



A R A C I S

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

External Institutional Evaluation

Universitatea Creștină Partium din Oradea, România

Foreign Expert Report

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1. Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as Foreign Expert from the visit to the Partium Christian University in Oradea (PCU) for an external institutional evaluation by ARACIS from April 2 to 4, 2014. This was the first institutional evaluation of PCU by ARACIS. Beside the institutional evaluation, the bachelor programmes "English Language and Literature", "Fine Arts" and "Management" were selected to be evaluated too.

During the last five years I have participated already in eleven ARACIS-evaluations. Especially I have participated in the institutional evaluation of PCU's "sister institution" the Sapientia University Cluj-Napoca in 2010. As a member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) I have participated already in more than 20 evaluations in 7 European countries, in Colombia and in Nigeria. Furthermore, I have also worked as a peer for the Lithuanian Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (CQAHE). Hence the following observations and comments will not only reflect my experiences with the ARACIS-evaluations in Romania but also my IEP-background and European perspectives. My focus is on the institution as a whole and not so much on individual study programmes. The self-evaluation process, international perspectives as well as governance and quality assurance are important core elements of my considerations.

I am very grateful to the Mission Director Prof.univ.dr.Adrei Bodiu*) and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.dr.Dumitru Miron for conducting the evaluation process in a very efficient way and to all members of the ARACIS team for their constructive and fruitful discussions during the visit. My special thanks go to the Technical Secretary Mrs.Anca Prisacariu from ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation and for her friendly way of holding contact with me, providing all necessary information for the visit and solving even the last minute problem with cancelled flights.

I also give my cordial thanks to the Rector Conf.univ.dr.Szabolcs János from Partium Christian University for the friendly welcome and perfect organization of my visit. I also want to express my appreciation to the Chancellor Prof.univ.dr.Flóra Gábor, to the President of the Senate Prof.univ.dr.József Pálfi and to the Administrative Director Mrs Annamária Berei as well as to the various representatives of PCU including students, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their discussions to an understanding of the institution.

2. Organizational Details of Partium Christian University

The Partium Christian University was founded in 1999 by the Pro Universitate Partium Foundation and accredited by law in 2008 as legal personality of private law and public

*) It was an unbelievable shock that Mission Director Prof.univ.dr.Adrei Bodiu died in the last night of the visit. I remember him as an open minded, extremely engaged and very friendly chair who fully integrated me into the team and supported me as much as possible.

utility. It is situated in Oradea and is a private institution of higher education of non-profit character. The roots of the University date from a Reformed Institute of Higher Education, which was established in Oradea already in 1989.

PCU has in its current structure 3 faculties (Human- and Social-Studies, Economics, Arts) with 11 departments and offers 16 bachelor and 8 master study programmes. Actually PCU has 943 students. Despite of the declining demographic situation in Romania, the financial crises and other reasons this number has not changed considerably during the last years. The University states to have actually 89 position of teaching staff occupied (in relation with 66 vacant positions) and 73 auxiliary teaching and administrative staff.

The financial resources of the University come mainly from the Hungarian Sapientia Foundation and are complemented by school fees and project income. The total income of PCU in 2013 was 16.76mio LEI in relation with 14.34mio LEI expenses. Due to an excellent financial management PCU has succeeded to reach a cash surplus and a certain financial flexibility despite of the actual difficult financial situation.

The premises of PCU are adequate and the University disposes of well equipped lecture rooms, labs and offices. The University has a central library with 6 reading rooms, faculty libraries, possesses digital printing facilities, operates a welcoming canteen and provides accommodation for 220 students. The main faculty building in Primăria street nr. 27 is predominantly owned by the Reformed Diocese of Piatra Craiului. For 2015 the construction of a new university building is planned.

The University is led by the Administrative Board (including the Rector) of 9 members, chaired by a member of the Foundation, and the Senate of 23 members, also chaired by a member of the Foundation. The Administration Board and the Senate are subordinated to the Founders Council. According to the Statutes of PCU the Administration Board is responsible for the operational management and applies the strategic decisions of the Senate. The Senate represents the university community and is responsible mainly for academic matters and the decision of guidelines for the university management. Students have one seat in the Administrative Board and six seats in the Senate.

