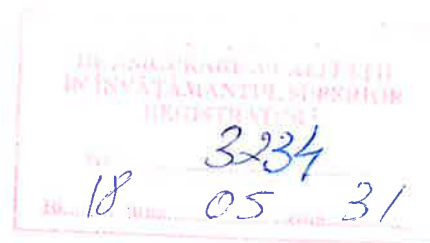


Mieczyslaw W. Socha



## I. General remarks

### a. Organization of the external review of the University

On 18 April 2018, I received an invitation from ARACIS to evaluate UTBV. When I accepted it, I was sent a self-assessment report which did not contain any annexes. Some of them were provided latter on. Quite a number of documents posted on the webpage were available in Romanian only which considerably limited in-depth analysis of individual aspects performed by a foreign expert.

The site visit to the University took place on 16 -18 May 2018 and was conducted in Romanian. The review team was composed of as many as 27 people supervised by Jordan Petrescu, ARACIS President. Although Romanian was the language of the site visit, almost all of the talks with the foreign expert were held in English. Students, staff and administration representatives demonstrated fluent command in English. And some of group meetings were translated into English by an interpreter. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the President of ARACIS for inviting me to participate in this evaluation, and the Rector of UTBV – for accepting me as a member of the Evaluation Team. I would like to give particular thanks to all representatives of various groups within the academic community for their expert explanations of the issues that were raised by me and for providing additional material. I am very grateful to Dr. Mona Arhire for her skilful interpreting at the group meetings.

As dictated by ARACIS's tradition, foreign experts were left some freedom as to the choice of meetings with the University's stakeholders and as to the structure of the final report. During the site visit I met the many representatives of stakeholders, a.o. The Rector Magnificus and Vice-Rectors, members of the Committee for Quality Assurance and Evaluation within University (CEAC-U), representatives of Committee for Quality Assurance and Evaluation within Departments (CEAC-D), Doctoral School, Alumni Office, Communication Office, academic teachers, students, doctoral students. In this report, I am mainly focussing on some selected issues such as: strategic planning, quality assurance policy and the internal system of quality assurance (IQAS), student-centred learning (SCL), programme monitoring and review, internationalisation and information policies. I have attempted to see it from the perspective of ESG 15.

### b. Quality of the Self-Assessment Report

This extensive SAR (71 pages and several dozens of annexes) sheds enough light on the operations of the University in recent years. Its full presentation of the University's internal regulations (in the text and its annexes) deserves special mention. Nevertheless, the following reservations should be put forward: Firstly, the SAR does not describe the procedure applied at the stage of its creation, composition of the group authoring it and the ways of its dissemination in the academic community. Therefore, no information is provided as to whether students and external stakeholders participated in the process and whether or not the academic community had an opportunity to read the report. Information gathered during the site visit leads us to believe that members of the University's collegial bodies had access to the report. It is regrettable that the procedures of ARACIS do not provide for a separate meeting between the evaluation team and the authors of the SAR as quite a number of SAR points lacking clarity

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could be explained there and then. Secondly, changes made to certain areas after the previous evaluation in 2013 should have been better exposed in the part presenting the University. Thirdly, CEAC-U's recommendations needn't probably have been contained in SWOT analysis. The part discussing Threats and Constraints includes only external risks and does not mention any internal threats. To bring the quality of University functioning analysis in line with ARACIS's criteria, SWOT analysis should be run in respect to each criterion, just like many other universities do it. Fourthly, the SAR does not offer satisfactory information about stakeholders' involvement in the University operations in each area undergoing analysis. It would be advisable to show, how these operations enhance education quality and serve quality culture development. Fifthly, the authors of the SAR are not particularly careful about the names of various units and collegial bodies, for example the following names of one body are used alternatively: *The Committee for Quality Evaluation and Assurance*, *Committee for Quality Assurance and Evaluation*, *Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance*. Finally, references to numerous annexes are quite pointless for the foreign expert as the annexes in questions have not been translated into English.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- In future, each quality standard discussed in the SAR should undergo SWOT analysis.
- Intensify SAR quality control

## **II. Mission and Strategic Statement**

### **Evidence:**

The HEI has its Vision, Mission and Strategy Statement, including annual action plans. The Vision puts emphasis on three aspects: Excellence, Competitiveness and Social Responsibility, and on traditional academic values such as transparency, performance, collegiality, fairness, acknowledgement of merits, ethics, openness towards the community. The Mission Statement of UTBv indicates that advanced research is carried out, that education is provided as part of all the three cycles - also to post-graduate students - and that there is cooperation with the business and public sectors. The Mission Statement wording quoted in the SAR is slightly different from that on the webpage. According to the latter, UTBv *"aims at training highly qualified specialists in the fields of fundamental sciences, technology, economics, law, sociology, arts and medical science as well as at providing knowledge and services for society"*. These general provisions have been translated into 5 strategic objectives: promotion of education oriented towards the needs of students and the labour market, development of scientific innovations and technology transfer, promotion of a quality working environment and services for academic community members; expansion of relations with the economic and socio-cultural environment and promotion of the University; intensification of the University's internationalization process. The summing up part of the Strategy quotes the last three objectives as priorities. Just like in the case of the Mission Statement, the version posted on the webpage is slightly different. It lists 6 objectives, among them: objective no. 1 *"Ensure the quality of the activities performed in the University with a view to meeting the standards of international accreditation"*, objective no. 3 *"Consolidate Transylvania University of Brasov as a prestigious academic institution in the field of scientific research"*, objective no. 6 *Develop the institutional management framework necessary for achieving the objectives envisaged, by means of an active partnership with students*. On its webpage, the University disclosed its Strategic Plan for Development 2016-2020, and annual executive plans in Romanian are available at the webpage of UTBv. Some faculties post their own development strategies, for example the Faculty of Economics and Public Administration. No separate procedure for assessing the degree of strategy implementation has been developed.



