

External Assessment Report for the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova

Introduction

I was appointed by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul superior - ARACIS) as an external evaluator of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy (UMPh) Craiova. This report is the result of the evaluation visit that took place in order to externally assess the University. The visit by a committee of experts took place during the period 27-29 of May 2009.

The program of the visit was known in advance and followed exactly. I personally took part in meetings with the University Board (including the Rector, Vice-Rectors, Chancellor, General Administrative Director and Chief Registrar), the Deans of the Faculties that were assessed. There were two additional meetings, one was open for all students of the faculties and another was held with the teaching staff of the UMPh.

I have signed the contract with ARACIS and I was bound to respect the methodology of assessment, using my complete expertise in coordination with the local situation and facts.

The evaluation committee comprised the following members: Prof. R. Oprean, Prof. D. Miron, Prof. Daniela Ion, Prof. G. Băciuț, Prof. Ursula Stănescu, Stud. Alina Sandu and Stud. S. Șerban. The following members also participated: Prof. F. Popa, Asist. V. Grigoraș and Prof. D. Podea. The University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova was represented by the Rector - Prof. A. Săftoiu, Vicerector – Prof. T. Ciurea, Contact person – Mihai Caragea, as well as other representatives of the evaluated structures.

During the evaluation process I have worked closely with Prof. R. Oprean and Prof. D. Miron, concerning the institutional evaluation, but also with Mrs. Prof. Daniela Ion, concerning particularly the evaluation of Medicine. There was an intensive exchange of information with Prof. Ursula Stănescu, being responsible for the evaluation of the faculty of pharmacy. The audit at the University began on Wednesday the 27th of May at 9:30 h with an assembly of the members of the committee and the representatives of the University. The coordinator, Prof. R. Oprean, opened the first session, introduced the members of the committee and their responsibilities and introduced also the Rector of

the University, Prof. A. Săftoiu, the deans of the three faculties for Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy and the other above mentioned representatives of the University. The further procedure was characterized by meetings, working in small groups and at 17:00 h we had an appointment with about 160 students of the university. The visit was continued on Thursday 28th of May with meetings of the committee, working in small groups and a meeting with the teaching staff of the University. I personally used the time between the meetings and appointments to visit the preclinical teaching facilities of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy and also some of the research laboratories of the University. The evaluation was terminated at noontime on Friday 29th of May with a joint session and concluding remarks of the coordinator Prof. R. Oprean.

Legal framework

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova is a state higher-education institution, founded in 1998 through Act 119 of 05.06.1998, of the Romanian Parliament.

The educational and research mission are precise and compatible with other values of the health education.

The University Charta exists, it respects the current legal framework and it is well known by the members of the academic community, being published on-line in the University website; last change was approved by the University Senate in 25th September 2007.

All internal regulations are specified in the University Charta, the rules being in concordance with the actual legislation, the Regulation concerning Internal Order of the University, the Regulation concerning Didactic and Professional Activity of the Students, Regulations and Methodologies for Admission and Finalizing Studies for all Educational Forms.

Through the University Ethics code, the University defends the values of academic liberty, university autonomy, as well as ethical integrity, while clear rules and mechanisms are described in order to apply the code.

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova has a structure with four faculties: the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Dentistry, the Faculty of Pharmacy and the Faculty of Midwifery and Nursing.

Institutional board

The persons from the institutional staff have the title of associate professor or full professor, being elected in conformity with the Methodology for Electing Management Structures in the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova. The Rector has been confirmed through the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research nr. 3530/24 March 2008.

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova has a Strategic Plan dispersed during 4 years, detailed by Annual Operational Plans with tactical objectives correlated with strategic axes.

Within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova, an information process of professional, organizational and scientific nature is carried out permanently, using the current institutional Intranet and INTERNET network. Concerning the communication infrastructure, the university has 500 computers connected in a dedicated network, using optical fiber connections between buildings, with all administrative, educational and research spaces connected to the INTERNET, while in key points wireless systems are used. Every year, the computer stock is renewed, with over 100 computers purchased only in 2008. All rooms in the university campus have been connected to the INTERNET.

Teaching staff and preclinical teaching

Contests for vacant didactic positions respect the methodology of contest, being organized in accordance with the legal rules of public announcement; the requirements for the vacant positions are based on actual rules of the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, concerning a minimum allowed duration of prior employment, as well as all key requests for didactic and research activity. The percentage of filled didactic positions is 77.15%, with a total number of professors and associate professors of 30.98%. While more than 80% of the professors' positions are filled, less than 75% of those of the lecturer assistants are filled. Around 50% of the teaching staff are women; their rate is even higher among Lecturers and Lecturer Assistants.

