



A R A C I S
Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

E x t e r n a l I n s t i t u t i o n a l E v a l u a t i o n
Universitatea "Hyperion" din București, Romania

F o r e i g n E x p e r t R e p o r t

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1. Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as Foreign Expert of the visit to the Hyperion University in Bucharest for a periodical institutional evaluation by ARACIS. This was my sixth participation in an ARACIS external evaluation procedure in Romania. As a member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) I have participated already in more than 15 evaluations in 7 European countries, in Colombia and in Nigeria. Hence the following observations and comments will partially also reflect my IEP-background and European perspectives.

I am very grateful to the Mission Director Prof. univ. dr. Lazăr Vlăsceanu and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Todea for conducting the evaluation process in a very efficient way and to the members of the ARACIS team for their constructive and fruitful discussions during the visit.

My special thank goes to Vice-rector Conf. univ. dr. Iulian Cârțână from the Hyperion University for the great hospitality and perfect organization of my visit and to Mrs. Loesana Petrișor Pădure from the Faculty of Law and Public Administration, as well as to Mrs. Carmen Dominte from the Language Department, for taking care of me during the visit. Furthermore, I also want to express my appreciation to the various representatives of Hyperion University, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their open discussions to a good view of the institution. Last but not least I want to thank Mrs. Mihaela Băjenaru from ARACIS for her friendly way of holding contact with me and providing all necessary information for the visit.

2. Description of Hyperion University

The Hyperion University is one of the oldest private universities in Romania founded in 1990 and accredited by law in 2002. It is a juridical entity of private and public utility. The special situation of Hyperion University is that it is one of the few private universities offering also technical careers beside other disciplines. According to my information Hyperion University was classified under the terms of the new Romanian Law of National Education 2011 as Teaching University. This signifies that all offered master programmes have to undergo a new accreditation procedure within the near future.

The main financial recourses of the University come from school fees, admission and degrees. The total budget of Hyperion University in 2009 was 20.435.000 Lei and 21.330.000 Lei in 2010. For 2011 the University expects revenues of 28.000.000 Lei. Between 56% and 58% of the budget are spent for salaries.

The University is led by the Founder Rector (since more than 20 years) together with three Vice-rectors (internal organisation and international relations, teaching and social affairs, research and quality assurance), the Senate and the Senate Office. The Senate chaired by the Rector is the governing body of the academic and scientific activities of

the University. Beside the Rector, the Vice-rectors, the Scientific Secretary of the Senate, the Deans, representatives of the teachers, the heads of the different divisions of administration and student representatives (according to the statutes 25% of the total number) are members. The executive management is done by the Senate Office, consisting of the Rector, Vice-rectors, chairman of the Board (which Board?), Scientific Secretary of the University (which Secretary?), Economic Director and a representative of the students. The University is well organized and owns four buildings in Bucharest. The buildings are in good state, but there is evidently a need for some larger class rooms and besides computer rooms there are no real technical laboratories for the science and engineering disciplines. The headquarter and the rectorate are in the Calea Calarasilor in Bucharest. The University is structured in 11 faculties, 15 departments, one institutional research centre and 11 (virtual?) research centres, one in each faculty. Actually the University offers 18 Bachelor degree (undergraduate) study programmes and 14 Master degree programmes in the fields of Informatics, Electronics and Applied Informatics, Physics, Geography and History, Literature and Foreign Languages, Psychology, Sociology, Political Sciences, Law, Communication Sciences, Banking Finance, Business Administration, Accountancy, Economics and International Business, Management as well as Arts (Theatre, Film and Media). There are many competitors in higher education especially in the Bucharest area offering the same or similar study programmes. The main advantage of Hyperion University against its competitors is that it is small and enables good personal contacts between teachers and students. Hence it is of interest for students who want to have personal contacts with teachers. The cultural sciences at Hyperion University (e.g. journalism, theatre, film and media) have certainly some effect on the local and regional TV, Magazines and newspapers.

3. Outline of the Visit

The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) provided by Hyperion University consists of two parts of together 73 pages with references to 116 Annexes I and 62 Annexes II. It gives a description of the development of the institution since its foundation in 1990 and its actual situation. The juridical framework, the management, human resources, financial activities, teaching and learning as well as research are described. Special focus on procedures of quality assurance with respect to the different activities of the University is taken. Part I and Part II of the ISER are redundant in several points. Furthermore, concrete numbers and details such as the number of members of the Senate, the total annual budget or the student numbers and graduates of the different careers are not listed and can be found only in the Annexes. The ISER is signed by the Rector but it is not mentioned who did prepare it. Unfortunately the ISER and in addition the English translation of the Romanian original are not always very clear and accurate. (E.g.: It is not clear if the Scientific Secretary of the Senate and the Scientific Secretary of the University mean the same person. Are all three Vice-rectors members of the Senate

Office or only one? Numbers of the undergraduate programmes and Master programmes in the ISER differ from the information given in other documents.)

