

I. Introduction:

In the period 12th of July – 16th of July 2021, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education (ARACIS) has carried out the assessment visit of the Doctoral Schools with the University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi. The self-assessment report has been elaborated in compliance with the Order of the Minister of Education no. 3651, including both the Methodology for the assessment of doctoral studies, and the System of criteria, standards, and performance indicators used in the accreditation and periodical assessment of doctoral schools and their fields. The assessment has complied with the mixed work method imposed during the emergency period, determined by the spreading of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The meetings have been organized both online, through the Zoom platform, and physically at the office of the University, while complying with all the enforceable norms imposed by the pandemic context.

University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi, as an Institution Organizing Doctoral Studies (IOSUD), organizes the studies in the fields of Accounting, Biology, Chemistry, Communication Science, Cybernetics & Statistics, Economic Informatics, Economics and International Affairs, Economy, Education Science, Environmental Science, Finance, Geography, Geology, History, Informatics, Law, Management, Marketing, Math, Philology, Philosophy, Physics, Political Science, Psychology, Science of Sports and Physical Education, Sociology, Theology. At the level of IOSUD, University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi had implemented a European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System for the period of doctoral studies of minimum 180 ECTS, before the presentation of the doctoral thesis.

Used methods:

Before the assessment visit of the IOSUD, the Commission of specialty permanent experts analysed the internal assessment file of the IOSUD, and the filed appendices (English version of some of the documents were provided on the first day of the visit, very quickly after the international experts requested for them). During the visit, the ARACIS commission analysed the required documents, and also the data and information presented in electronic format from the site of the Doctoral Schools. Furthermore, there were executed visits, during which the space designed for the process of learning and research, but also for the administrative activities, were observed. There were more than a dozen meetings with online support with the representatives of the management of the university and doctoral schools, with the responsible people from the doctoral studies field, with the doctoral advisors, with the representatives of the Ethics Commission, and of the Commission of Assessment and Quality Assurance, with the doctoral students, graduates, but also with employers from public and private space.

II. Analysis of performance indicators

During the visit, the Commission analysed the accomplishment level of standards and criteria, according to the Methodology for the assessment of doctoral studies.

A. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

A.1.1. The University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi, as an institution organizing doctoral studies (IOSUD) has implemented the effective functioning mechanisms provided for in the specific legislation on the organization of doctoral studies.

A.1.1.1. The existence of specific regulations and their application at the level of the IOSUD, respectively at the Doctoral School:

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

A.1.1.2. The doctoral school's Regulation includes mandatory criteria, procedures and standards binding on the aspects specified in Article 17, paragraph (5) of the Government Decision No. 681/2011 on the approval of the Code of Doctoral Studies with subsequent amendments and additions.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

A.1.2. The University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi, as an institution organizing doctoral studies (IOSUD) has the logistical resources necessary to carry out the mission of the doctoral studies.

A.1.2.1. Existence and effectiveness of an appropriate IT system to keep track of doctoral students and their academic background

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met.

A.1.2.2. The existence and use of a software program and evidence of its use to verify the percentage of similarity in all doctoral theses;

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met.

A.2. Research Infrastructure

The analysis of all the information made available for the Aracis Commission emphasised the fact that the spaces and material endowment of The University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi allow the execution of research activities from the assessed fields, in compliance with the mission and assumed objectives.

A.2.1.1. The IOSUD/the doctoral school presents proof of its own possession or of having rented adequate spaces for research activity specific to doctoral studies

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met.

A.2.1.2. The IOSUD/doctoral school has collaboration agreements with higher education institutions, research institutes, research networks for joint partnerships and have access for using various research infrastructures; the offer for research services is presented publicly using a dedicated platform.

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met.

However, it seems that the potential of the IOSUD is not fully exploited and central coordination is basic. The University seems to base on silos division as a consequence of high independence of individual faculties.

A.2.1.3. The IOSUD/doctoral school proves that it is concerned with permanent renewal of the research infrastructure to provide doctoral students access to up-dated research resources, by applying to various funding competitions and using own IOSUD resources for acquiring new research infrastructure.

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met.

A.3. Quality of Human Resource

A.3.1. At the level of each Doctoral School there are sufficient qualified staff to ensure a quality educational process

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met (formally, as of September 27, 2021).

A.3.1.1. The percentage of Doctoral advisors coordinating simultaneously more than 8 doctoral students but not more than 12 during their doctoral studies [3 or 4 years, depending on the field, plus the extension periods granted according to the art. 39 par. (3) from the Code approved by the Government Resolution no. 681/2011, with subsequent modifications and additions], does not exceed 20%.

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met (formally, as of September 27, 2021).

