



The University of  
Medicine and Pharmacy "Iuliu Hațieganu" Cluj-Napoca  
External Institutional Evaluation Report  
2021

## Introduction

I was invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to join the evaluation team for institutional evaluation of The University and Medicine and Pharmacy "Iuliu Hațieganu" Cluj-Napoca (UMF). Prior to the site visit I studied the English version of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) of the UMF. During the visit, which was carried out online due to pandemic restrictions from January 28 to February 2, 2021, I had a good opportunity to enhance information I had received about the UMF and its operation.

The site visit started with preliminary online meeting of experts who are the members of the evaluation team. At this meeting, a preparation and harmonization of evaluation stages in the blended format was discussed. Then, there was an online meeting with the leading representatives of the UMF, namely Professor Anca Dana Buzoianu, the rector of the UMF and her team of top leaders of the UMF. During the whole period of evaluation, I had a chance to participate at several plenary/group meetings with representatives of the UMF teaching staff, students, alumni and also employers of graduates of the UMF. Besides, a series of individual meetings, as well as group discussions with representatives of various positions (functions) within the UMF and beyond followed during the site visit. This way I met representatives of the UMF executive management (across the structure: university, faculties, departments and other units), the member of the UMF Senate, academic and administrative staff in charge of teaching, research, international relations, quality assurance, student support. I also had a chance to meet some student representatives individually, including representatives of students who follow the program in English and some other relevant people.

During the site visit, I received additional documents related to some aspects of operation of the UMF upon my request, which helped me to complete the picture. Thanks to this, I had a chance to study materials related to leadership, management and governance, budgeting, study provision, research, internationalization, external relations, quality assurance and many other aspects of the operation of the UMF for the purpose of its evaluation.

I would like to express my gratefulness to Ms Marilena Dobre, the ARACIS officer, for her very helpful support throughout the evaluation process. I also benefited from highly collegial approach of the whole group of evaluators led by Prof. Ioan Lascar, the head of the mission and Prof. Dumitru Miron, the coordinator of the expert evaluators' team. Last but not least, I want to thank Assoc. Professor Corina Bocsan for her very helpful support throughout the whole visit, as well as to Dr. Simona Ciotlaus for making herself available before and during the site visit. It was all very helpful.

On the basis of the sources of information mentioned, I herewith submit my report on the UMF's institutional performance as I have perceived it. I am well aware that this is a limited view by an external evaluator and a much deeper insight would be needed to really capture the essence of some issues evaluated. My evaluation, as well as my recommendations for possible consideration, should be understood as a collegial attempt to provide the UMF and

ARACIS with opinions aiming to contribute to possible improvements at the UMF and quality assurance of higher education of Romania.

### **Mission statement**

The UMF is a public higher education institution and it is well-established in the context of Romanian higher education.

Its mission is formulated clearly, it is sufficiently elaborated, ambitious and acceptable. The mission of the UMF is balanced in its three-fold focus, emphasizing education and research as well as having the ambition of public reach (broader social role of the UMF).

In particular, the mission of the UMF is “to contribute to the development of society through education, research in the medical sciences field and the promotion of the universal values of culture” (SAR, p. 11). The UMF declares in its University Charter that it respects and defends the academic freedom of staff and students, and operates under conditions of university autonomy, responsibility and public accountability for the services it provides.

The mission of the UMF appears to have a potential to serve as a basis for strategic planning at the UMF. The Strategic Plan emphasizes four priorities of the UMF: (1) constitution of learning, lifelong learning and mobility; (2) improving the quality and efficiency of education, training and research; (3) promoting equity, social cohesion and active involvement as a citizen; and (4) fostering creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship at all levels of teaching and training. For these priorities, short-, medium- as well as long-term strategies are foreseen to achieve them within the agreed timeframe. The Strategic plan is updated annually and it is supported by managerial plans of the deans (faculties) which specify objectives at this level.

I find these UMF documents complementary, they constitute a solid fundament on which activities of the UMF may be built and further developed.

#### *Recommendation:*

- *Make sure the key strategic documents are available in English and publicly accessible.*

### **Academic freedom and academic integrity**

In its Charter, the UMF emphasizes the university autonomy, academic freedom and public commitment to respect the legislation in force as fundamental principles underlying the university activity. The respect to academic freedom is related to all the staff as well as students. Provision of high-quality medical education, promotion of academic integrity, openness up to European recognition in research and development of organizational culture oriented to quality and excellence are the main aims of the UMF.

