



PARTIUM CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

ORADEA, ROMANIA

EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT 2019

By

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25.06.2019, Munich, Germany



Introduction

I have accepted the invitation to participate in the institutional evaluation process of the Partium Christian University in Oradea, Romania (in further text PCU) as external foreign expert evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation process started with the review of the Self-Evaluation report, and the on-site visit took place from 29.05.2019 to 31.05.2019. During this evaluation, I was responsible for establishing an overview of PCU from the perspective of institutional view. My main task was to focus on the institutional processes and procedures that have already been set in place to assure continued improvement of quality of education, future development aspects, as well as outline current and future challenges that PCU is, or may be facing before next evaluation period. I have reviewed the Self-evaluation report (2019) and also Foreign Expert External Report (2014) and I have used these documents as a starting point for my inquiries during the 3-day on-site visit.

During my stay in Oradea, I was given an opportunity to review all the documents regarding evaluation process, however many of them were in Romanian. When needed I requested clarifications or informal translations of the documents from the evaluation team colleagues, and I am grateful for their assistance in this matter. As part of the evaluation team, I participated in all meetings with University administration, as well as meetings with alumni, stakeholders, undergraduate and graduate students. I also had a series of individual interactions and meetings with faculty and administrators from different University units, including University management. With help of esteemed colleagues from the ARACIS team, and with kindly provided expert translator assistance, I have collected all necessary information about the operation of PCU, and prepared this external institutional evaluation report.

Background

In 1999, the PCU was founded by the *Pro Universitate Partium* Foundation and the PCU was accredited by Romanian Authorities in 2008. The PCU is private university located in the City of Oradea, Romania, and is registered as educational not-for-profit institution according to Romanian National Education Law No. 1/2011. The predecessor institution of the PCU is a Reformed Institute of Higher Education, initially established in 1989. PCU is a regional university which mainly caters for the Hungarian minority in Romania and is based on Christian, European and scientific values as well as the traditional values of the Hungarian community from Romania. The mission and objectives of the institution are stated in the PCU Charter (as per provided document).



PCU aspirations are to be a complex profile higher education establishment, with didactic activities in all fields, and based on the institutional model following contemporary academia. The notion “Christian university” defines the system of values that PCU desires to intrinsically promote. It is stated that educational process within the PCU community takes place in a spirit of ecumenism, tolerance and criticism. The university is describing itself as both an ecumenical and secular institution. The purpose of PCU is to ensure and prepare highly-educated intellectuals and experts, competitive both domestically and abroad, in a maternal language education system complying with the highest standards of education and science.

The PCU has recently 2016/17 reorganized its academic structure to combine three faculties (Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Faculty of Arts) in two new faculties: *Faculty of Letters and Arts* and *Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences*. This appears to have benefited the financial as well as academic circumstances of the PCU.

The main focus of the PCU is to offer training of the specialists that would take advantage of bilingual and multi-cultural environment at local and regional level and develop social science skills, but also scientific and technological skills. It is expected that such skill profiles can rapidly integrate in the existing work market, and offer set of competitive skills to prospective employers. The university continuously seeks to enrich their offer of academic study programs in order to cover the largest possible array of educational domains. Sometimes this appears to be in conflict with the existing teaching capacity, although the teaching faculty members present with high degree of optimism and enthusiasm as they are driven by sincere desire to help the education of Hungarian minority.

Financial resources of the PCU come mostly from the Hungarian Sapientia Foundation, and are supplemented by tuition fees and some third party funding for different projects (research or exchange programs mainly). After discussion with financial director, it is clear that the PCU has reached stability in funding that allowed for significant investments such as construction of new building that is currently used mainly by Faculty of Letters and Arts, and acquiring ownership over an older building in the immediate vicinity of main campus. Such financial structure supports longer term planning of infrastructural work and planned renovations, including acquisition of living quarters to assist existing faculty and visiting lecturers. Furthermore, such frugal management of the available funds serves also to maintain the high quality of teaching staff by offering competitive salaries and support to governance and research efforts of the faculty members through a bonus system. It appears that PCU has solid financial future at this time and is advancing toward one of the University strategic goals to reach 1,000 enrolled students through offers of attractive education opportunities in modern facilities and with high prospects of job placement after graduation.



