

"Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara - External Institutional Evaluation Report

October 2023

1. Introduction

As stated in the Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, engagement with quality assurance processes, particularly the external ones, allows European higher education systems to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programmes and other provision.

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes, including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritize different purposes, can view quality in higher education differently and quality assurance needs to take into account these different perspectives. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of the study programs, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus inter-related. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management.

I was invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to join the evaluation team for the institutional evaluation of "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara. Prior to the site visit, I had studied the English version of the Institutional Self-Assessment Report of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara and some other documents. During the visit, which was carried out on-site from 18th to 20th of October 2023, I had a very good opportunity to build upon the information, I had received about the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara and its operation.

The site visit started with a preliminary meeting of experts, who are the members of the evaluation team. At this meeting, a preparation and harmonization of evaluation stages was discussed. Then, there was a meeting with the leading representatives of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara. During the whole period of evaluation, I had a chance to participate in several plenary/group meetings with representatives of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara teaching staff, students, alumni and also the employers of graduates of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara. Besides, a series of individual meetings, as well as group discussions with representatives of various positions within the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara and beyond followed during the site visit.

During the site visit, I received additional documents related to some aspects of the operation 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 "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara for the purpose of its evaluation. Since the visit was organized on-site, I also had a very good possibility to see the main premises of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Florentina Paraschiv, an ARACIS officer, for his very helpful support throughout the evaluation process. I also benefited from a highly collegial approach of the whole group of evaluators, Evaluation director Prof.univ.dr. Ladislau Nagy Universitatea „Babeş-Bolyai" din Cluj-Napoca.

On the basis of the sources of information mentioned above, I herewith submit my report on the Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara'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 Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara and ARACIS with opinions with the aim to contribute to possible improvements at the Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara and the quality assurance of the higher education in Romania.

2., General Statements

Institutional Self-Assesment Report

The Evaluated Institution has taken the evaluation process seriously and carefully prepared a the Institutional Self-Assesment Report. This document was available as 125 pages pdf document in the ARACIS cloud, and I was able to access it easily, on-time and as often as necessary. To support information included in the Institutional Self-Assesment Report, the annexes were addressed as links to documents publicly available online in digital format. These documents were later completed with other additional documents, upon request from the evaluation panel. All these documents were uploaded to the ARACIS cloud or sent directly by e-mail to the evaluation panel.

Mission statement

The Foundation for Culture and Education "Ioan Slavici" of Timișoara was established according to the Decision of the Timiș Court, given by civil sentence no. 544 of 04.01.2000 remained final and irrevocable.

The mission statement s formulated clearly, it is sufficiently elaborated, ambitious and generally acceptable. According to the Statute and its Charter, the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara has assumed a didactic and scientific research mission, and its option for the component specializations aims at the same mission, specifying the concrete ways in which it is to be fulfilled by each specialization in part.

The main objectives achievable through the educational and scientific research process, organized within the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timisoara, are the following:

1. The training of highly competent specialists, with solid professional-scientific knowledge and practical skills, in the profile of each of the specializations addressed within the 2 aforementioned faculties;
2. The training of graduates in a new economic, legal and scientific mentality, suitable for the organizational-social framework specific to the competitive market economy, which is characterized by mobility, depth, entrepreneurial and innovative spirit, with implications for all activities in the social, production and services;
3. The development of creative attitudes in the training of future specialists, who become capable of assuming responsibilities and effectively contributing to the solution of concrete, theoretical and practical aspects of each profession, corresponding to the requirements of social-economic activity and environmental protection.

Academic freedom and academic integrity

The Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara aims to abandon the old approaches within an integrated educational process, this leading to the reduction of administrative costs, the members of the academic community benefit from more freedom to find, most of the time together with the students, creative solutions materialized in original bachelor's and dissertation papers.

The Ioan Slavici University of Timișoara operates in the conditions of academic autonomy, academic freedom, emphasising free and equal access and public responsibility and accountability. The respect to academic freedom concerns the staff, as well as students.