## Comments

Despite possessing a long-term Vision and Mission, the University prefers to apply a medium-term 5-year perspective to its strategic planning. University representatives justify that with a number of factors, such as fluctuations in legal regulations concerning higher education and the uncertainty that it causes, 4-year term of office of the Rector and Senate of the University. It turns out that the Strategic Statement project is prepared before each rector election as the new rector's election manifesto. From the perspective of strategic planning that kind of combination of elections with strategic planning cannot be rationally justified. Relying on the Rector's manifesto encompassing 4 years (not more than 8) poses a risk of reflecting University voters' short-term interests only but not the HEI's long-term interest. Even technically, it is difficult to narrow down the planning of the development of facilities, research and academic staff to a five-year period only. It is interesting that some faculties, such as the Faculty of Economic Studies and Business Administration, formulated long-term objectives in their strategies. In the circumstances affected by the uncertainties discussed above, having a long-term multi-variant University development plan is not only a requirement of modern planning but a social responsibility of a publicly financed institution.

On the basis of analysis of documents made available, some other critical observations regarding the Mission Statement and the Strategy of the University can be formulated. Firstly, it is not clear for outsider, how certain strategic objectives and tasks are justified. It would be advisable to run SWOT analysis and refer to the comprehensive evaluation of the achievement of objectives listed in the previous Strategy. Secondly, certain inconsistencies in the presentation of those strategic objectives in various documents may give rise to doubts as to the real priorities of the University's development. Moreover, it can impair the HEI's stakeholders' perception of the Mission Statement and Strategic Objectives. Thirdly, the SAR does not provide information, how the two documents were prepared and who, in particular, students or employers, participated in their preparation. Students could indirectly participate in the process as members of collegial bodies operating at the University and the Faculty. It is a bit strange as education is to be oriented towards the needs of students and the labour market. It also seems that the website of UTBv remains the main channel of dissemination of the Mission Statement and Strategy. Fourthly, the SAR does not say, how the HEI's strategic objectives are transposed to the level of faculties and departments. No all units publish their development strategies. Fifthly, the SAR does not present a procedure and methods evaluating the degree of the achievement of strategic objectives, KPIs and persons responsible for their implementation. This information appears only in annual action plans. Annual executive plans are evaluated at department, faculty and university levels, in this last case by the Committee for Monitoring, Coordination and Methodological Guiding of the Development of the System of Management Control. However, even in those documents it is difficult to realise when individual tasks are to be completed as most of the time "*permanent action*" is entered into the column entitled "*Time limit*".

The short-term risk assessment procedure is worth mentioning. Such risks are identified on the basis of analysis of the results of self-evaluation questionnaires administered to all academic and administrative units of the University. The questionnaire contains 16 evaluation criteria divided into five areas of University governance. The report is posted on the webpage and discussed by the highest-ranking management groups. My interlocutors said that filling in the questionnaire was rather onerous, the more so that there was also internal auditing operated by the University. Although we share this opinion, a change to the nature of the questionnaire and to the period when the governance system is evaluated could be useful. It could be directly combined with the evaluation of strategic plan implementation after five years instead of being dominated by current problems. During interviews held with the authorities of the University it



transpired that despite short-term planning the rectors as well as the deans devote lots of time to reflecting on the position of UTBv on the national and international education market in a dozen or so years. It seems that the development of institutionalised forms of reflection focussing on the University's long-term plans would boost the effectiveness of their implementation.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Include all core stakeholders in the preparation and assessment of the Mission Statement and the HEI's strategic plans.
- Consider the establishment of a HEI-level Advisory Council advising the authorities of the University on strategic development issues.
- Prepare a long-term development plan for the University (possibly with various scenarios) and a long-term risk management plan.
- Complete the Strategic Plan by adding SWOT analysis and KPIs.
- Introduce a procedure evaluating the implementation of five-year strategic plans on their completion.

