



Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education
ARACIS

International Evaluator's Report

University: Free International University of Moldova

September 2023

Introduction

I was selected by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to be a part of the evaluation team for the institutional assessment of the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM). Prior to the on-site visit, which took place from September 27th to 29th, 2023, I reviewed ULIM's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and some other documents. During the visit, I had the opportunity to gain more insights into the functioning of the ULIM.

The site visit commenced with a preliminary gathering of experts who formed the evaluation team. The preparation and coordination of evaluation stages were deliberated during this meeting. Following the meeting, there was a conversation with the ULIM's top officials. Throughout the evaluation process, I had the opportunity to participate in all plenary/group discussions with representatives of the ULIM's teaching staff, students, alumni, and employers of ULIM graduates. Additionally, there were individual meetings and group discussions with individuals from various positions within the ULIM and beyond.



During the on-site visit, I obtained additional materials related to various aspects of the ULIM's work, which aided me in developing a comprehensive understanding of the organization's functions. This allowed me to examine materials on leadership, management and governance, research, internationalization, external relations, quality assurance, and many other areas of the ULIM's operations. As a result of the visit, I also had the opportunity to observe the ULIM's main building and various facilities firsthand.

I'd like to express my gratitude to Ms. Ioana POPESCU, an official of ARACIS, for her invaluable support during the evaluation process. I also appreciated the highly collaborative approach of the entire evaluation team, led by Prof. Univ. Dr. Mihail ANTON, the mission's leader, and Prof. Univ. Dr. Adriana GIURGIU, the expert evaluators' team coordinator.

I am submitting my report on the ULIM's institutional performance as viewed by me, based on the sources of information listed above. I want to emphasize that this is a limited perspective from an external evaluator, and a much deeper understanding would be required to truly capture the spirit of some of the concerns reviewed. My review, as well as my recommendations for possible consideration, should be interpreted as a collaborative effort to present ideas to the ULIM and ARACIS in order to contribute to prospective improvements at the ULIM and the quality assurance of higher education in Moldova.

General Statements

The International Free University of the Republic of Moldova (ULIM) is a private educational institution that is part of the higher education system of the Republic of Moldova. As a non-commercial organization, founded on October 16th, 1992, ULIM operates within the legal framework established by the Civil Code of the Republic of Moldova, and it adheres to all relevant national university system regulations.

The ULIM Charter outlines a clear and comprehensive mission for the university, encompassing three fundamental objectives. To achieve this mission, ULIM has set specific objectives. It aims to cultivate well-rounded and proactive individuals through advanced education and professional training in various fields, drawing from European and global university experiences. Additionally, ULIM engages in entrepreneurial activities, aligning with national and international practices, to maintain a robust technical-material foundation and ensure the seamless operation of all university divisions. The successful realization of these missions and objectives hinges on a collaborative effort involving students, faculty, alumni, employers, and the administration, with a shared commitment to the principles outlined in the ULIM Charter. This collective endeavor forms the bedrock for ULIM's pursuit of academic excellence and societal progress.

The university consists of five faculties offering programs in both undergraduate (Licentiate) and graduate (Master) cycles. Furthermore, ULIM has a Doctoral School, that provides opportunities for students to pursue doctoral studies.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *The Institutional Strategic Development Plans represent the ULIM's strategic priorities. The strategic objectives are reinforced and outlined in each faculty's and department's Strategic Development Plans.*
- *The ULIM's Strategic Plan for the period 2020-2025 addresses all major areas of the institution's operations. The strategic plan presents the objectives for various areas of the university's operations, and the achievement of these objectives is done through the involvement of economic and social partners. The ULIM's mission, vision, and strategy are all interconnected.*

Managerial Structure

The ULIM has a variety of regulation documents that govern the institution's organisation and management processes. The University Charter or University Statute is the most important document in this regard.

The university is governed by the Administration Board, which is responsible for the overall management and development of the institution. The Rector is the chief executive officer of ULIM and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the university. The SAR also describes the roles and responsibilities of other key administrative positions, such as the Vice-Rectors, Deans, and Heads of university subdivisions.

Accounting is directly subordinated to the Rector of ULIM, and the structure and attributions of the ULIM Accounting department are reflected in the ULIM Accounting Organization and Operation Regulation.

The SAR describes the mechanism for electing student representatives in ULIM's councils, the Senate, and other structures. The mechanism is clearly described in the ULIM's Charter and the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the Senate. The election mechanism is democratic and transparent, non-discriminatory, and does not limit the right of students to represent and be represented.

The functioning regulations of the University's structural subdivisions are prepared in compliance with the applicable legislation.

ULIM enrolled more than 5500 students in the most recent academic year (2022-2023).

The ULIM operates on a five-year strategy, and its current strategic plan (2020-2025) appears to be a solid basis for its institutional development.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Continue to improve the management practices and ensure that they are aligned with the mission and objectives.*
- *Continue to strengthen the governance and management structures, to ensure effective decision-making and accountability.*
- *Continue to have students as full members of the university community and partners in the management of ULIM, including in the quality assurance process.*

Teaching Staff

The ULIM has qualified staff to deliver the present portfolio of educational programmes as well as other relevant activities.

ULIM's didactic staff are recruited through a fair and transparent process, and the job descriptions are established taking into account the educational plans, study formations, teaching and research norms.

The positions of lecturers and university professors are occupied by the decision of the ULIM Senate, the positions of lecturers are filled by the decision of the professorial councils of the faculties. The file of the didactic-scientific staff consists of documents provided by the national and institutional normative framework.

The ratio of didactic staff to the total number of students is 1/25.08.

During the interviews, it was revealed that there are some staff development activities, primarily linked to the development of teaching skills, including online teaching.

