

Foreign Expert Report

Introduction This Report contains observations of a foreign expert participating in an institutional review of the UPET University. UPET is a medium-sized university with 3754 students and 289 academic staff members, which was originally founded as a mining school, and later transformed into a technical university with strong links to the mining region in which it operates. My observations are based on the analysis of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), documents published on the University's website, and information and opinions provided during many conversations with members of the University community. Due to the unavailability of the materials in English (except for the SAR), these observations cannot be interpreted as a detailed examination of the issues raised. However, the authors of the SAR should be commended for their carefully prepared SAR and numerous annexes to it, which form an excellent and comprehensive source of knowledge about the operation of the university. At this point, I would like to thank the ARACIS agency for inviting me to this project. I would like to extend my thanks to Rector Sorin Mihai RADU for accepting me as an expert and to all the interviewees for providing me with interesting information and opinions. I would like to express my special thanks to Vice-Rector Prof. Codruta Dura and Prof. Gabriela Dumbrava for their assistance in the organisation of online meetings and their translations.

Mission and Strategic Plans. The mission of UPET is formulated in a rather general manner: *"The mission of the University is to generate and transfer knowledge to society, according to the requirements derived from Romania's status as EU member..."* This statement has been developed into the Didactic Mission, Research Mission and Civil and Cultural Mission. However, these statements do not fully reflect the specific character of the University, which stems from the tradition of a technical university that predominantly offers M.Sc. programmes. This can be evidenced by the following statement: *"Didactic Mission - aims at training specialists with higher education, through all forms of university and postgraduate education provided by law, in the fields and study programs for which the institution is legally accredited or authorised"*. A slightly more detailed description of the university's activities is presented in the form of 14 objectives defined for the aforementioned areas. No Vision for the UPET has been formulated in the documents relating to the university. Also, the Mission Statement should be complemented by the identification of academic values that UPET pursues. These have been defined in the *Code of Academic Ethics and Deontology*. Thus, it is difficult to clearly assess what the university's long-term aspirations and future place in the education market are, and how the UPET differs from other Romanian universities. The expansion of socio-economic programmes raises the question of their balancing with technical programmes and the future profile of the university. According to the Rector of UPET, the HEI is to retain its existing character i.e., it will combine engineering studies with science programmes and these in social sciences. There are no plans to expand educational provision to include medical sciences, humanities and arts. New fields of study - including robotics - are to closely match the interests of students and the needs of the labor market.

With the Mission Statement so broadly defined, the objectives of the Medium-term Strategic Plan 2020-2024 are consistent with its contents. It covers seven areas: Education; Quality assurance; Scientific research; Development and innovation; International relations; University management and business relations; The image and promotion of the university. The main strategic objectives were divided into specific goals and planned tasks. These are translated into annual operational plans, which define the tools and deadlines for implementation, the persons responsible and performance indicators. Reports on the implementation of operational plans were ineptly included in the latter. The development of a five-year financial plan for the period 2021-2025, which accompanies the UPET Strategy and the Internationalisation Strategy for 2020-2027 is highly commendable. Faculties, departments, research centres and other organisational units define their own visions, mission statements and development plans.

Conducting a closer analysis is needed to assess whether the strategic objectives are achievable with the current human resources and funding levels. Student numbers consistently grow, and the university budget is expected to show a surplus of income over expenditure in each of the next five years. However, the multiplicity of objectives and sometimes their vague formulation coupled with the lack of a link to sources of funding are noteworthy. The strategic documents also signal problems with insufficient stakeholder involvement in the implementation of the strategy, as discussed further below. Rector of Radu pointed to insufficient preparation of students in mathematics and physics for technical studies.

