



Foreign Expert Report

Introduction. This report focusses on selected - and in my opinion - the most important areas of UBB's activity. This is my attempt to reflect upon them from the perspective of my international experiences that I have gathered working as an expert. Not surprisingly, the basic source of information in this case includes SAR, documents posted on the University's webpages and extremely valuable information and views gathered during my online interviews with a number of groups making up UBB's academic community. These talks were of much greater importance than is normally the case, due to the large scale of organizational and systemic changes implemented only this academic year, and not presented in the SAR prepared earlier.

I would like to take this opportunity and thank the ARACIS agency and prof. Simon Lache for inviting me to participate in this review. I wish to thank the Rector Prof. Daniel David and Vice-rector Prof. Marko Balint and all leaders and heads of units, students and academic staff for an open and honest exchange of views and all support I received. My particular thanks go to Dr. Adina-Maria Cornea and Mr. Matej Idu for their excellent interpreting at the interviews and to Adrian-Virgil Hudrea for making smooth Internet connections and Vlad Popescu from ARACIS for all support I received.

Mission and Strategic Planning. The Vision and the Mission ambitiously determine the University's position not only as a leader on the domestic education market but also as a unit recognised in Europe. The documents emphasise advanced research and high-quality education provided by the University in line with international standards. The new Strategy clearly defines UBB's goal - to acquire the status of a world class university. UBB stands out from other higher education institutions thanks to its multiculturalism, multilingualism and inter-disciplinarity of its programme offer (including an extremely extensive choice of programmes provided in Hungarian and German) whose essential part includes theological studies examining various religions, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, culture of respect for diversity and lifelong learning. These documents could be made more attractive to UBB's stakeholders if the Mission and Vision better reflected the scope of university activities and distinctive features of the UBB and its long-term aspirations. The statement that "*the main mission of UBB is to ensure modern, student- centred education through outstanding expertise and character formation, in which scientific, cultural- and artistic sporting activities are harmoniously combined in the academic model of a world-class university*" may suggest, that education is the main field of university activity, and the reference to the world-class university, that UBB has already achieved such status. Interviews held with various academic groups confirmed that they know University's distinctive features and its long-term aspirations.

The Mission is reflected in mid-term (the most recent one is for 2020-2024) and annual action plans concerning the University and its faculties. There are separate strategies for scientific research, human resources development and internationalisation. Unfortunately, the above documents are posted on the University's webpage in Romanian only (except with the new Strategic Plan). The 2016-2020 Strategic Plan reflects the University's Mission and includes 11 goals concerning four areas: education, research, cooperation with stakeholders and

governance. Each of those goals is broken down into objectives with their own KPIs. However, the KPIs are formulated in a way making it harder to assess progress in the implementation of those objectives. Most of the time these are vague numbers of students, study programmes or organisational units but also - for example - *"Methodology, research and reports on the careers of graduates and their entry into the labour market"*, *"Activity of Quality Assurance Commissions at Faculty Level"*. Unfortunately, the new Strategic Plan has not eliminated those shortcomings, worse still, it has even made them more pronounced. It identifies 111 goals referring to 6 areas: education, research, research-development-innovation, relations with the society, development of quality culture, human resources, administration and services. This document is more of a collection of intentions and assumptions than a list of strategic objectives to be transferred onto an operational level. This is one of the examples of defining the 4.2.2.4 strategic objective: *"Increased cooperation with universities, research centres/institutes abroad. RDI/cultural/artistic/sporting programmes must be continually interconnected to joint activities with international partners"*. An excessive number of objectives and their vagueness coupled with failing to identify ways leading to their achievement may cause problems with understanding the Strategic Plan and difficulties with a clear determination of stakeholders' role therein. That may weaken the involvement of the academic community in the implementation of UBB's strategic tasks. The interviews that I held with various groups of stakeholders exposed that kind of problems due to the vague clarifications of strategic priorities.

