



*Prof. Dr. Ladislav Paule, Faculty of Forestry, Technical University,
SK-96053 Zvolen, Slovakia
Phone: +421-45-5206221, +421-903-535759; e-mail: paule@vsl.d.tuzvo.sk*

Evaluation Report
of the institutional evaluation for education quality of the
Universitatea Valahia din Târgoviște, Romania
(University of Valahia, Târgoviste, Romania)

The evaluation report is written on the request of the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education to serve as a foreign external evaluator and is based on study of the International Evaluation Report of the Universitatea Valahia din Târgoviște, Romania (University of Valahia, Târgoviste, Romania), delivered by the ARACIS, and the site visit which was done on May 13 – 15, 2009.

Both site visit reports (a) Verification of the compulsory normative requirements, and (b) Standards and performance indicators and supporting appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, were finished during the site visit according to the methodology of the ARACIS and signed by both, i.e. the representatives of the visited institution and me, as a foreign expert.

The audit process began with the Plenary meeting of evaluators team with the management of the University of Valahia, Târgoviste, and followed by the expert groups. Besides, there were other two meetings: (1) with students and graduates and (2) with employers of the university graduates. Both meetings gave very good overview of different aspects of educational process and also the qualities of graduates and their position in practice.

The team of evaluators was coordinated by Prof. Steliana Toma. The team of evaluators was supported by the management of the University – Prof. Dr. Ion Cucui, rector, and Prof. Ioan Stegaroiu, University contact person.

During the site visit the team of evaluators had a chance to visit the facilities of the University, e.g. students dormitory, labs, Congress Center, sport facilities, libraries etc.

In my role as an International expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of the whole university and was allowed to move freely, talking to the members of the staff, students and other members of audit team. I have concentrated my efforts on the research activity within the University.

During the work in Târgoviște I was also assisted by English speaking Prof. dr. Delia Popescu, the head of the Foreign relations Department of the University of Valahia. This contact person made all the necessary communications easier and removed the language barriers.

In my opinion the audit was conducted in an open and friendly atmosphere and it was a constructive event and fulfilled its tasks.

To summarize both the site visit and the study of the presented internal evaluation I would like to add some comments which could highlight the evaluation of the visited institution and/or improve the evaluation process in general.

General

My personal impression has been that the ARACIS paid attention to the preparation of the entire evaluation process. The experts and the evaluated institutions were provided with the methodological material which guided them through the evaluation process. This is a good basis since both sides knew well in advance the rules and criteria which were the subject of the evaluation.

The evaluated institution was well prepared for the visit and provided printed material in form of the Internal Evaluation Report in both languages. I have received the English version of the „Autoevaluation Institutional Report“ well in advance. For me, as a foreign expert, it was easy to use the material and to follow the additional material written in Romanian, e.g. list of publications, list of research projects etc. The site visit was also well prepared and in all visited departments all required information was obtained.

Since I have visited in the past several universities in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland and Romania for evaluation procedures as well as numerous universities for my professional contacts, I can state that the University of Valahia in Târgoviste is a developing university which already possesses a high standard of education and research. There are, however, some items which could be improved especially in comparison with some universities in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. I do not want to make comparison with western Europe from pragmatical reasons, since this comparison would not have the same basis (historical and economic development of the faculties). A comparison with the schools in the three above mentioned countries is from the historical and economic viewpoints possible.

Education

The educational standards and the facilities in the compared countries are comparable, although in some cases there occur differences in the infrastructure and the standard of facilities. But in general I would not find too many significant differences. I have noticed another positive feature of the educational process – participation of scientists working in other educational centers and the scientific institutions from the region in the educational process. This practice improves the pedagogical process and enriches it with recent scientific advances.

Some remarks to the personnel structure of the university. During the site visit and also according the internal evaluation report I got the feeling that the age structure of the teaching staff has a good „distribution“. 43 % of pedagogical staff are under 35 years, 62 % posses PhD title and furter 196 members of pedagogical staff are from other institutions. Planned number of pedagogical staff is 498 members and from this number 318 is taken. A smaller number of professors below 50 years and associate professors below 40 years have a consequence in a less effective orientation for good projects and

high-rank publications (see next paragraphs). Younger and prospective teachers and scientists should get a good motivation in professional growth and a quick promotion.