PCU proposes a number of fundamental strategic objectives for the next 5-year period, although some of them appear to be longer term (>5 years) strategic goals. From the perspective of the fundamental priorities as mentioned in the Charter, PCU aims at reaching the following objectives:

- initiating new study programs according to the training needs and the demands of the labor market
- the development of human resources (the teaching staff, the auxiliary administrative and teaching personnel, the students);
- the increased involvement of the institution in the cultural life at the local and regional level;
- the continuous development and restructuring of the educational process with a view to increasing quality;
- reconfiguring the strategy of scientific research and of the existent monitoring tools, with a special emphasis on increasing international visibility and on ensuring the impact of research outcomes in the region;
- accrediting the university press and the periodicals
- the harmonization of financial planning with the professional-academic one, the development of the self-management capacity;
- developing the infrastructure;
- the development of e-learning programs
- increasing the efficiency of the institutional organization;
- extending partnership relations with other institutions of higher education as well as of the collaboration with other institutions ;
- adapting the educational offer to the labor market demands, especially at the regional level;
- creating and developing collaboration relationships with local and county authorities, with civic and entrepreneurial organizations;
- the development of the collaboration relationships with institutions and companies who may be potential employers of our graduates;
- initiating projects in collaboration with partner companies and institutions with a view to absorbing European funds (through which these could be motivated to offer extra support for the students' internship and training;
- creating counselling teams at the institutional level while activating the existing specialists within the institution with a view to getting involved in the local socio-economic life;
- assuming the role of a catalyst in the scientific and cultural life of the local communities

Course of the Visit:

The following members of the evaluation team participated in the evaluation activities:



1. Prof. dr. **Nicoleta CORBU** - National University of Political Studies and Political Administration of Bucharest (Mission Director)
2. Prof. dr. **Alexandru ȚUGUI** - Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași (The Coordinator of the Expert Team)
3. Prof. dr. **Gheorghe SOLOMON** – Politehnica University of Bucharest (Consultative Commission)
4. Prof.dr. **Alexandru-Silviu APAHIDEAN** (Institutional Evaluation Commission)
5. Prof.dr. **Dusan PALIC** – LMU Munich (Foreign Expert)
6. **Sorin ALECSA** (Technical Secretary – ARACIS)
7. Prof. dr. **Alexandru RUJA** - West University of Timișoara (Evaluator of the German Language and Literature - Bachelor studies)
8. Prof. dr. **Mihail ANTON** – National Defence University CAROL I of Bucharest (Social Work - Bachelor studies)
9. Prof. dr. **Marina THEODORESCU** - National University of Arts Buchares (Visual Arts - Master studies)
10. **Andreea-Anda MACRA** - West University of Timișoara (Student Expert UNSR)
11. **Horia MARIAN** – Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj Napoca (Student Expert ANOSR)

The visit schedule was as follows:

Tuesday, 28.05.2019.

Travel from Munich to Cluj-Napoca Airport, and transfer to Oradea.

Wednesday 29.05, 2019

9:00 - 9:30 - Meeting with the University representatives
9:30 - 10:00 - Technical meeting of the evaluation committee
10:00 - 11:00 - Tour of the University
11:00 - 13:00 - Work program
13:00 - 14:00 - Lunch break
14:00 - 17:00 - Work program
17:00 - 18:00 - Meeting with (PCU) students
18:00 - 19:00 - Meeting with (PCU) graduates
19:00 - 20:00 - Meeting with (PCU) Graduate Employers

Thursday 30.05,2019

09:00 - 13:00 - Work program
13:00 - 14:00 - Lunch break
14:00 - 19:00 - Work program
19:00 - Congressional meeting for conclusions

Friday 31.05,2019

09:00 - 11:00 - completion of documents and synthetic reports
11:00 - 12:00 - Technical meeting of the evaluation committee
12:00 - 13:00 - Final meeting with the (PCU) Staff
13:00 Transfer to Cluj-Napoca Airport and travel to Munich.



Observations and Recommendations:

The orientation of the PCU to cater for the Hungarian minority education needs is positioned well and the University is striving to achieve competitiveness and high-performance in order to integrate into the international scientific value circuit and the attainment of a well-recognized position within higher education and research institutions in Romania and Hungary cross-border Region. Furthermore, the PCU has a strategic goal to expand its enrollment to reach a 1000 student mark (currently about 850), and the Institutional team, as well as the Foundation is providing strong support in both governance and resources commitment to achieve this within next several years.

Governance and institutional organization

The earlier foreign Expert report provided several recommendations regarding the governance structure, and the PCU has addressed these recommendations in my opinion successfully and thoroughly.

The triangle governing structure is established between the Senate, Administrative Board and Founders Council, and the roles and responsibilities have been reviewed and defined according to latest organizational Chart. Next Senate elections will introduce reduced Senate size and optimize the number of elected Senate members. It should be noted that, as the PCU is a small-size institution, the communication between the governing structures is rather simple and easy to achieve.

Monitoring of strategic plan achievements has been improved and the SWAT analysis has been used in current self-evaluation report to pinpoint the potential areas of concern. The benchmarking process has been initiated, albeit the fact that PCU is not fully comparable with other regional institutions of higher education due to both their primary orientation toward Hungarian minority as well as size of the University. The peers in the region are usually either larger (e.g. University of Debrecen) or addressing educational needs of primarily Romanian students (University of Oradea, University of Cluj). The PCU has applied effort to regularly measure indicators of the strategic plan progress, SWAT analysis was performed to identify potential problems and solutions, and contingency plans were developed.