The Strategy does not show how to accomplish its objectives. Rarely does it indicate activities to be undertaken and there is no mention of KPIs. During the talks with people responsible for the preparation of the strategic plan, I was informed that the new plan took more account of qualitative measures. The five-year plan indicates neither persons responsible for task implementation, nor deadlines and sources of financing and - as far as the new Strategic Plan is concerned. Therefore, it is difficult to say to what extent individual strategic objectives are realistic and to what degree the University's financial sustainability will be preserved. Meanwhile, almost all interviewees identified insufficient funding as one of the main challenges. The present human resources are at the minimal level with many unfilled vacancies and the university budget in the last year shows a surplus. However, the State's budgetary subsidies constitute as much as 77% of the University's income which makes UBB dependent on business cycle and the State's financial policy.

UBB is a large organisation operating within the public sector, however, its plans do not go beyond five years and - worse still - they are linked to university Rector elections. Therefore, it is difficult to convince prospective students and learners that UBB is a future-oriented institution if the basic period in strategic planning may be shorter than the duration of their programme. As early as a dozen or so years ago, UBB leaders declared their intention to be included in the first 500 best HEIs according to the Shanghai university ranking, but they failed to define a path leading there. The absence of multi-scenarios planning taking account of changing external circumstances and the risks that it involves is another weakness of UBB's strategic planning. UBB has the potential and should introduce a formal system of risk assessment and risk management not only for strategic planning.

All strategic stakeholders were involved in the preparation of the strategy, and the strategic plans, at least in outline, are known to students and employees. The coordination of work on strategic planning and its monitoring are the responsibility of the Senate Commission for Strategy and the Centre for University Strategy and Quality Management (CDUMC). There is a procedure governing mid-term plan evaluation. The first evaluation is performed after two

years. Reports provided by the Centre confirmed that the evaluation of plans and proposed improvement actions include all plans. As a result, strategic planning is compatible with the PDCA cycle. However, a more precise assessment of the degree of achievement of strategic goals could be expected. The intermediate report analysing the achievement of the goal *"Ensuring a predominantly interdisciplinary education adapted to the current challenges in society"* lacks any information about interdisciplinary programs.

University Governance. UBB's organisational structure and its governance system, together with extensive internal regulations, reflect solutions typical of large universities in Central and Eastern European countries. The academic authority is shared by the Senate and the Rector and on faculty level - by faculty councils and deans as well as heads of departments and department councils. The sheer size of the Senate - 103 people representing students and academic staff - seems problematic from the perspective of effective management. A closer look at the structure reveals its fragmentation. There are as many as 22 faculties, some of them supervise scarcely 1-2 departments. The position of those departments gives rise to some doubts. For example, the Faculty of Business operates two departments, whereas the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration - as many as 11. At least half of them is more linked to business studies than to economic studies. It is difficult to find a rationale for establishing 2 engineering faculties, 4 theological faculties, combining biology and geology, operating 31 doctoral schools and having as many as 9 vice-Rectors. The new Strategy announces the consolidate all faculties in 6 schools: School of Arts & Humanities / School of Liberal Arts, School of Sciences and Life Sciences, School of Social Sciences, School of Engineering and Technology, School of Health. However, these structures are not to interfere with those already in existence, that is with faculties and departments. Moreover, the structure becomes even more complicated as an additional level of management is created. It is not clear how this structural change will affect the division of functions among schools, faculties, departments and research centres, but also standing committees in the area of education and research. The University leaders and academics I met seem quite satisfied with these changes. I would encourage university management to reflect critically on the structure implemented and to consider other alternatives. The first is the liquidation of faculties and the takeover of departments by the established schools. The second is to maintain consolidated, larger faculties and 2-3 schools offering education with a practical profile, eg. School of Business, School of Law. Offering the same study programmes by different faculties gives rise to even more reservations. For example, the International Relations programme is provided by the European Studies Faculty and the Faculty of History and Philosophy, the Management programme is offered by the Faculty of Economics and Business as well as by the Faculty of European Studies.

