

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ARACIS

External Evaluator's Report



"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

May 2024

Introduction

I was invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to join the evaluation group for the institutional assessment of "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad (UVVG). This report summarizes my impressions as a Foreign Expert from the visit, which took place from May 15th to 17th, 2024. Prior to the on-site visit, I reviewed UVVG's Institutional Internal Evaluation Report (IER). During the visit, I had the opportunity to gain more insights into the functioning of the UVVG, and the way it operates.

The site visit began with a preliminary meeting of experts who formed the evaluation team. During this meeting, the preparation and harmonisation of evaluation stages were discussed.

Following the meeting there was a conversation with the UVVG's top officials. Throughout the evaluation process, I had the opportunity to take place in all plenary/group discussions with representatives of the UVVG's teaching staff, students, alumni, and employers of UVVG graduates. Additionally, there were individual meetings and group discussions with individuals from various positions within the University and beyond.

During the on-site visit, I obtained additional information related to various aspects of the UVVG's work, which aided me in developing a comprehensive understanding of the organization's functions. This allowed me to gain a clearer insight into leadership, management and governance, research, internationalization, external relations, quality assurance and many other areas of UVVG's activities. As a result of the visit, I also had the opportunity to observe the University's main building and a variety of facilities.

I would like to thank Ms. Ioana POPESCU, an official of ARACIS, for her invaluable support during the evaluation process. I also appreciated the highly collegial approach of the entire evaluation team, led by Prof. univ. dr. ing. Neculai Eugen SEGHEDEIN, the mission's leader, and Prof. univ. dr. Răzvan Liviu NISTOR, the expert evaluators' team coordinator.

I present my report on UVVG's institutional performance as I see it, based on the sources of information to which I have had access. 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 “Vasile Goldiș” Western University of Arad to contribute to prospective improvements.

General Statements

UVVG is a higher education institution, a legal entity under private law and of community interest, part of the national education system of Romania.

The “Vasile Goldiș” Western University of Arad is among the first private universities established in Romania. It was founded in 1990, with the aim of promoting the values of education, research and the relationship with society, under the sign of the academic community, capitalizing the institutional culture and perpetuating national and universal values. The UVVG provides education and research services in the field of scientific knowledge and her ideal is to use of academic values for the purpose of personal development, the individual’s professional insertion and to satisfy the need for competence of the socio-economic environment.

The Institutional Internal Evaluation Report is very well prepared and provides thorough information regarding the institution. It consists of three key domains: “Institutional Capacity”, “Educational Efficiency”, and “Academic Quality”, supported by a number of Annexes that have been provided as supportive evidence to the report.

The UVVG’s web Site (www.uvvg.ro) provides extensive information about the University, including general data and access to open-source documents regarding research, entrepreneurship, admission, students, educational resources, professional training etc. The English and Italian web page versions are available as well, but the Italian has a very reduced content.

The University Charter defines institutional Mission, as well as the strategic objectives. The UVVG’s mission is of education and scientific research, by promoting excellence to generate and transfer knowledge to society.

The UVVG Strategic Plan for Institutional Development (2020-2024) is structured into seven priority axes, each one developed on the basis of strategic objectives. The main focus of the plan is to increase the university’s relevance as an educational and research structure at the level of the local community, but also at the regional and international level, and to strengthen the internationalisation process at the UVVG level.

Each faculty has its own mission, articulated in its specific strategic plans and integrated into the overall mission of the university. To achieve this mission, UVVG has set specific objectives. The general objectives aim at training highly trained and performing specialists for economic and social activities, education, science, and culture, able to respond adequately to the requirements of society and to the current and expected dynamics of the labour market.

The didactic activity of UVVG (Annexes 2,3,4) is organized in the Bologna paradigm, the study programs corresponding to the three cycles, BACHELOR, MASTER, and DOCTORATE.