A.3.1.2. At least 50% of all teaching/research staff involved in teaching/research activities related to training programs for advanced university studies or in individual research/art creation programs have a full-time employment contract for an indefinite period with the IOSUD, in compliance with the enforceable legislation regarding the level of loading the norm with teaching and research activity.

On the basis of the material provided in English, the advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian and coordinated onsite visits the requirement is met (formally, as of September 27, 2021).

B. Educational effectiveness

B1. The number, quality and diversity of candidates who submitted for admission contest

B.1.1. Candidates admitted to doctoral studies demonstrate the highest performance, and they are diversified as representation gender and social representation.

B.1.1.1 Admission to doctoral study programs is based on selection criteria, including: previous academic, research and professional performance, their interest for scientific or arts/sports research, publications in the domain and a proposal for a research subject. Interviewing the candidate is compulsory, as part of the admission procedure.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

Unregulated but important role of recommendations of faculty members, indicated during one of the discussions, should be noted. One of the supervisors stated, that he would not accept someone without recommendation. However, such requirement did not explicitly exist in the regulations. However, the formal procedures seem to meet the legal requirements of the higher level.

B.1.1.2. The IOSUD/doctoral school has a policy for stimulating the enrolment of doctoral students coming from disadvantaged social environments, by allocating reserved positions in the admission procedure and/or granting special scholarships, as well as organizing support programs to prevent drop-outs.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

B.2. The content of doctoral programs

B.2.1. The training program based on advanced university studies is appropriate to improve doctoral students' research skills and to strengthen ethical behaviour in science.

- Significant problems of ethics and academic deontology are approached – plagiarism, production and data counterfeiting, *ghostwriting*, norms on working with vulnerable people, etc.;
- The class subjects use the bibliography and recent examples from the international academic environment, and also public resources.

B.2.1.1. The training program based on advanced academic studies includes at least three disciplines relevant to the scientific research training of doctoral students; at least one of these disciplines is intended to study in-depth the research methodology and/or the statistical data processing.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

B.2.1.2. At least one discipline is dedicated to Ethics and Intellectual Property in scientific research or there are well-defined topics on these subjects within a discipline taught in the doctoral program.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

B.2.1.3. The IOSUD has mechanisms to ensure that the academic training program based on advanced university studies addresses “the learning outcomes”, specifying the knowledge, skills, responsibility, and autonomy that doctoral students should acquire after completing each discipline or through the research activities.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met. The University Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi staff presented strong bonds and existing academic culture behind formal presentation of the learning outcomes.

B.3. The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation

B.3.1. Doctoral students capitalize on the research through presentations at scientific conferences, scientific publications, technological transfer, patents, products and service orders.

B.3.1.1. For the doctoral school there are in place mechanisms for valorisation of the results of doctoral studies in accordance with the specificity of the particular domain (i.e. technological transfer, products, patents in the case of exact sciences; products and services for social sciences and humanities; festivals, contests, recitals, sports competitions; cultural-arts orders in the vocational domain; presentations at national and international conferences, publication of research results in national and international publications, engaging doctoral students in writing research-development projects etc.).

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

B.4. Quality of completed doctoral theses

B.4.1. Completed doctoral theses fulfil high quality standards.

- The completed theses within the Doctoral Schools are checked for similitude through the application Sistemantiplagiat.ro;
- The application generates a report allowing the quantification of the similitude level of the assessed thesis with already published materials;

B.4.1.1. At the level of IOSUD, the percentage of theses non-validated, at the level of General Council of CNADTCU, without the right of further amendments and re-organizing the process of public defending, is not exceeding 5% in the last 5 year.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C. Quality Management

C.1. Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system

- The strategies for the quality assurance are consistent in every department, they stimulates the participation of each member of the teaching and research staff, and also of the students.
- The current performance levels and the action on some key factors are measured for the subsequent improvement of the results.

C.1.1. There are an institutional framework and procedures in place and relevant internal quality assurance policies, applied for monitoring the internal quality assurance.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.1.1.1. IOSUD developed and periodically applied a procedure for the assessment and internal monitoring of the evolution of the doctoral schools, among the assessed criteria the following criteria are mandatorily included:

a. the scientific work of Doctoral advisors;

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

Methods of evaluation vary between faculties, though.

b. the infrastructure and logistics necessary to carry out the research activity;

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

c. procedures and norms in sequences based on which the doctoral studies are organized

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.1.1.2. Students' associations and, according to the case, representatives of students organize elections in the community of doctoral students, for positions in the CSUD, by universal vote, direct and secret, all doctoral students having the right of electing or being elected.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met. The students' involvement in evaluation procedures is relatively low, though.