That kind of practice begs the question of how effectively the main processes process of education are coordinated at university level. From the formal point of view, UBB's two main processes, that is education and research, are coordinated at university level by separate committees, such as the Committee for Curriculum, Quality and Non-traditional Education as well as the Committee for Scientific Research. However, the first of those units focusses mainly on study programme management, whereas the issues of teaching and learning are divided among other committees and units. In the new organizational structure that has been operating since this academic year, three committees have been established to coordinate activities in main areas: education, research, and cooperation with the socio-economic environment. The division of tasks among standing committees and functional centres is not always clear. For example, graduate careers are traced by CDUMC and not by the Centre for Career, Alumni and Relations with the Business Environment (CCARMA), which would normally be in line with

European solutions. I learned from CCARMA representatives that Human Resources Department deals with the analysis of labour market needs.

UBB has multi-level organizational structures and numerous advisory bodies. Hierarchical governance does not favour horizontal cooperation and the release of relevant synergy. A certain anchoring in the silos of disciplines and their organizational units was visible during the talks. It manifested itself, *inter alia*, in limited information about the activities of other organizational units provided by interviewed persons. The Mission and Strategy both emphasise the development of interdisciplinary programmes, however, the programmes provided still focus on individual disciplines and there was no support offered to interdisciplinary programmes by specialised organisational structures, such as schools or university departments/institutes. UBB's representatives say that this is mainly due to tradition, however it seems that also due to the resistance to structural changes interfering with the interest of individual groups. The University has developed neither technology parks and nor business incubators which are widespread and common European solutions supporting cooperation with industry and business. The intention of creating start-ups, spin-offs and business incubators expressed in the new Strategy is highly commendable. I understand these issues will be addressed in the next years. UBB could also enhance the third mission activities by initiating the so-called Third Age University. Such universities are very popular in other countries.

The fact that students participate in all representative bodies and numerous standing committees is also praiseworthy. The Student Prefect represents students in the Administrative Council which makes current operating decisions. The governance structure does not include representatives of administrative, technical and support employees and there are no external stakeholders, including those from abroad. Non-academic staff and employers may attend meetings of the so-called Enlarged Senate or Enlarged Faculty Council, as advisers but non-voting members of these academic bodies. Just like quite a number of foreign HEIs, UBB could set up a board of trustees (or an advisory board) representing strategic stakeholders. Governing a modern university wishing to become a national leader should be based on the professionalism of its managers. Therefore, university provides specialist training to those in managerial positions and those participating in collegial bodies. The skilful implementation of institutional changes, including hybrid education in the period of turbulence caused by the pandemic proves the high managerial qualifications of university leaders. A large number of managerial positions and collegial bodies involves a high number of academic staff members, which - when coupled with their significant workload - reduces their time that could be spent on research. I was told that the workload of academic teachers in managerial positions, including rectors and deans, has not been reduced which is rather in contradiction to customary practice introduced by European universities.

The university structure changes over time and undergoes interim evaluations in the form of internal audits focussing on UBB's units. Despite the development of a relevant procedure, no comprehensive review and analysis of UBB's organisational structure and governance has been performed. The University's rational decisions rely on the good quality of collected information. It seems that analyses and self-evaluations rely too heavily on information gathered from stakeholder surveys. Such information is not always representative of a survey group. The University analytics should reflect more on the validation and relevance of information and use less survey-based examination of stakeholders needs.

UBB - a university with a long history - takes great care of its academic values and ethical norms. They are listed in the Mission and the UBB Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

UBB can deservedly boast of a number of valuable initiatives such as academic integrity and ethics courses compulsory for MA and doctoral students and optional for BA students, or the adoption of the Intellectual Property Policy, as well as the publication of the Guide for Combating Discrimination. In accordance with the suggestion made by students, it would be useful to adapt the content of these classes to the specifics of individual fields of study and future professional work. A short while ago an academic ombudsman was appointed, and its role is to become even more significant as stipulated in the new Strategy. Activities involving issues of academic integrity are coordinated by the Ethics Committee which is a body independent of the Senate. Reports and information coming from its members suggest that the Committee's activity boils down to the promotion of ethical norms and responding to complaints and unethical behaviours such as plagiarism. In order to strengthen the Committee's preventive function, it would be useful to conduct a survey of the extent of occurrence of such phenomena as plagiarism, corruption, mobbing, sexual harassment, discrimination etc. Such a study is expected in the near future.

