

# **ATHENAEUM UNIVERSITY of BUCHAREST**

## **EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT**

### **2018**

#### **Introduction**

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the ATHENAEUM UNIVERSITY of BUCHAREST (UATH) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 24 October and Friday 26 October 2018. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of the focusing on the main points of improvement of quality and future development aspects with outlining the main dimensions of present and future challenges of the university. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of the institution. During my stay in Bucharest with the help of the colleagues of the UATH I had the possibility to insight the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and collect information about the university. My report is roughly following the structure of the self-evaluation report of the institution.

#### **Background**

Athenaeum University of Bucharest was founded in 1990 and it was accredited according to Law no. 135/2005 in 2005. UATH was established as a higher education institution of private law and public interest, with legal personality and became a part of the Romanian higher education. The university underwent external evaluation process in 2015 and received a lack of confidence rating that has generated certain changes in the institution in the last three years in order to meet the requirements of the ARACIS, with reflecting the changing market needs to reach financial stability in the long run, and consolidate the quality of its educational and research process. Athenaeum University of Bucharest is the owner of its establishment situated at 2A Giuseppe Garibaldi Street, District 2, Bucharest, where the headquarters are, as well the location for educational activities and scientific research activities. Right now, the university has two faculties (Faculty of Economic Sciences, Faculty of Public Administration) offering bachelor and master study programs in these fields, with 550 places.

## **Mission and objectives**

The main strategic objectives and mission of Athenaeum University of Bucharest are described in the 2016-2020 Strategic plan for institutional development and focusing on the assurance of the quality for the educational activities, the development of the research activities, the growth of the internal and European visibility by an increasing academic cooperation with the social and economic market actors, and to train students with necessary knowledge, professional and transversal competences for their future careers. Parallel with this, it is also important priority the improvement of the internal evaluation system concerning the quality of the didactic personnel, the knowledge dissemination for the next generation, increasing the number of students and optimization of the university management system. The University Charta provisions of UATH are in respect with the national legislation and the European principles for higher education.

It is important to point out that UATH of Bucharest as a private institution has to cope with the challenges of the competitive higher education market, national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields and it has to offer attractive study programs which are really based on the demands of the students. It seems that the present 'answers' of UATH of Bucharest for these permanently appearing challenges are more or less working, as some steps have made to reach better operation in the last three years but it is important to point out that parallel with maintaining the present situation the university also has to find other market niches where it could operate successfully between the dominant state universities and other private universities of Bucharest and the region, because the present educational programs exist in other universities as well.

## **Management, organizational structure, human resources**

The UATH of Bucharest has made several necessary steps in the last years in order to stabilize its operation, and some changes affected the management, organizational structures and human resources as well. According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of UATH of Bucharest have appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. On the other hand, the present

number of employees is relatively low which results that the different functions and positions of the institution are overlapping, and most of the situations the same colleagues are working in the commissions and other managerial formations. Some teaching activities are developed by specialists, from outside of the university, which bring their important contribution to the teaching programs with their specific knowledge, field expertise and competencies.

The University Charta is the fundamental regulation where we can find the academic principles governing the entire organizing and functioning activity. The university has made its structures, norms and rules similar to bigger universities. On the other hand, due to the relatively small numbers, there are certain overlaps in positions within the faculties and at university level as well, which is not very good as the same colleagues have to play different roles in these managerial structures and bodies. According to the self evaluation report of the institution, university Senate is composed of 15 members (from this number, there are 4 students) – this practically means that 61% of the academic staff of the university are also the members of the Senate and some of these colleagues have also other positions as well. Student representatives are the part of the Senate of the university (25%). In the current academic year, the didactic personnel of the university included 23 members, with 18 tenured didactic personnel and 5 associate didactic colleagues.

Counselling Center for Career Orientation (CCOC) is a new initiative was established to help the students to find their place on the labor market. On the other hand, most of the students of the university have jobs and work, so relatively small number of students needs the services of the center. UATH also has a library although the changing needs of the students show that traditional way of getting information is not the traditional library any more: online and digital solutions are much more popular among the students. Within the Athenaeum University Library, the colleague occupying the librarian position has higher education degree with philology specialization. Courses and didactic materials for all the disciplines in the educational plan are accessible to all students in electronic files (on the e-learning platform, in the informatics system EDATA, and on the university website, virtual library section) or in printed form at the university library as well. The auxiliary didactic personnel, technical and administrative personnel of the university include 6 people.

## **Educational programs**

The educational programs in the last years show that the main focus of the university is operating study programs that satisfy the demands of the labor market parallel with satisfy the demands of the students. As a result, some of the earlier offered education programs had been temporarily not operating and there are efforts to develop new education programs as well. All the present BA and MA education programs are seem to be still marketable although most of these fields are not very 'special' as these programs can be found in many private and state higher education institutions in Bucharest and all over the country.

