

# **GEORGE ENESCU NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IAȘI EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT 2021**

## **Introduction**

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the George Enescu National University of Arts (UNAGE) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The online evaluation took place between Monday 19 April and Friday 23 April 2021. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of UNAGE focusing on the main points of improvement of quality, and the present and future development challenges of the university. Before the online visit I received the self-evaluation report of UNAGE from ARACIS. During the evaluation, with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to collect information about the operation of the UNAGE. My report is roughly following the structure of the self-evaluation report of the institution.

## **Background**

George Enescu National University of Arts, Iași (UNAGE) is operating as an education and research institution having the mission of forming professionals in the field of theatre, music, and visual arts and has a significant role in the promotion of cultural and artistic values in Romania. The 160 years of traditions since 1860 show the role and the importance of the institution. The university has three faculties (Faculty of Interpretation, Composition and Theoretical Musical Studies, and the Faculty of Theatre and the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design), offering Bachelor and Master study programs, and doctoral programs on the fields of music, theatre, visual arts. Parallel with the faculties, Teaching Staff Training Department (DPPD) is also operating in the institution. In the 2020/2021 academic year, the total number of

registered students was 1605 (1086 Bachelor, 365 Master and 154 doctoral students).

With its old traditions UNAGE has a significant role in Iași and in the country as well. This long history through time, changing socio-economic systems, restructuring processes and transformations have resulted educational programs that meet the needs of the students. As an important actor in Romanian higher education, this institution has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills, and competencies in the field of art at high standards. The tradition, the experience, the prestige, and the competences of UNAGE show the importance of this institution in the internal and international environment.

Overall, the institution meets the cultural, social, and economic needs of the community. According to the self-evaluation report of the UNAGE the strategic objectives focusing on the maintenance of the present position and provide future development to be considered as one of prestigious universities in Central-Eastern Europe.

### **Legal and Organizational Framework, Missions and Objectives**

George Enescu National University of Arts, Iași is a public higher education institution, with legal personality and autonomy, in accordance with the provisions of the Romanian Constitution, the education legislation and the University Charter. The Charter of George Enescu National University of Arts is the basic document that provides the guidelines regarding the structure, strategy, and principles of functioning, development and regulations. The charter provisions have been harmonized with both the Romanian legislation and the principles of the European Space of Higher Education.

The mission of the institution is to train specialists - both artists or theorists – who are able to capitalize their talent, and parallel with the activities of artistic creation and research, are able to ensure the progress of Romanian and international culture and



art. In this respect, according to the self-evaluation report of the institution, UNAGE provides and develops resources and tools necessary for the education, artistic creation and scientific research processes at quality standards required for competitiveness in Europe, and in the country as well.

The Charter of the UNAGE is the fundamental document which states the principles, functions and objectives and ensure the academic and the institutional frame of the university. According to the Charter, the University Senate is the main decision-making body of the institution, and it is led by the President of the Senate. The Senate consists of 32 senators, 24 teachers (75%) and 8 students (25%).

According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of UNAGE have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the three faculties of the university, departments, and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution relies on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of different types of programs, teaching staff and the other personnel of the university.

According to the self-evaluation report and the annexes of the university, parallel with its didactic, cultural, and scientific missions, the main mission of the university is to focus on to train professionals in the fields of arts. Beside these aims, it is also an important priority to promote the freedom of artistic expression, critical thinking, and strengthen national cultural identity and keep the leading role within the Romanian and European art education on a long term. The university has a strategic plan for the next years (2020-2024); the annual plans are based on this plan. This plan contains the vision and mission of the university, the proposed strategic objectives, and the main dimensions of the allocation of the available human, material, and financial resources.

Overall, from the beginning the university has the mission of carrying on specific higher education activities in the fields of arts, having the purpose of training high-skilled specialists, developing, and improving professional competences, improving constantly the education process and scientific research, in permanent cooperation with similar institutions, as well as with institutions from the national, European, and international environment.

### **Educational Programs, Teaching Staff**

The university has three faculties (Faculty of Interpretation, Composition and Theoretical Musical Studies, and the Faculty of Theatre and the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design), offering Bachelor and Master study programs, and a doctoral school on the fields of music, theatre, and visual arts. Most of the offered programs are in Romanian, although in the period 2015-2020, the university has established three authorized study programs in English. The educational programs of the university are popular, and according to the number of students in the last five years, these numbers are definitely stable. The internationalization of the educational supply seems to be an important priority of the institution, although the present number of the international students is not significant yet.