***C.1.1.3. Students' associations and, according to the case, representatives of students organize elections in the community of doctoral students at the level of each doctoral school, for positions in the councils of doctoral schools, by universal vote, direct and secret, all doctoral students having the right of electing or being elected.**

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met. The students' involvement in evaluation procedures is relatively low, though.

***C.1.1.4. Following the internal evaluation, IOSUD and the doctoral schools' draft**

strategies and policies aiming to eliminate the identified deficiencies and to stimulate scientific and academic performance of IOSUD.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met. The students' involvement in evaluation procedures is relatively low, though.

C.2. Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources

C.2.1. Information of interest to doctoral students, future candidates and public interest information is available for electronic format consultation.

The IOSUD sites seem to meet the requirements, the English version could be expanded, though.

C.2.1.1. The Doctoral School, through IOSUD, publishes on the website of the organizing institution, in compliance with the general regulations on data protection, information, etc.

Here I need assistance as some of the materials in Romanian seem to be broader than in English and I don't want to misjudge the IOSUD. I have a general impression the requirement is met, the English version of web content could be expanded, though.

C.2.2. The IOSUD/The Doctoral School provides doctoral students with access to the resources needed for conducting doctoral studies.

C.2.2.1. All doctoral students have free access to one platform providing academic databases relevant to the doctoral studies domain of their thesis.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the summarising meeting of the ARACIS teams during the last day of the visit, the requirement is met.

C.2.2.2. Each doctoral student shall have access, upon request, to an electronic system for verifying the degree of similarity with other existing scientific or artistic works.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.2.2.3. All doctoral students have access to scientific research laboratories or other facilities depending on the specific domain/domains within the Doctoral School, according to internal order procedure.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.3. Internationalization level

C.3.1. IOSUD/Doctoral school has a strategy in place, and it is applied to enhance the internationalization of doctoral studies.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement seems to be met. However, it's hard to make a judgment concerning the entire IOSUD just on the basis of the documents provided, as the statements of individual ARACIS teams evaluating individual faculties seem to differ with some faculties dealing with the matter far better than the others.

***C.3.1.1. The doctoral school, through the IOSUD, has concluded mobility agreements with universities abroad, with research institutes, with companies working in the field of study, aimed at the mobility of doctoral students and academic staff (e.g., ERASMUS agreements for the doctoral studies). At least 35% of the doctoral students have completed a training course abroad or other mobility forms such as attending international scientific conferences.**

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement seems to be met. However, it's hard to make a judgment concerning the entire IOSUD just on the basis of the documents provided, as the statements of individual ARACIS teams evaluating individual faculties seem to differ with some faculties dealing with the matter far better than the others.

C.3.1.2. The doctoral school supports, including providing financial support, to the organization of doctoral studies in international joint supervision or invitation of leading experts to deliver courses/lectures for doctoral students.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement seems to be met. However, it's hard to make a judgment concerning the entire IOSUD just on the basis of the documents provided, as the statements of individual ARACIS teams evaluating individual faculties seem to differ with some faculties dealing with the matter far better than the others.

***C.3.1.3. At least 10% of the doctoral theses of every doctoral school of the IOSUD are drafted and/or submitted in an international foreign language or are organized in international joint supervision.**

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.3.1.4. The internationalization of activities carried out during the doctoral studies is supported by IOSUD through concrete measures (e.g., by participating in educational fairs to attract international doctoral students; by including international experts in guidance committees or doctoral committees etc.)

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.4. System for assurance of ethical and academic integrity

C.4.1. IOSUD/Doctoral school has a functional and efficient system in place for prevention and assuring ethical and academic integrity norms

C.4.1.1. IOSUD/Doctoral School applies the current provisions regulating ethics, deontology/academic integrity, respectively to academic freedom and has developed:

- policies based on prevention regarding possible violations of the Code of ethics and academic integrity, demonstrated by public positionings, studies, analyses or measures taken;
- practices and mechanisms for preventing fraud, from an institutional perspective as well as from the perspective of the doctoral students;
- practices for preventing possible fraud in academic activity, research or any other activity, including active measures for preventing and avoiding plagiarism of any kind, as well as promoting ethical and integrity/deontology principles or observing intellectual property norms, authors' rights and other related rights, among all members of the academic community;
- administrative instruments which allow applying effective and eliminatory sanctions;
- mechanisms and measures to assure equal opportunities and protection against intolerance and discrimination of any kind;

IOSUD monitors and permanently evaluates these practices and can prove they are applied to all activities and engagement of students in all these processes, and the results of the monitoring is made public yearly or whenever it becomes necessary.