Right now, there are 3 bachelor study programs (Accounting and Management Information Systems; Business Administration; public administration) and 2 master study programs (Accounting, audit and consultancies; Executive power and public administration) are operating with the total number of 392 students. 72% of the students are attending bachelor study programs, and 28% is attending master study programs. The number of students on the given year show relatively well the changing interests. These changes should be important signs for the management of the university to intensify the marketing activities and permanently looking for new directions that meet the needs of the students and the labor market. Of course it is not easy to forecast these needs but in the next years the role and importance of digital competencies is going to grow. According to the received information, there are efforts in these field to start new education program but it would be also useful if the present educational programs contain these type of competencies (a professional in accounting, or auditing, etc. has certainly better possibilities on labor market with usable digital competences on these fields).

## **Financial activity**

As a nonprofit institution, the university is self-financing, establishing funds for activity from the annual school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university right now the financial activities – incomes and expenses of UATH of Bucharest are relatively well-balanced. The most significant part is coming from student fees and from some other outside resources, extra budget incomes. The present number of the

students and the present amount of fees paid by them parallel with the strict economic activities and reduction of expenses seems to be enough to sustain the present operation of the university, although it is important that the university has to keep the present number of students for a long run. To reach this aim the university permanently has to attract potential students. Additionally, UATH of Bucharest fees seem to be lower than the average level of fees of the competitors. BA graduates could also continue their studies in in master programs: according to the data, this is not very significant in this moment, so it is also an important task to convince the freshly and earlier graduated students to come back and study here on Master programs or participate in other educational offerings.

### **International visibility, collaboration and research**

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. The university should promote the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, univesities and state institutions and nonprofit orgazizations as well.

Although the importance of international visibility questions and research activities seems to be priorities in the documents of the university (for example in the 2016-2020 Institutional Strategy of UATH), the present level of these activities are still not very significant. It would be important in the future to organize conferences and workshops which could help to strengthen the national and international visibility of the institution and beside the colleagues of the university and the colleagues of partner institutions, it would be important to organize real open scientific events with the participation of local and international academic figures. These events could also give possibility for the students of UATH to present the results of their research activities.

The university has Erasmus connections and participating in 2 ERASMUS+ strategic partnership programs ("Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices", in collaboration with the University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz, Odas Global Consulting -Romania, EG Consult Ltd Sofia Bulgaria and United Societies

of Balkan's Thessaloniki, Greece. The second collaboration is with the University of Salerno-Italy, with the project "Increasing the capacity of labor market integration"), although the mobility is not really typical among students and teachers in this moment. Most of the international connections are the connections of the colleagues – in the future is recommended to strengthen the existing connections at university level and parallel with developing the activities of the research center of the university that could lead more intensive national and international visibility in the future.

The university also has a periodical, Internal Auditing & Risk Management, founded in 2006 by Athenaeum University and The Center of Excellence in Financial Management and Internal Audit. In the future the university has to concentrate on more to participate and generate special research programs which also could lead to create a special image and knowledge which – over the applied education characteristic of the institution – could contribute to find the specific position of the university and offer special programs for the community.

### **Material resources**

Athenaeum University owns the building situated on 2A Giuseppe Garibaldi Street, district 2, Bucharest, where there are classrooms, informatics laboratories, library with lecture rooms and other proper material bases for the educational and research process. These spaces dedicated for developing the didactic and research-related activities are owned by the university and meet the norms and legal requirements. The spaces designated for the educational process development are equipped with furniture and specific technical equipment for an adequate didactic and research-related activity concerning the learning, training and communicating process.

All the existent rooms with didactic destination (courses, seminars, laboratories) have wireless connection to the Internet and provide a straightforward application of the modern didactic technologies, combined with the classical one. Most of the courses rooms and the laboratories are equipped with projectors, computers as well as air condition. For the accommodation of students, Athenaeum University has concluded a renting contract with Media Technical College. Medical assistance is provided to the students of Athenaeum University by Colentina Hospital on the basis of the agreement concluded with this medical institution. For activities performed at Physical Education

and Sports Discipline, the university made a contract with Clubul Sportiv Dinamo - Bucharest, which ensures the students' access to the sport grounds, athletics tracks and other specific facilities.

The University Library has 2 reading rooms with 43 places, and over 27.600 of books, journals, CDs, and 20 posts for unlimited access to the Internet. The reading rooms are equipped with computers with wireless internet access, a printer, a scanner and a copy center, where the lecturers can do documentation and informal activities, accessing the books patrimony, the journals, as well as the virtual library.

The virtual library aims to publish in digital forms various materials: books, courses, practical work papers or monographies issued by the didactic personnel of the university. It will also include other books and studies with the agreement/ at the proposal of the authors, assuming the responsibility and the publisher's permission. Students could do their online research, find information about their scholar situation, by using the informatics program EDATA. They can also find the latest news posted on the university website. Through the EDATA, the system of e-learning platform and virtual library, courses in electronic files prepared by the university tenured higher education didactic personnel could be accessed from anywhere.

Starting with the first semester of the year 2011 – 2012, an online collaboration platform became functional. It was accomplished in collaboration with Valahia University Targoviste and the Institute for Studies in International Relations and Public Policy (I.S.I.R.P.) Bruxelles. This platform contains a gate accessed online by all system users – an unique access interface for the collaboration and communication system and the management system for training and contents management.

