

Akkreditierungsagentur
im Bereich Gesundheit und Soziales
Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences



Assessment Report

on the Accreditation of

**the Study Program
"Nutrition and Dietetics"
(Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics)**

**at "Vasile Goldis Western University",
Arad, Romania**

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1 Introduction

Study programs in Romania require authorization for provisional functioning, as established by Law no. 87 of 2006, which approved the Emergency Decree no. 75 of 2005. The Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport is responsible for authorizing provisional functioning of study programs. According to the Law of National Education no.1 of 2011 (hereinafter “Law of National Education”) Art. 150, Par. 1, the decision of whether to grant authorization is contingent upon the evaluation and subsequent recommendation of the study program by an external quality assurance agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

After authorization for provisional functioning has been granted by the Romanian Ministry, the applicant higher education institution may enroll students in the respective study program. Following the successful graduation of three subsequent cohorts (taking approximately five years for three year study programs), the higher education institution must submit its application for accreditation. The accreditation procedure is similar to that for authorization for provisional functioning: an external evaluation by an EQAR-listed quality assurance agency, takes place on the basis of which the Government decides whether to accredit the study program.

The AHPGS Accreditation Agency was tasked with accrediting Bachelor study programs offered by the “Vasile Goldis Western University”, Arad, Romania (hereupon: the University) in September 2018. The University submitted the documents in July 2018.

In October 2018, the relevant documents were forwarded to the experts for the evaluation of the programs and to review the available information, determine particular strengths and weaknesses, and identify any open questions regarding the study programs in writing.

The on-site visit of the University took place on July 9-11, 2019. In the course of the on-site visit, experts conducted discussions with the University management, representatives of the faculties, the teaching staff of the programs as well as with students currently studying in study programs of the University. Furthermore, they inspected the learning premises, such as research facilities, classrooms, computer rooms, and practice facilities. Moreover, the experts had the opportunity to see the equipment and the capacity of the laboratories. The

University also provided a presentation including the most current information and statistical numbers regarding the developments of the University.

The following four study programs were subjects of the assessment for provisional authorization, accreditation, and periodical evaluation:

Faculty of Dentistry:

- “Dental Technique” (Bachelor)

Faculty of Medicine:

- “Nursing in General Medicine” (Bachelor)

Faculty of Pharmacy:

- “Nutrition and Dietetics” (Bachelor)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical Education and Sport:

- “Psychology” (Bachelor)

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS nominated the following experts to conduct the on-site visit:

As representatives of academic institutions:

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Arnold¹

Witten/Herdecke University, Germany

Prof. Dr. Barbara Bräutigam

Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Mathias Maximilian Dilger

University of Freiburg, Germany

Prof. Dr. Barbara Freytag-Leyer

Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Prof. Dr. Uta Gaidys

Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany

¹ The experts shown in italics did not participate in the on-site visit of the University.

Prof. Dr. Marion Halfmann

Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Kleve, Germany

Dr. Rolf Heusser, MPH

NICER, Zurich, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Holger Höge

Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, Germany

Prof. Dr. Johannes Keogh

Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Prof. Dr. Kathrin Kohlenberg-Müller

Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Prof. Dr. Manfred Müller

Kiel University, Germany

Markus Stracke

Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany

The proceedings of the Process of Accreditation conform to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as to the Art. 150 of Romania's Law no. 1 of National Education 2011; the Quality Evaluation Activities Guide for University Study Programs and for Higher Education Institutions: Part 1 Study Programs Accreditation External Evaluation Guide, and the Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ("Methodology").

The expert group surveyed the proper implementation of the criteria, standards and performance indicators, as specified in the above-mentioned legal texts as well as the compliance of the program with the normative criteria, as stated in the "Methodology".

The documents submitted by the University, the experts' feedback to the documents, the observations made during the on-site visit, the results of

discussions with the representatives of the University serve as the basis for the statements made in the Expert Report. Since the Expert Report investigates the fulfilment of the standards and criteria specified in the "Methodology", the structure of the Expert Report follows the logical succession of these criteria, as they are formulated in the document.

The following Fields of Activity pertaining to the program and the University were assessed by the expert group with respect to the corresponding criteria and standards: (A) Institutional capacity, (B) Educational effectiveness, and (C) Quality management, each with the corresponding Criteria and Standards.

2 The study program to be accredited

The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is offered by "Vasile Goldis Western University", Arad, Romania, Faculty of Pharmacy. The period of education is six semesters (three years).

The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" was launched in the winter semester 2011/2012. It is affiliated with the Faculty of Pharmacy. It is one of two Bachelor study programs offered in this faculty. It is solely taught in Romanian. The general mission of the study program is to provide students with the skills to become highly qualified personnel in the nutrition and dietetics profession. 180 credit points (CP), i.e. 30 CP per semester, according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) are required in order to graduate from the program. One CP is equivalent to 25 workload hours. The total workload of the program constitutes 4,500 hours, of which 2,864 are contact hours and 1,816 independent study hours. The contact hours include 360 hours of internship. The 10 CP received for drafting and defending the Bachelor thesis are added to the total amount of 180 CP (*see B.1 in detail*).

All modules are program-specific modules and have to be completed within one semester. The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" consists of 52 modules. 44 modules are mandatory and eight are optional. Per study year, students have to choose one optional module, i.e. three in total. Overall, students have to study 50 modules. Credit points allocated to the elective modules are added on top of the required total of 180 CP and are mentioned separately in the transcript of records.

Admission requirements include a Baccalaureate degree or equivalent diploma. Moreover, applicants have to pass an admission examination, which comprises 30 multiple-choice questions covering biology and chemistry. Admissions are organized in two sessions during July and September. Foreign students have to provide a Romanian language certificate (level C1) issued by institutions authorized by the Ministry of National Education. Students receive information about the amount of the tuition fees in advance.