Strategic planning would gain in quality if different development scenarios were presented, the risks associated with them identified, and estimated and measures to mitigate them presented. Unfortunately, just like it is the case with other Romanian universities, strategic planning at UPET is linked to the Rector's election cycle, which may give the impression that the strategic plan is owned by the Rector and not by the whole university community, and its contents are subordinated to the expected success in the elections. Moreover, a long-term strategic plan going beyond the five-year horizon has not been developed. The exception is the adoption of the Internationalisation Strategy for 2020-2027. The absence of such a plan and also of a Vision signals a certain deficit of reflection on the long-term development goals of UPET. This has been borne out by interviews in which quite divergent perspectives on the university's development were outlined, and differences between the previous and current strategy were not always accurately identified. The systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of annual plans, the results of which are published in reports, deserves recognition. However, a certain weakness is the lack of documented evaluation of the implementation of five-year plans (e.g. in the form of a progress and final report). Thus, medium-term planning has not been properly linked to quality assurance and the quality loop is not closed.

All internal stakeholders, primarily the members of collegiate bodies, participate directly in strategic planning. Indirect participation of alumni and employers, who express their opinions in surveys, is also ensured. All planning work is coordinated by the *Senate Management, Commission*. The mission and strategic plans are available to all stakeholders in the form of publications posted on UPET website. Twice a year, the Rector organizes meetings with university employees, informing them about the plans.

University Governance. The organisational structure of the university is characteristic of a Central and Eastern European university and combines two groups: university administration/managers and academic collegiate bodies with decision-making and advisory capacities. The former group includes rectors, the Administration Council, university directors, deans, heads of departments, heads of operational and administrative centres. The latter group

includes the Senate with five commissions, faculty councils, departmental councils, standing committees including the *University Commission of Ethics*. A brief review of the university's leaders points to a good gender balance in the leadership positions. The development of new strategic plans, a number of regulations, procedures, including those related to education during the pandemic, ensuring an increase in the number of students, and maintaining the financial stability of the university speaks well for the quality of the HEI's management.

The organisational structure and management system of the university have been stable recently. Various aspects of the functionality of the management system are the subject of evaluations carried out, among others, by the *Management Commission*, *Quality Assurance Department*, *The Public Internal Audit Departments*. Leaders and organisational unit managers expressed satisfaction with the current state and do not anticipate major changes. It should be noted that a body such as a Board of Trustees or Advisory Council with external stakeholder as their members has not been appointed at UPET. The existence of such a body would enhance the quality of strategic planning thanks to taking into account the point of view of alumni, employers, representatives of local government, industry and business, and would improve the credibility of the university. According to the Rector's information, it is planned to establish an Advisory Council with the participation of industry representatives. Currently, the Advisory Council with the participation of foreign experts operates at the Doctoral School. Consideration should also be given to establishing a centre for strategic analysis responsible for the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of strategic plans.

In formal terms, university staff, students and doctoral students are ensured participation in the co-management of the university. They sit on the Administrative Council, the Senate (1/4 of the membership), the Faculty Councils (1/4 of the membership) and functional committees such as the *University Commission of Ethics* and the *Commissions for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEAC-U)*. Student matters can also be addressed with the agency of three student organisations and via surveys. No analysis of student activity in collegiate bodies are conducted at the university, so it is not easy to assess the degree to which their voice is heard. During interviews, it was signalled they are quite active, however no solid evidence was provided. Therefore, it is worth considering organising special training for new members of collegiate bodies. The more that in some committees, eg. CEAC-F, students members are replaced every year. Such training is reportedly offered by student organizations. Due to the fact that university authorities are elected for a specific period of time, such training should also be offered to newly elected university managers and members of the collegial bodies. Non-academic university staff (administration staff, technical staff, service staff) have fewer opportunities to express their needs, as they do not participate in collegiate bodies and do not express their opinions via surveys. Also, doctoral students are not represented in all university bodies as a distinct group. and are not included in the survey.