All this provides a framework for the UVVG’s activities and decision-making processes. They reflect the University’s commitment to academic excellence, innovation and social responsibility.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Generally, the extent and cover of information acquired from various sources was comprehensive and coherent.*

- *The Strategic Plan for Institutional Development (2020-2024) represents the UVVG's strategic priorities. The strategic objectives are reinforced and outlined in each faculty's strategic and operational plans.*
- *The importance of UVVG for the region and beyond is obvious: as the only higher education institution in the region that offers medicine, it is vital for the development of the city and the region. Not surprisingly, employers, as well as students and graduates, are quite satisfied. In this sense, the university is a driving force for regional being.*
- *Consider monitoring the website for constant updates and improvements with new and relevant information.*

Managerial Structure

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

UVVG is a multi-unit institution. Currently it has 6 faculties and 5 branches/extensions that offer different specializations. In the academic year 2023/2024, 37 study programs operate at undergraduate level within UVVG, which are covering 18 level fields. Also, 13 master's programs covering 10 fields of studies and I.O.S.U.D with two accredited doctoral schools - Biology and Medicine, reorganized in 2024 into a single multidisciplinary doctoral school (Annexes 2,3).

The management positions at university level are as follows: rector, president of the Board of Directors, vice-rectors, general administrative director, deputy general administrative director. Management positions at faculty level are represented by deans and vice-deans. The management position at department level is represented by the Head of Department

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

In accordance with the "Student Statute" and the "Regulations for the election and revocation of students in the positions of representation" students are voting members in the Faculty Councils and in the University Senate, with a representation percentage of 25%.

While the rector/deans/heads of departments represent the institution's executive processes, the University Senate and the Board of Directors form the institution's self-governing bodies. The UVVG operates on a four-year strategy, and as previously mentioned, its current strategic plan (2020-2024) appears to be a solid basis for its institutional development.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad has a coherent, integrated, and transparent management system, adapted to its strategy, mission and objectives*
- *The UVVG has a very active leadership. The administration has a vision for the university's future, as well as fresh ideas and a strong commitment to regional development.*
- *Continue to have students as full members of the university community and partners in the management of UVVG.*

Teaching Staff

UVVG has its own methodology for occupying teaching positions, in accordance with the requirements of higher education imposed at national level. The study and scientific research criteria considered in the recruitment and selection of teachers were those provided for in the legislation in force (Annexes 30, 31).

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

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

Periodic evaluations are an essential aspect of working with employees. This covers a range of evaluation methodologies, which may serve as a foundation for future developments. However, it seems that there is not much visibility of the results of teachers' evaluations. According to the IER the average ratio between the number of tenured full-time teachers in the university and the number of students enrolled for the academic year 2023-2024 is 1/14.76.

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.*
- *Ensure more visibility of the results of teachers' evaluations (in conformity with the law).*

Facilities

During the visit, I was able to see a large part of the university facilities: lecture halls, seminar rooms, certain laboratories and centres, the library. Within UVVG there are over 188 rooms that ensure the development of teaching and research processes in optimal conditions. They are properly equipped with computer technology, multimedia systems (smartboard, video and overhead projectors, projection screens, flip-charts, etc.). UVVG has its own university Bistro EuroGastroTech - a specially designed space for preparing and serving meals for students and teaching staff, and a student café, too. Students and professors can also use a dormitory, which I was not able to look at.

The material base of UVVG corresponds to its specificity and is at standards that ensure the development of a quality educational process, and the capacity of the educational spaces (classrooms - amphitheatres, seminar rooms, laboratories) used within UVVG is in accordance with the norms in force.

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

Comments/Recommendations:

- *The university has a museum and various other buildings of historical and architectural value. While they are difficult to maintain and do not generate sufficient revenue for UVVG, the care of historical and cultural heritage has a high added value for and increases the University's impact on community development.*
- *The existing facilities could accommodate many more students and personnel than*

are now available.

Students

“Vasile Goldiș” Western University of Arad enrolled 4706 students in the most recent academic year (2023-2024).

As already noted above UVVG offers study programmes in all three cycles of higher education: bachelor's, master's, and doctorate. The study programmes are designed and developed according to the requirements of the university qualification and the national and European legislation in force. The UVVG has implemented a number of study programmes at various levels in a variety of subject fields.

The professional training of UVVG students is described by a set of regulations regarding the organization, conduct and completion of studies, for all categories of students of bachelor's and master's degree programs. The regulations and methodologies are public on the university's website, being developed in accordance with the legal regulations in force (<https://www.uvvg.ro/studenti/regulamente/>).

Besides the Library, the availability of learning resources is also ensured through the cursuri.uvvg.ro platform, an UVVG's e-learning platform, developed on the Moodle solution.

The university allocates scholarships for students every semester of the academic year in accordance with the *Regulation on granting scholarships to students*.