Upon graduation, students are awarded a Bachelor graduation diploma (Diploma de Licenta, cf. Law of National Education no. 1 from 2011), as well as a Diploma Supplement, comprised in both Romanian and English. Graduates of the

Bachelor study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" are awarded with the academic degree "Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics".

The experts take note that the formal requirements of the study program are in accordance with the national Romanian requirements.

The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" was launched in the winter semester 2011/2012 and has not been accredited yet. Currently, a total of 100 students have completed the study program.

The University with its Administration Board confirms in a declaration that the endowment and facilities for the study program is ensured for the future, including all buildings, equipment, apparatuses and personnel necessary for the implementation of the program.

3 Expert Report

In October 2018, the application documents of the University were made available to the expert group for written evaluation. The expert group assessed the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" based on the Romanian standards and regulations specified under Section 1. They have also examined the factual and other program-related aspects described in the documents. The results of this review were forwarded to the AHPGS in November 2018.

Based on the written evaluation of each expert and the on-site visit, the expert group jointly agreed upon an Expert Report.

A. Institutional Capacity

A.1. Institutional, administrative and management structures

Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad was founded in 1990 as a Higher Education Institution, having a legal status as an Institution of private law and public utility, being part of the national education system. The University achieved institutional establishment by Law no. 240 of April 20, 2002 published in the Official Gazette of Romania no. 291, part I, of April 30, 2002.

The University has six faculties: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Economics, Computer Science and Engineering, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports, Faculty of Judicial Sciences. Finally, the University comprises also an Institution Organizing Doctoral Studies (IODS) with two doctoral schools in Biology and Medicine.

According to information provided to the experts during the on-site visit, the University currently has a total of 4,354 enrolled students. Thereof, 234 students are enrolled at the Faculty of Pharmacy, which was founded in 2015/2016.

The University currently offers 41 Bachelor study programs and 25 Master study programs. Some Bachelor study programs are offered in different languages and, in addition to the institution in Arad, in the cities of Sebis, Satu Mare, Baia Mare, Zalau and Marghita. Currently, 895 Students are enrolled in these branches. The Bachelor Study Program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is solely offered in Arad in Romanian. The full-time study program is affiliated to the Faculty of Pharmacy.

The Faculty of Pharmacy also offers the Bachelor study program "Pharmacy".

The expert group assessed the compatibility of the written documentation and the University's missions and objectives. Based on the information provided in the written documentation, the experts have determined that the main objective of the University is to offer a variety of higher education study programs. The programs aim to meet the needs of the Romanian and European labor market as well as to comply with national and European standards of education. The institution supports the programs and staff in line with the aims and objectives of the program and common standards of integrity (e.g. "Code of Academic Ethics").

The University strives to contribute to the social and cultural life of the local community. The embedding of the University in the region is recognizable for the experts. The strong relation to the region is of mutual interest. The University provides skilled graduates, which are needed in the county and beyond. External stakeholders, for instance the city of Arad or the Church, support projects conducted by the University. The experts determine this as a distinct strength of the University.

Missions and objectives of the programs are stated by the University. With a glance at the study programs currently offered at the University, it becomes clear that these formulated missions and objectives are coherent. The Management of the University explains on-site that, due to low student numbers, merely 33 of the possible 41 Bachelor study programs offered at the University started in 2018/2019. Consequently, the University intends to cease those study programs with perpetual low application numbers. According to the University, a study program starts if at least 20 students enroll in it. In order to counter a decrease of student numbers and concomitant financial losses, the University outlines that the implementation of more study programs that need little expenditure is intended. From the experts' point of view, this approach seems reasonable. However, the experts recommend that the University focuses on the medical field, which, according to the experts and the University, constitutes the strongest branch in the portfolio of the University. In the experts' opinion, this is of particular relevance in order to establish a profile that is unique to the University. A profile that demarcates the University from other Higher Education Institutions will make the University more attractive for students and researchers alike, and would contribute to higher student numbers.

The University explains on-site that the need for graduates of the study program is of increasing importance in the region due to the negative public health situation, such as obesity and malnutrition, in Arad and its corresponding county. The experts agree with the necessity of the study program and support its objectives.

Another aspect of the University's mission is to intensify research activity among students with the goal of enabling them to contribute to the general advancement of knowledge in their respective fields. The experts take positive note of this. The experts are of the opinion that the University has well-functioning resources in the medical and bio-medical field and conducts adequate

measures to participate on an international scale. The experts emphasize that the University succeeded in contracting companies from the private sector. They recommend, therefore, that the University focus on research in the bio-medical area and continue offering its research services to the private sector. In the non-medical fields, the experts recommend that the University conduct applied research, such as applied educational research.

With regard to the administrative structures, the University has accomplished to reduce administrative staff significantly in order to (1) create leaner structures, and (2) compensate decreasing student numbers. The experts value this as an accomplishment.

Concerning the collaboration between the department, faculty and University units, the experts encourage the University to look for common interests and to combine forces and resources. The University explained on-site that many courses have common parts, but some parts are specific to the respective study program. In the experts' opinion, the University would be well advised to detect those courses that are common to several study programs and combine the cohorts of the respective study programs. The most important result of this approach would be a reduction of the teaching load. Additionally, this would also help to facilitate the coordination of research activities and propel interdisciplinarity.

The expert group has been convinced of the University's commitment – as an institution – to offer high quality education opportunities. It was asserted that the University and its study programs function within the Romanian legal framework and that the institution promotes academic integrity and freedom among its students. Besides, the University regularly monitors its own activities, and students take an active part in management. Moreover, the needs of students with disabilities are taken into consideration (e.g. admission and exam requirements).