The Ethics Commission is the main body dealing with this agenda, its reports are published annually. The Ethics Commission seems to be functioning well and it has sufficient support from the Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara.

Overall, the bodies of the Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara seem to be in compliance with legislation and they provide the faculties with the respective academic freedom.

All study programs are accredited by ARACIS and evaluated at regular intervals. The Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara respects the academic freedom of teaching and research personnel, as well as the rights and freedoms of students in accordance with the the Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara Charter and specific regulations

The university uses an anti-plagiarism software to fight against intellectual frauds.

The public information can be found on the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara 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 language. The English version of the website exists, although it is very incomplete. In connection with this it is highly recommended to develop the English version, because this could help to grow the visibility and internationalization of the institution as well.

Recommendations:

- 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 continuous investment in human capital.
- University permanently has to develop its competitive factors and have keep the present role and the place in local and international market.
- The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow.
- The English version of the website exists, although it is very incomplete. In connection with this it is highly recommended to develop the English version, because this could help to grow the visibility and internationalization of the institution as well.

3., Managerial Structure

The organizational structures and subdivisions that ensure the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara management system, as well as the relationships of hierarchical subordination that are established between them are specified in the University Charter. The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara has a clear distribution of duties and a delineation of the responsibilities of its administrative staff and governing bodies.

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara has a number of regulatory documents, which determine organisation and management processes in the institution. The University Charter is the key document in this respect. Both the University Charter and the regulations are

periodically reviewed by the representative bodies of the University, in accordance with the legislation on higher education at national and European level.

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara complies with the legal regulations for the election/appointment of the structures – the Board of Directors, the Senate and the Faculty Council, of management positions at the departmental level – heads of departments, faculties – dean, vice-dean and at the institutional level, the information regarding the elections/competitions will be posted on UIS website.

The university uses information and communication systems such as the Internet and Intranet (e-learning platform) and the secretariat, which involve members of the academic community, including students, administrative personnel, as well as other beneficiaries and partners of the University, thus responding to public interests.

The Senate comprises 12 members, of which 9 (ie 75%) are teaching personnel, and 3 (ie 25%) are students.

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

The faculty council includes teachers and researchers, 73%, and 27% students. The dean, vice-dean and department head are the ex official members.

Recommendations:

- *Equality of representation (e.g. gender, discipline, faculty) should be considered in all university bodies and functions.*
- *More involvement of the rector and the dean into the decisionmaking process. The decision&making process in an organization or business should be planned and resolved in a comprehensive, reliable, and transparent manner.*
- *Review the titles of the institution and its faculties to reflect research-oriented strategic direction and current study programmes.*
- *Consider the possibilities of providing management training to leaders at different levels of the university structure.*

4., Teaching Staff

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara has a qualified staff to provide the current portfolio of educational programmes as well other relevant activities.

Teaching and research staff at the university are recruited on a competitive basis. AUO offers equal opportunities, without gender discrimination or based on other criteria, to candidates for teaching positions. Leadership at "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara is highly-motivated and there have been significant improvements over the last years.

During the interviews, some representatives of the younger generation of academic staff expressed their well-balance workload between teaching and research.

The teachers carry out permanence hours and hours of consultations in which they are available to the students for guiding them during the academic year both for the activities arising from the teaching-learning process and for the activities related to the individual training program.

Students and alumni were positive about the academic staff, as well as about the administration support.

Recommendations:

- *Especially, at small institutions it is essential to save human resources and to avoid any overlapping of responsibilities.*
- *Make sure the workload of each academic staff category is properly balanced, as for the teaching, research and the public reach.*
- *To promote the continuous professional training of teaching staff to acquire new skills, methods and techniques that can further improve their teaching activity.*
- *Continue to identify and use innovative techniques for effective teaching/learning, including the use of new technologies and the organization of training sessions for academic staff and try to maximize participation to these type of training sessions.*

5., Facilities

The financial activity of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara organized on the basis of non-profit and self-financing.