Good language proficiency of the teaching staff has been found as another positive feature. Many of those whom I met in the departments spoke fluent English or French, some with good German proficiency. This is a good precondition for a tighter international cooperation in teaching and science.

I have also got two negative feelings. According to my opinion there is a high proportion of vacancies (36 %). I know these vacancies are covered by higher teaching loads, but hours of higher teaching loads are reflected negatively in research activities. Except that I found a lack of the technical staff in departments. For effective scientific research the departments should be equipped with technical staff (lab assistants, technicians for field work, etc.). This is, however, a common feature also of other Romanian universities I visited in the past two years.

PhD programs

When evaluating the PhD study programs I have found a rather high number of supervised part-time PhD students (about 80 % of the total number of PhD students). However, it is difficult to make any comment since I do not know exactly the Romanian rules concerning the allocation of scholarships for PhD students. According to my experience, the part-time PhD studies prolong the education process and lower the quality. Most of the part-time PhD students work outside the university and are thus not directly involved in research. My general recommendation would be to increase the number of full-time PhD students (in Slovakia the Ministry of Education allocates scholarships for 10 % of graduates in undergraduate studies for their further PhD studies), to motivate the students for early publications and to base the PhD theses on published papers.

The average number of supervised PhD students by one supervisor is too high and it does not guarantee a high quality of supervision. Is it due to a high proportion of vacancies or a lower interest of some professors and associate professors to supervise the PhD theses? (there are in total 102 professors and associate professors and out of this number only 55 are supervising PhD theses).

Research

Research activity within the university is managed by the Chancellor and is organised through research centers. All academic staff are obliged to participate in the research. Unfortunately, I have not find records whether it is really the case, since some teachers use to teach more norms than 100 %.

There are differences in the structure of the research programs (national vs. international) and mainly in the output of the research programs. As for the number of research projects, the figures are rather impressive, and the co-workers of the faculty aimed their research activities on modern scientific disciplines (chemistry,

optoelectronics, biotechnologies, etc.). The research is conducted in 9 centers (laboratories) accredited by the CNCSIS and six laboratories accredited by the Senate of the University of Valahia.

Two research groups are outstanding over Romanian level and reach high international rank. (Although I have identified two groups, there might be more than two, due to overlapping co-authorship on high ranked publications). Their publication records are outstanding and most of the papers published in the high ranked journals and the papers have also got corresponding citations records. I have got the feeling that most universities abroad would be proud to have these scientists on their own salary list.

However, in general, I am less satisfied with the output of the research projects transformed into the publications. According to my opinion, in some groups there is not paid sufficient attention to the publishing in international or national journals. 22 % of total publications were published in journals of B+, B and C category and 60 % in proceedings from domestic and foreign conferences. These proportions have negative impact on the citation chances of individual papers since they are not included in databases and the proceedings are accessible only in limited number of copies.

I understand this is a difficult task to reach a higher publication rate in foreign journals, if this practice has not been applied earlier and people are satisfied with low rank publications.

Recommendation: Full papers published in all series of the scientific journals of faculties of University of Valahia should be placed on the Home Page of the University which could substantially improve the accessibility of the journals to scientific community in Romania and abroad. Due to high mailing expenses the wider distribution of these scientific journals is limited and making free access to published papers via University Home Page has also economical rationale.

Since Romania is a new EU member country, it will be expected to participate in the EU scientific projects of different categories and a closer orientation towards high-quality projects resulting in good publications. I would like to state that I have clearly seen the potential to publish abroad and to participate in the international projects. More initiative from the side of the university to cooperate more tightly with the foreign faculties or scientific institutions and/or be members of the international consortia preparing international projects is required. For the scientists it would also be recommended an increased initiative to publish abroad. This remark is meant mainly for other groups than those mentioned in the second paragraph.

Library and other facilities

A special attention should be aimed at the library and the scientific information system. I understand well that any scientific library is limited as for space and also finances to purchase books and journals. The numbers of books and journals and their prices are increasing in the geometrical order and it would be hardly possible to subscribe everything which might be of interest by any scientific library.