Internal assessment and audit processes take place in order to monitor the achievement of the objectives of the University. The experts have observed an active collaboration between the administrative and teaching structures. The University has developed an ethical code of which its members are aware.

Regarding internationality, the experts took notice of the measures put in place by the University in order to pursue its international orientation. The University clearly communicated that internationalization is a clear priority. The University

achieves mobility of its students by means of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Erasmus exchange program. The experts took positive note of the summer schools that the University carries out every year. Furthermore, the University organizes international events and invites international guest professors. In view of accumulating a specialized vocabulary in a language of international use, Romanian students can attend English, French or German language courses throughout their studies. Simultaneously, international students have to attend Romanian language courses through their entire four years of study. Additionally, students of the Faculty of Pharmacy have access to subjects of other study programs at the University, including those conducted in English and French. Furthermore, the University's "International Centre for Language Testing, Academic Evaluation and Counseling" (I.C.L.T.E.A.C.) offers language training courses and exams and is approved by the Cambridge Assessment Great Britain and Educational Testing Service U.S.A.

The University explains on-site that its internationalization strategy aims at enrolling more international students. In order to achieve this, the "Department of Admission and Recruitment" was established which uses a wide set of marketing strategies in order to make the University internationally more visible. The Department cooperates with education agencies, which represent the University on international fairs. The strategy includes the use of social media, such as Facebook, linked.in, Twitter and Instagram, which reduces costs and is more efficient in reaching out to national and international students. It is important to note, however, that the focus lies not merely on international but also on national students. It became clear that the University aims at catering to the job market in Arad and its surroundings in order to strengthen the region economically.

Even though the experts acknowledge the measures put in place by the University, from the experts' point of view, the University, apart from maintaining its role in Arad and its surroundings, should present its internationalization measures in a more open and distinct manner (e.g. extending its partnerships with foreign universities). The experts recommend that the University devise an internationalization strategy that clearly articulates goals and measures. This way it could further promote its attractiveness and unique character by standing out from other higher education institutions.

The experts recognize the possibilities for further development in the strategic alignment of the University in general.

Taking these facts into account, the expert group regards criterion A.1 as fulfilled.

A.2. Material resources and infrastructure

Overall, the experts recognize that the University has sufficient material and financial resources with regard to the study programs currently offered. All facilities are in possession of the University. According to a declaration by the University Rector, the University declares that the endowment and facilities for the Bachelor study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" are ensured for the future.

Looking at the premises and resources available for the desired number of students in the study program (45 per year), the experts conclude that the University is able to offer this number of study places. The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" started in the winter semester 2011/2012.

The experts also point out that tuition, academic success, and scholarships are established within the University. With regards to the scholarship system, the experts notice that merely students with above-average grades as well as students involved in honorary work, e.g. as student-representative in the senate, are awarded with scholarships from the University. However, apart from state funded programs, there are no support mechanisms for students with a disadvantageous socio-economical background. From the experts' point of view, supporting these groups would accord with the University's general motif of strengthening the regional civilian population.

Furthermore, with regard to the library and lecture halls, the experts assess that the lecture halls and seminar rooms are sufficiently equipped for providing adequate teaching and learning processes (e.g. whiteboards, portable projectors). Nevertheless, it became clear that the program-specific literature is currently not sufficient. Therefore, the experts urge the University to extend the library significantly both regarding printed and electronic books as well as databases. In this regard, the expert group encourages the University to establish more partnerships with similar national and international institutions (libraries, publishing houses) in order to provide students and teachers' access to an even wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material. Furthermore, the experts consider the laboratories as very specialized, but deem it

important that the University provides more nutrition and dietetics laboratories assigned to the study program, e.g. a laboratory for nutrition status or dietetics.

Taking into account the University's need to improve the provision of program-specific literature, the expert group considers criterion A.2 to be partly fulfilled.

The University has to provide students with a wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material.

B. Educational Effectiveness

B.1. Content of the study program

The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is affiliated with the Faculty of Pharmacy. The study program's mission, general and specific learning objectives, curriculum and outcome competencies were presented in the written documentation. The curriculum description specifies the qualification objectives, competencies (knowledge and understanding, explanation and interpretation etc.) and learning outcomes for each module.

The general mission of the study program is to provide students with fundamental knowledge in nutrition and dietetics. According to the University, graduates of the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" can access the labor market as dietitian, nutritionist or as teachers if they choose to take the psychopedagogical modules the University offers.

The experts agree with the above-mentioned qualification objectives. However, in the experts' opinion, the study program lacks a holistic approach to human nutrition and clinical nutrition. The courses are too natural science oriented. Nutrition and dietetics are fragmented in many subjects and miss linkages. Actual framework conditions and influences, e.g. social and political, are also missing. In addition, the historical point of view (food history and culture) occupies too much space. Not all age groups and actual nutrition problems e.g. obesity, malnutrition and sarcopenia are considered, even though, obesity and malnutrition constitute the main health issues in the region and beyond.

Behavioral and spatial conditions as well as setting oriented interventions and economical and administrative courses are not part of the curriculum. However, in the experts' point of view, those are necessary competences for the internalization and orientation to European nutrition and dietetics standards.

The experts urge the University to establish interdisciplinary cooperation amongst the faculties. According to the University, exchanges between the study programs within the Faculty of Health and Pharmacy exist. Notwithstanding, regarding the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics", the expert group recommends combining courses with students from other suitable study programs in order to promote interdisciplinary competences and interprofessional skills.