One of the sources of information relevant for decision-making and improving the quality of teaching and learning processes are surveys addressed to students, graduates and employers. In the case of employers, it is difficult to treat these results as representative, as only 24 respondents filled in questionnaires in the last survey. Students (in two separate questionnaires) rate the quality of teaching, the services provided by the university administration, the quality of teaching infrastructure, the extracurricular offer and social support. Also, in this case the return response of the surveys is not high and fluctuates around 30%. Two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, there is a need to analyse the reasons for the lack of interest in the surveys. Secondly, there is a need to supplement this flawed database with other sources of information about stakeholders' needs and preferences. In order to learn more about the needs

of the university community, it would be advisable to conduct surveys among doctoral students, academic teachers and non-academic staff.

The university's activities are covered by regulations ensuring academic integrity. Rights and responsibilities of university staff are stipulated in the *Code of Academic Ethics and Deontology* and these of the students in the *Code of students' rights and responsibilities* (the latter was approved by the Senate in 2021). An independent *University Commission of Ethics (CEU)* oversees the compliance with ethical standards. Its annual activity reports are posted on the UPET website and form a subject of the debate in the Senate. A review of these reports shows that the Commission primarily responds to reported cases of unethical behaviour. Its preventive activity is modest and not based on the identification of the types and scale of undisclosed violations of ethical standards. I would like to suggest conducting such a study, e.g. in the form of an anonymous survey of the incidence of such phenomena as plagiarism, corruption, bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment, etc. According to the representative of the CEU, such phenomena rarely occur. It would be an interesting exercise to analyse the results of the assessment of ethical behaviour carried out as part of the annual teacher appraisal, and especially peer review. The Code includes a statement about the protection of intellectual property rights, but no policy for the protection of intellectual property has been formulated. Activities in this sphere mainly boil down to the use of a plagiarism checker on the theses presented by students, doctoral students, and academic teachers. The provision of Article 377 of the Code, which states that only members of the university's management or authorised individuals can speak about the university in a public forum sounds somewhat controversial. In order to strengthen the enforcement of student and staff rights, it is necessary to appoint an academic ombudsman. Incidentally, many of the interviewees did not know this institution. Strengthening ethical attitudes would be served by reminding about the ethical principles required in a given class in the syllabus.

Quality Assurance Policy and Internal Quality Assurance System (IQA). Quality issues form an important part of the UPET Strategy. Its scope covers the quality of education, research, organisation, and relations with the socio-economic environment. One of three strategic objectives is “*To develop a quality-oriented organisational culture*”, and another one “*To consolidate and increase the level of achievement of quality indicators at university level in order to maintain a “high level of confidence” rating in the next ARACIS accreditation.* This latter objective suggests a reactive approach to developing a quality culture and insufficient intrinsic motivation to improve quality. The UPET Statutes state that “*Members of the university community have a responsibility to foster a quality culture...*” A separate document, which is updated annually, defines the tasks within the quality assurance policy. The quality policy adopted for 2021 promises to develop a new culture of quality education and to ensure a high degree of awareness of accountability for the services provided by the university. It is highly doubtful that such a significant objective related to changing the mindset of stakeholders can be achieved just in short or even medium term. A comprehensive approach to quality policy covering four basic spheres of university functioning: education, scientific research, quality management organisation, and relations with the socio-economic environment, deserves praise. The University has a rich and structured set of procedures, which in a fairly comprehensive manner relates to UPET's basic processes and areas of activity. In the most visible way, the operation of IQA is documented in the area of education. The University and study programmes are systematically reviewed by ARACIS. Among other instruments, ISO standards were adopted and formed the basis for the operation of internal quality assurance system, although the University does not have a current certificate of this organization. In addition, the SAR mentions the use of experiences of other national and international universities in the

development of IQA. Its structure is not fully comprehensible for external observers, due to the lack of presentation in the form of a Quality Manual/Handbook and the descriptions of processes and procedures are scattered in many different documents.