Quality Culture and the Internal Quality Assurance System. High quality is treated as a tool to achieve UBB's highest competitiveness both on the domestic and international education market. The University has defined the objectives, principles and scope of the Quality Assurance Policy (QAP). UBB's extensive Quality Manual identifies the processes, procedures and tools that form the Internal Quality Management System (QMS). Quality is defined as *"adequacy to the desired objective at the level of the mission and goals of the organisation"*. The main purpose of QAP is to develop quality culture, whereas *"Consolidating the quality management system"* as well as *"Promoting a culture of performance and equality of chances"* were one of its previous strategic objectives. The 2020-2024 Strategy considers quality issues as one of the strategic priorities, announces the *"Development of UBB quality mindset"*. This goal has been broken down into four activities: strengthening the quality management system, developing an internal quality assurance policy, ensuring a dynamic and stimulating work environment. However, it is difficult to see how these "institutional activities" are related to the present state of advancement of the quality culture.

It is noteworthy that UBB has a comprehensive approach to QMS which covers four areas of the University's operation: education, research, cooperation with the stakeholders and university governance. UBB's faculties develop Quality Assurance annual plans, and their implementation is evaluated on the basis of a set of indicators. Emphasising self-assessment as a basis for the improvement of processes is a very commendable thing. It is for this purpose that UBB has internal quality standards and a catalogue of measures applicable to each area of its activity. It also acknowledged that Curriculum, Quality and Non-Traditional Education Committee of the Senate (CCCIN) performs comprehensive internal programme accreditation. However, despite putting emphasis on the significance of experiences and international standards and referring to some European documents, the Quality Policy and other documents describing QMS basically lack a reference to the foundations of the European quality assurance system, namely ESG chapter one, especially to their latest 2015 version. It seems that their awareness is not very high even among quality officers.

UBB has structures supporting the implementation of QAP, such as CDUMC, as well as the Quality Assurance and Assessment Committee at university level (CFAC) and the Quality Assurance and Assessment Committees at faculty level. CDUMS is accountable to the Rector, whereas CEAC - to the Administrative Council. In 2020, the Qualitas Centre became a unit separate from CDUMC. There are also many other committees and centres dealing with quality issues. For example, quality and internal programme accreditation are a responsibility of the

CCCIN, whereas CCARMA supervises cooperation with the community. The Scientific Council, Committee for Research, Excellence and Human Resources is responsible for assessment of scientific research. The Office of Internal Public Audit performs periodical evaluations of UBB's administration and university units. By participating in numerous committees and councils, a significant number of employees and students participate in developing an academic culture. However, the inclusion of all key stakeholders in the quality enhancement processes through dialogue between peers is of particular importance for the development of a quality culture.

There is no solid evidence confirming institutional cooperation between the above committees and centres. It seems that the structure supporting quality processes and individual subsystems is not fully integrated in one quality management system, and the QMS is overly regulated and not too clear to students and staff or even leaders and quality assurance officers. It was proven during their interviews when the above persons had problems with identifying the strengths and weaknesses of QMS or quality policy priorities. The incomplete knowledge about the functioning system may be evidenced by the provision of divergent information about the activities (and their effects) of individual committees and organizational units. Thus, the mechanism for disseminating good practices is not fully operational. Therefore, it is necessary to perform a comprehensive review of QMS, ensure its simplification and integration with other sub-systems to form a uniform university governance system. I was informed that such an evaluation is foreseen in the future. The ongoing re-structuring process should be used as an opportunity to remove overlappings and clarify responsibilities. University could consider introduction an internal accreditation - similar to that one used for study programs - of university organizational structures and all areas of its activity. It would help to identify good practices, weaknesses and also constitute a good information base for external accreditors. More effective circulation of information along with the promotion of good pro-quality practices is necessary to increase quality awareness. It would be advisable to explain the development of quality culture based on tradition and UBB's present evolving context. Such activities would allow the academic culture of quality to be raised to a higher level. The commitment to a culture of continuous improvement demonstrated by stakeholders during the meetings create a solid basis for increasing the effectiveness of pro-quality activities.