Currently, there are no clearly formulated standards regarding the competences of nutritionists and dieticians in Romania. According to the University, such a framework regulating this field more precisely will be elaborated by the state in the near future. Following this, the demand for nutritionists and dieticians will rise, too. The experts discern that graduates have good employment opportunities on the Romanian job market, especially since problems concerning nutrition and dietetics are increasing in Romania. However, in the experts' opinion, the study program lacks competences that are expected on a European level. In order to prepare students for the European labor market, the experts recommend that the University aligns the curriculum according to European standards, as, for example, formulated in the EFAD (European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians) and other European universities. The experts reach the conclusion that the study program focuses on qualifying students for social responsibility and personal development.

The curriculum of the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" comprises compulsory and elective subjects. Both are an obligatory part of the curriculum. Regarding the elective modules, students have a choice between at least two modules. Per study year, one elective module is mandatory, i.e. three in total. Further credit points allocated to elective subjects will be added on top of the 180 credit points obtained by the students upon graduation and will be mentioned separately in the Diploma Supplement.

The experts appreciate the optional modules, which complete the offered courses. Especially the English courses are very meaningful concerning internationalization. The "Nutrition and Dietetics" program is structured adequately, but the subject descriptions need revision according to the experts. Modules are described in detail (e.g. with objectives, aimed competences, content), but in a too differentiated way and not homogeneously. According to the experts, some of the competences are formulated too widely and will not be fulfilled through the content. The program is relevant as the intended career is clear.

The experts take note of the fact that roughly 80 % of the curriculum is laid down as a rule on a national level, this includes also the module titles and in addition the title of the study program. From the experts' point of view, this appears to be quite restrictive and, thus, limiting the academic freedom. The experts encourage the University to use the academic freedom wherever possible, especially within the preset modules, to sharpen its profile and strategy as well as to adhere to European standards, striving to become more relevant in an international context by defining its unique profile. The experts recommend juxtaposing the modules, including the module titles, of the study program with modules that are commonly offered in the European scientific community.

Alongside the theoretical curriculum, practical training is part of the curriculum. It is conducted in every semester by way of internships, laboratories or in summer training. The University cooperates with practice institutions such as medical centers and hospitals. The University explains on-site that the teaching personnel also works in the institutions where the students undergo their practical training. A physician supervises the summer internships. Consequently, students are supervised by professors and teaching instructors during the practical training. On-site the students highlighted this as an advantage of the study program as the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical training is immediate. The experts take note of the cooperation agreements and come to the conclusion that the University carefully selects its cooperation partners and ensures the qualification of the students' supervisors. It became sufficiently clear that the University strives to offer the same quality of practical training for all students at various cooperation partners.

The Faculty of Pharmacy has its own research plan. Concerning the integration of research into the course of study, teaching staff, the researchers and the students of the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" are involved in national and international research programs. The scientific research methodology is learnt by students through their involvement in inter- and transdisciplinary research teams, scientific clubs and projects. The Faculty also organizes student scientific symposiums, where students' most valuable scientific papers are awarded, and advanced study schools for theoretical and practical training. The University explains that by developing the scientific clubs and the cooperation with the Institute of Life Sciences, the students are coopted in activities of research.

The credit system applied in the "Nutrition and Dietetics" study program and at the University in general complies with the *Order of the Romanian Ministry of Education no.3617/2005* on the generalized application of the European Credit Transfer System.

The subjects in the curriculum can be evaluated during the semester through verifications and at the end of the semester through written and oral exams. All exams are conducted according to the "Regulations for students' examination and grading". A course can include one or more forms of assessment.

The University offers three exam sessions: regular sessions in winter and summer, a re-examination session and a session for recovering credits. They extend over a period of three to four weeks after the period of teaching activities. Re-examination periods take place after each academic year. If a student fails during the re-examination period, he or she has to repeat the failed modules and can re-sit the exam in the next year. Should a student not pass an exam during these sessions, he or she may retake that exam maximum three times. In order to be allowed to study to proceed to the next study year, students have to acquire at least 45 CP.

For the evaluation of the students' performance in exams, the University applies a 10-point grading system (10 being the highest grade). The minimum passing grade is 5 points. Verifications may also be graded with the qualifications 'passed' or 'failed'.

The study program is completed by composing a Bachelor thesis/license exam (10 CP). The license exam consists of a written multiple choice test, a written thesis and an oral defense of the thesis.

The Bachelor degree examination takes place in accordance with the Ministry Decree regarding the general framework for organizing final examinations in higher education and based on the institution's own procedure approved annually by the University Senate. According to the regulations in force, the Bachelor degree examination consists of two tests:

- a) test 1: assessment of fundamental and specialized knowledge
- b) test 2: presentation and defense of the Bachelor thesis

The number of credits allotted to the promotion of the license thesis (10 CP) is added to the 180 ECTS credit points for the entire program. From the experts'

point of view, the thesis is an obligatory part of the curriculum. Thus, the final thesis should be part of the official workload of the study program. Nevertheless, the experts acknowledge that the addition is a singularity in Romania due to the National Law.

To conclude, graduates of the study program “Nutrition and Dietetics” appear to have good employment opportunities on the Romanian job market.

However, regarding the structure of the study program, the European perspective could be more emphasized in the curriculum. Hence, the University should try to close some gaps (e.g. workload, examination, profile of the study program) in order to guarantee international applicability of the Romanian degree in other European countries. In this regard, the experts also want to draw attention to the process of recognizing externally achieved credit points. The University recognizes credits obtained at other universities if they comply with the regulations on students’ professional activity; the equivalence of credits is evaluated by an internal credit recognition committee inside each faculty. From the experts’ point of view, the recognition of credits transferred from other universities (national and international) should be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, i.e. the burden of proof to demonstrate that an application does not fulfill the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment².