It is declared by the UMF that members of the academic community are obliged to respect

professional deontological codes, legislation related to health care field and patients' rights, the labour code and all the other legal provisions related to educational and research activity. There are structural units in place at UMF that are in charge of these issues, especially the University Ethics Commission (subordinated to the University Senate), Scientific Research Ethics Commission and Scientific Council (both subordinated to Vice-rector for Research).

University Code of Ethics is a key instrument to provide guidance here.

The bodies of the UMF seem to be in agreement with legislation and provide the faculties with respective academic freedom.

### **Organisation and management**

UMF is a well-established university. It consists of three faculties specifically focused on segments in the field of medicine and pharmacy.

Management and administration of UMF are well developed both vertically and horizontally as well as in other directions across the university. The principles of organization of UMF and its functioning are described in the University Charter and they are related to teaching, research, administrative structures, management structures and functions, institutional co-operation, university ethics, quality assurance and other relevant areas of the university operation.

There is a standard set of main units of the management system at the UMF. This specifically includes the University Senate, Management Board, Faculty Councils, Faculty Council Offices and Department Councils. Among them, the superior management forum composed of teachers as well as students is the University Senate.

The Rectors' team consists of five vice-rectors (teaching; academic development and university administration; scientific research; residents and postgraduate studies; quality assurance and international relations), which seem to cover the main areas of UMF activities. The Deans' offices and university administration services are related to the strategic management structures of UMF as well.

The electoral regulations stipulate a transparent procedure for electing the rector, members of the University Senate and members of the Faculty Councils.

Students are represented in consultative, decision-making and executive structures within the UMF. The university does not condition the status of a student representative depending on the academic performance or attendance at courses, seminars and laboratories.

Communication within the UMF is supported via Internet and Intranet systems, both managed by University Communication Centre.

### **Academic programs and student management**

The UMF is currently offering a relatively wide range of programs at all three levels as well as residency programs; all programs are directly related to the field of health care. Some programs are also provided in English and French. The academic programs seem to be in correspondence with UMF's mission statement as well as with international standards. The quality, range and academic aims of the curriculum may be viewed as appropriate for the awarded academic degrees. All programs seem to be well thought over and they are regularly monitored, evaluated and updated when necessary.

The admission procedures are clear and in line with the legislation, they are well described in the SAR and also publicly available. The UMF applies its own methodology as for the admission process and this is made public well before the application period. Admission preparatory courses and simulation of the entrance exam are available to those interested. In the case of the programs in English or French, the candidate students are admitted on the basis of evaluation of their school performance and personal achievements.

The rules related to assessment of student results, throughout all study phases are clear and publicly accessible too.

The UMF declares that student-centred approach is the key didactic principle in the programs concerned. Within this framework, the problem-based learning is emphasized from the first year of the studies. Students are encouraged to develop theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills. Student activity portfolio is one of the means to document and develop these efforts.

Student support at the UMF is realised in different ways. There is a tutoring system (support and counselling to students) to help them integrate into academic education. This consists of activities of personal communication of the tutor with students. There are tutors for each study program, respectively for each year of study, including those conducted in English and French. During the site visit interviews, a positive view at tutoring and its potential was voiced out by student respondents. There are some other indications that the tutoring system has been gradually improving at the UMF (for instance, modifications of tutoring arrangements made last year).

Students' study paths have a certain degree of flexibility. Diploma supplement is a part of the certification at the end of successfully completed studies. Graduation rate is over 80% for most of the study programs.

The Centre for Psychological Counselling and Career Guidance provides assistance to UMF students. It is well organized and carries out a number of relevant activities. The list of activities of this centre in 2020 is impressive and contains individual counselling sessions, classes on mental health, learning how to learn workshop, psychological evaluations for the admission of foreign students (personality tests, interviews), psychological support to individual students in need, involvement in special projects (for instance on choosing the medical specialty, issues concerning job interviews, transition from study to work, personal development) and so on.

Office hours of teachers (two hours a week) is also a practical possibility for students to reach the teacher and discuss study-related issues if necessary.

Students organisations are involved in development of a number of activities supporting student learning as well as social life. There is a student organisation for students studying in English or French too, at the UMF.