The Quality Manual should be updated and extended by adding an organisational chart and a description of interrelations between processes and subsystems, as its current version is a collection of various documents describing the procedures and organisation of quality assurance. Stakeholders should be offered a shorter (the present version has over 450 pages) and a more intelligible version to enable individual academic groups to understand their role in activities aimed at quality improvement. There is a relevant procedure concerning the updating of that document.

UBB is a pioneer among Romanian higher education institutions as it has been evaluated not only by ARACIS (2009, 2014), but also by foreign agencies and institutions. So far it has been evaluated twice by EUA, it has also undergone a QS Star international evaluation resulting in awarding the University quality status (four-star University), has ranked first among Romanian HEIs in the Shanghai university ranking (in the 9th hundred worldwide) and been reviewed by the High Commissioner for Minorities (OSCE) at the Salzburg Seminar. In light of the University's vast experience gathered thanks to those evaluations and reviews, reports prepared by UBB's quality committees leave something to be desired as they are of a descriptive and not of an analytic nature. Part three of SAR is entitled *"Analysis of the positive and negative aspects*

of internal quality assurances". In fact, there is an enumeration of positive achievements (over 5 pages) and only one sentence relating to the negative aspects.

Academic programmes. UBB's education offer makes the University stand out from other European and not only European higher education institutions as it offers programmes in quite a number of foreign languages (including Hungarian, German, English and French) as well as theology programmes encompassing several religions. Together with a foreign partners, the University is currently developing double degree (11) programmes. The structure of UBB's academic programmes is similar to that offered by other European higher education institutions, and it defines learning outcomes, ECTS, elective courses, transversal competencies etc. When modifying programmes, UBB takes account of suggestions coming from students, graduates, employers and international experts, as well as conclusions drawn from the experience of other HEIs. However, informal benchmarking has not been integrated into a consistent and uniform policy. Students have a wide range of extracurricular activities. It would be advisable to analyse how this offer contributes to improving students' skills and better employability.

The Senate Committee for Curriculum, Quality and Non-traditional Education not only approves the structure of academic programmes/curricula, coordinates and monitors study programmes, but also performs their internal accreditation. The comprehensive analysis of individual study programs presented in the internal evaluation reports is highly appreciated. Annual study programme reviews are published in the form of reports. Both students as well as graduates and employers are satisfied with the quality of qualifications gained at UBB. This is confirmed by employability statistics which show that 67% of first cycle students, 85% MA students and 87% doctoral students find a job within a year of graduation. However, students and graduates suggested to strengthen the practical component of education, including better organization of student internships. Quite a number of UBB graduates have made global and spectacular careers in science. High level of satisfaction from the quality of study programs and teaching staff have been also expressed by foreign students who indicated that some organizational arrangements are better than in their home universities.

Although the education process attracts high ratings, the following weaknesses should be pointed out: the percentage of compulsory courses is too high in study programmes – at the undergraduate level, elective courses are practically not available - which does not allow students to follow an individualised learning pathway. In spite of the fact that the syllabuses I reviewed had a common scheme, their non-uniformity and failure to properly define learning outcomes are quite striking. Their division into professional and transversal competencies is different from the most common one - knowledge, skills, attitudes (social competencies) and makes it difficult to assess knowledge and skills. Some of them are defined quite vaguely and their number ranges from several to some dozens (almost 40) for one course. Finally, some intended learning outcomes are unachievable. It cannot be expected of a Bachelor's degree first-year student completing 56 hours of a standard and introductory Microeconomics course to be prepared for "running a subdivision of a company/an organisation". The same outcome is repeated in the syllabus for a Macroeconomics course provided to first-year students. These examples demonstrate insufficient supervision of the curriculum and the necessity to train teachers in defining intended learning outcomes. I was informed, that a new guide on how to write LO will be prepared. The adaptation of the programme offers to students' needs - which is so much emphasised in the Mission - would be better if in future more classes was provided in working places. It would also be advisable to ensure employers' institutional participation in committees responsible for study programmes.