### **III. Quality Assurance Policy and the Internal Quality System**

#### **Evidence:**

The 2016-2020 Strategy lists 10 actions which are meant to ensure the implementation of the first strategic objective, that is the promotion of high quality education. The SAR says that *"the Rector has formulated Quality Policy and Objectives"*. The version available on the webpage says that this policy covers three areas: teaching and learning, research and University governance. The procedures, mechanisms and tools of the Quality Assurance and Evaluation System are presented (in Romanian) in Annexes (I.9 and I33). The Vice-Rector for University Internationalization and Quality Evaluation coordinates steps taken in the area of quality policy. UTBv has introduced a quality management system echoing ISO 9001 2008. The structure supporting the implementation of the objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy involves several collegial bodies and one administrative unit. The SAR lists the following committees: The Committee for Quality Evaluation and Assurance, the Committee of Academic Ethics and Professional Deontology, the Committee for the Analysis of Disciplinary Misconduct, the Committee for Monitoring, Coordination and Methodological Guiding of the Development of the System of Management Control, the Inventory Committee, the Internal Audit Compartment. The first Committee operates at the level of the University, Faculties and Departments. It includes student representatives. The above quality assurance committees prepare their own reports and the University report on quality assurance. Such reports are presented to the authorities of the University and posted on the webpage. The following actions are developed in relation to teaching and learning: programme reviews, evaluations of the process learning and self-learning, support systems for teaching staff and students, mobility programmes.

Quality assurance problems relating to University governance presented in the SAR are limited to regular governance reviews, system of internal communication with stakeholders and information policies relating to external stakeholders and the general public. As it was mentioned, every two years, the Committee for Monitoring, Coordination and Methodological Guiding of the Development of the System of Management Control headed by the Vice-Rector for Public Relations evaluates management processes from the



perspective of 16 criteria on the basis of a self-evaluation questionnaire. The results of such analysis are used in the preparation of a so-called risk register.

The University undergoes regular evaluations conducted by ARACIS and international organisations such as EUA. The Faculties of Natural Sciences and Engineering have ISO certificates relating to education and research issued by the Romanian Movement for Quality, whereas the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities - relating to research. Certain programmes involving technical sciences have obtained EUR-ACE accreditation offered by ENAEE (European Network for Engineering Education). Analysis of issues being of key importance for this issue shows that the construction of the internal quality assurance system was not directly related to ESG 15. According to the Vice-Rector for Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation there was no need for that, as the solutions already implemented were consistent with the spirit of ESG 15.

### Comments

Just like in the case of the Strategy, the Quality Assurance Policy project and IQAS were not subject to consultation with the student community and external stakeholders. Students were able to influence the final version through their representatives within collegial bodies. They are also members of the Quality Assurance Committees. An unquestionable advantage of the quality policy is its comprehensiveness as it encompasses three main areas of the HEI's activity: teaching and learning, scientific research and governance. The provisions of the Quality Assurance Policy are consistent with the implementation of the key strategic objectives and with the requirements of ESG 15. However, it has to be mentioned that on the basis of available information it is difficult to say, to which extent ESG was based on in the preparation of the IQAS and to what degree the ISO system was adopted to the specificity of UTBv. I would also expect the role of quality culture to be clarified in detail in the University's development policy. I would also welcome demonstrating how to transit from quality assurance/quality improvement to quality culture. This notion is rarely used in University documents despite the fact that quality is one of UTBv's strategic priorities.

The internal quality assurance system serves the implementation of the objectives of the policy and university strategy. There are two basic weaknesses of IQAS visible from this perspective. The first of them consists in the absence of a comprehensive evaluation of the quality assurance policy and IQAS as well as of their effectiveness at University level. No rigorous analysis of the weaknesses of the ISO system has been conducted. This was confirmed by the Vice-Rector for Internationalisation and Quality Assurance. According to the information provided by her, no application to have the ISO certificate renewed will be lodged this year as there are no obvious benefits from its implementation. However, applications of that kind may be submitted by faculties. The reasons why certain faculties wish to keep the certificate are also unknown. For the time being there is no plan for the implementation of an alternative system of quality assurance and development. *Nota bene*, this is a good opportunity to include EGS 15 solutions to a larger extent. Also, it would be advisable to revise Quality Handbook, and relate the description of the processes and procedures to the PDCA/Deming cycle.

The other weakness consists in the absence – even at department level - of an integrated approach to the effects of IQAS in the three areas of teaching and learning, scientific research and University governance. Each of them is evaluated by separate committees and vice-rectors. The last area is analyzed from the perspective of the internal and managerial standards already discussed and risk identification in HEI governance. The early detection of risks and recording them together with proposed ways of counteracting them in the form of a risk register is an example of good practice.



The quality of teaching and learning is assessed by the Quality Assurance Committee and the Quality Office. However, a closer look at the scope of their activity shows that they are only involved in quality assessment based on student survey results. Information obtained at the meeting with members of the Committee for Quality Assurance and Evaluation within Department (CEAC-D) proves that these committees do not analyze the educational offer, student assessment system, university quality policy etc. The CEAC-U, in turn, does not analyze student-centered learning. Therefore, making the Committee for Quality Evaluation and Assurance accountable to the Vice-Rector for Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation may give rise to certain doubts. It would probably be a better option to entrust quality issues to the Vice-Rector responsible for didactic. UTBv's structure is developed and supports the processes of quality policy implementation in all areas and at all levels. However, the allocation of tasks and responsibilities is not always clear at the administration level. For example, the Career Office advises students on how to take up job but conducts no alumni career monitoring surveys. This is a responsibility of the Alumni Office. It also seems that communication between the University's QAC and their counterparts at department level is slightly failing as during the meeting with my participation representatives of the former were not aware of changes planned at the University level for example changing in the approach to the ISO system.