### **Internationalisation**

It may be said that learning/teaching and research are naturally profiled as activities which reflect and include international dimension at the UMF. There are many indicators proving this evaluation statement. The UMF has a sufficient number of bilateral co-operation contracts with universities in Europe and beyond, as well as a high number of co-operation partners through the Erasmus program. The UMF documentation as well as interviews with the staff and students brought the evidence about mobility and other academic exchange activities. These activities take place within the framework of different EU programs (typically, CEEPUS, ERASMUS), but also within the framework of many other schemes. During the interviews, some students were appreciative about organisation of the mobilities and their inclusion into the study path.

Similarly, this may be seen in case of research (a number of international research projects, and more – see the chapter on research).

One of the specific features of the UMF is a presence of relatively large number of international students, mainly those who study full-length programs in English or French. These students have their representatives in UMF bodies and they also have their own student organisation. There may be found some examples of efforts to integrate Romanian and non-Romanian students within the UMF (cultural events and so on).

The English as well as French versions of the UMF websites are supportive to the internationalisation efforts of the UMF, in principle.

#### *Recommendation:*

- *Consider some more possibilities to help integration of Romanian and foreign students at the UMF in order to fully use the potential of a culturally very rich student body at the UMF.*

### **Research**

Research seems to be a relatively strong pillar of the UMF functioning. The UMF has a long-term research strategy, but also medium- and short-term programs and plans supporting it. This strategy is closely related to the UMF Strategic plan and analogical documents that exist at the level of faculties.

There is a support structure for research at the level of the UMF provided by the Department of Research Development and Innovation. Apart from faculties, there is a number of other research-focused units, such as the centre of excellence and several research centres at the UMF. A considerable number of research projects indicates a positive orientation of the UMF

towards research and its relatively strong position within academic community in Romania and beyond. This is supported by publications of the UMF staff as well as by a number of awards obtained by the UMF and its staff. Research at the UMF has an international ambition and there are many clear links to international research community in this respect.

It may also be appreciated that there are efforts to link teaching and research and involve students (especially but not exclusively on the PhD level) to senior research projects and other activities.

Apart from this, there is the evidence about support provided by the UMF to student research (research grants, student research conferences, student research circles and so on).

The issue of transfer of research into the broader society has been dealt with since some time with more intensity at the UMF. The Centre for Transfer Technologies has been set up, and there are plans of activities to make better flow in this direction. Creation of spin-offs and support of start-ups is a part of these tendencies.

There are explicit criteria for work of researchers at the UMF. The Department of Monitoring of Scientific Activities seems to be playing a positive role in developing research-related activities at the UMF.

*Recommendations:*

- *Consider possibilities to introduce granting schemes that would make it easier for some researcher to return/re-connect to their career (for instance those returning after parental leave).*
- *Consider possibilities to train supervisors of students (leading their theses and dissertations) in supervisory skills.*
- *Consider possibilities to attract more internationals to postdoc positions at the UMF.*

## **Staff**

The UMF has a significant number of highly qualified staff, namely in the positions of professors and associate professors.

According to the SAR, there are 887 teachers, out of whom 89 are professors, 123 associate professors, 312 lecturers, 363 university assistants. The auxiliary teaching staff amounts to 349 employees, the administrative staff has 199 employees.

The UMF staff is typically appointed on the basis of competition. Regular evaluations/assessments are an integral part of working with the staff. This includes the assessment of the performance of teaching as well as administrative staff, which is done annually by the hierarchical superior body, following the procedures approved by the UMF management. The academic staff's performance and its evaluation are also related to the research performance.

Professional development activities take place at the UMF in a number of directions and forms. Academic staff is trained in several basic areas, which include use of new teaching

technologies and also courses of pedagogical/didactical methodology (they are in part realised within the framework of international project initiatives). The latter is focused mainly on junior categories of academics. In addition to this, problem-based learning is also in the focus of courses of similar kind, again with international experts involved. Administration staff is also getting trained via courses in different areas, including English/French language proficiency and computer skills development.

During the interviews, students and alumni were very positive about the academic staff as well as about the administration support.

*Recommendation:*

- *Apart from the existing practice, consider further possibilities of providing management training for leaders at different levels of the UMF structure (for instance, departments).*

### **Finance and infrastructure/Space and equipment**

The UMF is financed from several sources: the state budget, extra-budgetary revenues (tuition fees, registrations, re-enrolments etc.), revenues from research activities, revenues from economic activities, revenues from student dormitories etc., funds from other ministries and other sources. The institution has an annual budget in line with the financial policy of the UMF and on the general level, financial issues are coordinated by the Economic Director.

