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Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education
ARACIS

International Evaluator's Report

Moldova State University

6th of July 2023

Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as ARACIS International Expert Evaluator for the Institutional Evaluation of Moldova State University (MSU). The evaluation of the Moldova State University was carried out by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) jointly with the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research of Moldova (ANACEC), as a procedure of quality assurance aimed to certify fulfillment of operating standards of the evaluated institution.

For the evaluation process the following Experts Committee, in charge of Institutional Evaluation at the Moldova State University (MSU), was recruited:

Director ARACIS:

Prof. PhD Nicolae-Adrian Opre; Babes Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca Romania

Coordinator ARACIS:

Prof. PhD. Calin Rosca; University Transilvania Brasov Romania

Expert Evaluator ANACEC:

Prof. PhD. Lilian Saptefrati

International expert ARACIS:

Prof.PhD. Razvan Ionut Ghinea; University of Granada, Spain

Employees representative ANACEC:

Daniela Vacarciuc, Liceul "Vasile Alecsandri" Chisinau.

Student Evaluator ANACEC:

Lucia Pirau;

Student Evaluator ARACIS:

Buhus Stefanut Iulian; Vasile Alecsandri University Bacau

The on-site evaluation period extended from 29/05/2023 to 31/05/2023. After my appointment as an International Expert Evaluator, I was informed by the Director (Prof Dr. Adrian Opre, Babes Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca), the Coordinator (Prof. Calin Rosca; University Transilvania Brasov) as well as the Technical Assistant (Elena Catana - ARACIS) of the evaluation team on important aspects of the evaluation process, such as:

- Working methodology and the structure of the evaluation panels for Institutional Evaluation, including contact data;
- All important working documents, such as The Guidelines for Periodical External Evaluation of academic quality in accredited higher education institutions;
- Detailed meetings and visit schedule;
- Credentials and how to access the Internal evaluation reports and their annexes uploaded by the evaluated institution in the ARACIS cloud.

As stated in the Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, engagement with quality assurance processes, particularly the external ones, allows European higher education systems to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programs and other provision.

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes, including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritize different purposes, can view quality in higher education differently and quality assurance needs to consider these different perspectives. Quality, whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teaching staff, students, and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of the study programs, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus inter-related. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management.

The Moldova State University (MSU) is the first higher education institution with university status established in the Republic of Moldova as well as the first nationally accredited higher education institution in 2001 (and re-accredited in 2006). The educational process is carried out by an academic community that ensures meeting of the requirements of the labor market, adhering to modern training paradigms by joining the Bologna Process in May 2005. The MSU promotes academic freedom based on a constructive dialogue between students and academic staff. MSU also supports pluralism of opinions, creativity, as well as the tendency to ensure high quality of professional training.

For the purpose of the Institutional Evaluation carried out by ARACIS and ANACEC, the Evaluated Institution carefully prepared a Self-Assessment Report (SAR). This document was available as 51 pages .pdf document in the ARACIS cloud, and I was able to access it easily, on-time and as often as necessary. To support information included in the SAR, a large number of annexes were uploaded in the ARACIS cloud or were addressed as links to documents publicly available online in digital format. These documents were later completed with other additional documents, upon request from the evaluation panel. All these additional documents were uploaded to the ARACIS cloud or sent directly by e-mail to the evaluation panel.

The evaluation also benefited of a large series of on-site meetings with different MSU stakeholders, such as MSU Management and representatives, the contact person and the team that drafted the internal evaluation report, representatives of MSU Financial Offices,

Quality Management Department, Ethics Committee, teaching staff, MSU graduates, employers of MSU graduates, and MSU students. A visit to different MSU teaching and research facilities was also included, and members of the evaluation committee had the opportunity to visit, among others: several teaching spaces and research laboratories, University Housing, eating areas, Sports Palace, Culture House, Mediacor facilities, etc.

General Statements

According to the SAR, the MSU is one of the leading higher education institutions in Moldova, comprising 11 faculties running 62 bachelor's programs, 59 master's programs and benefiting of 6 doctoral schools (with a total number of 11401 students), being the largest higher education institution in the Republic of Moldova.