The average ratio between the number of teaching staff / students has been stabilized around the value of 1:7,15, being generated by the specific conditions of the medical and pharmaceutical education.

Teaching of medical and dentistry students in anatomy, histology, physiology and biochemistry is performed in small groups in seminars and practical courses. Group sizes of students and facilities appeared appropriate.

Comment, recommendations: The ratio between the number of teaching staff and students seems to be adequate. However, about 45% of the teaching staff (without counting tutors) are Lecturer Assistants without MD or PhD. In German Medical Faculties the number of teachers with MD or PhD is higher (> 80%). In order to improve the quality of teaching it is recommended to increase the number of MD/PhD teachers.

Material assets and preclinical teaching

Based on the documents provided by the university board, as well as after the site visits in different locations where didactic and research activities take place, I noticed that the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova has the necessary facilities and resources used in order to support a high quality educational process, in concordance with the space / student numbers required based on ARACIS normatives. Besides main lectures, preclinical teaching is organized in small groups of students in the presence of a supervisor. I visited several seminars and practical courses during teaching activities in anatomy, histology, physiology and biochemistry. Practical activities (laboratory seminars, practical courses) of the special disciplines take place in laboratories endowed with modern and appropriate equipment.

Distances between lecture halls, rooms where seminars and practical courses take place, library and hospital are altogether in walking distance or situated in the main building of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy. This infrastructural feature of the University is consequently followed, since new research facilities are placed and expanded near by. Many of the lecture halls correspond to European standards, with modern equipment for real time video conferences with other national and international institutions or centers.

These elements of infrastructure correspond to the profile of the study programs offered by the university and composed by lecture halls, didactic laboratories and research centers, in concordance with technical norms, safety regulations and hygiene standards currently enforced by law.

Added to the specific components used in the educational and research processes, several other assets can be added: two hostels, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a floodlight tennis court, basketball field, etc. The majority of teaching premises have been included in a developmental and transformational process and, at present, are renovated, rehabilitated and modernized according to the high standards of academic medical education and scientific research.

Comment, recommendations: As far as I could estimate during the random inspection of seminars and practical courses, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy has reached a high standard of teaching. The procedures of preclinical teaching are very similar as in the German Universities I know. However, there are differences in facilities and equipment between Pharmacy and Medicine/Dentistry. The newest and best equipped laboratories seem to be those in the faculty of Pharmacy. It will be necessary within the next years to update and improve equipment in biochemistry and physiology teaching laboratories, and may be also in anatomy and histology. Further, modern developments e.g. in the fields molecular biology and bioinformatics will make it necessary to adjust preclinical teaching facilities and equipment.

Students

A total number of 3129 students are registered within the university year 2008-2009, with different types of financing. The admission of students is based on an exam performed respecting the legislation in force and admission methodologies approved by the Senate, which is public on the university website, without any discriminatory selection criteria oriented to religion, race or political affiliation.

The students' entire professional activity (attendance, graduation, ECTS, discontinuance, expelling, etc.) is regulated by the Regulation on Students' Professional Activity and by each training form regulation. The results of student evaluation and assessment during the study years are recorded for each discipline in the Discipline Register, and the results for each year of study are recorded in the Registration Certificate. For each graduating student, a Diploma Supplement is issued, this being verified at the faculty and Rectorate registrars, while the university graduates are conferred the graduation diploma and the diploma supplement in legal conditions.

More than 80% of the graduates obtain a right to practice medicine, can practice after completing their studies and enter the labor market. Approximately the same percentages of graduates of the Faculty of Medicine, who are required by the legislation in force to continue their training, enter the residency training program in the first two years after graduation.

During the visit of the evaluation committee a meeting between students and committee was arranged. I was surprised that more than 160 students attended the meeting, actively contributed to the discussion. The students are very motivated for learning and are engaged and interested to improve both, teaching conditions and their personal situation. Though the discussion was held in Romanian language, I could roughly follow questions, suggestions, demands and answers by the committee. The presence of the English teacher of the University was very helpful during the discussion with the students.

Comment, recommendations: I was positively surprised by the self-confident behaviour of the students and the open discussion between students and the committee. This may indicate that there is a good discussion culture also in the University and a quite good relationship between students and teaching staff. During the discussion it turned out that only very few students had the opportunity to spend a semester or a year at a university abroad. It is recommended to announce and support students exchange programs, such as ERASMUS, and improve opportunities for students of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy to spend part of their studies abroad. The financial support to study abroad is also important. It is recommended to apply for financial support at the European Community. In the long term, student exchange will have positive effects on both, teaching and research at the Medical University of Craiova.

