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Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

External Institutional Evaluation

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila”

Bucharest, Romania

Foreign Expert Report

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1. Introduction

On February 18, 2015 I was nominated by the Central and East European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQUA) as an international expert for the institutional evaluation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila" (UMFCD) that was held from March 26-28, 2015. The nomination was accepted by the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (ARACIS) on February 24, 2015. Based on my previous activities in the area of higher education (German rector's conferences on curriculum reform of medical schools in South-East Europe, curriculum reform according the Bologna process, establishment of Medical Studies in English at the School of Medicine University of Zagreb, accreditation of the School of Medicine University of Zagreb with the Agency for Science and Higher Education Republic of Croatia, European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education, CeQuInt project, etc.) I gladly accepted the invitation to assess UMFCD.

The UMFCD self-evaluation report (translated in English) was sent to me via mail on March 18, 2015. It was a well-structured document tailored according to ARACIS standards. The report comprised of 86 pages and significant number of annexes that were linked/incorporated into the body of the text report. It should be pointed out that the annexes were in Romanian. I was offered a translation of selected annexes of my interest. ARACIS arranged very good assessment conditions. Thus, the Romanian experts were divided into 2 groups: the institutional evaluation group and the programme evaluation group, whereas I was offered a special tour to see a number of hospitals, departments/wards as well to participate in various meetings (employers, graduates, students, etc.). The meetings in and with the ARACIS team of evaluation were performed in the Romanian language, and for this matter I was during the whole process attended by 2 competent interpreters who gave me a first hand feeling for the various presentations and discussions going on around the table and in the various hospitals, wards and lecture halls that we visited. The process of assessment took 2.5 days with various activities included: documentation analysis, meetings, talks with key stakeholders, students, graduates, faculty members, administration, Erasmus office etc. For me, the most instructive parts were direct inspection of departments of basic sciences, clinics

and various lecture halls as well as one “county” hospital.

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HIGH DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE

with an increased potential to be competitive in the area of EU biomedical higher education in both the field of biomedical education and research.

2. Language

Based on the previous assessment, language maintains to be a problem in communication with foreign visitors, students and foreign faculty members/doctors/visiting scientists. However, one can see a significant improvement in English language competencies, especially of younger staff members and students. The very fact that there is an English module (medical studies pursued in English language) offers a good opportunity (at least for the faculty members of School of Medicine) to continuously work on and improve their English language competencies. The representatives of the student’s body and students on the wards as well as junior assistants mostly spoke English well. I was able to witness a lecture given for the students of the English module (on the development of the tooth) that was very good both in terms of medical expertise and English language. In addition, UMFCD provides courses on Medical English and Romanian, thus covering both national and international group of students. Some senior staff members were very proficient in English and some were not.

Recommendations:

- a. expand the teaching of English/Romanian into the 3rd year of studies;
- b. when accepting a candidate for a position at the UMFCD carefully check English language competencies (one of the essential prerequisites to be accepted as a member of the faculty).

3. Exchange and credit transfer

According to the self-evaluation report, UMFCD has 57 institutional agreements for the period 2014-2020 in view of continuing the collaboration within the programme ERASMUS+. At the end of 2013, twelve agreements were renewed for the period 2014-2020, the renewal of other agreements being currently underway (to be signed by one of the parties). There was a significant number of faculty members participating in international conferences and meetings related to the joint scientific projects. Thus, 217 foreign travel “decisions” for the teaching staff for various international scientific events financed through the personal funds of the participants, 370 foreign travel “decisions” for scientific research for participation at congresses and international events and for research activities jointly run by the members of UMFCD scientific community with their foreign partners were issued. The members of the faculty of Dentistry were able to visit and perform a research activity at prestigious European universities, such as University of Oxford, University of Innsbruck, University of Freiburg and Semmelweis University. During the meeting with students in particular it became clear that their Erasmus experience was very valuable for them both in terms of international experience and professional activity, not to mention the improvement of foreign language skills. Most popular countries for the Erasmus exchange were Italy, Germany and France. There is an existence of the programme called TRANSMED, which enables exchange of students between Romanian biomedical universities. The student body seems to be much involved in the organization of the exchange, which, obviously, enhances the number of students that participate in the programme.