The MSU is recognized in the field of international higher education and is part of an international cooperation network, having signed 110 bilateral cooperation agreements with higher education institutions from 28 countries. In an effort to harmonize best practices and benchmark both educational and research activities, the MSU became a member of the Consortium of Universities of the Republic of Moldova - Romania - Ukraine (CUMRU) in 2011, associate member of the Universitaria Consortium since 2018, and member of the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA) since 2022.

The objectives of the MSU are set in the Development Strategy 2021-2026, derive from its mission, and represent 8 priorities: ensuring guaranteed conditions for quality studies; promoting research excellence; leveraging human potential and supporting cultural and sports performance within the institution; creating a student-friendly university environment; international academic openness and cooperation; digitization of the MSU; promoting the MSU identity and image and strengthening institutional management and financial capacity.

According to MSU representatives, the mission of the MSU is achieved through implementation of Institutional Strategies, in agreement with both national Education and Development and benchmarked with international documents and agreements in the field of education. MSU also developed a common Action Plan to achieve strategic objectives as well as Annual Activity Plans for each entity. Annual activities are focused on a measurable outcome and represent a core indicator of the process of achieving the MSU strategic objectives. As resulted from the available documents and information, MSU has a strategy in place for internationalization, to promote study programs, for teaching staff policies, quality assurance, and development of doctoral studies, among others.

The MSU encourages transparency and participation in strategic planning and decision-making, and actively involves in related activities the academic community (decision-makers, academic staff, students) and stakeholders, including representatives from the social and professional environment. During on-site meetings with some of MSU stakeholders, they all agreed that both stakeholders and MSU can further benefit from constant and closer cooperation. I was pleasantly surprised to check that most of the employers' representatives

constantly collaborated with MSU for different activities: they were consulted regarding curricula modifications, they were invited for lecturing; they receive students in practice at their companies, etc.

After analyzing the available documents, the on-line available information as well as after on-site meetings and discussions, several aspects might be highlighted. According to the discussions with employers of MSU graduates, overall, they were satisfied with the level of training of the graduates as well as their considerably high level of knowledge. Some of the MSU stakeholders suggested that MSU should promote more practical activities, team and collaborative work, IT and Digital skills, Project Management skills and Project-based learning, a better training on foreign languages (mostly English and in some cases, technical and specific English was suggested), or better equipment available within teaching laboratories. Also, most of the employers highlighted the need of a better preparation on entrepreneurial skills for MSU students. Of course, the suggestions largely depended on the professional profile of the employers and the graduate that they seek to enroll. Employers and former students of MSU also suggested to explore the possibility of creating an MSU Alumni organizations that can also act as an advisory board or committee for MSU.

Comments/Recommendations:

- An asymmetrical development (in terms of available spaces and equipment) between different faculties was observed. MSU is encouraged to increase efforts to ensure overall equal development of all the faculties.
- Continuously adapt educational offer according to societal needs and after consulting with all relevant stakeholders.
- Increase, where possible, frequency and duration of practical activities, and try to adapt these activities to societal and economical requirements.
- Map existing courses that might be offered to different degrees within the same Faculties to promote transversal knowledge for students.
- Increase efforts towards offering professional development programs and opportunities for the support and administrative staff.
- Develop closer links with potential employers of the graduates, by perhaps meeting on regular basis and consult, this way developing stronger real partnerships for future mutual benefit.

Managerial Structure

MSU has an organizational structure that corresponds to quality standards in higher education, an elected management structure organized in accordance with legal provisions and its own regulations, and a medium-term strategy whose objectives are achieved stage by stage and integrated into annual operational plans.

The MSU Senate is the supreme collective governing body. The system of governing bodies of the MSU also includes the Board of Administration, which implements the decisions adopted by the Senate, by the ISDC and the Scientific Council, which coordinates research, innovation and technology transfer; the Rector who ensures the operational management of the MSU, being assisted by the Vice-Rectors (Senate Office), the Faculty Board which includes teaching and scientific staff, as well as students, all subdivisions of the Faculty being represented based on the principle of equal rights; the Department of Quality Management whose mission is to monitor the structures for ensuring the quality of education within the MSU, as well as ensuring the curricular conditions for the integration of the MSU into the European education area.

