinary topics. At the same time, it is flexible enough to contemplate the students' individual interests. They also claimed that the programme meets the needs of the students regarding the enhancement of their research skills, taking into account that they come from different career paths. On this point, some differences could be identified amongst the students

concerning writing abilities, which shows the need to consider the introduction of specific spaces related to this need.

The procedures oriented to monitoring and supervision are well-stated. They constitute part of the everyday life of the program, and the measures are recognised as effective enough by all the members of the PhD programme.

Recommendations:

- Regarding the set of courses, adopting some measures to make it more flexible or introduce optional alternatives to provide them more adaptability to different topics of interest for the PhD students could be an asset.

The indicator is fulfilled.

B.3. The results of the doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation

The PhD programme of Philosophy includes proper attention to the outcomes. They are related to the acquisition of strong professional abilities, reflected in the production of academic results. In this line, the programme promotes the publication of papers during the PhD studies offering opportunities in local journals. The profile of these publications is adequate, but they do not have enough quality parameters regarding indexation on global databases that are nowadays the basis for quality monitoring of scholarly publications. There is also a suitable promotion of participation in conferences and academic activities in general, which is strongly present in the discourse of all the members of the PhD programme. Furthermore, the overall development of the Doctoral studies offers enough opportunities leading to the PhD thesis. Even if some delays are identified, they are not beyond the standard.

Concerning the overall results, the group of graduates claimed, during the corresponding interview, that the PhD programme reaches their expectations both during the lifetime of the programme and after it. They underlined the connection with the labour market. There was mention of significant activities that use to gather the academic community with transversal participation of all its members. In the same line, the employers emphasised the quality of the graduates, their ability to fulfil the requirements of the labour market, and their overall good reputation amongst the employers in the field.

The evaluation of the results is conducted through adequate measures, paying attention to different relevant aspects. The PhD programme includes proper steps of monitoring and follow-up the development of the students' progress, but it is also appropriately focused on the performance of the academic staff. For this reason, it foresees periodical self-evaluation of the teaching staff and consultation with the students. There are precise channels for participation in decision making. However, they can be enhanced to broaden the involvement of all the members beyond the managerial staff. In some cases, the mediation of the teaching staff seems to be substantial.

Recommendations:

- The journal where the students are expected to publish should upgrade its indexation. The quality of the journals and publishers should be taken into account as a principal aspect of academic production.
- Broadening of the strategies of dissemination and territorial articulation. Given that the national context is suitably emphasised in the institutional guidelines, this aspect could be reinforced by developing specific dissemination projects.

The indicator is fulfilled.

B.4. Quality of doctoral theses

The procedures to ensure the high quality of the doctoral theses are within accepted standards and fulfil the institutional procedures and parameters. During the interviews, the managerial officers, the teaching staff, the students, and the graduate expressed no troubles related to the associated aspects.

The indicator is fulfilled.

C. Quality management

Under this criterion, the measures for quality assurance are taken into account, paying attention to the implementation of specific procedures, the access to information and learning resources, and the quality of internationalisation mechanisms.

C.1 Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system

The PhD programme of Philosophy takes properly into account the implementation of procedures for internal institutional evaluation of the different processes that constitute the everyday life of the programme. They include monitoring the quality of the PhD students work, the current state of infrastructure and the improvement needs, the quality of the outcomes of the different members and levels.

During the meeting with the authors of the internal evaluation report, several questions were responded to about the program's goals, structure, and management, underlining the procedures for quality assurance. Assessment is conducted on the basis of suitable mechanisms of feedback gathering and permanent evaluation. The students express that they are satisfied with their participation in decision-making. However, the instances provided as examples were limited. This tool to enhance quality assurance should not be undermined.

Recommendations:

Participation in decision-making, both in the case of the students and the graduates, could be improved. It seems that they find means to dialogue, but the institutional channels are traditional and not innovative.

The indicator is fulfilled.