The University's willingness to undergo evaluations carried out by external accreditation agencies, also those from abroad, deserves special mention. The review team welcomes the existence of internal regulations such as the Code of Academic Conduct and organisational structures such as the Ethics Commission ensuring academic integrity. Reports prepared by the Ethics Commission are available to the general public on the webpage.

During the site visit I was shown a report prepared by three students and entitled "Students' Report on Internal Institutional Evaluation" (Brasov, 2018, 26 pp.) which was to evaluate the University from the perspective of students. However, the report discussed is practically limited to the presentation of the status quo of the University and offers no comment or the authors' opinion. Also, it is not known, to which extent the contents reflect the authors' views/choices or whole student population's opinion, as the methods of its preparation are not known, and even the objectives are not stated. The initiative to prepare that report is to be seen in very good light. Doctoral students present at the meeting expressed their interest in the preparation of a similar report by themselves.

#### **Good practice**

- Comprehensive approach to the Quality Assurance Policy

#### **Areas for improvement**

- A comprehensive evaluation of the degree of quality assurance policy implementation and IQAS effectiveness to be introduced, taking into account an integrated approach to the three areas of teaching and learning, scientific research and University governance.
- Revise the Quality Manual and match it with the requirements of ESG 15 chapter 1.
- Evaluate the structure supporting the implementation of QAP and provide a clearer allocation of responsibilities between academic units and bodies.

#### **IV. Student-centred learning**

##### **Evidence**

In its documents, the University makes a reference to student-centred learning in quite a vague way, at the same time presenting numerous initiatives and steps consistent with its spirit. Students have direct influence on the process of education through participating in the



University's collegial bodies, including those exerting significant influences on the programme of study. Their opinion is also sought at regular meetings between the Rector and student representatives and the best students, which serve the exchange of views concerning current programmes of study. The student-centred learning process is supported by the organisational structure.

All programmes of study and individual courses have intended learning outcomes assigned to them which are generally consistent with National Qualification Framework. Modern teaching methods involving students' active participation (e.g.: Problem-Based Methods and Project-Based Methods) are being introduced. To some extent, students are able to shape their individualised study programme by choosing classes and activities from the optional courses group. The teaching and learning process undergoes regular evaluation using various tools (self-evaluation, peer evaluation, evaluation by the directors of departments etc.). Students regularly evaluate programmes of study and academic teachers' competences by participating in surveys. *Nota bene*, there are financial incentives for obtaining top ratings from students as 10% of the highest-rated teachers are given pay rise. Various forms of support relating to new teaching methods and technologies are offered to teaching staff. Students also use a system supporting their academic and cultural development. The University has developed general frameworks for the evaluation of student achievement at individual stages of education and of learning outcomes demonstrated at final examination and thesis presentations. The SAR does not say whether or not external examiners take part in the process.

### Comments

Student involvement in the teaching process is one of the fundamental things of student-centred learning. The documents presented lead us to believe that students are ensured influence on the way in which the teaching/learning process is implemented both at University and Faculty levels and at the level of programmes of study and courses. However, the teaching and support process is geared towards student population diversification to a smaller extent. Basically, there are four groups towards which slightly other attitudes are applied, that is part-time students, disabled students, to some extent at risk students and foreigners. The documents that were made available to the review team do not prove that the system of assistance to low-performing students, those who are not enough prepared for starting a programme is effective. This is proven by a high drop-out rate (about 25%) in the first years of studying. A rate almost just as high (20%) is reported for doctoral programmes. Information obtained during the site visit leads us to believe that the inability of students from families on low income to cover fees and other costs is one of the main reasons for quitting the programme. Improved information for candidates about academic requirements for a particular programme by tightening the University's ties with secondary schools, special remedial summer courses, more funds for social scholarships, preference in employing low income students by the University are examples of steps likely to increase retention rates. The authorities of the University pay close attention to the problem of drop-outs. Among other things, first year students fill in a special questionnaire where they provide information about their financial situation and their possible intention to quit the programme. Low response rates linked to surveys and no student access to full information about their results (it is only aggregated information) may reflect the absence of interest in new teaching methods. The documents do not say, either, which procedure is applied to the lowest-ranking teachers and which practical consequences this brings to the teacher in question and the teaching process. In the Rectors' opinions, dismissing teachers with low teaching competences is difficult because of the legal regulations that protect their employment.