The representatives of the university community, such as teaching staff, researchers, employees as well as students can participate in the management and decision-making processes by submitting proposals/suggestions/recommendations for improvement of university activity at regular meetings of the university divisions to which they belong.

MSU has an effective administration, which ensures good management of income and expenditure budget. However, MSU is encouraged to carefully monitor and maintain an operating surplus and a low share of salary expenses in total income, to ensure the financial stability of the institution in the medium term and to allow for investments. This is especially important within the context of merging with several research institutes, that put additional pressure on the financial balance of MSU. Also, the student-dependent financing might also force MSU management to tackle future difficulties if the demographic development of the country does not vary in the short-medium term. Additionally, MSU needs to continue efforts towards a wider digitalization of the administrative processes, as many of them are still required to be done on-site at the different administrative offices (such as Faculty Secretariat, for example).

Comments/Recommendations:

- Increase efforts to accelerate digitization of all types of administrative processes carried out within MSU.
- Actively promote MSU identity and institutional image.
- Increase visibility and attractiveness of educational offer at MSU.
- Continue the current financial policy, with the maintenance of an operating surplus, in order to ensure the financial stability of the institution in the medium term and to allow for investments.
- Strengthen the institutional management and financial capacity of MSU by diversifying possible alternative sources of income (such as services to companies and society, research grants, etc.).
- Permanently pursue to benchmark MSU internal regulations (and consequent implementation) with in place national regulations regarding Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions.

Teaching Staff

The Evaluated Institution has made consistent efforts to assure the competence of their staff. Fair and transparent processes are applied for the recruitment and development of their teaching and research staff. The areas of activity at the MSU are interconnected, meaning that the teaching staff is carrying out both scientific and research activities through organization and participation in national and international scientific events, research projects and publications of scientific papers.

The Evaluated Institution assumes responsibility for the quality of their staff and provides a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. It was confirmed that the Evaluated Institution sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognize the importance of both teaching and research; offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff; encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research and encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

According to the discussions with MSU representatives, it seems that, mainly as a consequence of the decreasing number of students, an important part of newly hired teaching staff is offered contract for limited periods. Unfortunately, this might cause instability in terms of teaching staff pool and might discourage possible candidates to apply or pursue professional careers within MSU. During discussions, MSU representatives highlighted that the lack of full benchmarking between MSU internal regulations (and consequent implementation) with in place national regulations regarding Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions led to an unbalance within the teaching staff pool at MSU. On some segments of the educational process there is a negative future provision of teaching staff.

According to discussions during on-site meetings, MSU is focusing on providing training for the teaching staff, which was confirmed during discussions with MSU teaching staff, as they indicated that they are continuously participating in training activities, and that they receive constant information regarding all the available training activities from MSU. Also, there is a tracking and a feedback system in place for staff participating in this type of activities, as well as a reward system for participants. Teaching staff at MSU expressed their concern regarding the decreasing number of students as consequence of the demographical problem that affects the country. They also highlighted the need to continuously improve teaching and research premises across all MSU Faculties, as the development seems asymmetrical. The need to improve available teaching and research facilities was also highlighted by MSU graduates during on-site meetings.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *To continue good policies and practices in terms of quality of teaching and research staff.*

- *Design new strategy and policies to offer long-term contracts for teaching staff in order to attract highly skilled possible candidates that might be interested in pursuing professional careers within MSU.*
- *Continue to identify and use innovative techniques for effective teaching/learning, including the use of new technologies and the organization of training sessions for academic staff and try to maximize participation to these type of training sessions.*
- *Promote the continuous professional training of teaching staff to acquire new skills, methods and techniques that can further improve their teaching activity.*
- *Develop strategies and policies aimed at maintaining a properly balanced age-wise teaching staff pool.*
- *Continuous analysis of the teaching staff structure in relation to the objectives set in the field of quality assurance and compliance with legal provisions.*
- *Monitor the ratio of academic/teaching staff to students and benchmark with other reference universities within the country or abroad.*

Facilities

MSU enjoys modern material and technical resources that support student and academic staff activities, creating a favorable environment for education and research. The University infrastructure includes 12 study buildings, 12 dormitories, a library with reading rooms, a Sports Palace, a House of Culture, eating areas, practicum and recreational facilities.