The main structures of UVVG that have a support role for students are: General Administrative Directorate, Financial and Accounting Department, International Relations Department, Career Counselling and Guidance Centre, Scientometry Office, Entrepreneurship Centre. All administrative departments within UVVG have their own operating regulations (Annex 83). These structures appear to be a significant framework. During the site visit interviews, students primarily expressed gratitude for the university's assistance.

At UVVG, a student representative structure has been established. According to the IER, student representatives at UVVG are involved in all decision-making structures, including the Senate and Faculty councils.

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

Comments/Recommendations:

- *UVVG 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 university 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.*
- *Continue to develop practices of attracting more international students.*
- *Ensure that students have a sufficient number of hours for professional practice.*
- *Motivate more active student participation in university governance.*
- *Continue to pay attention to forming a cohesive student community and consider alumni activation.*

Research

Research management in the university is carried out by the Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and Doctoral Studies. Regarding the scientific research activity, UVVG has a strategic vision in this field, synthesized in the *Strategy for the development and diversification of scientific research*, also elaborated for a period of four years (2020-2024). The Strategy refers to research topics, the structure of research units, funding scientific research and increasing the competitiveness of the institution.

The research activity is mainly funded through competitions from public funds (national and European).

UVVG 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.

UVVG has developed a *Code of university ethics and professional deontology* to safeguard ethics and integrity in research activity and to prevent intellectual or academic fraud.

UVVG joined the ANELIS PLUS consortium (National Electronic Access to Scientific Literature to Support the Research and Education System in Romania) and supports the project on continuing and expanding access to scientific literature in electronic format for Romanian researchers. Currently, 8 databases are made available to university users.

The university possesses significant scientific and inventive potential. The UVVG has got six journals included in international databases. The papers and other research findings appear to be valued both domestically and internationally. UVVG's Hirsch Index (total) for Web of Science through 2023 is 46.

Even though UVVG is not eligible to apply for some of the project programmes, 41 projects have been submitted for national and international project competitions during the period 2019-2023.

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

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Continue to increase the number of research projects with national and international funding.*
- *Continue to publish especially in scientific journals.*
- *Encourage collaborations with other research institutes.*
- *Encourage the involvement of more students in the scientific research.*
- *Stimulate academic entrepreneurship of staff, graduates, and students.*

Internationalization

UVVG's institutional development strategy for the years 2020-2024 includes specific objectives and strategies for internationalization, which respond to the mission and objectives of the university regarding international cooperation and academic mobility. The UVVG has signed cooperation agreements with numerous universities and research institutions from Europe, Asia, and America.

UVVG is actively engaged in international academic mobilities. Students (and

professors) can take advantage of a variety of foreign mobility options, mostly through the Erasmus+ programmes. UVVG currently has 92 Erasmus+ partnerships and for the 2023-2024 academic year about 30 incoming and about 130 outgoing mobilities (30 for study and about 100 for practice).

The IER does not mention any specific initiatives or programs that UVVG has implemented to promote internationalization.

According to the provided data, UVVG 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.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Consider increasing the amount of incoming mobility students (and personnel) from other HE schools in Romania 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

UVVG's institutional emphasis is on the development and implementation of quality assurance procedures and policies.

The UVVG's main structure with direct attributions in the field of quality is the *Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance* (CEAC-U). CEAC-U is subordinated to the rector, who is solely responsible for the quality of education provided by UVVG, and who ensures its operative management.

In addition to internal evaluations, the quality management system is periodically evaluated through annual surveillance audits by the SRAC certification body, in accordance with ISO 9001:2015 (Annexes 67, 68).

The peer review process is a component of the quality assurance system.

The university implements the operational procedure for evaluation of teachers by students. According to it, the evaluation is conducted on a semester basis and refers to all teachers who hold courses or conduct practical works/seminars, both at bachelor's and master's level (Annex 76). 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:

UVVG has a coherent and sustainable organization, an adequate management and administration system, material base and financial resources in the short and medium term, as well as adequate human resources to achieve the mission and objectives proposed.

Over the past five years UVVG has shown steady trends in student numbers that indicate competitiveness at a regional level. By maintaining extensions, UVVG supports community development with a broad geographic reach.

UVVG continues to make a significant contribution to Romania's academic landscape by adhering to legal requirements and providing a diverse range of educational programmes. I am confident that it will continue to make a positive contribution to Romanian society through education, research, and broad social engagement.

Finally, the overall impression gained from the tour inspires confidence that the management and institution have sufficient ability for consistent expansion in accordance with national and international academic quality and rigour requirements.