Structures have also been established to support the implementation of quality policy in the form of the university-wide Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEAC-U) and faculty commissions (CIAC-F), as well as the *Quality Assurance Department (DAC)*. The Department employs 11 people performing numerous tasks, including "*elaboration and implementation of the elements of quality culture*", "*Execution and monitoring activities of the quality management implementation stages*". However, the systematic cooperation of the above-mentioned bodies with other units responsible for quality, e.g. Committee for Scientific Research and Department of Internal Audit is practically not well developed. This makes it difficult to achieve synergies between various actors of the Internal Quality Assurance system and to have a holistic view of its results. One of the negative effects is the lack of analysis of the relationship between teaching and research. The mechanism of disseminating good practices is poorly developed. The top-down approach dominates in the quality policy, while the initiatives at the basic level of the quality assurance system are initiated to a small extent.

A well-developed system for monitoring evaluation and reporting the results of this evaluation forms a strength of any quality policy, in particular this relating to education. Once a year, the teaching and scientific activities of the University, faculties and departments are evaluated. The publication of annual reports on the implementation of tasks forming the quality policy is commendable. They reports, informs, among other things, on activities in the areas of education, research, and internationalisation. Moreover, recommendations are presented in in the summary of strengths and weaknesses. Their value for the enhancement quality policy would be greater if they contained an extended analytical component, referred more explicitly to strategic goals and their recommendations pointed to concrete ways of implementing these goals. In addition, a mention should be made of reports summarising the results of student surveys (*Yearly Report for the Assessment of the Students' Satisfaction Regarding the Learning Environment*), periodic evaluation of teachers, self-assessment of study programmes subject to ARACIS accreditation and reports presented by individual organisational units. Unfortunately, reports reflecting on medium and long-term effects of the operation of these units have not been developed. One of the few documents available is *The Department for Professional Development and Continuous Training of the Didactic Staff (DPPD-FC) Report* covering the years 2016-2020. It should be noted that these reports are presented and discussed by the university's collegiate bodies. A variety of platforms have been created to reflect on pro-quality measures and their results. However, it is worth refining the formula of the reports. For example, in the reports summarising the results of academic teachers' appraisal there is no analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers' activity, which should justify the recommendations for improvement formulated there. In the quality assessment reports, e.g. for 2020, there is no reference to operational objectives written in annual plans. Based on the reports, it is sometimes difficult to understand the reasons why some planned tasks were not carried out. No evidence of checking the implementation of the recommendations is presented in the reports, including those formulated by ARACIS review teams. Incomplete implementation of recommendations and low knowledge of new regulations were considered by the representative of the Internal Audit Office as the main challenges for their work.

So far, no comprehensive, holistic assessment of the internal quality assurance system, its strengths and weaknesses has been made. The periodic evaluation of IQA from the perspective of its impact on the achievement of quality policy strategic objectives should form a permanent element of the system. The university has created a rich database of quantitative and qualitative information that describes progress in quality development. Therefore, I would like to propose conducting systematic analysis of this data and the publication of the results in the form of thematic analyses on key issues in the development of a quality culture. Such studies should answer the question how the adopted arrangements contribute to quality improvement and enhancement.

A certain weakness of the implemented quality policy is the adaptation of general objectives and principles to the conditions in which the university operates. The first objective - the development of organisational culture - was not interpreted in the context of the University's operations. During interviews with quality assurance officers, it was difficult to get a clear interpretation of this objective and even more so of the relationship with quality culture. The extent to which the quality-oriented measures are driven by internal motivations or the drive to improve and enhance quality are also unclear, and so is the extent by external rules imposed by national law and ARACIS accreditation requirements. There is also no convincing evidence of knowledge of ESG Part One and that the IQA was modified in line with the ESG 2015. Thus, it is doubtful if they can be used to promote a quality culture. It would therefore be useful to evaluate the procedures and mechanisms from the perspective of ESG'15 requirements and not just ARACIS accreditation standards. In connection with the participation in EURECA PRO Consortium and the declaration of offering joint studies in all cycles of education, work should be undertaken to adapt the internal quality assurance system to the requirements of the European Approach to Joint Programmes.