Admission, Teaching and Learning and Assessment. From the formal point of view, university admissions are based on the competitive base (secondary school final examination results and entry examinations). UBB successfully competes for students as their number is growing unlike in the case of many European higher education institutions. The autonomy of UBB's faculties in determining their own admission principles gives rise to certain doubts which - when coupled with the fact that the same programme may be provided by different faculties - may lead to unjustified differences in admission criteria. I was assured that this could be prevented by the coordination of admissions at university level. It is worth emphasising that the admissions policy is not aimed at the maximisation of financial benefits. This is proven by the provision of programmes in foreign languages despite the fact that low numbers of students following certain programmes do not even cover the University's relevant costs.

In the increasingly crowded educational market, dropping numbers of candidates caused by demographic changes, quite a number of higher education institutes in Europe and all over the world take a keen interest in their alumni by offering them short postgraduate programmes adapted to their needs. Viewed from this perspective, the UBB's programme offer tailored to the needs of employed graduates, is surprisingly limited and so is the resulting income. The highest number of students study Economic Sciences, but the University offers no MBA-type programme. The shift from student to learners and intensification of efforts aimed at extending the scope of lifelong learning requires changes to the style of work at the Centre for Career, Alumni and Relation with the Business Environment and the Centre for Continuous Learning, Distance Learning and Part-time Learning and other centres. It would be just as beneficial to the admissions process to differentiate the admissions campaign (and information about UBB's programmes) depending on various groups of learners: those wishing to gain professional qualifications, those interested in the good preparation for an academic career, those supplementing their qualifications, full-time and part-time students, working learners etc.

SAR quotes numerous examples of active teaching methods applied by UBB's teachers. UBB's teachers are offered assistance in the development of their teaching competencies by the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CIPI). However, this is not fully reflected in the syllabuses that I reviewed. The interviews I held, and students' views expressed in survey questionnaires prove that the scope of applying methods encouraging student participation in the teaching/learning process varies greatly depending on individual programmes. The university authorities are aware of these weaknesses and modernization of the teaching and learning processes is announced in the strategic plan. It would be advisable to integrate UBB's existing good teaching practices in the form of a student-centred-learning strategy/policy. The introduction of innovative teaching/learning methods require an appropriate number of teachers. SAR states that in the case of UBB's first- and second cycle programmes the average number of students per teacher is 27 and it is highly differentiated. It is 5 at the Faculty of Theatre and Film, 6 - at the Faculty of Physics but 55 at the Faculty of Law. Some students complained about too large groups of students, sometimes reaching 100 people.

The University's steps taken to provide support to low-performers and underachievers deserve special mention. UBB applies the Strategy for Reducing the Risk of Student Drop-out and the Procedure for Monitoring the Population of Students at Risk of School Drop-out. The StudHub Learning Centre provides assistance to students. However, the available data indicates that student drop-out, especially during the two first years, is relatively high and oscillates around 10% in the case of Master's and almost 20% for Bachelor's programmes. As it was explained, it results, inter alia, from frequent changes of the fields of studies. This would prove the

insufficient effectiveness of information about the specificity of individual study programs addressed to prospective students.

The University operates a strictly regulated system of evaluating student achievements. It would be beneficial for the evaluation of teaching and learning quality to study differences between student achievements recorded at the beginning and end of a programme, exactly as stipulated in the University's quality policy. Representatives of other universities and employers could sit on the final examination committees in order to increase the objectivity of the assessment of the final learning outcomes. The University has developed a network of foreign partners and provides education in a number of languages, but does not invite foreign professors to review theses, with the exception of doctoral studies. It is excellent that a PhD student has two thesis supervisors, including one from abroad. UBB has 38 joint PhD co-tutelle agreements with foreign HEIs from Belgium, Iceland, Germany, Portugal, USA, Hungary and Italy. Also, this system should take account of the diversity of the learners. In the 21st century, higher education institutions are not the only source of knowledge, as there are a number of non-academic providers of documented education and training in the form of so-called micro-credentials (professional certificates, badges, etc.) which are valued by employers. Students' interest in learning effectiveness would be much bigger if the University and professional organisations widely enabled students obtaining such certificates during their programmes. I was told UBB does not operate a procedure for recognising learning outcomes achieved outside the higher education system.