Study programmes of PCU are taught in Hungarian language. The University is specialized in the fields of economy, arts and humanities, trying to contribute to the cultural and economic needs and the consolidation of the Hungarian minority in Romania. As it is the only higher education institution with this profile in Bihor County there are no direct strong competitors in the region. One of the main challenges of PCU is to ensure employability of its graduates not only within the Hungarian community but in whole Romania and beyond that in Europe. Another challenge is to keep critical mass of students and to identify areas for teaching and research where strengths of the Hungarian population can be used.

3. Outline of the Visit

As already mentioned, this was the first institutional evaluation of Partium Christian University by ARACIS. By my impression the institution took the whole process very seriously and prepared very well for the visit.

3.1 The Self-Evaluation Process

The Self-Evaluation Committee consisted of 6 leading personalities of PCU chaired by the Rector. The elaborated 72 pages self-evaluation report (SER) was approved by the Administrative Board on February 17 of 2014 and made available for ARACIS team members together with numerous Annexes at the website www.partium.ro/documente at the beginning of March, 2014. The SER and the documentation provided were of very good quality. The SER is very clear and with view exceptions contains all important data in order to enable a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of PCU. An included SWOT analysis identifies some important key themes. However, I would have appreciated in the SER a more explicit description of changes and innovations since the accreditation in 2008. I have missed some specific data like the size of the Senate, the mobility numbers of students and staff or more information on the drop-outs. Further on, a more active view in the SER into the future would also have opened the chance to PCU to use this evaluation not only for an institutional-wide discussion on its present situation but also on its possibilities for the future.

3.2 The Evaluation Visit

The institutional evaluation visit to Partium Christian University in Oradea began in the evening of 1st April of 2014 with the arrival of the ARACIS team at the Scorilo hotel in Oradea.

During the evaluation visit I participated in the meetings of the main ARACIS team, but did also arrange my own interviews and examinations.

Wednesday, April 2, 2014

The evaluation procedure started punctually at 9:00 in the Rectorate meeting room of PCU. Rector Conf.univ.dr.Szaboles János welcomed the ARACIS delegation and introduced the present representatives of the University. Mission Director Prof.univ.dr.Adrei Bodiu and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.dr.Dumitru Miron presented the members of the ARACIS team and explained the procedure.

In the following internal ARACIS team meeting from 9:30 to 10:00 the schedule of the visit was discussed and fields of special attention were mentioned.

From 10:00 to 11:00 I had a private meeting with the Chancellor Prof.univ.dr.Flóra Gábor. We discussed the governing structure, the relations between Senate and Rectorate, the financial situation, the study offer and other things.

Between 14:30 and 16:15 the evaluation team was guided by the Rector through faculty buildings. We visited the building in Primăriei Street nr. 36 with the Rectorate, the Canteen, a part of the Library and student dormitories. The building in Arany János Street no. 4 accommodates student dormitories and social rooms for students. In Primăriei Street nr. 27 the highest proportion of learning spaces is located. The building on Mihai Viteazul Street no. 3 belongs to the Faculty of Arts. During the round tour we have met ongoing classes and found well equipped lecture rooms, labs and offices.

From 16:15 to 16:45 I had a meeting with the President of the Senate. We discussed the separation of power between the Senate and the Rectorate as well as the functioning of the Senate and its sub-committees. Furthermore, the relations with the founders were explained.

From 17:00 to 18:00 the ARACIS team met 11 graduates (3 males / 9 females) from all three faculties. There were no complaints or suggestions for alterations with respect to the education at PCU. Everybody felt well prepared for his/her job by the education received at PCU. Excellent contacts with teachers were praised.

From 18:00 to 19:00 a meeting with 17 students (4 males / 13 females) was arranged. Only one of the students was also a student representative in a Faculty Council and there were no student representatives from the Senate present. The general statements were again very positive. The good relations with teachers and the open atmosphere in the institution were praised. There was no clear statement pro or against the evaluation of teaching. Experience on mobility was mainly with Hungarian universities. The high drop-out rate in the first year was mentioned as a special problem. The practical part of studies (3 weeks praxis) was considered as not sufficient.