Despite formal participation in collegiate bodies, students and staff, and even university managers were not always aware of the priorities of quality policy and quality assurance arrangements in place. Representatives of staff, students and external stakeholders are not among the authors of the SAR report and the report itself was not made available to the university community. The report is not to be published until the ARACIS evaluation is completed. Although the students prepared their own report, it basically only contains the facts known from SAR, and the few recommendations written at the end of it do not stem from its content. Some interviewees found it difficult to identify not only the objectives of the quality policy, but even the benefits of IQA. The need for greater student and staff involvement in quality processes is mentioned in the strategic plan. The Internationalisation Strategy explicitly states that "*The university community lacks the cooperation culture*". This issue was not addressed in the SAR. In such conditions, it is difficult to develop a quality culture based on the knowledge and acceptance of shared values and an understanding of individual stakeholders' roles. This implies the need to improve communication with stakeholders. The members of collegiate bodies should be offered training to prepare them for these roles, seminars should be organised, etc. Such a recommendation was included in the Rector's Report for 2019, but apparently it has not been fully implemented. The development of a Quality Handbook presenting IQA in an attractive and comprehensible form should serve to increase the involvement of students and staff in quality-oriented activities.

Academic programmes, Teaching and Learning. The degree programme offer includes two blocks, engineering studies and programmes in economic and social sciences. However, there is little evidence of integration of these blocks e.g. in the form of interdisciplinary studies, such as Engineering Economics, for example. This situation changes radically with UPET's

participation in the EURECA PRO consortium of six European universities. As part of this project, joint interdisciplinary Bachelor's degree and Master's degree programme in Responsible Production and Consumption have been launched. The first Bachelor's and Master's degree programme will be completed in 2023. A doctoral program degree programme will be completed in 2040.

The design of the study programmes is similar to that of similar programmes offered by other European universities. I was informed about benchmarking, but as it seems these are individual practices not included in a university-wide framework. The syllabus structure is also consistent with that applied in other universities, albeit slightly differently group Intended Learning Outcomes than in Dublin Descriptors. Namely, "professional skills" and "transversal competencies" are identified, while knowledge-related learning outcomes are also included in the former group. The syllabuses have been published on the website in English, albeit in an incomplete version, and without the description of learning outcomes and the requirements for obtaining a credit for a given course. A review of student, alumni and employer surveys indicates that their informative value for improving study programmes and the teaching process is limited. The questionnaire aimed to evaluate the quality of teaching filled in by students and the questionnaire addressed to graduates only contain standardised answers, and they give no possibility to present open comments. Graduates do not have an opportunity to express their opinion on the usefulness of the acquired learning outcomes, the quality of teaching, etc. In contrast, employers can do so. Those responsible for the methodology of this survey should reflect on the concept of the surveys and in exit surveys addressed to graduates leaving universities ask them how they evaluate the completed study program, quality of teaching and learning.

UPET shows a very favourable academic staff-student ratio. On average there are 9.5 per one teacher and maximum values do not exceed 15. This creates favourable conditions for the implementation of interactive forms of teaching, including the master-student model. The SAR cites examples of student interactive techniques in the teaching process, but no general framework for Student-Centred Learning (SCL) or for the dissemination of good teaching practices has been developed. It is therefore worth considering the creation of a university forum for the exchange of information on innovative and applied teaching techniques, pedagogical training and best teaching practices noted at UPET and other universities. The lecturer is required to have developed research in the corresponding scientific discipline, which is documented by publications published over the past five years. So, the prerequisites for the transfer of new knowledge into the teaching process were created. However, this issue was not analysed, despite the requirement stipulated in ESG'15.

