

University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Carol Davila of Bucharest (UMFCD)
External Institutional Evaluation Report
2021

The evaluation context and organisation

On October 2021, I was invited by the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (ARACIS) as an international expert for the institutional evaluation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Carol Davila (UMFCD). Due to the pandemic conditions, the evaluation was conducted entirely online during the week of November 1-5. The assessment process took 2.5 days in total.

Prior to the visit, ARACIS via its cloud platform provided us with the documents needed for the evaluation, including the English version of the UMFCD self-assessment report (164 pages, translated to English) and related annexes. Although these annexes were drafted in Romanian, upon request, documents translated in English were provided. Despite some editorial errors, in overall, the internal report document is easy to read and provides pertinent information.

The visit followed a meticulous plan provided beforehand by ARACIS. A preliminary meeting with all panel members was organized and dedicated to the preparation of the evaluation process, ensued by a series of plenums with the university representatives, including the managers of UMFCD, members of the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEAC) and of the Ethics Commission, Doctoral graduates, Employers of UMFCD doctoral graduates, and PhD students. In addition, I had one-on-one meetings with the Vice-rector for teaching, the Vice-rector for research and internationalisation, International relations officers, and the student support service.

During all meetings, an interpreter was present to assist international evaluators.

The teams from ARACIS and UMFCD in charge of the organisation ensured a professional work environment and were of great help. Their professionalism and reactivity are highly appreciated.

The self-assessment report and the discussions during the evaluation process provide a panoramic view on all activities of UMFCD.

The institution

UMFCD (<https://umfcd.ro>) is a high education state institution with a legal personality. UMFCD is composed of four Faculties (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Midwives and Nursing), 24 departments and 256 disciplines. No fewer than 1568 full-time teachers are in charge of ensuring the teaching, training, doctoral supervision, scientific research and clinical activities in the four faculties.

For the last academic year (2020 - 2021), no fewer than 12000 students were registered at UMFCD, including 10785 students in undergraduate programs, 149 master's students and 1208 students enrolled in doctoral studies.

The main missions of UMFCD are to provide students with high-quality educational programs and to conduct high-level fundamental and translational research. In order to achieve such ambitions, UMFCD has established a series of objectives to be met: continuous improvement of student-centered educational processes and scientific research, internationalization,

digitalization, transparent management system enhancement, and strengthening the role of the university in the economic and social environments.

From research and education perspectives, UMFCD has long set a clear goal of establishing itself as a leading University in Romania with an international status. Although the ambition is high in the face of current challenges, we consider the mission attainable in view of the means deployed.

Management and budget

UMFCD is managed by a set of elected members:

- The University senate which is composed of: The Rector, the Vice-rectors, the General administrative director, the Deputy general administrative director.
- Deans and Vice-deans in charge of the Faculties management
- Department directors.

Regarding the budget, the university has two sources of revenues, one of which comes from the Ministry of Education and Research, the other mainly comes from school fees. Based on the budget of the civil year 2020, 72% (14% higher than that of 2019) of the resources come from the state and 28% from other sources (the university's own resources). The main budget headings are personnel salaries, scholarship and running expenses. At the beginning of the year 2021, UMFCD displays a positive budget balance of 282 million lei (57 million €).

Recommendations:

- At the management level, although the gender parity is not an issue at UMFCD, high care should be given to it by stakeholders during the election of the managerial team.
- UMFCD should be proactive about increasing its own resources (without increasing the tuition fees). In this regard, two options can be considered. The first one could be the development of continuing education (paid training) for health professionals. The second is to take part in EU mobility programs (EIT, Erasmus Mundus...) which provide high tuition fees.

Infrastructures and facilities

For its missions, UMFCD manages over 259 amphitheaters and teaching rooms for over 15000 seats. The teaching rooms are equipped with projection materials and are connected to internet networks. The capacity of educational spaces is expressed precisely in square meters per individual occupying the teaching rooms, the computer rooms, the library and the laboratories. In addition to these facilities, clinical activities are mostly carried out in public hospitals where students have access to over 21,000 hospital beds in Bucharest including some well reputed ones. Moreover, for the discipline of anatomy, the University offers high-standard facilities located at the Museum of Anatomy, which is a part of the European network of Anatomy museums.