The day concluded with a short ARACIS meeting where first impressions were collected and open questions mentioned.

Thursday, April 3, 2014

In the morning I studied documents and interchanged impressions and findings with other ARACIS members.

From 11:30 to 12:15 I had a private meeting with the Administrative Director Annamária Berei. The Director explained the budgeting process and the role of the Sapientia Foundation, the integration of administrative staff into decisions and the project for the new university building.

From 15:40 to 16:15 the two student members in the ARACIS team had arranged an additional meeting with two student representatives in the Senate. I attended this meeting and we discussed the role of the students in the different decision bodies of PCU. Student representatives turned out to be very modest. Their main goal was to receive information but they did not take any active role. It was also clear that they did not feel any ownership with respect to quality assurance.

For 18:00 the University had invited 9 employers (4 males / 5 females). Representatives from schools, economy including banks, music and theatre were present. There were again mainly positive comments, praising the knowledge and the social skills of the graduates. The majority of the present managers and employers offers internships to the students of PCU and employs graduates. Representatives of economy mentioned that the praxis of three weeks was too short in order to get really involved into a project of the enterprise. The involvement of stakeholders into the discussion of curricula was mentioned to be more or less informal.

Between 19:10 and 19:25 we had a short internal debriefing on our impressions. So far no major problems were identified.

Friday, April 4, 2014

In the morning I was informed on the sudden death of our chair.

From 10:00 to 13:00 I checked documents and had another short meeting with the Chancellor. Documents were finalized and impressions summarized.

At 13:00 the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.dr.Dumitru Miron chaired the final meeting between the ARACIS experts and the management of PCU. He summarized the findings of the evaluation group and invited me to give my report as Foreign Expert and the Student Representatives to inform on their impressions.

The Rector thanked the ARACIS team for their constructive and supportive work.

In the afternoon I left the University and went to the airport.

4. Governance and Institution

The leadership of the University shows high identification with the institution and is highly committed. The Mission Statement is realistic and clear and is based on the demands and needs of the Hungarian minority in the North-West of Romania. Despite that the 2011 Law allows different interpretation of the duties and rights of the Senate, the Administrative Board and the Senate at PCU co-operate very well and have developed a fruitful and effective way to govern the institution. But things at PCU are still in transition and optimization of decision and governing procedures is still going on. By my opinion the provided Organisation Chart of PCU with the Administrative Board sub-ordered to the Senate does not fully correspond to the intentions of the 2011 Law nor does it reflect the actual situation at PCU. The Chart and the SER are also not clear in separating strategic decision bodies and management bodies and give the Senate the possibility to intervene in the daily business of the Rector. But according to Art. 207 (1) of the 2011 Law the management positions at university level are the Rector, the Pro-Rectors and the Administrative Director. These persons are responsible for the executive management on university level and not the Senate.

The size of the Senate with 23 members seems to be quite big for a small institution. It is very democratic to include representatives of all Faculties and Departments into the Senate, but modern university management requires fast and efficient decision structures. As many staff members as possible should be exempt from administrative and bureaucratic work and use their working power only for teaching and research.

It should be mentioned that PCU is to my knowledge the only university in Romania which organized the rector's appointment based on a public contest according to the 2011 Law, Art. 209 (1) a).

The University has to be commended for its promotional and PR activities like visits to schools and Open Doors days. But corporate identity of PCU should be still strengthened.

Recommendations:

- Reconsider PCU's organizational structure and put Administrative Board and Senate on the same level under the Founders Council (triangle governing structure). The Senate should limit its function on mainly academic affairs, define the general framework for the Administrative Board and monitor the institution.
- The Senate should reconsider its optimal size with a view to its reduction.
- Monitoring instruments of the progress of the strategic plan and the operational plan should be improved. Indicators to be reached should be regularly measured and compared with benchmarks from similar institutions.
- Even it is a general habit in Romania, PCU should stop the carry over of unrealistic vacant staff positions from year to year and open new positions when needed.
- The existence of an Ethic Commission has to be commended. But as PCU is a small institution where everybody knows everybody I strongly recommend to install – if necessary informally - an inter-university commission with half members coming from PCU and the other half from other universities. Only such a body will be able to discuss sensitive cases.
- Strengthen the corporate identity of the institution by provision of a common e-mail address to all students and staff members.
- Intensify contacts with graduates tracking their career and supporting common activities (alumni association, etc.)
- In order to make PCU sustainable with respect to student numbers and importance for the region, consider the introduction of new study and research fields based on special strengths of the Hungarian population (e.g. applied mathematics and information technology).