IOSUD/Doctoral School has a policy based on the prevention regarding the eventual violation of the ethics code and academic integrity, demonstrating the same through public positionings, studies, analysis, and measures.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

***C.4.1.2. All intimations regarding suspicion of plagiarism related to doctoral theses have been analysed and resolved by the IOSUD within the time interval legally established for expressing in writing its position regarding the intimation received.**

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.4.1.3. Annual Reports of the Ethics commission of the IOSUD contain information on the stage of solving each case of intimation or own - initiative intimation regarding violation of norms or ethical aspects relevant for university doctoral studies, and from the description of the facts, there are no delays in respect of the legal term of resolution indicated for such cases through national and institutional regulations.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.4.1.4. The measures taken by IOSUD after the final decision of CNADTCU to withdraw the title of doctor following accusations of plagiarism comply with the legislation in force.

- In the period 2016-2020, there were no plagiarism cases reported by CNATDCU.

The requirement is met.

C.4.1.5. The measures taken by IOSUD following accusations of plagiarism, aimed at least one of the following actions:

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

***C.4.1.6. The scientific reviewers, members in the commissions for public defence of two of more doctoral theses with definitive decisions of withdrawal of the doctor title for plagiarism, have not**

been nominated in other commissions for public defence of doctoral theses for a period of at least 3 years.

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

C.4.1.7. IOSUD has a database open to the public containing all the doctoral theses defended in the institution beginning at least in 2016 in a format including: the domain, author, doctoral advisor, title of the thesis and the thesis in electronic format (if there is an agreement of the author).

On the basis of the material provided in English and advice concerning the documents provided in Romanian, the requirement is met.

III. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

High level of academic culture based on strong academic community bonds.

Diversity of faculties and faculty members' backgrounds.

Strong links between supervisors, PhD students and alumni.

Opportunities

Broad pool of academic talent makes a good basis for coordinated efforts promoting cooperation within the University, in Romania or internationally.

Weaknesses

It seems, that although the University enjoys high academic standards and talent pool the high degree of independence of individual faculties makes implementation of coordinated strategies difficult.

The internationalization of the IOSUD is below the level the institution of such size may be expected to enjoy.

Threats

COVID Pandemic, if prolonged, may slow further complicate the implementation of much needed strategies of coordination and internationalization.

Macroeconomic situation of the country may negatively influence the public financing of Higher Education Institutions.

IV. Overview of judgements awarded and of the recommendations

In opinion of the evaluator, the requirements are met. However, as some of the documents were available only in Romanian, and some voices of the individual faculty related evaluation teams seemed to be more critical, taken into consideration the size of the IOSUD under evaluation, opinions on indicators C1.1.2, C1.1.3, C1.1.4, A3.1, A3.1.1, A3.1.2 should be crosschecked with Romanian evaluators.

V. Conclusions and general recommendations

1. The visit was prepared professionally, especially on the of ARACIS. I take it as evidence

of high professionalism and organizational culture of this institution.

2. The most important documents were available in English. Some documents, which were not available in English, were provided swiftly after requests of the ARACIS team. The assistance of the ARACIS team and of the IOSUD translators allowed to conduct evaluation in the broader context of both the State and the University regulations.
3. The reality of a relatively new EU member state has to be taken into consideration when it comes to evaluating the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats to IOSUD performance and future. The IOSUD has to function in reality of competing for the best PhD candidates with the market which may offer better business incentives to follow a non-academic career or with foreign Higher Education Institutions which may have a far better financial situation developed in a decades' longer perspective. The discussions during the meetings with the lecturers had shown, that the personnel of the University realizes these facts and tries to address them in day-to-day practice. While the lecturers have exhibited attachment to the University, some remarks indicated, a general disappointment with state policies regarding Higher Education (which is by all means a common feature in most of the states that had joined EU in XXI century). The consequences of the brain-drain for the equality of recruited talent were also suggested by the Faculty members, and should be taken into consideration while evaluating the IOSUD.
4. It has to be noted, that the evaluation took place in the pandemic context. Thus, the effectiveness of some steps already taken by the IOSUD representatives may not have yet shown adequate results, especially in terms of obtaining foreign talent in regards to foreign lecturers of PhD students, as the academic mobility declined drastically due to COVID-19.
5. The policies concerning the internationalization seem to be a weak spot of the IOSUD. Further efforts (coordination, introducing more incentives) are suggested. However, the remarks made earlier, concerning the Pandemic and geopolitical factors, should not be forgotten here.
6. The IOSUD lecturers, students and alumni have shown a great deal of attachment to academic culture emphasising ethical conduct and high academic standards of teacher-student interactions. The IOSUD seems to be in a comfortable situation when the regulations and procedures concerning oversight of academic behaviour in terms of academic evaluation and ethics follow the already existing informal cultural standards. However, the high academic culture should not slow down the development of ethics' related procedures in the future. Introducing more formal, periodical and systemic evaluation procedures may help to show the qualities of the IOSUD better.

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