The library has a capacity of 1400 seats. It provides students with an access to publications (Romanian and foreign collections) in the reading rooms, long-term publication loans, and electronic resources. Interestingly, UMFCD has its own publishing house and contributes to the editing of several types of documents. In order to keep the cap on future spending and to continue its development, the University has engaged in two investment plans including the construction of a new research center for which the financial means are now secured.

Based on the self-assessment document, the University seems to enjoy a set of infrastructure and patrimony facilities and offer the students comfortable conditions for learning and training. However, due to the lack of onsite visits, it is very difficult to give an objective opinion about the quality of such infrastructures. Therefore, no recommendation can be proposed regarding the infrastructures and facility issues.

Education

The University operates in full compliance with the principle of equal chances for all candidates. The admission to UMFCF is managed in accordance with the national legislation in force and its own admission rules, which are applied to Romanians as well as to candidates from other countries (both inside and outside the EU). The admission conditions are notified and promoted through multiple communication channels six months before the admission.

The admission for the eight proposed undergraduate programs is made exclusively on the basis of the baccalaureate diploma and the high school academic transcript. For the three master's programs run at UMFCF, the admission decision depends on undergraduate results of each candidate as well as a written test. Online courses, webinars and written documents are provided to train candidates for the admission sessions. Moreover, UMFCF provides special measures for handicapped students to put them in the same conditions as all others and facilitate their admission process. Each full-time undergraduate and master's program requires 60 credits per year (30 credits per semester), which is in line with European rules. The tuition fees are fixed and amended by the University senate. Some issues related to tuition fees were raised during the evaluation and need to be clarified. The presentation of each study program is provided under the form of a package that is divided in 9 chapters describing the objectives and outcomes, the curriculum and curricula, thematic programs as well as the evaluation methods. Each study program includes mandatory courses/topics and optional subjects for each year, throughout which students work in close relation with teachers and professors, either face-to-face or online. UMFCF performs regular and continuous improvements of the study programs based on state-of-the-art disciplines, the emergence of new technologies, new challenging health problems, as well as teachers' and students' feedbacks.

Due to the specificity of education carried out at UMFCF, the analysis of the education performance is carried out mostly on the basis of two indicators: rate of admission to residency for which the admission is programmed at the regional level; assessing students' satisfaction based on standard and anonymous questionnaires.

During the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, UMFCF has implemented all required technical and human means to ensure continuous education online.

Students who are soon to graduate also benefit from accompanying measures to plan their career paths. Such measures include assistance in writing motivation letters and presenting themselves at a job interview.

For the external evaluator, the education path, from the admission until graduation, follows standard rules as observed in most reputed European Universities. Transparency seems to be the golden rule of UMFCF.

Recommendations:

- More actions should be taken to promote the educational programs and attract talented students from other regions as well as from European countries.
- Explore possibilities for promoting educational programs taught in English (in addition to the existing one).
- Enhance the quality of the English version of the website.

Scientific Research Activity

At UMFCF, each faculty has its own research strategy that fits within the general goals of the scientific activity of the University: develop high-level scientific research among teachers and students. The scientific research is under the coordination of the Vice-rectorate for scientific research. The university is involved at the regional and national levels in establishing multi-year research strategies in the field of biomedicine. In this regard, UMFCF is an active member of the Alliance for Life Science network for promoting advanced biomedical research in Central and Eastern Europe. The research activity at UMFCF is conducted in 20 scientific research centers and 36 laboratories. During the evaluated period, 1268 doctoral students were enrolled and 736 doctoral degrees were awarded. The doctoral students were supervised by 271 doctoral advisors, over 80% of whom belonged to the Faculty of Medicine. The University dedicates a substantial amount of its revenue for supporting research, i.e. for proposing research positions, supporting publication fees, providing financial help to applications targeting international programs. Young scientists are particularly beneficiaries of the financial support of the University through research grants of excellence and mobility. Although the scientific production is different between faculties, departments and laboratories, it is still strong on both quality and quantity, as evidenced by the number of indexed publications and a very limited amount of articles published in predatory journals.

Recommendations:

- Provide financial means to attract international scientists (foreign post-doctoral fellows)
- For teachers coordinating major projects, introduce mechanisms to discharge them (partially) from pedagogical duties
- Promote interdisciplinary research
- Young teachers who are in their first years of employment at UMFCF should benefit from financial advantages to help them start their careers.