The articulation of intended learning outcomes needs significant improvement. The University has developed neither a procedure for defining learning outcomes nor special guidelines in this



scope. Having reviewed a dozen or so syllabuses I can say that this is their weaker component. First of all, they are formulated in quite a vague way and make no clear distinction of knowledge, skills and social competencies which makes the evaluation of their implementation quite problematic. The cycle of study is reflected unsatisfactorily – undergraduate versus graduate programmes – and the level as well (introductory versus intermediate versus advanced). For example, the Microeconomy syllabus for the second-cycle programme lists only professional competencies and transversals competencies, indicating C1 in the case of the former. Moreover, the description of the contents leads us to believe that the sometimes topics are presented at basic and not advanced level (for example Fundamental Economic Principles at MA level). Professional competencies defined for Macroeconomics (BA level) have little in common with the objectives and contents of the course. Intended learning outcomes are often contained in course objectives (for example Business Ethics, BA level). The above examples are indicative of teachers' poor awareness of the articulation of intended learning outcomes and of no QAC supervision over the quality of syllabuses. The Vice-Rector for didactics tells me that since last year, regular meetings with the heads and employees of departments have been held to identify ways of improving the quality of syllabuses and teaching methods in general, and of study programme reviews including the order of courses provided. The issues of learning outcomes are not visible in questionnaires filled in by students, undergraduates and graduates. Doctoral students do not complete such a questionnaire.

The University is currently implementing interactive learning methods. I had an opportunity to see it when I participated in a student session entitled Faculty Letters. During the session, students of various years presented their projects in a very interesting way and using fluent English and they discussed with the audience also composed of professors. However, the implementation of the student-centred learning process is still at its initial stages. A relatively high percentage (about 50 % according to the vice rector) of traditional teaching methods (lectures, seminars in large groups) is still evident. Teachers are given opportunities to raise their teaching competences and encouraged to diversify the methods of teaching. Not always is it possible as teaching is provided to large groups (according to information obtained, seminars are held for groups composed of 25 students). The introduction of the Master - Disciple model teaching would necessitate significant funds. The SAR provides information about student growing interest in the introduction of a more extensive group of optional courses which would boost the individual shaping of study programmes. However, this comes up against legal barriers (see next section). Moreover, the system of good practices dissemination in the scope of teaching and learning functions within a limited scope, basically at the department level. Representative from The Doctoral School explained that its students were unable to change their discipline and choose a discipline different from the one studied during their second-cycle programme. If this was to be true, it would mean questioning the student mobility idea. Another striking thing is the absence of reflection on the system of student achievement assessment including grade distributions. A review of selected syllabuses shows that both forms of evaluation are used - summative and formative - however, the former (exams) is rather dominant. Therefore, the feedback system is not fully developed. In order to ensure that those evaluations are fully objective, it would be advisable to involve external examiners, be it only as members of examination boards assessing theses. It is formally possible, although this does not refer to employer representatives. The latter can (and do) participate in thesis presentations open to the general public but they may not vote. The suggestion to conduct regular evaluations of BA and MA theses and the quality of their reviews by sending a sample to be evaluated by professors from other HEIs is worth considering. There is no system evaluating learning outcomes achieved by distance learning students. I was offered conflicting explanations





concerning the validation of learning outcomes achieved by students outside higher education and confirmed or not in appropriate certificates of professional competence.

Finally, the documents shown to the review team do not allow us to get an idea of which concept is associated with the implementation of student-centred learning as this is not defined anywhere in the context of UTBv. From this perspective, it would be advisable to combine certain elements, for example learning outcomes reviews, student assessment and programme reviews, into an integrated system. Therefore, it would be advisable to conduct a student expectation survey at the beginning of the programme and then confront it with a graduate survey which rates the degree to which such expectations are met by the University. The University realises the existence of these shortcomings by pointing out weaknesses accompanying the implementation of student-centred learning in SWOT analysis.

#### **Areas for improvement**

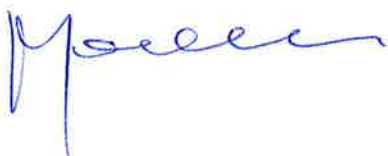
- Develop your own SCL model basing on good practice and disseminate it within the University. It would be useful to formulate a teaching and learning strategy.
- Evaluate intended learning outcomes at course and programme levels and introduce strict provisions in line with the requirements of NQF and the Dublin Descriptors.
- Increase the percentage of interactive classes and the scope of formative assessment.
- Improve the effectiveness of the system of assisting students at risk, especially during the first year of studying. A summer school for those with problems with following the programme might be one of such useful tools.
- Increase the participation of external peer reviewers in the evaluation of student learning outcomes.

#### **V. Program designing, approval, monitoring and review**

##### **Evidence**

The HEI offers an impressive range of programmes at all levels of study - undergraduate, graduate, doctoral and post-graduate. First cycle programmes go on for 3 or 4 years and as stated in the SAR, graduates' qualifications are in line with those provided in the NQF. In accordance with the requirements of the Bologna Process, intended learning outcomes are to be presented as divided into three areas: knowledge, skills and competencies. Each programme of study and course has been allocated ECTS credits and the University issues Diploma Supplements. Doctoral programmes are provided in the Doctoral School run by the University. The creation of one doctoral school offers opportunities to strengthen their interdisciplinary dimension. The fact that the doctoral programmes are not accredited is seen as a weakness in the SAR. There is one double Master's degree programme provided in partnership with the Ilmenau University of Technology in Germany, and some programmes with companies (eg.: *Virtual Engineering in Vehicle Design provided in English, Engineering of Advanced Manufacturing Processes, Practical Methods Integrated in the Propulsion Systems Engineering provided in English*). Sometimes employers directly participate in designing Master's degree programmes (eg.: Manufacturing cars with virtual engineering, Practical integrated methods for propulsion system engineering, Advanced manufacturing processes). Meetings of employer representatives are held twice a year.