The material basis of the university meets the needs of the educational process. Right now the university doesn't have an Aula Magna or any community spaces, which also could be useful for social events, conferences, ceremonies, and doesn't have an own dormitory and cafeteria. On one hand these facilities are certainly not the most important elements for a proper level of educational processes and students of the university seem to be satisfied with the present situation, but on the other hand it would be very useful for the institution to have its own facilities in these fields. On the whole

it is important to continue the present work to invest permanently and maintain the infrastructure of the university.

## **Students**

Although the number of students is certainly lower than it was few years ago (the total number of students is almost 30% less than it was 3 years ago), one of the most important attractions for the students is the flexible organization of the educational process. Large part of the students (younger and older generation as well) is working, so it is much easier for them to attend the classes in the afternoon: that is the reason why most of the classes are organized "atypically", in this time of the day. In this sense the university plays a very important role in the education or reeducation of these generations, with taking into account the special needs of those who have jobs and who are not able to adjust their daily activities for the requirements of the formal, normal full time education programs. It is also important that due to the digitalization, new generations of students have certainly different needs in connection with education, and higher education institutions have to reflect for these changes in the next years. UATH has already started this process, and many parts of the "traditional" educational process could be reached online, parallel with the accreditation process of a new education program on the field of informatics.

During the 3-day long visit ARACIS team met with students (23), graduates (27) and employers (10). Generally speaking, the participants were satisfied with the university and educational programs, although some students were talking about the need of more practical knowledge. Students do not have too much information about mobility possibilities and scientific events organized by the university and it seems that the managerial structures are also not totally clear for everyone. On the other hand, they were satisfied with the schedule of the educational programs, fees, and the flexibility of the institution. As most of the students are from Bucharest and the neighborhood, and large share of them are working, they do not really need the services (accommodation, medical services, or sport facilities) offered by the university.

The earlier mentioned Counselling Center for Career Orientation (CCOC) is also helps the students in connection with carrier and labor market questions, increasing the



specific competencies of the students and abilities for proper identification of their future working place.

### **Quality Assurance**

An institutional quality management system is regulated and functions within UATH. The main objective is the implementation of a quality evaluation and assurance system based on policies, an organizational structure and documentation able to permit monitoring and evaluating, prevention and adjusting interventions and the continuous quality increase. Requirements of the UATH quality management system are fulfilled by applying the University Charta, the internal rules and regulations, methodologies and operational procedures.

Reviewing the structure and activities of quality management of the university, the main principle and objective has to be that quality assurance has to become a part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus. The institution permanently has to face with economic, social and environmental challenges, so there is a continuous adaptation pressure for quality assurance processes to adjust to the changes.

### **Public information**

The public information can be found on the UATH site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language which gives visitors information about the study programs, admissions, curriculum, final exams, national and international relations, as well as information regarding management, documents and regulations, contact possibilities. The university has modernized its website in the last few years, being now more useful and attractive for potential students and partners ([www.univath.ro](http://www.univath.ro)) and as the digital environment has grown significantly in recent years, the university has a presence on social networks: the university has a Facebook page as well ([facebook.com/univath](https://facebook.com/univath)). Although the Romanian language version of the website of the university seems to be good, the

English and French language information is relatively poor, more information needed if UATH really wants to increase its visibility at international level.

All the students benefit from an online account included in the informational system E-DATA, an online account for accessing the e-learning platform and a password for virtual library access.

## **Conclusion**

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. On one hand, university has made efforts to stabilize its operation and fulfil the requirements of ARACIS, but parallel with this, the market needs and the number of students have changed in the last few years. According to the fact that from the time of the last evaluation visit the university has done important steps to reorganize its activity to meet the educational and professional training standards, I recommend the level of limited confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- The present educational programs offered by the university are not really unique as these programs can be found in the other private and state universities as well. The institution has to find market niches where it can operate successfully in a long run. The present competitiveness lasts until the competitors, as a reaction for the changing market situation, start to use more intensively the same flexible techniques in educational programs. The University has to focus on maintaining the present situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work which in an optimal situation meets the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development (developing new education programs, e-learning programs, focusing on other potential target groups, etc.). Further decline of the total number of students could result a decision making situation when the management of the university is forced to cope with this challenge as well.

- UATH of Bucharest should maintain and continue to invest in the infrastructure and facilities when own resources, and any other funds allow.
- I suggest developing more international links and collaborations to support local and international research activities and encourage students and staff members taking part in exchange and mobility programs.
- In the future it is recommended to strengthen the existing connections parallel with developing new ones and intensify the activities of the research center of the university that could lead more intensive national and international visibility besides the applied characteristic of the institution.
- Quality assurance has to become a part of the organizational culture of the institution.

I wish that UATH would find the right way for success and the right position in the Romanian Higher Education. Finally I would like to thank to the Rector of UATH and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Bucharest. At least but not last special thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

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