C.2. Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources

The channels for institutional communication are efficient and consistent with the general regulation of the Doctorate studies level. They provide accurate information on the legislation, admission steps and conditions, procedures during the studies, expected features of the PhD theses, and complete information about the defence protocols. The dates of defence of particular theses are properly spread and can be accessed by the public at large. Copies of the theses are also accessible through the library.

During the interviews, the general opinion of all the members agrees that all the relevant information is at disposal in a simple way, and the channels are sufficient and effective. The information about grant opportunities seems to be at disposal. However, few of them take them as a real option, which suggests that more decisive actions to promote these actions should be

expected. Regarding the administrative procedures in general and those oriented to access learning resources, all the members of the PhD programme claim that they tend to be easy and the obstacles are minimal, finding willingness of the administrative staff to help them and solve any issue.

Recommendations:

- An enhancement of the follow-up of the graduates and their labour integration, paying attention to expanding the traditional career paths could produce positive outcomes.

The indicator is fulfilled.

C.3. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is well-present in the framework of the PhD programme. The managerial staff underlines the objectives related to this aspect, describing the existing schemes where the students are able to participate, providing details about experiences and opportunities of joint supervision. However, beyond some specific cases, the global belonging of the PhD studied is not fully developed. The research projects are mostly local, and international activities are not part of the everyday life of the members of the PhD programme. Given that the interest on this point and the institutional channels are at hand, it is expectable that this aspect will be enhanced during the following years.

Recommendation:

- Internationalisation should be strengthened at all levels, both for supervisors and students. Measures related to better use of mobility programmes, enhancement of the global belonging of the research projects, publication in well-ranked international journals and publishers and participation in international networks and societies, which are especially active in the field of Philosophy, are expectable.

The indicator is fulfilled.

IV. SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The teaching staff is motivated and has an excellent relationship with the students. The students have a good background and capacities to follow the enhancement measures of the PhD Programme actively. The infrastructure is adequate to conduct academic and research tasks. There are suitable channels of dialogue with graduates and employers that could be the basis for further improvement.

Weaknesses

Internationalisation actions are not fully developed, even if the framework of opportunities is reachable. There is not enough attention to the quality of the journals in which the students are expected to publish during their studies. There is not a proper research unit to promote specifically the related activities. Dissemination activities and territorial articulation could be better addressed.

Opportunities

There is a proper basis to improve the profile of the teaching staff to reach maximal qualifications and the major impact of research. The local, regional and international network

of academic collaboration could be enhanced, taking into account the current development. The current joint work with graduates allows exploring the broadening of the range of labour opportunities for the graduates in the field of Philosophy.

Threats

The immoderate growth of the programme without proper attention could produce negative effects. The imbalance between supervisor and students could undermine the overall results. The lack of attention to the weaknesses and the corresponding solving measures could stall the proper development of the activities.

V. Overview of judgements and recommendations

No.	Type	Perf. indicator	Judgement	Recommendations
1	A2	Research infrastructure	Need of more specific attention	Creation of a research unit to promote the area
2	A3	Human Resources	Academic staff with diverse qualifications	Improve the profile to reach maximal qualifications
3	B1	Candidates enrolled	Diverse origin	Attention to different needs, specially academic writing, through specific academic offer
4	B2	Content of the doctoral programme	Benefits to provide flexibility	Introduce flexible modalities or optional alternatives to better fit the needs of the PhD students
5	B3	Results of the doctoral studies	Journal for students' publication not indexed	Upgrade indexation and enhance the notion of parameters of quality of publications
6	B3	Results of the doctoral studies	Few channels for dissemination and territorial integration	Reinforce the strategies of connection with the local and national environment through specific projects
7	C1	Quality assurance	Possibility to enhance participation in decision making	Improve participation of students and graduate in decision making as a tool for quality assurance
8	C2	Transparency and accessibility	Possibility to improve the connection with graduate and labour market	Enhance the follow-up of the graduates and their labour integration to expand the traditional career paths

VI. Conclusions and general recommendations

The PhD programme of Philosophy is in the process of sustained growth, and the effort to produce significant breakthroughs in the main aspects. It is strongly recommended to deepen the ongoing measures paying attention to the current shortcomings.