During on-site visit, a large number of teaching spaces and laboratories were observed. I was happy to see that most of the facilities (which corresponded to different Faculties) are well equipped and fit for their purpose. Also, teaching staff has allocated spaces, in most cases in shared offices. Additionally, co-working spaces, IT rooms, cafeterias and other student-related facilities were available across the majority of the visited sites. However, as mentioned before, there are still notable differences among different Faculties, and MSU should increase efforts towards ensuring symmetrical development of all teaching facilities and buildings. During discussions with students, teaching staff and MSU graduates, some of them expressed their concerns on the available teaching resources and overall conditions in some of the teaching spaces. Students also were unsatisfied by the fact that some of the co-working spaces or IT rooms are not permanently open and is often required to ask and be granted a permit to access them. MSU also acquired license for different software corresponding to the directions and subjects of study in the curricula, such as Microsoft package made available to MSU students and employees; Teams for online activities, access to EduRoam network services, etc. All courses are developed through the Moodle university platform. During the on-site visit, it was certified that there is WiFi (with EduRoam) coverage

among the vast majority of teaching and research facilities, but sometimes the connectivity speed was low.

MSU provides their students, within the Central University Library, with a large multidisciplinary collection (books, manuscripts, magazines, doctoral theses, PhD summaries, electronic documents, etc.) in different languages and includes an online Electronic Catalog, which provides access to the information resources of university libraries and to external scientific resources (such as SpringerLink; EBSCO platform; Research4life portal, etc.). The university also has its own Printing House that helps both students and teachers to print teaching materials. During the on-site visit it was confirmed that the library is working on the principle of open shelf for the majority of the documents available, and that students also have available co-working space within MSU premises. The MSU Institutional Repository (RI-MSU) is an open electronic archive, intended to accumulate and disseminate the scientific production of university researchers. This resource has been developed by the MSU library since 2016 and currently includes 8965 documents.

In addition to educational spaces and digital platforms for studies and research, the university provides students with a Sports Palace, a university subdivision with the following objectives: ensuring optimal conditions for carrying out the instructional process in the Physical Education discipline; diversification of sports and leisure activities for people who practice a healthy way of life, and providing sports services to individuals and legal entities outside of study hours. The Sports Palace is equipped with a handball court, a mini-football stadium, 3 basketball courts, 3 volleyball courts, 6 badminton courts, a fitness room, a tennis hall, a swimming pool with an area of 275 m², 2 saunas, a multi-purpose hall, and a gym with modern equipment. A total of 14 sports clubs are available to all MSU students and employees. During the on-site visit, although overall equipment and facilities available at the Sports Place seemed fit for their purpose, some of the available facilities might require equipment update or renovations in the near future.

MSU benefits of a Health Service Centre - "Universitatea" Medical Centre – that provides basic healthcare to MSU students and staff; 3 different museums (Museum of Natural Sciences; "Tudor Arnăuț" antiquities museum and "Nicolae Dabija" Museum) and a House of Culture –where most of the cultural activities at MSU take place, as well as teaching activities and other services for students of the Faculty of Fine Arts. The MSU House of Culture has a concert hall with 500 seats, 17 auditoriums and theatre and ballet halls, musical instruments, costumes, teaching materials, etc., which ensure favorable conditions for the study process. However, during the on-site visit, although overall equipment and facilities available at the House of Culture seemed fit for their purpose, some of the available facilities might require equipment update or renovations in the near future.

The MSU student complex is an institutional entity made up of 12 student dormitories (University Housing) that offer accommodation for students and MSU collaborators. The overall accommodation capacity is of 1849 places. During the on-site visit, several University Housing facilities were visited. The accommodation conditions at the visited sites are really

good, as students are provided not only with proper living spaces, but also with a large variety of services, such as access to kitchen, lavatory, library, co-working, conference spaces, and recreational facilities. However, during discussions with MSU students, it seems that not all of these services are available at all University Housing facilities.