The SAR provides information on a well-developed system of support for academic staff in developing their teaching skills. The quality of the classes and the teaching techniques used are highly rated by students in surveys, as well as during teacher evaluation by their supervisors and colleagues. Some interviewees pointed to the need to strengthen feedback, or rather information about it from teachers, and to modernize the literature recommended in the syllabus. The compatibility of education with the needs of the labour market is emphasised. Employer satisfaction with the quality of graduates expressed in the surveys is a high; 4.75 on a five-point scale for undergraduate courses and 4.47 for graduate courses (survey conducted in 2020). However, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the employers interviewed called for closer cooperation between the university and them in order to close the gap between labour market requirements and the learning outcomes acquired at university. Against the backdrop of these opinions, flawed teaching efficiency is apparent. The SAR signals problems with high student dropout rate and

postponement of final exams. In 2016-2020, about 51% of graduates passed their exams on the first attempt. The employability rate is not very high. According to the SAR, just over 51% of graduates took a job in the first two years after graduation, which signals problems with the transition from studies to work. The direct involvement of employers in the processes of creating and monitoring the quality of study programmes, e.g. in the form of councils for individual study programmes, as well as inviting them to take part in final examinations could improve the adjustment of educational structure to the needs of the labour market. Students, graduates and employers also suggested strengthening the practical component of the studies.

Scientific Research. Research forms one of the main strategic priorities. In the University's current strategy, research activities are more closely linked to the policy of internationalization. Currently, UPET does not have a separate long-term research strategy, although such a document for the period 2016-2020 was adopted. Scientific research is carried out in individual departments and research centres. Each year, departments, faculties and research centres prepare research plans. The research process is coordinated and monitored by the *Senate Council for Scientific Research* together with three faculty committees and handled by *The Department of Research, Development and Innovation Management (DMCDI)*. Based on information collected, it can be concluded that the listed units cooperate and use common research infrastructure. The university actively applies for national and international grants and their financial value has increased significantly in the last five years. Among other things, UPET has participated in a project funded under the European Horizon 2020 programme.

However, there is a certain gap between increasing investment in research and the results measured by the number of publications in peer review journals of international renown, the number of patents and even consultations. In 2016-2020, 182 scientific articles were published in international journals listed in bibliometric databases. That is, on average, one employee publishes less than one article over a five-year period. There is also a noticeable decline in the number of national publications and presentations at scientific conferences. Also unusually low are the average Hirsch index values, which in 2020 amounted to 1.154 for publications registered in Web of Science and 3.816 for publications listed in Google Scholar. Only 7 patents have been registered in the last five years, including one international patent. Undoubtedly, this area of activity is one of less developed. However, the reasons for this are not further commented on in research reports and SAR. Perhaps, historical heritage is of some importance here, because under the Communist system, research was concentrated in the Academy of Sciences and research institutes, while universities were mainly concerned with education. Also, strategic goals and objectives are not linked to funding, so research opportunities depend on the available, mainly external, sources of funding and the motivation for conducting it. It is likely that the policy for assessing teachers' academic performance lacks clear priorities for research or firmness in enforcing planned tasks in this area. I have heard that in periodic appraisal of a teacher's achievement, teaching is given more weight than research. On the other hand, one-time allowances of € 300 are awarded for publishing an article in a foreign journal. The lack of visible progress in the university's academic 'production' can be a significant obstacle to improving its visibility and academic reputation internationally. The strengthening of research component in the university's activities will depend to a large extent on the use of opportunities for scientific and research cooperation with partner universities within the EURECA PRO consortium.

Academic Staff. The number of teaching and research staff is stable and the turnover rate is low. About ¼ of the total number of teachers are professors and associate professors. The group of the former is small (17 persons) and their share in the total number of academic teachers