Students of all cycles of education have influence on modifications made to study programmes, teaching methods and evaluation systems. After each term they evaluate the quality of education process and every two years they are administered surveys in which they rate the quality of this process, financial assistance and services offered to them. Student organisations conduct independent student satisfaction surveys. Unfortunately, the survey response rate is rather low and oscillates around 25%. It could be partly due to the weaknesses of the feedback system as, basically, students have no full access to their results and - as they told me - they cannot see any practical effects on the quality of learning. The problem of unsatisfactory feedback was emphasised in a student report prepared for ARACIS and in interviews. Some students fear that revealing their opinion may meet with teachers' negative reactions. On the other hand, during the meetings, the students positively assessed the informal feedback provided by teachers. Analysis of this problem should result in suggesting solutions which would close the quality loop in the area of education.

Scientific Research and Development. In its Strategy for Research – Development – Innovation (CDI) for 2016-2020, UBS states it conducts advanced scientific research owing to which it will be recognisable all over the world and which is proven by its Shanghai listing among the first 500 best universities. SAR does not say how this is to be achieved and what its long-term priorities are. However, there are some organisational measures aimed at the facilitation of the process. Advanced research is conducted in over 86 research units of the newly created STAR-UBB Institute. The University effectively applies for domestic research grants, participates in European research projects and publishes as many as 81 scientific journals whose significant number is cited by international bibliometric databases. UBB's research facilities are being modernised and, according to SAR, quite a number of laboratories have world-class equipment and appropriate accreditations. All research initiatives are coordinated by the Scientific Council and the Vice-Rector's Office for Research, Competitiveness – Excellence, Scientific Publications. I really welcome the establishment of the Advisory Council - an international body with the participation of representatives of

renowned universities from France, Germany, USA and Hungary. At least three publications within three years are expected from academics and university grants can be used to fund their relevant activity. The Committee for Research, Excellence and Human Resources is responsible for the evaluation of research quality. There are research evaluation procedures in place and evaluation results are posted on UBB's webpages.

Apart from a certain number of registered patents, this policy results in a growing number of scientific publications cited in renowned bibliometric databases such as the Web of Science. In 2018, UBB received of "HR Excellence in Research" award from the European Commission. UBB's researchers are of the opinion that further progress is hindered mainly by insufficient funding from the state. It also seems that the University should be much more involved in applied research for industry and business. Research-generated income constitutes only 4% of UBB's total income.

From the perspective of ESG'15, the degree to which research achievements are transferred to the teaching/learning process and the extent to which students of the last two years are involved in scientific research is a very significant issue. However, basing on the information provided in SAR, it is difficult to get a clear picture. Information obtained during my interviews allows me to say that no analysis of syllabuses from the perspective of embedding the latest knowledge has been performed. A brief review of English-language syllabuses posted on the webpage leads to the conclusion that in the case of quite a number of syllabuses lecturers recommend mostly textbooks some of which were published a dozen or so years and rarely do they indicate the latest scientific articles. The Student College of Scientific Achievements is a valuable initiative. It is there that students improve their research competencies supervised by academic teachers and publish the results of their research.

Academic Staff. The University has a coherent and comprehensive strategy governing human resources development as well as appropriate procedures serving its evaluation. It encompasses all groups of employees, also those in managerial positions and involved in the process of education and research. Scientific, teaching and administrative achievements as well as those relating to working for the community are important for periodical evaluations performed every four years. Recently, teachers are expected to present a development plan in which they can freely determine the proportion of time spent on teaching, research and other activities, without violating the adopted minimum standards. Teaching staff evaluation is based on student opinions, results of class observations performed by peers and on the opinion of supervisors. In practice, a fairly soft approach to evaluation of academics' performance is made. Those who do not publish, or their teaching competences are assessed poorly by students are not fired but are offered help in overcoming the difficulties. As an external observer I was struck by the high and poorly diversified ratings given by peers during class observations and by supervisors. In 2019, 1379 people were evaluated, and the ratings ranged from 4.03 and 4.89 on a five-grade scale. As much as 50% teachers were rated "excellent" and 32% - "very good". The fact that the University received the HR Award in Excellence proves the good quality of the human resources policy.