Ethical commission accepted recommendations and now has an external member. However, as the PCU is a community of peers that frequently are well aware of each other, it is likely needed to consider possibility of adding further external members of the ethical committee, perhaps in the form of an advisory body that would be consisting of several third-party members and support the PCU ethical commission with independent opinions on sensitive cases.

Quality Assurance Culture and Control Structures

There appears to be significant improvement of the QA/QC processes and procedures. The reorganization of the PC to two faculties, reduced the number of departments, and clear hierarchy of the responsibilities of the faculty, staff and students in respective committees has been set. Data collected



from continuing self-assessment is used to provide evidence based feedback to the Faculty members and support them in the continued improvement. As in other areas of the PCU activities, there is always a concern about too few people trying to do too much. It is strongly advisable that the central administration of the University (including both Administrative Board and Senate) streamlines the outcomes of the QA/QC processes in a process to reduce administrative workload of the colleagues whose primary role is providing teaching and research output. The steps in right direction have been observed that are part of the regular individual self-evaluation procedures of the faculty members, and the possibility of direct or indirect incentives that would allow rational workload distribution. It should also be noted that the Faculty members are very interested in participating in incentives scheme, and are enthusiastic about their role in academic service and governance.

Teaching and Learning

Overall, the impression is that the PCU is offering rather solid education in the areas of interest to Hungarian minority in the region. In some aspects, the PCU is even reaching international attention and quality of the educational programs is benefiting from the increased international exchange either individual or institutional such as through Erasmus project(s) developed and implemented by the faculty.

The facility upgrades (new building), and also plans for recent renovations (with approved funding) of the recently purchased buildings, are strongly supporting the strategic effort of the PCU to increase quality of the offered educational programs and reach the goal of 1,000 enrolled students in next 5 years.

The PCU has further developed all aspects of Bologna approach to improve learning, stakeholder involvement, internationalization, and employability. The student centered learning is used in most of the subjects, and specifically the small student groups benefit from this in the area of visual arts. In the discussion with regional stakeholders (potential employers) it was clear that the PCU students are well trained and are gladly accepted as interns or employees in the business community and regional/local government institutions and agencies. It is suggested that further involvement of the stakeholders is needed to provide structured internship or other types of external practical experiences that would emphasize the strengths of the bilingual population in the region, and capitalize on the multi-cultural environment. In other words, it is very important that PCU students are given the opportunity to serve the needs of multi-lingual and multi-cultural community, therefore increasing the employability while keeping high standards of quality education.

Internationalization and Increasing Research Impact



The PCU has in previous period (2014-2019) made a significant effort to improve its international visibility, and has successfully gained momentum on increasing number of international publications, research projects, artistic activities (competitions, exhibits, festivals, etc.). Taken together, the primary driver for this expansion of research activities can be attributed to a) increased support of the PCU to faculty members that take the time and effort to produce quality research and build international reputation of the University, and b) increased external funding (e.g. Erasmus project) that supported international exchange. Increased research and artistic output has further benefited the image that the PCU fosters in the local community.

It is of high importance to continue to support the efforts of the Faculty members. One major recommendation would be to establish a task force at University level to help streamline PCU research, artistic and internationalization efforts in order to increase efficacy of the limited resource use. The priorities of the PCU should be considered in the development of the strategic goals addressing further achievements in research, art, and internationalization. It is very difficult for a small university to compete in the research arena, so the strengths of the PCU may need to be better used in providing sustainable growth of international network of research and art. Diversification of funding sources to support regional activities (cross-border, business development, art exhibitions/events) may provide the PCU with added boost to sustainably increase its visibility in the region and also at the European level.

Conclusion

This report is based on the careful review of 2019 self-evaluation report, 2014 Foreign Expert Report, and other available documents, the 3-day site visit and direct contact with the University administrators, faculty members and students. I have been impressed with progress that PCU has achieved in the interim evaluation period, and I hope that following comments will help the University to continue to improve its teaching, research and extension services to society at regional, national, and international level.

Overall impression is that PCU achieved majority of the evaluation marks and I have high level of confidence that it will continue to improve in the next period.

It will be very important for the PCU to continue with the positive momentum and take advantage of the significant investment in education infrastructure. The University needs to continue and possibly increase institutional support to young researchers and fully exploit the position of a Hungarian minority education and research hub in the region, in order to attract third party grants and contracts. Existing University strategy appears to follow this pattern and is commendable that observed increase in research output includes external collaborations and recognized success on regional, national and even European competitions. Fostering regional industry relationships, as well as addressing local government needs is commendable.



I would like to give my best regards to the Rector and Vice Rector, the University staff and students, as well as colleagues from the Evaluation team and ARACIS support staff for very professional and pleasant experience.

In Munich, on 20.06.2019.

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