There is a range of scholarships available to students. They include international Olympic merit scholarships, performance scholarships, merit scholarships and social scholarships/occasional social scholarships (these are all funded from the state budget funds directed to the scholarship fund). There are also scholarships funded by extra-budgetary sources of the UMF (scholarships based on contest – criteria are set by the University Senate). The UMF has a scholarship fund for foreign students, too.

There is an evidence that UMF supports students in their participation in other activities, such as research projects, scientific events, student competitions, publishing scholarships, scholarships for cultural events.

The UMF has its own premises to conduct teaching as well as research and other activities and it also uses public health-care facilities which is in line with the focus of the study programs/the UMF. The premises seem to be in line with the laws and regulations.

Some infrastructure elements/units seem to be of an advanced nature. For instance, this may be said about the simulation centre, (The Centre for Practical Skills and Simulation in Medicine), or some similar infrastructure related to dental medicine.

As for the equipment, the rooms for teaching seem to be equipped with necessary means to facilitate quality teaching and learning process. The same goes for the research activities. On the basis of co-operation agreements, facilities of hospitals and clinical institutes are available to students as well as staff.

Certain number of students of the UMF is provided with the accommodation at student dormitories (available for about 20% of students). The evaluation of facilities offered by the UMF to students is conducted annually. Students mostly evaluate the accommodation in a positive way.

The Library is placed in two locations and besides printed resources, it also offers access to e-databases. Its services were appreciated by the students during the interviews.

The student canteen, some sport facilities etc. are also a part of the infrastructure of the UMF.

The UMF has IT systems for administration (EMSYS) and also a platform for online management of students' activity from the admission to graduation. There is also a platform to manage the academic evaluation processes and some other specialised software. It appears that the level of digitalisation of daily operations at the UMF is up to date.

The English and French versions of the UMF's websites are of a good quality.

Due to the pandemic restrictions, I could not physically visit the above-mentioned premises and facilities. I obtained information from the documentation and other information resources provided by the UMF as well as from interviews.

*Recommendation:*

- *Consider possibilities to decentralize (some part) of the budget to the level of departments.*

### **Quality management**

Quality assurance (QA) of main processes is paid sufficient attention to at the UMF. The structure and processes of quality assurance are well developed there. Processes of QA regularly focus on teaching, research as well as administration processes.

Quality assurance explicitly belongs to the agenda of one vice-rector and there is also the QA Department at the UMF. There is also the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance, which is composed of teachers and students (the senate level). At the level of each faculty, there are operational structures that carry out periodic quality evaluation of study programs. It may be said that the structures to develop QA are well elaborated at the UMF.

Students' level of satisfaction in relation to the teaching services is measured by the QA department at the UMF annually. It is focused on four aspects: quality of teaching, personal development, students' facilities, sufficient quality of the study programs as a whole. The results show overall positive evaluation by students, which was confirmed during some interviews, too.

There are different forms of evaluation/assessment conducted within the QA framework at the UMF. The *Regulation for occupying teaching positions* sets the rule that self-assessment, evaluation by the superior, collegiate evaluation and evaluation by the students are the

promotion criteria at the UMF. Teachers' self-assessment is carried out annually. Not only students, but also graduates are involved in regular assessment of study programs. Annual assessment of individual professional performance is developed and applied under the supervision of the Head of Human Resources and QA Management. The collegiate assessment is carried out annually and relates to teaching, research and administrative work. Evaluation of the teaching staff by students is a mandatory process. A multidimensional evaluation of the Doctoral School is in place as well.

There are also some specifically focused activities and bodies within the QA system at the UMF, for instance, the Council for QA in Doctoral Research.

The UMF strives to work with a set of benchmarks for higher level of quality of teaching, learning and research in the field of healthcare, under the umbrella of higher education development projects it has been involved in.

The UMF is periodically subjected to external evaluations, usually with a positive evaluation outcome.

It may be concluded that the quality management is well organized, contains a series of processes and is focused on relevant areas of evaluation and on possibilities of improvement.

## **Final recommendation**

**I recommend providing the UMF with institutional accreditation with the rating of High Confidence.**

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