decreased from 9% in 2015-2016 to 6% in 2020-2021. Thus, the system of academic promotion to the highest degree in the academic hierarchy is not fully effective. There are no foreigners among the teaching staff and the number of visiting professors is small. To a small extent, industry and business practitioners are employed as academics. Among new staff members employed based on open recruitment competitions are mainly UPET graduates. The negative effect of this HR policy is the lack of diversification of teaching techniques that graduates from other universities could bring. The SAR also signals the need for employing younger staff members. However, the university is facing difficulties with recruiting young staff and, according to the SAR, the reason for this is low wages. The quality of teaching is also not helped by the fact that one teacher teaches several courses, usually 6 to 8, and there are also cases of teachers teaching a dozen or so of different courses in one academic year. As I found out, the university in principle does not offer any classes to improve pedagogical competences, because every new employee must have a doctoral degree and a specific certificate confirming the completion of pedagogical courses. At UPET, they are offered by *The Department for Professional Development and Continuous Training of the Didactic Staff* to students who will be employed as teachers in the future. Thus, there is no mechanism for the improvement/enhancement of pedagogical competences of teaching staff in the context of the dynamic development of modern teaching techniques and methods. The exceptions are voluntary trainings in the field of IT and e-learning.

Academic staff undergo annual performance appraisal, which consists of a self-assessment of teaching and research achievements, an assessment of the quality of teaching conducted by students, a peer review and an assessment conducted by superiors, i.e. heads of departments. Heads of departments are assessed by deans and deans are assessed by the Rector. Peer review is an interesting solution. A three-strong committee of evaluators consists of a teacher designated by the person being evaluated, a teacher designated by the head of the department, and a teacher appointed by the faculty quality assurance officer. Teachers with poorer ratings are not sanctioned, but attempts are made to explain the rating and address identified weaknesses. Several elements of this assessment can give raise to some questions. The first is asking only closed questions in student surveys and the lack of opportunity to form an opinion that would complement a standardised response. What is puzzling is the fact that, for the most part (over 90% of cases), only very good and good ratings are awarded by the students. It is also difficult to consider student assessments reliable and representative because of low survey response rates (one in three students completes the survey). The second is the peer review, which does not involve class observations. However, one of the criteria is the assessment of the use of modern teaching techniques and methods. It is also unclear on what basis the committee assesses whether teachers' behaviour complies with the standards of the Code of Ethics. Last but not least, because the person being evaluated can swap roles with the evaluators during the next appraisal, peer review in such a small group of teachers makes it difficult to maintain objectivity of the appraisal. This is evidenced by the results of the performance appraisal for the academic year 2019/2020 when out of 138 teachers assessed, 136 obtained a 'very good' rating and 2 obtained a 'good' rating. Students also assessed their teachers highly. There were 122 'very good' and 15 'good' ratings and only one 'average' rating. According to the heads of departments, 129 teachers deserved a 'very good' rating and 9 a 'good' rating. The third element is the lack of a clear link between appraisal indicators and strategic priorities. It is difficult to understand which type of academic achievements is preferred, be it: teaching, research, international cooperation, organisational aspects or services to the society. However, this situation is not a cause for concern and the students, staff and managers interviewed were satisfied with the current teacher appraisal system. I have been informed, the impact of this system on the quality of teaching and scientific research has not been analysed.

Internationalisation. Intensifying the internationalisation of education and research is considered a top priority in the UPET Strategy. The Internationalisation Strategy adopted for 2020-2027 lists numerous and ambitious goals and objectives and aptly points out the weaknesses and risks associated with its implementation. The internationalisation process is intended to cover all spheres of the university's activities and, in particular, to increase UPET's international visibility, to increase participation in EU structures and programmes, and to ensure alignment with international standards in education and research. Among other things, it is envisaged that joint studies will be offered in cooperation with foreign partners; degree programmes will be provided in English; the proportion of foreign students will be increased to 10% of the total number of students; at least three doctoral students from abroad will be employed per year; at least one doctoral student per year will be taught jointly by a domestic and foreign supervisor; and the number of scientific publications in the most renowned foreign journals will be increased. To this end, a wealth of information, including a curriculum, has been published on UPET's English-language website, which is useful for foreign applicants. Mobility programmes are handled by *the Department for Cooperation and European Programmes*, and the Deputy Rector and a Senate commission coordinate activities in this sphere. A specialised "*Eurolanguage*" Centre supports the development of linguistic and intercultural communication competencies of staff and students.

