

“Bogdan Voda” University of Cluj-Napoca
External Institutional Evaluation Report
November 2021

Introduction

I was invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to join the evaluation team for the institutional evaluation of “Bogdan Voda” University of Cluj-Napoca (BV UCN). Prior to the site visit, I had studied the English version of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) of the BV UCN. During the visit, which was carried out online due to the pandemic restrictions from November 8 to November 12, 2021 I had a good opportunity to build upon the information I had received about the BV UCN and its operation.

The site visit started with a 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 BV UCN. During the whole period of evaluation, I had a chance to participate at several plenary/group meetings with representatives of the BV UCN teaching staff, students, alumni and also the employers of graduates of the BV UCN. Besides, a series of individual meetings, as well as group discussions with representatives of various positions within the BV UCN and beyond followed during the site visit. This way, I met representatives of the BV UCN executive management (across the structure: university, faculties, departments and other units), members of the BV UCN Senate, the staff in charge of teaching, research, international relations, quality assurance. I also had a chance to meet representatives of graduates and employers, and some other relevant persons.

During the site visit, I received additional documents related to some aspects of the operation of the BV UCN upon my request, which helped me to complete the image. 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 BV UCN for the purpose of its evaluation.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ms Roxana Florea, an ARACIS officer, for her very helpful support throughout the evaluation process. I also benefited from a highly collegial approach of the whole group of evaluators led by Prof. Ion Popa, the head of the mission and Prof. Calin Rosca, the coordinator of the expert evaluators’ team. All these activities were very helpful.

On the basis of the sources of information mentioned above, I herewith submit my report on the BV UCN’s institutional performance as I have perceived it. I am aware that this is a limited view by an external evaluator, and a much deeper insight would be needed to really catch the essence of some of the issues evaluated. My evaluation, as well as my recommendations for possible consideration, should be understood as a collegial attempt to provide the BV UCN and ARACIS with opinions with the aim to contribute to possible improvements at the BV UCN and the quality assurance of the higher education in Romania.

Mission statement

The BV UCN is a private higher education institution and it entered the Romanian higher education sector in 2005.

In its mission statement, the BV UCN emphasises “higher education and scientific research activities focused on the training of specialists so that they are able to solve all domain-specific problems through competence and conscience in the area obtained within their Bachelor’s /Master’s Degree” (SAR, p. 4). Furthermore, the BV UCN also stresses the ambition “to generate and transfer knowledge to individual and collective creation, in the field of sciences, as well as capitalizing their results” (SAR, p. 5).

While the education and research agenda are clearly part of the mission statement, it may be said the third role of the university (public reach) is somewhat implicit or even missing.

At the same time, however, the set of major objectives, which is formulated and should serve as a vehicle on the way to the realisation of the mission, is broader in its scope and ambitions related to the third role which may be identified there. These objectives are also stressed in the 4-year Strategic Plan of the institution, while paying attention to five areas of the BV UCN’s operation: (1) creative transfer of information and professional experience to students; (2) creation and development of knowledge and values; (3) application of knowledge in economic, legal and sports practice of excellence; (4) institutional development; (5) assurance of efficient management. The annual operational plans seem to concretize individual strategic objectives and lead to concrete actions at the level of university as well as of individual faculties.

It may be concluded, the mission of the BV UCN appears to have some potential to serve as a basis for strategic planning at the BV UCN.

Recommendation:

- *Make sure the mission statement clearly and explicitly aims in a three-fold way at the same time covering the third role besides education and research.*

Academic freedom and academic integrity

In its Charter, the BV UCN 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 concerns the staff, as well as students.

The Code of ethics and professional deontology is the main regulatory document in this field and it has a guiding function too. Among other issues, it deals with situations of incompatibility and conflict of interest, as well as with measures related to academic fraud at different levels. The Code of ethics and professional deontology complies with the provisions of the BV UCN’s Charter and it is mandatory for the whole university community.

The bodies of the BV UCN seem to be in compliance with legislation and they provide the

faculties with the respective academic freedom.