The University has formal tools for designing and implementing new programmes of study and for evaluating the existing ones. Specific programmes undergo regular evaluations. They are conducted at department level every year. This is the responsibility of relevant committees at University and faculty level. Final decisions are made by the Senate. Such evaluations involve students and other stakeholders as they express their opinion in questionnaires and participate



in the academic work of collegial bodies and teaching committees. The evaluations are meant to adapt programmes to the needs of the labour market and new requirements resulting from the development of individual disciplines of science. The authors of the SAR are of the opinion that the curricula are in line with similar programmes of study offered in Europe and in the world, which is indicative of using the benchmarking principle when performing evaluations.

### Comments

UTBv relies on a well-developed body of regulations (internal regulations and general legislation) which determines the way in which new programmes are launched and in which the existing ones are evaluated. The SAR does not indicate whether or not and when comprehensive analysis of all programmes was performed. However, the Vice-Rector says that in fact this kind of evaluation has been repeatedly performed for some years. As its result, 6 new undergraduate programmes and 15 graduate programmes have been launched within the last five years. At the same time, 8 programmes have been closed as there was not enough interest. Partner universities in the country and Western Europe – a.o. in Austria, Germany, Portugal and Italy - were visited when the new programmes were developed.

The establishment of the Doctoral School should be seen as a successful step. At the meeting with doctoral students, there was a presentation of certain initiatives which contribute to the interdisciplinary character of the programmes. *Lunch time seminars* are one of them. During those seminars, doctoral students present their research proposals in the presence of all doctoral students. A big number of faculties and departments provide a solid basis for the development of interdisciplinary programmes at the first- and second-cycle levels. The first programmes with the participation of various academic units have already been launched. However, it has to be emphasised that the development of interdisciplinary programmes is quite limited because of rigid external legal regulations. Among other things, each new programme must fall within the scope of the central nomenclature of programme titles. As it is impossible to shape the profile of programmes, some of them were probably closed as they were not adapted to the needs of the labour market. Legal regulations are an obstacle in making programmes flexible and adapting them to the needs of student groups. The Vice-Rector says that at the moment it is impossible to launch individualised learning paths and shorten their duration in the case of the best students. These limitations mainly affect first-cycle programmes. In my opinion, introducing detailed legal solutions to programmes is contrary to the idea of shaping them from the perspective of their compliance with the NQF. The HEI also provides four-year Bachelor's degree programmes which may limit the interest of foreign students from countries where such programmes go on for 3 years only. The arguments that were presented during the site visit that the four-year programme was indispensable for acquiring basic competencies are not very convincing. They are more indicative of no willingness to restructure the curricula and adapt them to new requirements imposed by the labour market. Employers' opinion should play a vital role in this discussion.

Two clear conclusions can be drawn from analysis of graduate employability based on information given in questionnaires. Firstly - no wonder – employability rates are strongly diversified depending on the programme and faculty. Almost all technical programme graduates take up employment in the first 6 months of when they graduated, whereas only under 60% of music studies graduates declare employment within that period. A minimal percentage (below 3%) of graduates setting up their own business is striking. Explanations offered by HEI representatives lead us to believe that red tape barriers to be overcome when registering new businesses and running them are the main culprit. Secondly, high employability rates are correlated with the intensity of cooperation between an individual department and employers. However, despite declaring the necessity to take account of labour market needs and developing institutionalised forms of cooperation with employers (their representatives meet the rectors



twice a year), the employability rates relating to certain programmes remain low. The weaknesses of work placements were discussed in the SAR and at the meeting with the Evaluation Team. An obvious suggestion is to increase the involvement of employers in the work of programme committees at programme or - possibly - department level. It seems that the HEI should extend the graduate questionnaire to obtain more detailed opinion on the programme of study. The University should also monitor graduate careers over a longer period, for example three years after graduation. A representative of the Alumni Office announced the introduction of a new questionnaire in October. Reports prepared by this unit should also be improved as for the time being only information about employability rate is given at faculty or university level only and not at the level of individual programmes.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Perform comprehensive analysis of the programme offer taking account of the comparative advantages of individual faculties
- Expand the offer of interdisciplinary Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes
- Introduce the benchmarking principle or at least intensive consultation with foreign partners when developing new programmes of study and evaluating the existing ones.
- Make the curricula more flexible by increasing the number of optional courses.
- Consider the establishment of Advisory Boards for the faculties (programmes) with the participation of representatives of business and the public sector.
- Provide students with the possibility of obtaining International Professional Certificates.