I consider the number of book units to be found in five specialized libraries as modest one. Also the number of subscribed journals is not very high as it would be

expected. There are further journals and book titles which could be obtained within the exchange system. But the library cannot rely on the exchange system since the mailing expenses to send a book abroad are sometimes higher than the printing costs.

It is welcomed that the library has an access to Web of Knowledge (Web of Science), Springer and Scopus databases. So, at least the information flow is up-to-date and the sciences interested for the newest publications are informed in real time. This is, however, only the first step, since many journals do not offer the free access to full-text papers of electronic versions of scientific journals. The information flow is also a precondition to a high standard of research and teaching activities.

I have been impressed about the facilities – building of the Doctoral School, dormitories, new buildings (although not finished yet) in the University campus and above all the Congress Center. These facilities are proof that the University of Valachia will be soon a modern University campus. This is good credit of the management of the University they found finances and put all efforts to develop the University Campus.

The visited student dormitories are modern full equipped and furnished. Sport and culture facilities, canteen and a student club are a part of the University Campus. The facilities are well used and it seems that both staff and students feel a sense of ownership. It all creates good conditions which make students life in Târgoviste pleasant and may be unforgettable.

International cooperation

International cooperation has according to the internal evaluation report a long-lasting tradition. It has been mainly oriented to some west European universities. There have been signed 37 contracts with foreign universities, mainly oriented towards Erasmus, Socrates and similar programs.

I have not found the information about how effective it has been in terms of real scientific or pedagogical cooperation (common projects, publications, etc.). In European scientific space it is expected in general a tighter cooperation mainly between the new member countries (between the old member countries the close cooperation already started more than 15 years ago in the 1st and 2nd framework programs). It is highly recommended (not only for the evaluated university but also for other universities in Romania) to intensify the international cooperation with universities and scientific institutions among the new-member countries, mainly from the central and eastern Europe, which already existed but was from different reasons slowed-down or interrupted.

Conclusions

I found the entire evaluation process as a positive feature of the Romanian universities. Both the ARACIS and the universities pay seriousness to the entire process with the aim to assess and increase the quality of the educational and scientific activities.

University leadership has a firm idea about the further improvement of the University and its further development and creation the modern University. In general, it was impressive what they reach in the past two decades since its establishment in 1992.

Recommendations:

- It is necessary to intensify the research efforts in University of Valahia also in other branches than those they are already excellent in and to direct them for high quality projects (e.g. CNCSIS) and to participate in consortia of European research projects such as FP7, ESF.
- It is imperative to improve the international cooperation in more efficient way and to become involved in a European program Erasmus – Socrates, Leonardo, Lingua etc. currently grouped in the Life Long Learning (LLP) to facilitate mobility and exchanges of teachers, researchers and students with similar structure of education and research within the EU and make the exchanges more balanced in both directions. To utilize also the opportunities of exchanges between the universities in new EU-member countries.
- Improve publication flow using internet accessibility of published papers (see recommendation earlier).

Foreign experts show a great satisfaction with a meeting with potential employers of graduated students. This meeting was very informative and showed great importance of the opinions expressed by the employers, the main beneficiaries (customers) of the university (graduates). A large number of employers (about 70) were present in the auditorium at this meeting and they positively evaluated the graduates and their flexibility and practical knowledge.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended to establish a platform of *alumni* to be supported by their opinion about the graduates and their positions in practice and on the other hand to keep the firm contacts between the University and alumni.
- To establish a forum of students with aim to prepare them for better communication in foreign languages (discussions, lectures, communication training).

Based on the internal evaluation report and my previous reports based on site visit I can summarize the evaluation of the University of Valahia, Târgoviste, Romania is a modern university, which has full potential for further development both in pedagogical and research activities. Remarks written in this report should help the university for improvement their strategic documents enabling further development both in teaching but mainly in research. The university has a potential for improvements in this field, based on high number of good specialists in productive age, good infrastructure and tradition. I recommend and support positive evaluation of the university.

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Prof. Dr. Ladislav Paule