A high number of vacancies is one of the main problems in this area. The Rector's report states that out of a total of 3022 posts only 52% are taken, the most for teaching staff (82%) and the least for assistants (36%). At some faculties, the number of vacancies is higher than the number of employed teaching staff. This probably leads to an excessive workload in the case of those teachers. According to the information I obtained, an average workload is high and sabbatical leaves are practically non-existent. Increasing the number of programmes announced in the

Strategy is, therefore, questionable. SAR does not discuss those shortcomings and their causes. According to the Rector the policy of keeping minimal staffing of the programs is forced by the lack of funding. A relative low percentage of young people among lecturers is also a thing requiring attention. Out of all the 1484 staff members holding a doctoral degree, only 153 are under 35 years of age. Students pointed to the age gap, as some older lecturers lack communication skills.

The University has a praiseworthy system of developing teachers' didactic, academic and language qualifications. The new Strategy announces a new concept - the development of each teacher's individual career plan. UBB's Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning offers various teaching training. The best teachers can be awarded teaching grants.

Internationalization. The internationalisation of UBB is treated as a tool necessary for achieving excellence in education and research and for integrating with the international academic community. The Internationalisation Strategy for 2016-2020 is based on four principles: internationalisation of study programmes, increase of the number of foreign students, increase of student and staff participation in mobilities and on the improvement of UBB's visibility abroad. There are supporting functional structures in place to implement the Strategy, namely the Commission for Internationalisation and Cultural Dialogue and the Centre for International Cooperation.

The number of agreements concluded with foreign higher education institutions is impressive. Having so many partners, UBB should select them and choose those to which priority should be given from the perspective of developing intensive cooperation. A high percentage of programmes provided in foreign languages is something that makes UBB stand out from other universities. In 2020, 140 such programmes were provided. They were followed by every fourth student. As there is not enough information, it is difficult to see the degree of curriculum internationalisation and the existence of inter-cultural, global and international values therein. The syllabuses selected for review rarely contained defined inter-cultural competencies. The provision of 11 double degree programmes confirms high quality education and foreign partners' trust in the international arena. However, the internationalisation of education measured with the percentage of foreign students is small and amounts to about 3%. The percentage of UBB students participating in mobility programmes is also low in light of the University's programmes provided in foreign languages. In 2019-2020 the percentage was less than 2%. A small number of foreign students (392, including 322 Erasmus+ students) came to study at UBB. The index of internationalisation relating to researchers and academic teachers is much better as it amounts to 18%. In the academic year 2019-2020, the University invited 311 visiting professors from 37 countries. Almost 30% of teacher visit international HEIs. UBB is an active participant in a number of international research programmes and in 10 international university networks. The University's position in international rankings is quite good (ranked between 701-800 in the Shanghai university ranking) and some faculties are among the 301-400 best in the world. The Rector's report says that some researchers are among the best 2% worldwide. UBB's international recognition is proven by the above positive evaluations performed by international organisations. Lately, UBB has been granted the status of international university of excellence (four-star university), received QS Star ranking as well as membership of the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities.

Final remarks. UBB has a large academic potential which is being effectively increased. Since the most recent ARACIS evaluation, numerous and modern systemic solutions improving the quality of processes and results have been implemented in education, research and other areas

of activity. UBB's leaders are visibly determined to deepen the internationalisation of the University and develop continuous improvement culture. The quality of education is highly rated by students, graduates and employers. The University is a partner valued by foreign higher education institutes. In Europe, it is recognised as a multilingual, multicultural and multid denominational university, definitely oriented towards the needs of the region in Europe.

On the other hand, as mentioned before, there is a certain gap between the aspirations of being a world-class university and UBB's actual achievements. This gap can be bridged by in-depth reflection on the long-term effects of the procedures UBB is implementing, new organisational structures and motivation systems.

But having taken into account all UBB's achievements, I have no doubt that the University deserves ARACIS's positive accreditation and the highest degree of confidence rating.