## **VI. Scientific research**

### **Evidence**

In the Strategy and the Mission Statement, the quality of research conducted at the University received much attention. Research conducted in the HEI involves 30 research centres grouped in the Research and Development Institute. The University is currently implementing a lot of national projects and 36 with the participation of foreign partners. The HEI capitalises on such results by selling patents and offering consultation to businesses, etc. Over the last 5 years, income from research has tripled. According to the SAR, research is conducted with the participation of students and doctoral students. To boost research quality, financial incentives have been introduced to encourage research staff to publish their articles in renown journals. Among other things, part of their remuneration depends on publishing in journals whose IF is superior to 0.5. This system seems to be working properly which is proved not only by the number of patents but also by a growing number of publications cited by the Web of Science. According to the SAR, research results are regularly evaluated using a special procedure involving specialist software.

### **Comments**

This consolidation of a number of research activities into one organisational unit lowers the relevant transaction costs, and, more importantly, favours interdisciplinary research. The review team welcomes the fact that the authorities of the University are striving for the creation of conditions and provision of incentives favouring interdisciplinary research involving large research teams. The HEI should increase the participation of researchers from foreign universities in those teams.

### **Area for improvement**



- The establishment of an Advisory Council with the participation of foreign partners which would advise on the strategy of research development could be considered.

## VII. Resources

**Human resources.** The teaching process and research involve 730 academic teachers out of whom professors (193 persons) and associated professors (199 persons) are the largest group. However, there is a high number of vacancies (771), especially in the group of lecturers (548). In accordance with generally applicable legislation, new academic teachers are recruited on a public competition basis and those who are already employed have to undergo annual appraisals on the basis of their teaching, scientific and organisational achievements. Therefore, that is why one might wonder whether or not such frequent appraisals of teaching staff are not too onerous (self-evaluation questionnaires contain lots of questions) and taking too much time which could be spent on research or raising teaching competences. The average workload of an academic teacher in full employment is almost 12 hours a week. This situation makes full involvement in research much more difficult.

It has already been said that the legal regulations that protect teacher employment hinder a more active human resources policy and dismissal of worse teachers and of those who have no academic achievements. Hence various forms of incentives to improve the quality of research, publications and teaching evident in the Rector's policy. Providing each member of academic staff with a laptop is one of such examples. A fully transparent remuneration policy not only in the form of publishing the principles of compensation for work is an absolutely exceptional development not only at national level. Each employee has direct online access to the amount and structure of remuneration of all academic teachers employed by the University. It seems that the system of various incentives is working properly as evidenced by a growing number of publications quoted in the Web of Science.

**Financial sustainability.** The University has different sources of funding its activity. State subsidies are the most important one. Information regarding the University's financial plans and their implementation is posted on the HEI's webpage. It is worth mentioning that research funds overheads are relatively low – only 15%. The University's financial resources are controlled by internal units (the Public Internal Audit Division, the Office of Financial Analysis and Strategy) and external entities (the Court of Auditors). The Rector explained that he supervised current expenditure almost on a daily basis.

The HEI balances well its revenues and expenditures. Moreover, there is a surplus of the former. Having a surplus in the University's budget, particularly in a period of global financial turbulences, proves effective financial control. In the short run, no significant risks to the University's financial stability are evident.

In accordance with the Strategy of the University "a resource allocation system meant to contribute to a sustainable and harmonious development of the university". Therefore, this begs the question how funds are allocated among faculties and departments. No clear explanation was offered on this issue.

### Good Practice

- Full information about the remuneration policy and its outcomes.
- Human resources and remuneration policies promoting employees with the best scientific and didactic achievements
- Effective supervision over expenditure and ensuring financial stability to the HEI.

## VIII. Internationalization



### **Evidence**

The University's degree of internationalisation remains so far modest. For example, in the 2016/2017 academic year there were 169 incoming students from other countries whereas 218 persons went to study abroad. Staff exchange involved a small percentage of academic teachers. The SAR provides no number of academic teachers coming from other countries. The University operates 10 programmes with foreign HEIs and 36 research programmes with foreign partners.

UTBv is aware of its shortcomings in this field which is mentioned in SWOT analysis. To overcome those problems, an internationalisation strategy for a period covering 2016-2020 has been developed. Internationalisation is aimed at the improvement of the University's international recognition and the quality of education and research processes by extending cooperation with appropriate EU and non-EU institutions. The steps proposed relate to internationalisation at home and abroad. They boil down to four operations: extending the offer of programmes provided in foreign languages, mainly in English; boosting student and staff exchange as part of mobility programmes, mainly Erasmus+; improvement of academic staff's linguistic competences; cooperation with foreign companies. The review team welcomes the announcement to establish an International Advisory Board. It has already been said that the English language competences of all interlocutors to whom I spoke ought to be rated very high.