The study program “Nutrition and Dietetics” contains 180 + 10 credits. The curriculum comprises a total of 49 modules. The study program is offered on a full-time basis (six semesters/three years). The total workload of the program is 4,500 hours, which is divided into 2684 contact hours, 1,816 individual work hours and 360 hours of practical training, which are included in the contact hours.

From the experts’ point of view, the student workload should be evaluated on a regular basis in order to make sure that students are not overloaded or under-challenged. Additionally, the implementation of evaluation results to improve the study programs should be clearly documented. The experts also suggest

² (Art 3.3 (5)); Each Party shall recognize periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education program in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education program in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education program which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought (Art.5.1 (1))

combining smaller modules into larger units of modules to emphasize competence.

According to the University, the admission of students to the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is based on the baccalaureate or an equivalent diploma and an admission exam. General admission procedures are stated in the document "Methodology on the Organization and Development of the Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Studies for the Academic the Year of 2018-2019". The University assures to give priority to academic equality and ethics policies contained in the "Code of Academic Ethics". Thus, students may apply for academic or social welfare scholarships in order to assure equality throughout the University.

Annual admissions are organized in two sessions during July and September. Foreign students must submit a Romanian language certificate (level C1) issued by institutions authorized by the Ministry of National Education.

From the experts' point of view, the admission procedure of the program complies with the requirements of the University as well as with the national standards. The general recruitment and admission policies for students of the University are clearly stated. The University makes it also clear that all discrimination is prohibited.

Based on the described conclusions, the expert group considers criterion B.1 to be partly fulfilled.

The recognition of credits transferred from other Universities (national and international) has to be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

B.2. Learning outcomes

From the experts' point of view, the "Nutrition and Dietetics" study program can be sufficiently classified within the Romanian higher education system. The final qualification gained by its graduates corresponds to the demands of the Romanian labor market. The knowledge, competencies and abilities gained throughout the study program correspond to the final academic certificate to be awarded. The practical activity, which has been described under criterion B.1, enables students to adapt to real life circumstances and to apply their theoretical knowledge.

The teaching and didactic methods focus on problem-based and interdisciplinary learning as well as interdisciplinary teaching. Lectures follow a weekly schedule. Multimedia devices such as power point presentations and educational films are incorporated and frequently updated. A Moodle E-Learning platform has been implemented by the University to increase the ability of providing students with information and access to courses.

From the experts' point of view, a mix between methods including interactive learning methods is applied. According to the University, the main responsibility of each course instructor is to increase student training according to their needs, expectations and goals. Furthermore, course instructors are responsible for the development of students' degree-specific as well as general competences, which are specified in the course descriptions provided by the University.

The expert group thinks that employability is given for graduates of this program. The experts conclude that this positive outcome and development stems on the one hand from the dedicated academic staff and on the other hand from the open atmosphere and communication ethics at the University.

Regarding student support measures, tutors serve as mentors for the students throughout the course of the study program.

The expert group considers criterion B.2 to be fulfilled.

B.3. Scientific research activity

The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" does not have a distinct research agenda and is, therefore, incorporated into the research carried out by the Faculty of Pharmacy.

In regard to the integration of research into the course of study, the teaching staff, the researchers and the students of the Faculty of Pharmacy are involved in national and international research programs. Moreover, the University offers students the opportunity to participate in scientific clubs that are organized within the faculties and coordinated by professors. The Faculty of Pharmacy also organizes student scientific symposiums, where students' most valuable scientific papers are awarded.

The experts are conscious of the fact that the study program's profile is rather practice-oriented. Nevertheless, as a research facility, applied research could be more dominant within the program. The experts highlight that the University

could, for example, invest in educational research which seems to be especially apt considering the aim of a large part of the students to work in the educational sector.

In terms of further development opportunities, the experts recommend to expand the already developed research plan on the study program. Moreover, the evaluation of research should be clearly documented. The expert group also recommends involving students in research activities, assuming that this will very likely have a positive effect on structuring students' independent study hours and motivate students to continue their studies after graduating from Bachelor programs.

Criterion B.3. is regarded as fulfilled.

B.4. Financial activity

Currently, the bulk of the financial resources of the University are composed of tuition fees. According to the University, the tuition fees were adjusted according to current student numbers. Nevertheless, for a sustainable financing it could also be helpful to look for other financial options besides tuition fees (e.g. sponsoring, research, further education; *see also A.2*).

The University has confirmed in a formal declaration that "the endowment and facilities for the Bachelor study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" at Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad, Faculty of Pharmacy, is ensured for the future, including all buildings, equipment, apparatuses and personnel necessary for the implementation of the program."

Furthermore, the University has taken measures to sell facilities owned by the University and reduced management allowances. One branch which has turned out as non-profitable, has been shut down and another one is in the process of being shut down.

The experts recognize that the University carries out adequate measures for improving financial activities.

Criterion B.4 is regarded as fulfilled.

C. Quality Management

C.1. Quality assurance strategies and procedures

The University has developed an elaborate quality assurance system implemented by means of corresponding evaluation procedures. The University presented its quality assurance system in the written documents and in the documentation presented to the experts on site. The University proved that the application of quality management mechanisms has been reviewed and all the internal regulations have been simplified. Furthermore, the experts took positive note of an increased role of the students in the internal quality assurance system.

A quality assurance system is sustained at the University by the activity of the following structural components: The Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission (C.E.A.C.), faculty committees for quality assurance, the Vice-Rector for Bachelor and Master programs, quality assurance and students' problems, and the Department for Quality Assurance (D.A.C.). Members of the C.E.A.C. and of the D.A.C. are approved by the University Senate. The University emphasizes that the D.A.C. published a "Quality Manual" for internal use.