The titular teaching staff in UNAGE has proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which results a good level of performance in education and training processes. According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, the scientific potential and quality of human resources of UNAGE are on a good level. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that foreign language skills of the staff are good. It is also important to add that the teaching staff from UNAGE enjoys a large national and international recognition and appreciation, which is also leading to their presence in specialized bodies, organizations, and committees in the country and abroad. In the academic year 2020-2021 the number



of the teaching staff was 246. The age structure and the academic composition is good, and the university pays great attention to the training the new generation of teaching staff as well.

The number of students is changing from year to year, but the changes are not so critical and there are also some educational programs where the numbers are growing. Due to the permanently changing higher education environment, needs and expectations of the students, it is very important to maintain the present numbers and if it is possible, attract more students in the next years. The university has to pay intensive attention in connection with the changes in the demands of the potential students. The internationalization also should be an important priority in the future, the institution has to make steps to grow the numbers of students on the existing English language programs and may develop new educational programs that reflect appropriately for the changing needs and attract new groups of potential students.

During the virus crisis, despite the special features of art training, the university has managed the online education quite well. It is also important to emphasize that some parts of the online education should be kept after the COVID situation is going to be over: from the feedbacks of the students, it seems that some of them prefer certain online practices.

### **Material assets**

According to the received information, the material resources are well suited for the educational and teaching process. The university operates in multiple locations. During the last years, there has been a permanent investment in infrastructure and material assets to modernize the teaching spaces and build new spaces. UNAGE has made constant efforts, year after year, to acquire the equipment necessary for the teaching process, for artistic creation, scientific research, as well as for the administrative activity. The existing equipment and the facilities are in accordance

with the technical standards of functioning. These facilities meet the needs of the students and perfect for the scientific research activities of the academic staff.

The capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations. Although the maintenance and development processes are permanent, university has to invest permanently to develop physical infrastructure. The present processes and plans seem to be promising, although without outside resources it is certainly not possible to implement everything. The university should apply for national and European funds for this work.

Overall, the university meets the demand of European standards. It is also important to point out that from last year, due to the COVID situation, the university, just like other higher education institutions, has started to organize the educational activities online. According to the received information, the university managed to cope with this atypical situation quite well. On one hand, because of the online solutions, the current use and utilization of the infrastructure is certainly lower than the previous periods, but the university must pay permanent attention to maintain and develop the infrastructure of education and take advantage of some online opportunities (e.g., establishing the planned online gallery, which could be reached from everywhere all around the world).

### **Financial activity**

As a nonprofit institution, the university is establishing funds for activity from the annual state finance, school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. According to the data, salary expenses are around 70% of the budget, and there is a certain imbalance in budget from year to year. This situation is certainly coming from the special financial needs of the art education. Beside the state support the university has to find the ways to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance its activities in a reasonable level. Right now, there



are plans to utilize the available resources and find also new directions to make extra money. Another way to keep the present financial situation relatively stable could be to realize more income from study fees with enrolling greater number of students for the present education programs or offering new, desirable programs which could attract more students. To reach these aims is an important challenge, just like everywhere in the Central Eastern European countries. Parallel with these processes, the earlier mentioned internationalization of certain educational programs could be a solution for a more balanced budget. During the present virus crisis, the expenses have become certainly lower although the maintenance of the built infrastructure results a permanent fixed cost. On the other hand, the good reputation of UNAGE attracts a lot of applicants and the number of students has been stable in the last five years.

## **Students**

According to the number of students in the last 5 years there is almost a 10% growth. This change is quite remarkable in case of the Master study programs (in Bachelor programs the growth is 8%, there is a 20% growth in Master study programs, in case of the doctoral studies the student number has remained stable, with certain fluctuation). In the 2020/2021 schoolyear, the total number of students is 1605, which means 1086 Bachelor students (68%), 365 Master students (23%), and 154 doctoral students (9%). There is a permanent interest, and the university attracts large number of students, so it would be worth to expand the education services and activities of the university.

There is many international cooperation with foreign universities and there are great numbers of bilateral agreements exists in UNAGE. The UNAGE is also participating in the ERASMUS program where parallel with the student mobility there was also an intensive teacher mobility until the present virus crisis. In Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these contracts permanently with these universities from abroad, even during the COVID period and

permanently increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities in the future.