Recommendations:

- a. increase the incoming mobility; it seems that the number of incoming students and foreign faculty members is rather low;
- b. use the English module for the international exchange; being taught in English, this module can significantly help in the process of the international exchange;
- c. stimulate both undergraduate as well as postgraduate students to attend international

student conferences and research programmes;

- d. intensify applications for EU grants, since these grants offer a lot of possibilities for the international exchange

4. Premises and infrastructure

During my visit, I was able to get an insight into variety of lecture halls, laboratories, working cabinets, hospital rooms, outpatient clinics, wards etc. The historic part (ancient buildings like rector's building/office, basic sciences buildings etc., dating from the 19th century) is very impressive and reflects the huge tradition UMFCO has. More than 50 affiliated hospitals ensure a good teaching capacity, especially in terms of bedside teaching and other practical forms of professional training. One could note that a significant effort was invested in renovation of some of the buildings, especially basic sciences laboratories (Physiology, Histology, Anatomy and Embryology) and outpatient clinics with diagnostic tracts. In hospitals, it seems that the partnership between a private and state-owned sector was very successful in some areas like: haemodialysis, diagnostics of infectious diseases, radiology (CT, NMR). The Department of Anatomy at the School of Medicine offers another good example: they were able to renovate a part of the basement by the income coming from courses on clinical anatomy and laparoscopic surgery. The project on virtual library and access to various journals and articles from one's office or home is worth of notice as well as the printing/publishing company within the UMFCO.

However, it has been recognized that there was a certain discrepancy between UMFCO organizational units: the best equipped seemed to be School of Medicine then School of Dentistry whereas School of Pharmacy, despite some sophisticated pieces of equipment installed, was less equipped, especially in terms of the adequate laboratory furniture. All parts of UMFCO should expand in number of rooms and space dedicated for teaching, especially when seminar and practical forms of instruction take place.

Recommendations:

- a. stimulate the partnership between private and state-owned sector; this partnership could of

- special importance for such areas as one day surgery, outpatient clinics, diagnostics etc.;
- b. UMFCF should invest more in the School of Pharmacy in order to meet professional standards of teaching and research in that particular branch of biomedicine; perhaps joint projects with pharmaceutical industry (provided that high ethical and scientific criteria are met) could help in the renovation of premises;
 - c. School of Dentistry should be able to move to adequate locations within the city; it would be desirable to have a larger number of premises/buildings close to each other;
 - d. constant inflow of modern equipment is necessary in order to maintain the quality of teaching; thus, School of Dentistry (as well as other units of UMFCF) should be able to have an access to new (dental) materials, implants, 3D printers, medical equipment etc.; again, more applications for EU grants dedicated to building an infrastructure would be desirable;
 - e. there is still a lack of a skill lab for School of Medicine; one of such labs is in the process of establishing with the help of European funds and could provide (through courses for laymen etc.) some additional income for the University.

5. Benchmarking and assessment

According to the self-evaluation report, in the UMFCF the assessment of the teaching staff by the students is made at the end of the study period based on standard assessment forms for the teaching staff/courses, approved by the Senate. The results of the assessment are analyzed at the level of every discipline or clinic and then the reports are submitted to the deans of the faculties. Based on these reports, the deans prepare reports regarding the situation of the faculties, reports that are submitted to the management structure of the University. In the UMFCF an annual assessment based on multiple criteria is performed for each member of the teaching staff, in accordance with the provisions of the Labor Code and of the Law no. 284/2010 regarding the salaries of the personnel paid from public funds. In communication with students that experienced Erasmus and graduates that are in the process of specialization, I got an impression that they are,

in general, satisfied with their knowledge and competences when compared with other schools across the EU. There was a self-critical remark from students that they sometimes fill the evaluation forms/questionnaires in a “mechanical” way after an exam, just to fulfill their duty in the assessment of different courses and teachers. Nevertheless, it seems that student’s questionnaires are constantly in action and analyzed in a systematized way. In addition, UMFCD organized a board/s that deal with quality assurance and control that are in a permanent communication with rector’s office.

Based on the self-assessment report, UMFCD seems to be successful in getting domestic and international grants. UMFCD is a partner in some FP7 projects and there is certain scientific activity based on bilateral and multilateral contacts. Certainly, the co-ordination of at least one FP7 project in a 5-years cycle evaluation period would be desirable. Although self-assessment report provided a lot of data on the activity of the UMFCD and its performance in Romanian area of higher education, a more detailed analysis of the university ranking at international, and, especially EU level should be performed.

Recommendations:

- a. simplify the student’s questionnaire in order to stimulate students to fill the forms. Perhaps an electronic (on-line) form would be more convenient;
- b. perform a more comprehensive analysis of the UMFCD ranking, especially concerning its position in the area of biomedical higher education within the EU;
- c. the self assessment report should address the benchmarking in more detail, referring to the following points:

number of presented Ph.D. theses; thorough analysis of publication activity in national and international journals; funding of scientific activity (especially coming from the EU) and dynamics of graduates (student drop-out rates at various levels of studies, employability of graduates etc.).