Nevertheless, the ISER was helpful in preparing the visit and getting an initial good understanding of Hyperion University.

The institutional evaluation visit to Hyperion University began in the evening of 22nd November 2011, with the arrival of the ARACIS team from outside Bucharest at the local Hotel Central. During the evaluation visit I participated in the meetings of the main ARACIS team, but did also arrange my own interviews and examinations.

Wednesday, November 23, 2011

The evaluation procedure started punctually at 9:00 a.m. in the Senate meeting room of Hyperion University. Vice-rector Prof. univ. dr. Anca Gheorghiu gave a short presentation on the University. Then Conf. univ. dr. Iulian Cârțână welcomed the ARACIS team in the name of Rector Prof. univ. dr. Ion Spânulescu, who was absent due to illness. Subsequently the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Todea presented the ARACIS team and gave a short overview on the evaluation procedure.

In the following internal ARACIS team meeting (9:30 – 10:00 a.m.) Prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Todea explained to the Team what he wanted to be specially reviewed in course of the evaluation. He asked all Team members to try to get a comprehensive impression of the whole institution.

Between 10:00 and 10:20 a.m. I had a private interview with Vice-rector Prof. univ. dr. Anca Gheorghiu and asked her different questions about the internal organization. From 10:20 to 10:40 a.m. I had an interview with two representatives (Dean Prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Popoviciu) of the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics. We discussed different aspects of the study career Informatics and the working situation at the Faculty.

From 10:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. I was taken to the Palace of the Parliament, where several members of the University have part time jobs. There I had a short meeting with Prof. univ. dr. Constanta Călinoiu in the rooms of the Romanian Senate.

After lunch in the University building with the restaurant and the Hyperion high school, from 14:30 to 16:45 p.m. a tour through the three other University buildings was organized. The Team visited an informatics lab, the University printing office, the University TV and radio studio, a computer room, a faculty library and a room in the student dormitories. Subsequently we visited the department of finance, the central library, the Department of Geography, the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Sociology, a class of sociology, the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism, a class of film production, a class of performing arts and the University book shop in the main building. A part of the visits I did alone together with Vice-rector Conf. univ. dr. Iulian Cârțână.

From 17:00 to 18:10 p.m. the ARACIS team met 40 employers (15 females). After a short introduction the Mission Scientific Coordinator asked the employers for their experiences with respect to the competences of the University's graduates. There were various statements by the present representatives (local TV, assurance company, computer security

company, electronic company, economy enterprise, lawyer, archivist, newspaper) that the education of the institution was good. Some attendants stated that they would like the students to have more practical experiences. There was no apparent difference mentioned concerning the qualification of graduates of Hyperion University and other universities in Bucharest. "All institutions have good and bad graduates", was one statement.

From 18:10 to 19:10 p.m. there was a meeting with 50 (25 females) graduates. Also this group had no severe complains or suggestions for alterations with respect to the education at Hyperion University. But it was mentioned that the University should enforce practical experiences and perhaps organize officially practices within the curricula. When there started a discussion that many things could not be realized because of the legal constraints in Romania I stated that by my opinion the given autonomy to universities in Romania would allow many more activities as there are actually done. Especially university people should be as creative and pro-active as possible within the legal framework.

Thursday, November 24, 2011

From 9:00 to 9:45 a.m. the Team met about 70 students (about 50% females). There were students of all different fields present. Vice-rector Conf. univ. dr. Iulian Cârțână explained shortly the reason for this meeting. Then Mission Scientific Coordinator asked very concrete for weaknesses and problems. The majority of students was very enthusiastic about their teachers at Hyperion University and commended the good relations between teachers and students. Several students complained that there were not enough copies of text books in the library. Although there are many text books written by teachers of the University students do not feel any pressure to buy text books written by their own professors. Practical work in arts, journalism etc. seems to be better included into curricula than in technical careers. Some students showed a very good command of English, others did not speak any word.

After this huge meeting with the students I had a more private meeting with 4 English speaking students till 10:15 a.m. Also in this small group students stated their satisfaction with the education at Hyperion University and had no severe complains. But support for student mobility and student representation in the different bodies of the University seem to be areas for improvement.

Between 10:15 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. I checked various documents and investigated questions such as the financial management structure of the University, student numbers and number of graduates in different disciplines etc. Vice-rector Prof. univ. dr. Anca Gheorghiu and the secretary of the rectorate provided all wanted documents.