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara provides some scholarship opportunities to the students. It has the responsibility for awarding scholarships and other forms of material support for students.

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara has recovery programs for students with learning difficulties (regular meetings with the psychologist).

Scholarships are provided from allocations from the institution's own resources. The financing of university studies is ensured through tuition fees approved annually by the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara Senate, through research contracts, projects with European funding as well as from other sources made available by the Foundation.

Students are also to some extent supported to participate in research programmes, scientific events, student competitions, publication activities.

According to the self-evaluation report and the received information the research facilities are not in good standing and they do not fulfill all recent requirements in terms of space distribution, allocated spaces, available complementary services, etc. In terms of research infrastructure, facilities are not so well equipped with state-of-the art equipment that can not clearly help and motivate students to properly engage in their research activities.

The spaces dedicated for the didactic and research-related activities are owned by the university and meet the norms and legal requirements, the present capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations. 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.

Infrastructure related issues were also identified, such as the lack of a larger performance and theater hall, lack of sufficient parking spaces and even insufficient teaching spaces. Some of the students highlighted the need to adapt curricula to new labor market needs, to improve the balance between theoretical and practical learning and to organize more socio-cultural events dedicated to students.

Recommendation:

- *To maintain subscription to software packages as well as continuously identify possible needs of both teaching/research staff and students in order to expand subscription and/or acquire more software packages.*
- *Supplement the library stock of books/volumes/scientific papers that are included in a course bibliographical references are missing.*

- *Continuous analysis of the opportunity to develop the book collection / other library resources, by acquiring titles published in recent years, related to all disciplines of study.*
- *Continue to equip all research and teaching laboratories with equipment and resources so they can meet the requirements, at least at a minimum level, of dealing with current scientific topics in the fields assumed by the institution.*
- *Continue to equip all rooms related to teaching activities (lectures, seminars, projects, workshops, etc.) with most recent technical equipment.*
- *Continue efforts to link scientific research to the needs and requirements of the economic and social environment.*
- *To perform regular analysis of the results of research activity and setting up mechanisms to increase scientific production.*
- *To expand high-speed Wi-Fi coverage to as many as possible buildings and facilities.*
- *Monitor the ratio of academic/teaching staff to students and benchmark with other reference universities within the country or abroad.*
- *Continue to develop the level of cleanliness and services provided.*

6., Students

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timisoara currently has 2 faculties, with a total of three accredited specializations (specialty Accounting and Management Informatics, Finance and Banking and Information Technology), by the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, following to be requested the obtainment of the institutional accreditation.

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara has been realising a small number of study programmes at different levels within a number of study domains. "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara organizes bachelor's degree programs.

The information about the programmes is published. The admission procedures seem to be in accordance with the legislation.

The academic programmes are in correspondence with the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timisoara'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 presented in the programmes.

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

The nomenclature of the subjects of study in the educational plan, the number of hours by categories of teaching activities, as well as their classification in one category or another of disciplines are established according to the norms in force.

Students' study paths have a certain degree of flexibility.

Student support services seem to be provided sufficiently in most cases. Staff contact hours, tutors for each study group/year of study, and mentors are significant measures regularly implemented at the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timisoara.

During the site visit interviews, students mostly voiced a positive view of the support they had been given by the university.

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara pays attention to the graduates and their employability in the labour market. The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara aims to abandon the old approaches within an integrated educational process, this leading to the reduction of administrative costs, the members of the academic community benefit from more freedom to find, most of the time together with the students.

During the meetings, employer representatives were positive about the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara graduates. Some of them highlighted, however, the need to re-consider some aspects of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara operation – for instance, the need for a clearer framework for the cooperation between employers and the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara; the need for more flexible curricula.

It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara attracts lot of potential students and the university also has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies.