Research

Scientific research activity is part the mission of the university of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova. The university has its own research plan, with separate domains and scientific objectives. A research department functions in the university, composed of two research centers with modern infrastructure. During the time of the evaluation visit, in the institution took place a total number of 98 research projects, with 32 obtained in 2008. Research results are included in the main publication flow (107 ISI articles were published in 2008).

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova is accredited as an Institution Organizing Doctoral Studies (IOSUD) that currently benefits of a number of 43 Professors. A Service of Scientific Research Management was also created for a better management of research contracts, using clear procedures for the follow-up of research project contracts.

A self-assessment report of the period 2003-2007 was compiled and sent in view of the accreditation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova as an institution able to conduct research-development-innovation activities, in accordance with the Law nr. 551/2007. The University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova was accredited by NASR (National Agency of Scientific Research), in accordance with the Decision nr. 9688 / 30.06.2008.

During my stay at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy I visited several research laboratories with an internationally competitive standard. The major research in medicine is focussed on gastroenterology and the analysis of cancer of the gastrointestinal tract. Endoscopic techniques and the analysis of tissue samples from the human gastrointestinal tract are on a very high standard. The analyses of tissue samples are performed by histological techniques, cytogenetical techniques and molecular biological methods such as RT-PCR. The successful focus on gastrointestinal research is also reflected in the number and volumes of research grants obtained during the last years. Nearly all of the grants with a volume > 300.000 Lei were approved for endoscopic techniques and the investigation of gastrointestinal diseases.

Scientific conferences are organized periodically with didactic staff, researchers, residents, students, etc. During the evaluation visit period two conferences, that of the Romanian Physiological Society and a second one on Histology and Morphology took place. Both conferences were organized with International participation. The conferences show the reputation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Craiova among the Romanian Medical Universities.

Comment, recommendations: It will be difficult for the University of Medicine and Pharmacy to achieve international competitiveness in medical research in general. In the field of gastroenterology and cancer research the basis is already excellent. However, in other disciplines the standards do not reach that level. It is difficult to answer how

research can be improved in the other subjects of clinical and basic medical research, since it depends on local circumstances, objectives of the management, involved departments, persons taking an initiative, etc. It would be very desirable to establish further research centres or collaborative research programs at the UMPH. Within a medical faculty of this size, 3 or 4 collaborative research programs could be principally developed. This would however require a lot of financial support and has probably to be prepared and guided. Many universities have a system to financially support initiatives for small collaborative projects. Financial support for such projects, provided by the faculty or university, can be a starting point for the preparation of significant grant applications to national or European organizations. It is recommended to include both, clinical and preclinical departments into collaborative research programs. This may have several positive effects: 1. It can improve communication and collaboration within the faculty. 2. It will prevent too much diversity in the research and can lead to concentration and focussing on 3 to 4 fields. 3. It could prevent migration of the best researchers to other universities in Romania and to abroad and thus maintain and improve teaching quality at the UMPH.

In some places there exists a fruitful collaboration between the local or national industry and the universities. There are also European funds to support the regional development by supporting research and development in companies, universities and collaborative projects. It is recommended to analyze these programs and take advantage of them.

Quality assurance

The UMPH pays a special attention to quality assurance. As stated in the self-assessment report the following features are aims and basis of quality assurance:

Responsibility, impartiality, externality, continuous improvement of the system and transparency.

The keyword "externality" expresses the fact that the application of internal quality mechanisms will be performed in direct correlation with external reference standards (i.e. those standards developed by ARACIS, ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and WFME – World Federation of Medical Education)

The details of the Assessment and Quality Assurance System at the UMPH are fixed in an Appendix Guide to the Institutional self – assessment report.

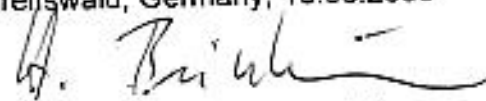
Concluding remarks

Based on the analysis of the self-assessment report as well as the visit of evaluation, I have seen an active and alive university with interested and engaged students. The University successfully developed teaching and research conditions and also the infrastructure and this raises many hopes for the future.

I would like to thank the Rector, the vice Rector, the deans of the faculties and all the university staff for their hospitality and support during the evaluation.

Further, I would like to thank ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to serve as an external evaluator.

Greifswald, Germany, 10.06.2009



(Prof. Dr. Heinrich Brinkmeier)