At the end of each academic year, an internal evaluation report of the quality of education and research is presented to the Senate for its approval and then published on the official website of the University.

The University conducts annual evaluations of teaching staff members. The evaluation includes a self-assessment, a peer-assessment and a student-assessment. It aims to evaluate the teaching activity, research activity, and auxiliary activities associated with the role of teaching.³ The research activities and the professional reputation of the teaching staff are assessed individually by each teacher with the help of an annual self-assessment sheet. The sheet is accompanied by a file comprising concrete evidence for each filled in component. The University emphasizes that the self-assessment sheet is also used to allocate awards and bonuses. (Wages for teaching staff vary depending on the obtained final qualification – satisfactory, well or very well. Furthermore, each ISI (International Scientific Indexing) paper is rewarded with a certain amount, according

³ The University explains the auxiliary activities as follows: "updating the courses with last hour information in the field, update of the practical works and of the seminar with up-to-date data, drafting the lectures in PowerPoint, delivering bibliographic sources of actuality, involving the students in the research activities specific for the subject, participation in scientific events etc."

to a grid approved by the Board of Directors). The teaching staff evaluation by students is conducted each semester and acknowledged by the respective professors. All evaluations are analyzed by the University Senate at the end of each academic year. The students affirm that evaluation results have consequences, such as the dismissing of teaching staff or the re-organization of courses.

Apart from this, regular meetings of the Quality Assessment and Assurance Committee with students contribute to the improvement of communication between students and instructors. The students participating in the QA Committee are representatives selected by the students of the faculty.

The University uses internal audit practices on key areas of academic activity in order to ensure that the commitments it has undertaken are rigorously followed in regard to public transparency. The University has its own "Code of Academic Ethics" that lays down rules of conduct, ethics and deontology.

The University also pays particular attention to the communication with external stakeholders such as employers and professional organizations. All communication is organized by the Alumni Association which organizes workshops and, together with the Career Counselling and Guidance Center, prepares graduate satisfaction surveys.

Information regarding the study program, its modular system, exam requirement and compensation measures, as well as the general information about the available support of students, is provided on the official website of the University (<http://www.uvvg.ro>), in the Regulations on Students' Professional Activities, brochures, and flyers. There are various organizations within the University, such as the Career Counselling and Guidance Center whose main function is to support and inform students in the aspects of career guidance, personal development, and learning optimization. On top, teachers and tutors have their individual office hours when students can refer to them directly.

To the issue of equal opportunities and gender equality, the University's admission competition, studying and teaching processes offer equal opportunities for all candidates regardless of gender, origin or social class. The University is ready to provide special conditions for admission and for students with restricted and low financial resources.

The University supports students with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Students are encouraged to ask for help if needed. In addition, the students with disabilities get support e.g. through tutors⁴.

Considering the thorough implementation of the quality assurance system and the active participation of all University members in quality assurance procedures, the expert group concludes that criterion C.1 is fulfilled.

C.2. Procedures on the periodical initiation, monitoring and revision of the programs and activities carried out

The experts highlight that the quality management system is ensured by central and decentral commissions and a quality management department. The commissions act in accordance with the quality assurance strategy of the University. Moreover, a "Quality Manual" is approved by the Senate for each study year. Students assess all teaching staff regularly.

The University implements procedures of periodical revision and evaluation of the study programs offered. Hence, the teaching staff is required to conduct annual self-evaluations and peer-assessments; students evaluate the teaching process every six months. According to the students on-site, their remarks and critique are considered by the University and lead to organizational and structural changes.

The experts conclude that the study programs are evaluated by different stakeholders on a regular basis by means of rational and effective methods.

The assessment of the teaching personnel is discussed in detail below, under criterion C.4.

The experts underline that the quality assurance system of the University enables productive application of the obtained teaching and learning evaluation results. This refers to the introduction of necessary corrective measures and better organization of the programs, as well as the improvement of teaching methods, envisaged in upcoming academic years. Nevertheless, the experts point out that the use of ISO standards bear the danger of over-

⁴ According to the provisions of Art. 118 Par. 3 of Law No. 1/2011 on the National Education and of Art. 7 of the University Code on the student's rights and obligations, the Faculty of Medicine considers the issue of disabilities an issue for the academic society, and not for the individual. This type of approach requires the establishment of groups of academic mutual assistance to turn the individual responsibility into a collective one keeping in mind the need for rights and freedom for all persons with disabilities while taking their own decisions.

bureaucratization. Therefore, the experts recommend re-considering this quality assurance approach.

Considering these facts, the experts conclude that criterion C.2 is fulfilled.

C.3. Objective and transparent procedures of learning results evaluation

Based on students' evaluations, the teaching process and the learning outcomes undergo a constant optimization process. Additionally, the University has established clear examination rules and a structured process for dealing with exceptional cases. Furthermore, the form of examination and the learning outcomes are clearly specified for each module.

In order to qualify for the final examination of a module, students must have met all subject requirements: attendance, passing the ongoing assessments and practical works. These are presented to the students by the lecture coordinator in the first course lesson according to the module description.

The final assessment in each course can be conducted in the form of a colloquium or an examination. Colloquiums are forms of oral examinations taken in, for example, optional courses. Practical competences are evaluated by way of an evaluation form, signed and certified by the supervisor.

Students' actions in case of appeal and re-examinations are well-defined and described in the regulations of the University. Hence, there are clear procedures established for the above-mentioned examinations and students are informed of these procedures in advance. The main function of examinations conducted in the program is to objectively evaluate students' achievement of the specific learning outcomes.