Recommendations:

- *Make sure student activities of the associations are sufficiently funded by the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara and students have sufficient information about available funding.*
- *Make sure employers have significant role in developing the study programmes, as well as other activities at the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara.*
- *To continue to consult external stakeholders in order to adapt its curricula in agreement to new labor market requirements.*
- *To consider authorization/accreditation of new study programs taught in international languages.*
- *Further promote internship and exchange opportunities to its students.*
- *"Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara should promote more team and collaborative work, timeline-based assessments, a better training on analytical thinking, professional communication or digital competences.*

7. Research

The international dimension in teaching, research and the public reach at the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara seems to be on a acceptable level. 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.

Although the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara is a relatively small institution, through inter-university institutional ties nationally and internationally it has managed to attract funds for research, through partnership programs and joint research projects. The teaching personnel from the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara participated actively and with good appreciation during the period mentioned above, in a series of international conferences organized by renowned universities in Europe. As a result of the work of these conferences, the communications presented were published in the volumes of the events or on electronic media (CD).

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual as well as student level. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intensive collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities, and state institutions. Students are permanently participating on contests, exhibitions, and conferences. Their ideas, knowledge and concepts should be an integral part of the future of the university. It is also important to point out that the concept of sustainability appears in many projects: this strategic orientation could help to prepare the next generations for the economic, social, and environmental challenges of humankind.

At the level of the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara, a campaign was initiated to review the research activity at the student level, by co-opting students in writing teams and implementing grants or research contracts, as well as student scientific research circles.

A considerable number of teaching personnel from the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timisoara work as lecturers in the training courses organized by:

- different professional organizations;
- institutions (commercial companies) intended for the business environment;
- public administration.

For the **Accounting and Management Informatics study program**, the scientific research plan of the study program includes 9 research topics.

For the **Finance and Banking study program**, the scientific research plan of the study program includes 9 research topics.

For the **Information Technology study program**, the thematic research directions specific to the field of study Computers and Information Technology.

The objectives of the research activity according to the mission assumed in the University Charter.

The research has sufficient human resources to achieve the proposed objectives, scientific research and creative activities can be carried out individually or collectively by the teaching personnel of the evaluated study program. There are 54 people involved in the didactic activities who can carry out the scientific research activities included in the scientific research plan of the study program so that the proposed objectives are met.

Members of the research teams are materially supported to participate in scientific events (conferences, symposiums, workshops, or research-specific product fairs). The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara acts to reward the work of research teams in accordance with the revenues achieved through research contracts.

The university promotes and enforces clear policies on academic integrity and copyright protection. Also, the university has procedures to prevent and identify plagiarism, in order to avoid violations of the norms of ethics and integrity by members of the academic community.

The research activity of the teaching personnel who carry out scientific research activities in the field of the subjects they hold as part of the study programs is materialized in the publication of a number of 14 scientific papers in magazines with an impact factor of nil, of a number of 24 papers in Proceedings Conferences - rated by ISI and of a number of 103 papers at other Conferences abroad. The teaching personnel involved in the evaluated study program were involved in numerous research contracts, grants or research projects, including projects carried out within the technology park. The scientific events organized and the participation in symposia of the teaching personnel of the study program over time are presented (57 elements).

In order to stimulate publication in journals with a relative influence score higher than 0.25, prizes were awarded depending on the SRI value and the related expenses were also settled (publication fee, consultancy fee for a firm specialized in editing-pre-evaluation).

Within the Science and Technology Park, a new building is being built, a project for research on the behavior and economic efficiency of photovoltaic cells is in the final phase of implementation.

Recommendations:

- *Benchmark with similar institutions and compare key parameters (curricula, research, mobility numbers, etc.).*
- *Contract teachers from other universities to give online courses at "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara.*
- *In order to increase international visibility and to attract also foreign students, any new postgraduate programmes should be offered in English language.*

- *Continue to seek partnerships with similar institutions within the same country or abroad to provide a framework for student and staff mobility.*
- *Continue efforts to direct the results of scientific research towards publications and other results with national and international relevance.*
- *Actively promote all forms of internalisation opportunities for staff and students: ERASMUS, virtual international weeks, participation in international student fairs, and the resourcing of international guest lecturers.*
- *Improve the university library intelligent knowledge service (database etc.).*
- *Create library website which provides a library with a website to offer its services and to tell its story to its community.*
- *Guide for how to get published in high impact journals.*
- *Construction of a seed data set from publication lists of "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara. Expansion of seed data by including publications from the target period that cite seed publications, and including publications from the target period that are cited by seed publications until saturation is reached.*
- *Consider the possibilities of training supervisors of students (supervising their theses, dissertations) in supervisory skills.*

8. Internalization

In Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European financial resources, projects, and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities. For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational, and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara these connections seem to be in an appreciate level as national and international collaboration has been in develop.