Scientific Integrity and Ethics

Preserving uncompromising scientific integrity and ethics is fully integrated in the UMFCF charter of good conduct, enabling students and professors not only to improve their research quality but also to develop a civic conscience. In the same vein, the University is proactive about promoting academic independence in thinking and equal opportunities.

Researchers, doctoral advisors and students at all levels are aware of the charter. Two active commissions are in charge of the issues related to scientific integrity and deontology.

UMFCF applies mechanisms to prevent fraud within the research and teaching activities. It takes measures to detect and eliminate plagiarism, which is the fraud commonly committed. Students may enroll in ethics and academic integrity courses and they are informed on a regular

basis of good research practices. Fraud cases are instructed by ethics commissions with the help of the legal affairs of UMFCF.

For the external expert, the scientific integrity and ethics are highly regarded by UMFCF. During our meetings with the university's graduates and PhD students, unanimously, their awareness about scientific integrity, ethics, scientific fraud consequences was confirmed.

Recommendations:

- Apply systematic similarity search on all scientific documents, manuscripts, master reports, theses.

Internalization

Internationalization and international visibility as an elite university for training in the medical professions is one of the nine pillars of UMFCF. The internationalization is headed by two bodies, a Vice-rector for research and internationalization and an international relations office dedicated to student support services. The internationalization is categorized in three panels: students mobility, teachers mobility, scientific collaborations. Generally, the three types of actions take place within the framework of EU programs. One of the driving forces for incoming mobility is the presence of an English-taught program at the Faculty of Medicine. This may explain why the mobility within the Faculty of Medicine is higher than the others. Beside students mobility, teachers mobility (outgoing and incoming) is well implemented, but less developed than students mobility. Due to the pandemic situation, the mobility (outgoing and incoming) was almost stopped during the two last academic years.

Obviously, the internationalization can be seen in research, where the UMFCF is very active as evidenced by the number of projects involving international partners.

Recommendations:

- For attracting talented foreign students to UMFCF, it is mandatory to make the English version of the website more informative and up to date.
- Promote programs taught in English.
- Provide student handbooks for incoming students in order to facilitate their installation.
- Promote sponsorship schemes targeted to foreign students by Romanians.
- Consider possibilities to attract international professors (invited professors...)

Quality Management

Quality assurance is developed on different activities of UMFCF: administration, education, teaching and research. To do so, the University has implemented efficient tools in accordance with the national rules in force. Quality assurance is performed at different levels: University, Faculties, educational programs and doctoral schools. Special care is paid to the assessment of study programs, the teaching staff, transparency, examination and grading procedures, as well as teaching resources. Through each assessment, students play a key role, as they are involved in the evaluation of the administrative staff, teachers, and courses. At UMFCF, the teaching activity of each study program is assessed once a year and internal reports are drafted. Students are regularly invited to evaluate the activity of employees with whom they have direct contact. Following students' feedbacks, recommendations are issued and actions are taken by UMFCF

authorities to improve the activities. The administrative staff benefit from the taken actions thanks to training opportunities to develop their skills.

During the evaluation, students were asked for their opinions regarding the quality of management and the feedback was very positive.

The conclusions of the external examiner are very positive. Remarkable and concrete actions are taken to improve the performance of all relevant areas of activity.

Recommendations:

- The student survey sheet should be simpler and more pertinent.
- The analysis of students' feedbacks should be proceeded with greater caution. Sometimes students evaluated their teachers on a personal level and did not leave relevant remarks about the courses that had been given or the disciplines that had been taught.
- Graduate employment rates should be used as a performance indicator.

Final remarks

Beyond its primary role as an institution dedicated to training health professionals, the UMFCDD displays high ambitions to ameliorate the quality of teaching, training and innovations. To reach such objectives, the University has implemented rigorous organizations, robust education systems, international partnership and strong scientific research activities. UMFCDD is active on self-questioning and criticizing, and therefore is able to improve itself through the implementation of an efficient self-evaluation and rigorous quality management procedures. The University has dealt efficiently with the pandemic situation and proved its ability to overcome challenges. Despite these performances, the University should consider possibilities to improve its attractiveness and visibility at the international level.

Final recommendation

I recommend providing the University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Carol Davila of Bucharest (UMFCDD) with institutional accreditation with the rating **High Confidence**.

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