The experts sum up that criteria and regulations about grading are present (*see B.1 for details*). The forms of examinations generally fit the competence aimed for by the study program and the modules. Thus, the evaluation of learning outcomes is appropriate.

Taking the above described facts into account, the expert group concludes that criterion C.3 is fulfilled.

C.4. Periodical evaluation procedures of teaching staff quality

The University has provided an overview about the teaching staff of the study program.

There are 34 teachers affiliated to the Faculty of Pharmacy who can teach in the “Nutrition and Dietetics” study program. Of these, all are involved in the program: five professors, five associate professors, 21 senior lecturers, three assistant lecturers.

Overall, the teaching and academic staff of the University shows a high level of commitment and potential for the execution and further development of the study program they are responsible for. The expert group came to the conclusion that there is a strong corporate identity and positive group dynamics among the university and faculty administrations

With the curriculum of the Bachelor study program “Nutrition and Dietetics” in mind, the ratio between professors and lecturers appears to be balanced. Overall, the teaching and academic staff of the University shows a high level of commitment for the execution and further development of the study program. Still, from the experts’ point of view, it is desirable to increase the percentage of teaching staff with a professional background in nutrition in the program.

The experts take note that all teaching positions are established in compliance with the requirements of legal norms and completed with tenured teaching staff in higher education in accordance with the Romanian law.

Mutual respect is conducted and confidentiality is guaranteed between the rector, dean and the evaluated teacher. Results of these annual evaluations serve as the basis for promotion proposals. The selection and employment of teaching staff are based on the principle of public contest; these procedures are regulated by the University’s “Methodology of Employment on Academic Positions” as well as by the Romanian legal requirements (Law of National Education no.1/2011, Government Decision no.457/2011, Government Decision no.36/2013, Order no.6560/2012, Order no. 4204/2013). According to these regulations, teaching and other positions are publicly announced and the University chooses candidates for these positions based on an open and independent procedure. These procedures are transparent and available for potential candidates from the academic as well as from the work field. By means of such transparent contest regulations, the University seeks to strengthen its competitiveness together with its national and international visibility.

The teaching staff is periodically evaluated by means of both peer and anonymous student reviews. Student evaluations are performed at the end of each

semester. They are anonymous, which encourages an objective assessment. The results of the reviews are processed by the Quality Assurance Committee. Students are informed about the results of the evaluations through their student representatives in the Senate. Should a member of the teaching staff receive an unsatisfactory evaluation result, a course of actions will be implemented in order to eliminate the existing problems. Hence, the results are carefully monitored and the improvements are continuously observed.

Based on these facts, the expert group considers criterion C.4 to be fulfilled.

C.5. Learning resources accessibility

Overall, the experts conclude that the University offers appropriate facilities and sufficient number for the execution of its currently running study programs. The students have access to three libraries in Arad:

- Central Library (Arghezi Complex): Monday-Friday 09:00-20:00, Saturday 09:00-12:00; exam session: Monday-Saturday 08:00-20:00,
- Medical Library ("Vasile Goldiș" University Campus): Monday-Friday 09:00-20:00, Saturday 09:00-12:00; exam session Monday-Saturday 08:00-22:00, Sunday 08:00-18:00,
- European Library of Biomedical Sciences: Monday-Friday 12:00-17:00; exam session Monday-Saturday 12:00-17:00.

The experts discerned that the program-specific literature for the "Nutrition and Dietetics" program is not sufficient. The experts urge the University to significantly expand the library in terms of printed and electronic books, journals, and databases (*see also A.2*).

The University encourages students' learning processes by offering resources and opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Moreover, the University offers various forms of academic support and counseling to students: e.g. consultations and tutorials. However, regarding infrastructure, accessibility for people with a disability should be improved.

The expert group considers criterion C.5. as partly fulfilled.

The program-specific literature should be expanded.

C.6. Systematically updated data base, with regard to the internal quality assurance

The University has designed an internal quality assurance system and established structures for monitoring and developing the quality assurance concept. Parts of the internal quality assurance system are regular student reviews, as well as the feedback meetings organized for this purpose. A more detailed description can be found under criteria C.3. and C.4. A regular track of the evaluation and review results is maintained by the University. Strategies for improvement are designed therefrom. A corresponding electronic system and database are also implemented. The experts conclude that the data and information policy seem to be adequate at the University.

The expert group considers criterion C.6. as fulfilled.

C.7. Transparency of public interest information concerning study programs

The results of quality assurance activities are summarized in a report, in order to improve the programs' quality.

Through its website, the University supplies relevant information concerning its programs and its structures to the public. Thus, the University promotes its study programs online, through local printed media, and by running open days and workshops in high schools and other institutions. Furthermore, the University collaborates with education agencies, which represent the University and its study programs on national and international fairs.

The experts conclude that the faculty provides information on qualifications, study programs, diplomas, teaching and research staff, student facilities and other aspects.

All in all, the expert group considers criterion C.7 to be fulfilled.

C.8. Functionality of education quality assurance structures, according to the law

The expert group was provided with an overview of the quality evaluation mechanisms and institutional structures. The Quality Management Commission regularly elaborates and reviews all corresponding policies and strategies as well as operational procedures. The expert group is convinced of the validity of the information provided in the application documentation, and its accordance with the legal framework, as stated in the "Quality Manual". Quality assurance and

evaluation for the currently running programs are adequately developed at the University.

Structured processes and an evaluated organization underline the importance of the quality management at the University; the organization strives for continuous improvement. Central and decentral staff are involved in the quality assurance process. The experts conclude that the institutional structure for quality education seems to be adequate. Thus, criterion C.8 is considered to be fulfilled.

For more details on the structure, functioning and members involved in the Quality assurance procedures at the University see also criteria A.1, A.2 and C.1.