After lunch at 14:30 p.m. there was a technical meeting of the ARACIS team, where all Team members reported to Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Todea on their impressions so far. Some open questions were identified and left for further investigation.

From 15:15 to 15:45 p.m. I had a private meeting with the Administrative Director Gheorghe Rădulescu of Hyperion University. Mr. Rădulescu is a very experienced administrator

working from the beginning with the University. We discussed the decision procedures and the financial management within the institution.

Afterwards I studied documents and worked on my notes till 18:15 p.m.

Friday, November 25, 2011

At 9:00 a.m. the Team members finalized their documents and summarized their impressions. Opinions were interchanged. I collected additional information from other Team members.

About 9:45 a.m. the Mission Director Prof. univ. dr. Lazăr Vlăsceanu started to discuss individually with all Team members their impressions and findings. Afterwards the results were summarized in an internal meeting of the whole Team. From 11:00 to 12:00 a.m. the Mission Director Prof. univ. dr. Lazăr Vlăsceanu gave an oral report in front of the three Vice-rectors Prof. univ. dr. Anca Gheorghiu, Conf. univ. dr. Iulian Cârțână and Prof. univ. dr. Sever Spânelescu summarizing in a very elegant way the preliminary results of the evaluation. Strengths and weaknesses were mentioned and some first recommendations given. Vice-rector Prof. univ. dr. Sever Spânelescu and Conf. univ. dr. Iulian Cârțână tried to explain several critical points mentioned in the report and thanked the Team for its professional work.

After lunch I left for the hotel.

4. Governance and Institution

Hyperion University has taken the whole evaluation visit very seriously. The leadership of the University and especially the Vice-rectors showed high competence and identification with the institution. Also the majority of all other staff members including the Administrative Director proved to be very engaged and highly committed to the institution. Thanks to its good financial management and efficient administration Hyperion University disposes of four buildings in good condition in Bucharest. The University leadership has also reacted on the results of former evaluations and modified its study programmes considerably during the last years.

But the University evidently still has a problem to invest in labs for technical studies and relies more or less on computer simulations. This does effect the education and even more the research in the Faculties of Electronics, Automation and Applied Informatics as well as in the Faculty of Physics. One Team member has described very well the situation as "The spirit of Technology is missing in the institution". But this should not hinder the University to offer technical studies linked to informatics, e.g. a career of Information Technology. Even in Physics it makes sense to offer a career linked to Informatics and Electrical Engineering. But Hyperion University will not be able to offer a full education in Physics without a strong partner from outside. At the moment Hyperion University is certainly not a University of Technology.

I have already commented the ISER. Beside several inaccuracies in the English transla-

tion it is too long and the description partially very general and redundant, on the other hand some important facts are not mentioned in the ISER itself and have to be checked laboriously within the Annexes. There is no comment on the position and challenges of Hyperion University in the region and on the relations of the University with the outside world (enterprises, society). I have also missed in the ISER a clear description of the relations between the Founders and the actual University leadership. Is the Rector the only link to the Founders or are there other connections?

The role of student representation and integration of student representatives in the Senate and other boards in practice is not fully clear. Several seats dedicated for students seem not to be occupied.

Recommendations :

- From the European point of view a rector's term of more than 20 years is a very long period. Private universities must end to be considered as properties of its founder. The lack of changes in the leading position of a university could hinder innovation and fruitful development. I think Hyperion University has been managed very well during the last 20 years. Nevertheless, an open discussion on the future of the institution and as much transparency as possible for management decisions could avoid critics and put the institution on a more solid base. As the new Romanian Law of National Education 2011 will regulate rector elections and re-elections also for private universities there will not be any long time rectors in future at private institutions too.
- It is not published who produced the ISER. By my impression many institutional leaders and interview partners as well as external stakeholders were not included into the discussion. I consider the self-assessment process as the most important part of the evaluation procedure. It is one of the rare advantages where the opinion leaders of a university come together in order to discuss the future of their institution. The ISER should be as much self-containing as possible and readable alone. It should contain all relevant information on the institution (legal framework, structure, governance and management, financial situation and buildings, teaching, students, research, staff, relations with external environment), give a description of the efforts with respect to quality assurance and internationalisation and include an outline of the institution's mission statement and strategic plan. Elaborating the ISER only as a duty for an external evaluation means a waste of time and losing a big chance. I encourage institutions to be more self critical in the ISER and to mention problems too. This could lead to a fruitful discussion on improvement and quality within the institution.
- Strengthen the corporate identity of Hyperion University by providing a common email address for staff and students. Use the same logo on all your printed materials and on your homepage (actually even the cards of the Vice-rectors do not have the

same lay-out).