Organisation and management

BV UCN has a number of regulatory documents, which determine organisation and management processes in the institution. It is structured into three faculties (Economic Sciences, Law, Physical Education and Sports) and these are further organized into departments. While rector/deans/heads of departments represent the executive processes in the institution, the university senate with a number of commissions form the self-governing bodies within the institution. The Board of Directors is the main governing/supervisory body of the whole BV UCN.

The principles of organization of BV UCN and its functioning are described in the SAR and they seem to provide a solid basis for main areas of institutional operation.

The electoral regulations stipulate a transparent procedure for electing the leaders of the institution, both in executive and governing bodies/positions.

Students are represented in consultative, decision-making and executive structures within the BV UCN, namely in the university senate and faculty councils (having more than 25% representation).

Academic programmes and student management

At the moment, the BV UCN is realising several programmes at the bachelor level (Management; Law; Physical Education and Sports). Two programmes are currently realised at the master's degree level (Business Management; Human Resource Management; some other master's degree programmes are not functioning at the moment). Most of the programmes are realised in a full-time form (534 bachelor's degree programmes with 11.36 students per teacher and 153 master's degree students with 8.05 students per teacher), some in a part-time form (254 students with 5.4 students per one teacher). The student/teacher ratios are very acceptable.

The admission procedures are in accordance with the legislation.

The academic programmes are in correspondence with BV UCN'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, there is a combination of professional, as well as transversal knowledge and skills present in the programmes. All programmes seem to be well thought out and they are regularly monitored, evaluated and updated when necessary.

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

The BV UCN pays attention to the graduates and their employability in the labour market –

the data available indicate a favourable situation of graduates and their involvement in the labour market.

Student research activities seem to be organized mainly via student scientific circles, which are organized around study years and specialisations. The activities that are supported in this context include annual student scientific sessions organized at the levels of faculties, as well as university, participation at relevant national events, workshops, discussion groups with the involvement of business partners and the like.

The final works of students contain scientific and an applied research component. The staff is not trained in the supervision process though.

Student support services seem to be provided via co-coordinators at faculties and study year groups. During the site visit interviews, students voiced a positive view of the support they were given by the university.

Students' study paths have a certain degree of flexibility, including the possibilities to move within the study programmes.

Students do not seem to have their own student organisation at the BV UCN.

Recommendations:

- *Encourage the establishment and meaningful functioning of student organisation(s) at the university.*

Internationalisation

The international dimension in teaching, research and the public reach at the BV UCN is rather limited.

Student international mobility is minimal, the same may be said about staff mobility. This relates to outcoming, as well as incoming mobilities.

The BV UCN does not seem to be strongly internationally networked and anchored and the international profile of its main activities is not very high. There are seven memoranda/agreements about co-operation between the BV UCN and foreign higher education institutions (among them Taipei Medical University, which by its profile somehow does not relate to the profile of the BV UCN). From the SAR, as well as from interviews conducted during the site visit, it was not evident what practical benefit these memoranda bring to students and/or the staff and their study and work.

The level of internationalisation of research at the BV UCN is very low too.

The English version of the BV UCN's website has potential for development.

Recommendations:

- *Make sure students, as well as staff have a decent chance for international mobility.*

- *Make sure there are incoming students and staff from other HE institutions from Romania and abroad.*
- *Consider possibilities to improve the quality of the English version of the BV UCN's website*

Research

Research is declared as one of the pillars of the BV UCN's operation in the mission statement of the institution, although the BV UCN falls into the category of accredited universities focused on education.

Attention is paid to research development in strategic documents of the BV UCN and annually, the BV UCN seems to organize some scientific sessions, symposia, conferences with national, as well as international participation. Yet research activities of the staff do not seem to be effectively stimulated by the BV UCN, although the representatives of the institution claim that the research performance of the staff is monitored and evaluated. The BV UCN does not seem to be providing internal funding of research activities, it supports in some extent organisation of and participation at scientific events of its staff. External funding for research is scarce at the BV UCN.

The Acta Universitatis (university proceedings) aims at three profiles: Economic Sciences, Law, and Physical Education and Sports.