4 Evaluation Summary

The main task of the expert group during the peer review was to assess the planned “Nutrition and Dietetics” study program and to verify its compliance with European and Romanian regulations (*see part 1 Introduction*).

In the view of the expert group, the “Nutrition and Dietetics” study program complies with Romanian regulations as specified in the “Methodology” and the “Law of National Education”. Hence, the study program complies with the pertinent Romanian conventions as well as with all legal normative requirements.

The expert group acknowledges the high motivation and engagement of all persons involved in the program. With regard to the current public health situation in Arad and the region, the experts also confirm and support the necessity of skilled nutritionists and dieticians. Nevertheless, it became apparent to the experts that the University has to close some gaps in order to guarantee international applicability of the Romanian degree in other European countries. This pertains particularly to the nutritional part of the study program. Hence, the experts encourage the University to use the academic freedom wherever possible, to sharpen its profile and strategy as well as adhere to European standards, striving to become relevant in an international context.

The on-site visit in addition to the documentation provided by the University, enables the expert group to recommend the Accreditation of the “Nutrition and Dietetics” study program offered by Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad, to the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS.

Given the fact that the program meets the national normative requirements, the expert group recommends the accreditation of the “Nutrition and Dietetics” study program also by the Romanian Ministry of Education.

The experts outline the following conditions:

- The University has to provide students with a wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material. (A.2 and C.5)
- The recognition of credits transferred from other universities (domestic and abroad) has to be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. (B.1)

At the same time, the experts attempt to provide constructive feedback and recommendations for further improvement regarding the concept, structure and content of the program.

The following recommendations are thus proposed for the University's consideration:

A) Institutional Capacity:

- The University should look for common interests between the faculties and, thus, combine forces and resources, e.g. with regards to personnel. (A.1)
- The University should focus on the medical field in order to develop a unique profile that demarcates the University from other Universities. (A.1)
- The experts recommend that the University focuses on research in the bio-medical area and continues offering its research services to the private sector. (A.1)
- An internationalization strategy should be devised that articulates aims and measures clearly. This way, the University could further promote its attractiveness and unique character by standing out from other higher education institutions. (A.1)
- Support mechanisms for students with a disadvantageous socio-economical background should be implemented. (A.2)
- More nutrition and dietetics laboratories oriented to the students of the study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" should be provided. (A.2)
- The University library could establish partnerships with similar institutions (libraries, publishing houses) within the country and abroad, in order to provide students and teachers with access to a wider range of IT resources, databases as well as learning and scientific material. (A.2)

B) Educational Effectiveness:

- Framework conditions and influences, e.g. social and political as well as topics on obesity, malnutrition and sarcopenia should be part of the curriculum. Behavioral and spatial conditions as well as setting oriented interventions and economical and administrative courses should also be integrated in the curriculum. (B.1)

- Academic freedom should be used wherever possible, especially within the preset modules, to sharpen the study program's profile and to adhere to European standards. (B.1)
- Synergies with related study programs should be established in order to save human resources, guarantee interdisciplinary learning and research methods. (B.1)
- Obligatory credits to be awarded for the final exam should be part of the workload of the study program. (B.1)
- Focusing on competence, modules should be combined into larger module units and the student workload should be evaluated on a regular basis. (B.1)
- In terms of further development opportunities, the Faculty of Pharmacy should clearly document the evaluation of research. (B.3)
- Students should be involved in research activities which will likely have a positive effect on structuring student's independent study hours and motivate students to continue their studies after graduating from Bachelor programs. (B.3)

C) Quality Management:

- The use of ISO standards bears the danger of over-bureaucratization and could, therefore, be reviewed. (C.2)
- The percentage of professors with a background in Nutrition teaching in the program should be urgently increased. (C.4)
- Regarding infrastructure, the accessibility for people with a disability should be improved. (C.5)

5 Decision

Decision of the Accreditation Commission of September 26, 2019

The proposed resolution of the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS is based on the University's application, as well as the expert review and the on-site visit described in the Expert Report.

The on-site visit at the University took place on July 9-11, 2019 according to the previously agreed schedule.

The accreditation decision is based on the Expert Report. The Expert Report, i.e. the proceedings of the Accreditation conform to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as to the Law no. 1 of National Education of Romania, 2011, Art.150, and Art.193; the Quality Evaluation Activities Guide for University Study Programs and for Higher Education Institutions: Part 1 Study Programs Accreditation External Evaluation Guide, and the Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS discussed the procedural documents and the recommendation of the expert group.

The standard study period in the full-time program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is three years/six semesters. The study program encompasses 180 CP and comprises 52 modules of which 44 are obligatory and eight are optional. Per study year, students have to choose one optional module, i.e. three in total. The bachelor program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is completed with the conferral of the academic degree "Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics". The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" was launched in the winter semester 2011/2012. It is solely offered in Arad. The language of instruction is Romanian. The University offers 45 study places for the study program per year.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS considers that most Criteria (according to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as to the Law no. 1 of National Education of Romania, 2011, Art.150, and Art.193; the Quality Evaluation Activities Guide for University Study Programs and for Higher Education Institutions: Part 1 Study Programs Accreditation External Evaluation Guide, and the

Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) are fulfilled and therefore adopts the following decision:

The study program "Nutrition and Dietetics" is granted the quality level of "Confidence" and the obtaining of the Accreditation.

Based on the Expert Report, the Accreditation Commission outlines the following conditions:

- The University has to provide students with a wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material. (A.2 and C.5)
- The recognition of credits transferred from other universities (domestic and abroad) has to be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. (B.1)

For the further development and enhancement of the study program and the University as a whole, the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS supports the recommendations articulated in the Expert Report.