5. Quality Culture

PCU has started important activities and procedures for quality assurance. Reference to the national legislation and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) is given. But by my impression the quality assurance system is still not fully working. Actually the feedback loops are not closed, consequences and supportive instruments are not clear enough. The engagement of students in quality assurance is completely passive. Students seem not to take any ownership for quality assurance processes.

Recommendations:

- The collected data and the results of evaluations should be used more explicitly for further improvement of teaching, research and administration.
- Promote more clearly to staff and students the benefits and improvements deriving from quality assurance procedures.
- Motivate students to participate more actively and critically in evaluation procedures according to ESG.

6. Teaching and Learning

The quality of the formation at PCU is recognized by employers and graduates. According to the national classification the majority of study programmes is in the class C, which is quite good for a small institution. The visited facilities and premises are very good or at least adequate.

Employers and graduates asked for more practical content in the curricula and criticized too few internship projects. Students were also alarmed by the high drop-out rate during the first year (up to 38% in the Faculty of Human- and Social-Studies).

Recommendations:

- Continue efforts for implementing all Bologna aspects (student-centred learning, involvement of stakeholders, internationalisation, employability, etc.).
- Formalise the involvement of stakeholders in the discussion of curricula.
- Extend practical parts of curricula and monitor the execution of internships (supervision during internship, obligatory report at the end).
- Strengthen contacts between the University and enterprises in order to integrate students into project work and sign contracts with institutions in- and outside Romania for internships.
- Observe high drop-out rates during the first year, investigate reasons and try to improve the situation.

7. Research and Service to Society

During the last years PCU has made progress with respect to strengthen its research. But from an international perspective the research output is still very low. Especially international visibility of PCU research is a problem field. The policy to pay higher salaries especially to young staff members and to attract by this ambitious young people has to be commended.

Recommendations:

- Increase visibility of research by supporting publications in English language, by being more active in international research groups and by forming research co-operations with other institutions in order to reach critical mass.
- Provide some "seed money" in order to support new research projects and the application for projects.
- Support publications in recognised international journals.
- Recruit future academic staff by defining concrete teaching and research profiles.
- Strengthen and improve relations with the region. Present examples of good consultancies and services to potential partners.

8. Internationalisation

Internationalization is today an essential element of higher education. It is a multi-dimensional task taking into account mobility programmes, language policy, curricula, joint study and double degree programmes, collaborative research, conference attendance etc. PCU is very active with respect to mobility and co-operations with Hungarian universities but relations with non-Hungarian speaking institutions should be extended. PCU's homepage in four languages and the high number of outgoing students to Hungarian universities have to be commended.

Recommendations:

- Define clear goals for internationalisation activities (strategic partnerships, language policy, mobility of staff and students, research collaborations).
- Look for partner institutions beside Hungary.
- Support mobility of teachers and students.
- Orientate your curricula according to international standards.
- Strengthen internationalisation at home by offering courses given in English or another foreign language, the use of English text-books, etc.
- Try to attract more international students by providing information (handbook) for international students on PCU's homepage.
- Update the English and German version of PCU's homepage (one Department is missing in these versions).

9. Final Remarks

Partium Christian University plays an important role in the North-West of Romania. The relations of PCU with public and private organisations in the region are very good. Graduates are also employed by non-Hungarian institutions and close important gaps on the Romanian labour market. The policy of multilingualism (Hungarian, Romanian, English and partially German) supports considerably employability. My remarks and comments should assist Partium Christian University to pursue its further path of improvement and sustainability.



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