6. Course evaluation/s, students and graduates

During my stay at UMFCDC I was able to visit a number of departments related to basic biomedical sciences as well as hospitals, wards, outpatient clinics, lecture and seminar halls and talk to students. Based on my experience, all forms of teaching (lectures, seminars and practicals) are regularly performed according to the schedule. The presence of students is especially required during seminars and practicals. In a clinical setting, groups of students were experiencing bedside teaching. However, the sets of students could be smaller and the number of teaching staff higher. It seems that students are quite satisfied with the theoretical knowledge they are getting at the university; I also got an impression that UMFCDC stimulates a "culture of good teaching" at all levels. However, the lecture and, especially, seminar halls seem to be overcrowded with students. The high quality teaching at UMFCDC deserves more lecture and seminar halls as well as laboratories for practicals/exercise. The good examples were Departments of Physiology and Histology with well-equipped laboratories and small seminar rooms for teaching in small groups. The afore-mentioned skill lab/simulation centre would be a solution for some student/graduates complains related to the lack of specific practical skills.

Student bodies of all three units of UMFCDC were well represented during the meeting with students. The activities of students seem to be sufficiently supported by the university. For example, students of School of Medicine organize their own congress that attracts participants at national level. The congress is fully supported by UMFCDC. Student body at School of Medicine has its own premises with computers and other IT equipment. Each student is able to access various databases of the Central library, either within the UMFCDC campus or from home using a password. The Central library is a nicely furnished and well equipped, providing good service to students and faculty members. The old premises have been renovated and reflect the tradition, influence and role of UMFCDC in the Romanian educational and health sphere. In addition, another 2 facts related to student's life are impressive: sport facilities and accommodation (student dormitories). Sport facilities encompass a large swimming pool, a modular hall/s for basketball, volleyball, gym etc. In the self-report, it has been stated that UMFCDC provides student housing for

80% students, which is a very favourable situation. However, students claim that these dormitories need a thorough restoration.

Although the student body has a variety of activity, it would be good that it organizes some kind of an “orientation” week for the newcomers (students accepted into the first year of studies). This would help newly accepted students to better adapt to the new environment, to know about exact location of different departments, where the student canteen is etc. I also noticed there is no ALUMNI organization. This organization could help graduates to choose their specialty, to represent the interests of graduates and to maintain the link between graduates and UMFCU.

During the meeting with graduates, it became evident that, after the graduation, a one-year of assisted practice was needed. Graduates from School of Dentistry, at least to my knowledge, are allowed to practice immediately after they were awarded their diploma. The situation would significantly improve if they would be provided with the assisted practice for a certain period of time. This seems true also for graduates from School of Pharmacy. It appears that the status and training of graduates, once they finish high education, is a kind of a “no man’s land” between Romanian Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health. One gets the impression that the jurisdiction over the assisted practice in all 3 fields (medicine, dentistry and pharmacology) should be given to the university, since graduates still heavily rely on its support.

The quality of (bio)medical education highly depends upon a good co-operation between the medical directors of affiliated clinical hospitals and UMFCU. As far as I am informed, there is a law in Romania that imposes a medical director of the hospital should be also a faculty member of a certain medical school. I think this is a very positive thing since faculty members, acting as medical directors, have special awareness for needs of students (i.e. necessity to have good lecture and seminar halls, wardrobe, medical library, etc.).

As for Ph.D. studies, UMFCU provides only a modest frame of education. According to the self-assessment report, besides the departments, in the structure of the university there is also the Council of Doctoral Studies, which is managed by a Director, its organization and functioning being set by the Charter and Chapter VI, art. 81-88. Current Ph.D. studies comprise only general

6. Final remarks

It was a pleasure to participate in the external institutional evaluation of UMFCD. Both the members of the faculty and the ARACIS team were very co-operative and provided me with the necessary assistance. Taking into the account last 5-years period, a significant improvement has been made. Despite the unfavourable economical conditions which still exist in Romania, the university exerted a significant effort to progress both the teaching process and the scientific activity. There is also an increase in the international activity and visibility of UMFCD. I am convinced that UMFCD will succeed in becoming a leading institution in the area of biomedical education not only in Romania but also in this part of Europe.

Therefore, according to my opinion, UMFCD deserves to be declared as a university of

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