Efforts to include elements of research in teaching and involve students in some extent may be evaluated positively. Apart from this, there is evidence about the support provided by the BV UCN to student research (small research grants, student research conferences, student research circles and so on).

Some employers' representatives informed us about the development of scientific park and indicated possibilities to interlink its activities with the research-driven activities of the BV UCN.

Overall, research is not a high profile at the BV UCN at the moment.

Recommendations:

- *Consider possibilities to introduce internal granting schemes to support research activities at the institution.*

Staff

The BV UCN has a qualified staff to provide the current portfolio of educational programmes.

According to the SAR, there are 26 standardized teaching positions for the Management departments, there are 21 standardized teaching positions for the Law department, and there are 14 teaching positions for the Department of Physical Education and Sports.

During the interviews, it appeared there are some staff development activities related mainly to teaching skills development, including online teaching.

Regular evaluations are an integral part of working with the staff. This includes a variety of evaluation methods, and they might have a potential to serve as a basis for possible improvements.

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

Recommendation:

- *Make sure the academic staff are trained in skills to supervise students' final works.*

Finance and infrastructure/Premises and equipment

The BV UCN's budget consists of the income from non-profit organisations, tuition fees, donations/sponsorships, FSL interest income, other income without patrimonial purpose and income from economic activities

The institution has an annual budget and also prospective budget plans for the next 3-4 years. These seem to be in line with the financial policy of the BV UCN. Overall, financial issues are coordinated by the Economic Directorate.

The institution under evaluation also provides some scholarship opportunities to the students. The BV UCN has the regulation on granting scholarships for full-time students. Students are represented in the process of establishing criteria for awarding scholarships. There are three types of scholarships available at the BV UCN: merit grants, social grants and financial support scholarships for further studies. Students may also benefit from free services tuition fee reduction and some other forms of assistance, as approved by the Board of Directors.

The financial-accounting activity of the BV UCN seems to comply with the legislation and it is periodically a subject of internal, as well as external financial audits.

As for the infrastructure, the BV UCN has its own premises to conduct teaching, as well as other activities. The premises include the headquarters in Cluj-Napoca and in Baia Mare. In Cluj-Napoca, there is an amphitheatre, seven classrooms, eleven seminar rooms, some laboratories, library spaces and offices. Similarly, there are BV UCN's own facilities in Baia Mare. The BV UCN is also renting some classrooms. Due to pandemic restrictions, I could not visit the site, yet according to the panel members who visited it, the premises, as well as their equipment seem to be at a satisfactory level and in line with the laws and regulations.

The BV UCN has some IT support to its main processes, the need to have an integrated IT system is felt and it appears there are plans towards this end.

Recommendation:

- *Make sure the BV UCN has an integrated IT system supporting effectively all main processes at the university.*

Quality management

The quality assurance (QA) of main processes is paid sufficient attention to at the BV UCN. The structure and processes of quality assurance are developed on a solid base.

The Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEQA) seems to be the main body in charge in this field. The CEQA consists of 3-5 members representing the senate, faculties and students. It is mainly focused on QA policies, strategies and procedures, methodologies of evaluation of programmes, student evaluation, ensuring quality of the teaching staff performance, evaluation of the learning process and so on.

QA Councils at the faculties in charge of the QA processes. The whole QA agenda falls under the portfolio of the vice-rector for QA and educational process.

Students of all programmes are required to provide feedback as for the teaching activity, with its main focus on the quality of information received, professional competence of teachers, their teaching skills, links between theory and practice, student-teacher relationship, stimulation of student creativity, clarity of teaching, innovativeness of teaching approaches and the like. It is not clear how students are informed about what is happening with their feedback. Neither is it clear whether and how it is ensured that the teaching staff whose work is evaluated by the students have a chance to respond to student feedback, explain the reasons of their work/approach etc.

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

Recommendations:

- *Make sure students are informed about what is happening with the feedback they provided on teaching activity.*
- *Make sure teaching staff have a decent chance to respond to student evaluation.*

Final recommendation

I recommend providing the BV UCN with institutional accreditation.

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