### **Comments**

The formulation of the internationalisation strategy deserves a positive comment. However, it is regrettable that the Strategy is not preceded by SWOT analysis as then its priorities concerning this field would be more obvious, the more so that at the moment the HEI has signed several hundreds of cooperation agreements and an overall evaluation of its effectiveness would be welcome. The basic weakness of the Internationalisation Strategy is that it does not include a key issue which is the extension of study programmes by adding intercultural values and competencies. Among other things, this requires the skill to formulate new learning outcomes, a change to teaching methods and developing adequate evaluation systems. The Vice-Rector said that the absence of changes to the curricula was due to the initial stage of implementing the internationalisation strategy. Most of the objectives and tasks are formulated at general and not at operational level (e.g.: *increase the University's efforts to... Support and stimulate in-service teacher training... identify and implement indispensable measures*). Its motivating role would benefit from adding KPIs, implementation time limits and persons responsible for particular tasks. Another weakness of the strategy is that it does not indicate partners with which (and from which countries) cooperation will be extended and in which fields. From this perspective, no field of study has been indicated as the first one to undergo internationalisation and no scientific disciplines where UTBv has the best chances to conduct joint research projects. Interviews held during the site visit provide information that on the basis of data obtained from deans the University identifies strategic partners with whom it wishes to develop closer cooperation. It is announced that foreign students and lecturers will be attracted but no specific countries are indicated. In the case of lecturers, no ways of solving problems resulting from the specificity of employing teachers in Romania are indicated (eg.: lower remuneration, higher workload). The Vice-Rector for Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation publishes annual reports on internationalisation. They would be much more helpful if they presented not only the status quo but if they also contained an analytical part and an attempt to evaluate the implementation of strategic objectives in the area.

### **Good practice**

- Development of the internationalisation strategy



### **Areas for improvement**

- Increase the number of courses provided in foreign languages, primarily in English
- Make the report on internationalization more analytical

## **IX. Public information**

### **Evidence**

UTBv has a strategy of informing its stakeholders and the general public about its activity. Just like each large university, it also uses various forms of communicating with its stakeholders. The forms include the webpages of the University (in two language versions: English and Romanian) and of its units, printed publications, face-to-face meetings with various groups as well as social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube), Intranet, e-mails, posters etc. The University publishes its own newsletter and has its own radio and TV. University representatives appear in local and central media. The implementation of the UTBv information strategy is supported by appropriate structures.

### **Comments**

The University declares the openness and full transparency of its activity. Having analysed the available evidence it can be concluded that the current information policy is conducive to the implementation of this strategic objective. Special mention should be given to the publication of a number of reports summing up the outcomes of the work of individual academic committees. The scope of information and access to it on the University's webpage in Romanian does not give rise to major doubts. Unfortunately, the scope of information presented on the English language page is much smaller and some folders are not available. This is glaring contradiction to the internationalisation policy operated by the University and to the intention of attracting more foreign students. Following the example of many other HEIs, more language versions of the webpage could be provided. The scant information that is provided on the webpages of faculties and departments with links to information in Romanian is a disappointment. The diversification of information (some pieces are out of date) or even of the structure of the webpages of individual faculties proves that the monitoring and evaluation of the information policy are ineffective. However, it has to be emphasised that the HEI launched a new webpage only at the end of last year and quite a number of initiatives have not been implemented yet. Therefore, the above criticism refers to its version in the transitory period.

### **Good practice**

- Publishing annual reports on the work of University committees, including those dealing with quality assurance.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The structure of the webpage to be changed to adapt it to the needs of strategic stakeholders by adding such folders as: „For Candidates”, „For Academic Staff”, „For Alumni”, „For Employers”, „For Media”, etc.
- A Quality Assurance folder to be created to contain all material linked to the University's activity promoting quality.
- Strengthen supervision over the webpages of faculties and departments



## Final remarks

Three general conclusions supported by statements from University stakeholders result from the picture presented here. Firstly, the University, just like other Romanian HEIs, operates in the conditions of a large number of legal regulations significantly hindering its development in practically any field. Worse still, as our University interlocutors said, those regulations are subject to frequent changes which contributes to general uncertainty. Secondly, despite those limitations UTBv has made significant progress in many areas of its activity since the previous evaluation, thus making the HEI more modern and capable of responding to external challenges. Thirdly, there are a number of good practices evident in the HEI which document progress in quality improvement. The involvement of the authorities and academic community in analysing and evaluating new and existing solutions is obvious, however, it is from a short-term perspective. The dominance of short-term analysis might be the reason why certain solutions, although unnecessary and onerous on the academic community, are still maintained, which results in too many regulations applicable to the University operations.

More reflection on the existing solutions would be advisable, it could be formulated from the long-term perspective. It is necessary to develop and strengthen the system of comprehensive and stricter analysis of the implementation of solutions from the perspective of the whole University's interests and strategic objectives, their intended and unintended outcomes and not only of individual areas of academic units. Internal, but above all external stakeholders should participate in the process to a larger extent than before. This is a condition that is necessary for changing the mentality of those members of academic staff who neither comprehend the changes in progress nor approve of them. The problem of mentality changes and acceptance of new paradigms was raised during interviews held with those managing the HEI.

However, the above criticism does not detract from a very positive rating given to the functioning of the University in the areas analysed by me. As access to a number of source documents was limited, I am not formulating "hard" recommendations, but merely suggestions of steps to be taken which - in my opinion - ought to contribute to the improvement of the quality of education, research and governance.

To sum up, I am fully convinced that UTBv deserves ARACIS's accreditation and a HIGH DEGREE CONFIDENCE rating.

Warsaw, 22 May 2018