Traditionally the university organizes many art and cultural events and programs, organizes contemporary art exhibitions in the halls and spaces of UNAGE. The public information can be found on the UNAGE site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian and English language. There are also scholarships for students. There are social and cultural services provided by the University to the students, many cultural and professional initiatives have taken place. There is a student association and an association for the graduates operating in the university, while the Center for Counseling and Career Guidance in the university help students to find their place easier on labor market.

As the part of the evaluation process there were online meetings with the present students, graduates, and employers as well. Comparing these meetings with the meetings of other evaluation processes, smaller number students, graduates and employers appeared online. Students and graduates have seemed to be very loyal to their university and have paid a lot of attention to their studies, and, if I understood well, they were basically satisfied with the university and the educational processes.

### **Research activities**

UNAGE plays an important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In UNAGE, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources, projects, and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities. The “George Enescu” National University of Arts



is also a member of important associations of international artistic education. According to the self-evaluation report, the professional training, the innovative spirit of teachers contributes to the creation of works of art, and unique artistic events. There is also a publishing house in the university (Artes Publishing House). It publishes books and other publications annually, participates in exhibitions and book fairs, representing a way to disseminate the results of research and artistic creation. According to the report, between 2015 and 2020, 280 book titles were edited and published in the journals of the institution.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual and student level as well. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, and collaboration with organizations, universities, and state institutions. Students are permanently participating on exhibitions and artistic and scientific events. Their ideas, knowledge, and creativity clearly show the role, importance, and good performance of the institution.

### **International Relations and visibility**

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific and educational fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. UNAGE pays more and more attention for collaboration with universities, or other institutions in Europe and all over the world. To manage these connections effectively relies on the available financial background, the level of intention to establish and manage real partnerships and cooperation from which the partner institutions could benefit and finally, how much work is invested in managing these relationships properly, if partner institutions have the same level of interest. In case of UNAGE it seems that there is strong intention that parallel with managing the present international directions, establish new partnerships to raise the level of international visibility and collaboration of the institution. This strategic orientation could be an important part of the

internationalization of the university. With the participation of the colleagues of the partner institutional connections, it is an important priority – even in the online world – to organize scientific conferences and academic events.

Students and teachers also have a wide range of possibilities to participate in mobility programs. It is important to point out that even in the period of COVID, when the personal contacts are missing, and nobody knows when this situation is going to change, the institution must pay attention to find the appropriate management of its contacts if the present situation drags on and the online world lasts longer.

### **Quality Assurance**

According to the self-evaluation report, UNAGE has a set of operational structures through which quality assurance actions are coordinated by the Quality Assurance and Evaluation Commissions of Faculties, the Commission of Educational Quality and Evaluation of the University Senate and the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation. The involvement of students in the quality assurance and evaluation process is a common practice and is done at the previously mentioned levels. Reviewing the structure and activities of quality assurance of the institution, these processes seem to operate well, but it is important to point out that the main principle and objective has to be that quality assurance has to become a part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus permanently.

### **Conclusion**

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have read and what I have heard before and during the online visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. Overall,



UNAGE meets the needs of educational and professional training standards, the social and economic development needs of the community and European standards of education and scientific research as well. I recommend the level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- The university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, changing educational conditions in the online world during the COVID period, etc.),
- The university permanently has to develop its competitive factors and have keep the present role and the place in local and international market,
- Parallel with traditional roles, the university has to adapt to the new needs of the students where permanent improvement of quality has to be in focus; keep in mind that adaptation needs flexibility and investment in human capital,
- UNAGE should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow,
- If the present pandemic situation drags on for longer time, UNAGE, just like other higher education institutions, has to pay intensive attention for taking the possible advantages of it and might keep some parts of the online methods when the virus crisis is going to be over,
- The university permanently has to manage its existing national and international partnerships and should establish new partnerships with institutions and organizations,
- Parallel with the high quality of art education, management knowledge elements are also needed. UNAGE could be among those higher education institutions on the field of art who recognize the importance of (cultural) management competencies and expands and develops the existing knowledge elements in this field in the educational programs.

Finally, I would like to thank to the Rector and all the University staff for the support during this online evaluation. At last, but not least I would like to thank to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

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