- The existence of a University Ethic Commission has to be commended. But in order to be able to discuss and solve also sensitive tasks I strongly recommend installing an inter-university commission with half members coming from Hyperion University and the other half from other universities or other institutions. Only such a body will be really independent from "not wanted" influences.
- The financial resources of Hyperion University should be more diversified. Actually the University depends strongly on student fees. Try to open other sources by contracts and activities besides teaching.
- Strengthen relations and information flow with graduates and employers. These groups have mentioned their high appreciation for the institution. The University should make more use of this advantage and formalize the input from this group.
- Try to sign contracts of cooperation with other research institutions in order to be able to offer better research conditions for staff and students mainly in the technical disciplines.
- Strengthen student participation in decision making bodies and formalise student representation within the institution.

5. Quality Culture

The University has started with quality assurance procedures but the quality assurance system of the University is still not functioning. Quality assurance should not be an option for staff and students. It has to cover all aspects of the institution, namely teaching, research as well as governance and administration. Quality assessment should not be a burden but an instrument for improvement.

Recommendations:

- Define clear procedures how to improve teaching, research, governance and administration by the extensively collected information and the results of different evaluations.
- Use the collected data in order to provide advice. Develop mechanisms to support academic staff in their teaching and research missions.
- Secure that the evaluation of teachers by students is performed systematically and not considered as a superfluous option.

6. Teaching and Learning

All study programmes of Hyperion University are offered as Bachelor or Master programmes according to the Bologna system. ECTS have been introduced for all careers. There are 16 accredited Bachelor programmes of 3 years and two of 4 years (Law, Electronics and Applied Informatics) complemented by 13 accredited and one provisional authorised Master programmes. According to the provided information in different documents it is not clear, if the provisional authorized career "Community policies and social interventions" has already been liquidated. The quality of the formation is generally recognized by employers and graduates. But there are problems concerning the teacher/students rate and with the practical work in technical disciplines.

Recommendations:

- Evaluate periodically Bachelor- and Master-programmes with respect to learning outcomes, employability and internationalization.
- Increase autonomous student work and self learning parts. Strengthen practical parts of undergraduate education especially in technical disciplines. Enforce contacts between the University and enterprises in order to integrate students into project work. Base Master programmes more on research and include master students into research projects.
- Include stakeholders and employers into the discussion on curricula.
- Enforce internationalisation by using English text books beside Romanian literature. In the libraries there are hardly any books or journals in English language. On the information sheet for the algebra course for informatics is not mentioned a single reference book in English even not for the seminar.
- Reduce the teaching load of young teachers. It is unacceptable that some teachers have 24 hours per week in classroom.
- Fill in all empty teaching positions and do not give the teaching hours of empty positions to employed staff for extra remuneration.

7. Research

There is no description of a visible clear research policy of Hyperion University in the ISAR. The ISAR does not mention any concrete projects or institutional research tasks. Actually Hyperion University is definitely not a research university. Research in its international meaning is a scientific activity creating new knowledge near the frontiers of knowledge which is shared with the scientific community through publications. The translation of a text book into Romanian language or the elaboration of scripts for lectures are

very important tasks but not research in this sense. In most research areas at Hyperion University the few publications on research results are in Romanian language and produced by a very small group of persons. Research seems not to be a topic for the great majority of teachers.

Recommendations:

- Enforce research activities and try to move from a pure teaching university to a teaching university with research. (This would be also very important with respect to the new classification of Romanian universities.)
- Create critical masses by enforcing co-operations with other institutions.
- Support publications in English language.
- Recruit future academic staff defining concrete teaching and research profiles.
- Support young research staff by reduction of their teaching load and give financial support for teaching staff to participate in national and international conferences, in research collaborations and advanced training courses.
- Do not offer master programmes which are not based on research activities.

8. Internationalisation

In our globalised world internationalisation is an essential element of higher education development. Internationalisation is a multi-dimensional task taking into account mobility programmes, language policy, curricula, joint study and double degree programmes, collaborative research, conference attendance etc. In order to be competitive teaching and research have to be synchronized with the international scientific community.

Recommendations:

- Support mobility of teachers and students (install an office for international affairs - maybe in co-operation with other universities).
- Strengthen the foreign languages policy inside the institution.
- Orientate your curricula according to international standards.

9. Final Remarks

Please consider these remarks and comments as constructive critics. This report should assist Hyperion University to master its actual difficult situation and pursue its further

path of improvement. The Romanian mentality to wait for instructions from the government should be overcome and the autonomy given to universities in Romania fully used. Links to employers should be strengthened, co-operations established and curricula flexibly organised. The new Romanian legislation could be taken as a starting point to think in new directions such as mergers with other institutions in order to solve existing problems. Provided good and future oriented strategic decisions Hyperion University certainly has the capacity to become a recognised university of critical mass in all its installed study programmes and research fields.



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