Students and alumni were generally pleased with the academic staff and the administration's assistance.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Continue to provide opportunities for the professional development of the teaching staff.*

Facilities

During the visit, I was able to see almost all the university facilities: lecture halls, seminar rooms, certain laboratories, the library. They are properly equipped with computer technology, multimedia systems (smartboard, video and overhead projectors, projection screens, flip-charts, etc.). ULIM has got a university hotel, too. Students can also use a dormitory, which is very well equipped.

Students in various disciplines can also use a variety of specialized platforms and apps for student learning and research.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *The existing facilities could accommodate many more students and personnel than are now available.*

Students

ULIM offers study programmes in all three cycles of higher education: licentiate's (cycle I), master's (cycle II), and doctorate (cycle III). The study programmes are designed and developed according to the requirements of the university qualification and the national and European legislation in force. The ULIM has implemented a number of study programmes at various levels in a variety of subject fields.

ULIM has human potential, as well as the technical and material resources, to provide quality education in all study programmes included in the educational offer. The enrollment capacity of the ULIM exceeds the number of currently enrolled students and academic staff. The rules related to the assessment of student results throughout all study phases are clear.

The sections for Psychological Counseling, Career Guidance, and the University Information System appear to be a significant framework. During the site visit interviews, students primarily expressed gratitude for the university's assistance.

At ULIM, a student representative structure has been established. According to the SAR, student representatives at ULIM are involved in all decision-making structures, including the ULIM Senate, Faculty councils, CpAc, and quality assurance commissions from faculties.

The ULIM is concerned with graduates' employability in the work market. During the talks, employer representatives expressed enthusiasm for ULIM grads.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Continue to develop practices of attracting more international students.*
- *Continue to work and care for giving back the facilities for the students.*
- *Ensure that students have a sufficient number of hours for professional practice.*
- *Continue to pay attention to forming a cohesive student community and consider alumni activation.*

Research

According to the SAR, the activity of scientific research constitutes an inalienable part of the teaching and scientific staff performance at ULIM. The university is governed by normative acts such as the Science and Innovation Code of the Republic of Moldova, the National program in the field of research and innovation for the years 2020-2023, and ULIM's institutional development strategy for the years 2020-2025. In addition, ULIM's scientific research strategy for the period 2020-2025 establishes specific objectives and strategies, as well as the main directions of action, and responds to the mission and objectives of the university regarding research, development, and innovation. The ULIM's strategic objectives emphasise research development, and the university appears to organise a number of scientific sessions, symposia, and conferences with national and international involvement each year.

ULIM supports the publication of scientific and didactic works and encourages research activity through various means, including providing financial, logistical, and human resources for scientific research, organizing scientific events, etc.

ULIM has developed a Code of Ethics to safeguard ethics and integrity in research activity and to prevent intellectual or academic fraud.

The university possesses significant scientific and inventive potential. The papers and other research findings appear to be valued both domestically and internationally.

Some employer representatives informed us on the status of research collaboration with the ULIM.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Continue to increase the number of research projects with national and international funding.*
- *Encourage collaborations with other research institutes.*
- *Stimulate academic entrepreneurship of staff, graduates, and students.*

Internationalization

ULIM's institutional development strategy for the years 2020-2025 includes specific objectives and strategies for internationalization, which respond to the mission and objectives of the university regarding international cooperation and academic mobility. The SAR notes that ULIM is a member of various international organizations and networks, such as the European University Association, the International Association of Universities, and the Association of Francophone Universities, and that ULIM has signed cooperation agreements with numerous universities and research institutions from Europe, Asia, and America.

Students (and professors) can take advantage of a variety of foreign mobility options, mostly through the Erasmus+ programmes.

The SAR does not mention any specific initiatives or programs that ULIM has implemented to promote internationalization. The SAR does not provide any specific information on the number of outgoing and incoming students at ULIM, too, but provides information on the number of associated didactic staff from abroad who taught at ULIM during the reporting period. According to the provided data, ULIM invites didactic staff with international recognition from abroad as guest professors, attracting experts from foreign companies to hold courses, trainings, and/or workshops dedicated to adaptation of the offer and content of study programs to the new requirements of the labor market.

ULIM is actively engaged in international academic mobilities within various programs, such as Erasmus+, Confucius Institute, Se Jong Center, Fulbright, DAAD, OeAd, AUF, etc. One of the vice-rectors is responsible for the international agenda.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Consider increasing the amount of incoming mobility students (and personnel) from other HE schools in Moldova and elsewhere.*
- *Continue to encourage more students for outcoming mobility (research and study stays).*
- *Continue intentions to be internationally more visible and better known.*



Quality Management

ULIM's institutional emphasis is on the development and implementation of quality assurance procedures and policies. The ULIM has developed a quality assurance system consisting of the Council for Quality Assurance (CpAC) at the institutional level, the Quality Assurance Department, and the Quality Assurance Commissions at the Faculty level.

All programme students are asked to offer comments on the educational activity and its primary characteristics. It is unclear how students are kept up to date on the status of their input. It is also unclear whether and how teaching staff whose work is evaluated by students are given the opportunity to reply to student feedback, explain the rationale for their work/approach, and so on.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Make sure students are kept up to date on the status of their feedback on teaching activities.*
- *Ensure that didactic personnel whose activities are evaluated by students have an opportunity to respond to students' input.*

Conclusions:

With its commitment to adhering to legal norms and providing a comprehensive range of educational programs, ULIM continues to contribute significantly to the academic landscape of Moldova, and I am confident that it will continue to make a positive contribution to Moldavian society through education, research, and its extensive social involvement.

Signature: Assoc. Prof. Dr Andrian Aleksandrov
Sofia University, Bulgaria