The winning and successful implementation of a project with European funding in this particular field, of the quality of scientific research as a whole, is emphasized.

There is a large number of international cooperation with other universities and there are many bilateral agreements exists. "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara is also participating in the ERASMUS program where parallel with the student mobility there is also teacher mobility which usually means a one-week long visit different European destinations basically with the same main directions as student mobility. Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these contracts permanently with the partner institutions and permanently increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities.

Overall, the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara seems to be well internationally networked and anchored and this contributes to the international profile of its main activities.

Recommendations:

- *A greater awareness of ESG and quality assurance methodology closer to the ESG would be useful in terms of European cooperation and important in developing further international partnerships.*
- *Explicit connection to the institution's strategic plan and its annual budget planning process (as well as that of academic units).*
- *Increase the number of collaboration agreements in the field of research.*
- *Increase the membership with international organizations and associations.*

- *Developing an institutional culture for internationalisation and its inclusion within policy, priority setting and budget processes.*
- *Expand the co-operation with other research groups in Romania and abroad.*
- *Create additional administrative support for the realization of research co-operations in order to reduce bureaucratic work for researchers.*

9. Quality management

The "Ioan Slavici" University Timisoara highlights the positions of collective bodies and persons with responsibilities in the quality assurance system at various levels.

The quality assurance (QA) of the main processes is paid less attention to at the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara. It can be defined as the set of organizational structures, responsibilities, regulations, standards, procedures, tools, and resources contributing to high quality educational services at all stages. An institutional quality management system is regulated and functions within the university. The main objective is the implementation of a quality evaluation and assurance system based on policies, an organizational structure and documentation able to permit monitoring and evaluating, prevention and adjusting interventions and the continuous quality increase.

Reviewing the structure and activities of the quality assurance of the university, these processes seem to operate appreciate, but the main principle and an objective has to be that quality assurance must become the 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.

The nation-wide competitive advantages of the university justify the need for the continuous quality assurance: the institution permanently has to face with economic, social and environmental challenges, so there is a continuous adaptation pressure for quality assurance processes to adjust to the changes and improve the quality of teaching and research processes.

Overall, the structure and processes of quality assurance are developed on a solid base.

Students of all programmes are required to provide feedback as for the teaching activity and its main features. 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.

Recommendations:

- *Make sure students are informed about what is happening with the feedback they provided on teaching activity.*
- *Consider the possibility for a teacher to respond to individual student feedback in an individualized way (electronically).*
- *Further strengthen certain internal quality arrangements (e.g. benchmarking with comparable institutions).*
- *Make sure performance of the academic staff leads to increased quality of research work overall at the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara.*
- *Continue to publish the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara annual reports on the university website.*
- *Improve the quality management system documentation at the university.*

- *Set up the documentation, its structure, requirements, benefits of well-documented and implemented documentation, and maintenance. Use software in managing quality management system documentation effectively.*

Final recommendation

The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara is a small but well-established university with strong leadership, highly motivated staff, committed students and very favourable support. The "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara upholds a good quality of education but there is scope to evolve in a number of aspects concerning the Bologna principles and current challenges of higher education.

I have confidence that the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara will continue to contribute to the Romanian society through education, research and its great social engagement

My remarks and recommendations should assist "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara to proceed its successful way into the future.

I recommend providing the "Ioan Slavici" University of Timișoara with „trust” institutional accreditation.

Debrecen, 23 10 2023

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