The University has signed over 100 contracts and agreements with foreign partners and is a member of several dozens of international organisations. In 2014-2021, 58 academic exchange agreements were signed. The percentage of foreigners – mostly from Moldova - among students is around 8%. UPET is actively involved in developing the European University initiative. Together with universities from Austria, Greece, Germany, Poland and Spain it forms the EURECA-PRO consortium: *The European University on Responsible Consumption and Production*. According to my interviewees, participation in this project is expected to contribute to a qualitative improvement in the level of scientific research. However, this valuable initiative is not adequately promoted, as it is difficult to find information on the website about specific activities undertaken as part of this project (there is no information at all on the English-language site). The 'Research' tab does not present any content. Adding other language versions of the website would promote more effective enrolment of students from Asia and Africa, which is a declared strategic objective. So, there is a need to integrate information policy with internationalisation policy. From the information provided to me, it appears that a website in French will be launched.

Actual progress in the implementation of internationalisation strategy is moderate. Its main weakness is lack of a link between strategic objectives and sources of funding. The Internationalisation Strategy points to another important weakness, which is "*...the lack of internationalisation-oriented organisational culture*". The harmonisation of study programmes with the view of globalisation is envisaged, but there is no systematic benchmarking practice concerning education and other areas of university activity. Except for the EURECA PRO project, no studies involving foreign universities and leading to a double degree are on offer. The review of strategies, performance reports in this area and syllabuses shows that no actions are taken to internationalise the curriculum with intercultural and global contents, etc. Participation of students and employees in mobility is almost non-existent. One of the reasons mentioned in the Internationalisation Strategy is the reserve (scepticism) of academics towards internationalisation of curricula. Teachers conducting classes in English with students staying under the Erasmus + program do not have any reduction in the teaching load or any other compensation on this account. As I have been informed, in assessing a teacher's performance, apart from publications in foreign languages, the achievements related to participation in the

internationalization process are not taken into account. Another reason indicated by the interlocutors is insufficient fluency in the use of the English language. It signals a lack of effectiveness in language training and in enforcement of foreign language skills for newly employed staff members.

Under the Erasmus+ programme, the number of outgoing students over the past five years has not exceeded 109 per year and there were no more than 12 incoming students. With regard to employees, the figures were 60 and 10 respectively. A limited doctoral students' participation in international research projects and internships abroad is also a weakness. One of the reasons for the low level of the university's internationalisation is the lack of programmes and courses offered in English. As a result, foreign students who do not speak Romanian have to extend their studies by one year to master the Romanian language. Low salaries are the most important barrier to recruiting international teaching staff for longer periods. Raising the level of teachers' and students' proficiency in English, introducing a system of incentives for teachers conducting classes in foreign languages and cooperating with foreign researchers, and launching studies and classes in foreign languages are the most urgent measures to accelerate the process of internationalization at UPET.

Final remarks. UPET's operations are transparent and supported by a structured system of governance and process monitoring. The commitment of university leaders to deepening integration with EHEA universities and enhancing education quality is evident. Challenges and threats are accurately identified. All stakeholders demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education and graduates, the university's contribution to regional development. Achieving by the University a higher level of development and prestige in the global academic world will largely depend on a significant improvement in the quality of research and a more explicit move in quality policy beyond the alignment with ARACIS standards. Critical reflection on the long-term effects of the implemented solutions and an in-depth analysis of failures is evidently lacking.

Despite the existence of many institutional platforms for discussion within the university, knowledge, understanding and acceptance among the university community of the stated strategic objectives and systems in place at UPET are insufficient. This results in an incomplete commitment to their implementation, including the development of a quality culture and internationalisation. Changing it requires better communication between leaders and stakeholders. To a much greater extent than before, the university should involve external stakeholders, including those from partner universities abroad, in its structures and processes.

However, I have no doubt that UPET has made significant progress since the last institutional review and deserves an ARACIS accreditation with a 'high level of confidence' rating.