Lastly, it has to be mentioned that MSU realized a series of important improvements of the available facilities, and a clear example is MEDIACOR, the first digital-media production center in Moldova, with an area of 3000 square meters. During the on-site visit, it was proven that Mediacor is an outstanding facility which offers excellent opportunities to students to develop their study paths as well as other stakeholders to develop their activities.

Comments/Recommendations:

- Continue to develop the available teaching and research infrastructure and, where appropriate, consider upgrading existing premises, based on realistic investment plans in relation to projected revenues.
- Maintain efforts to continuously improve accommodation conditions and available services across all available University Housing facilities.
- Ensure permanent and easy access to all teaching and/or co-working spaces available in the different faculties.
- Continue efforts towards constant development of existing IT Systems and upgrade of the institution's network infrastructure and digitization.
- Expand high-speed Wi-Fi coverage and Eduroam coverage to as many as possible buildings and facilities.
- Consider the possibility of expanding the available space for the Health Center, as well as the number of staff. Also, consider diversify the range of available medical services, after consultation with stakeholders, as it is currently very limited.
- Increase number of available documents in the MSU Institutional Repository by mapping all scientific output delivered within MSU.
- Maintain subscription to software packages as well as continuously identify possible needs of both teaching/research staff and students in order to expand subscription and/or acquire more software packages.
- Supplement the library stock with books/volumes/scientific papers that are included in a course as bibliographical references.
- Continuous analysis of the opportunity to develop the book collection / other library resources, by acquiring titles published in recent years, related to all disciplines of study.
- Popularize among students (especially those at Master and PhD level) access to online scientific database and the culture of searching for information in scientific articles.
- Continue to equip all rooms related to teaching activities (lectures, seminars,

projects, workshops, etc.) with most recent technical equipment.

- Increase efforts to expand University cafeterias - eating areas - available for students and teaching staff.
- Access for disabled persons (teaching and/or research staff, students or any other stakeholder) in all MSU facilities and buildings should be solved progressively, taking into consideration architectural and structural limitations of older buildings. In any case, it is highly recommended that any new building to be designed to grant access for disabled persons.

Students

Overall, students are satisfied with the quality of the educational services at MSU, as well as largely satisfied with the available teaching infrastructure. Also, students feel supported by MSU management and teaching staff. The MSU students are represented by MSU Student Self-Government (ASUSM) which aims to identify and solve problems related to student activity. During discussions with MSU students, it seemed that they were not clearly aware of the procedures in place to be elected as Student Representatives. Some suggested that they are selected and proposed by Faculty Management while others indicated that they are selected by vote, during meetings in which might participate both students and Faculty management members (such as deans or vice-deans). This does not seem like the best approach, and MSU should encourage establishment of clear procedures for election and proposal of student representatives within different bodies, in which, ideally, only the student's association (ASUSM) should be involved. During on-site meetings, students were also inquired on the procedure of Student election in the Ethics Committee, but participants seemed largely unaware of it.

According to the SAR, MSU has a well-developed framework for Student Support System. Within MSU, the career guidance of students and the monitoring of their professional development is done by the Centre for Career Guidance and Labour Market Relations, which has been operating since 2014. However, when inquired regarding the activity of this Center, both students and graduates of MSU were largely unaware of the activities that the Centre is offering nor interacted often with it or its representatives.

According to MSU representatives, the teaching staff of the Department of Psychology contribute to supporting students in adapting to the increasingly demanding conditions of modern society, by promoting emotional well-being and personal development. Other services offered to students are individual counseling, psychological diagnosis/assessment, organization of trainings, workshops, etc. Additionally, every member of the teaching staff has available consultation hours to interact with students.

Efforts have been made to offer conditions and personalized degree programs for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Also, architectural modifications were made to allow access to disabled people to some of the MSU facilities (for example the

Law School). In this sense, MSU has to continue efforts to adapt as many as possible premises to ensure proper access to all types of students.

Students were familiar with the procedures required to access University housing and considered the price as affordable. Also, they were generally satisfied with the level of cleanliness and services provided. However, it seems that there are still some University Housing where accommodation conditions still might be improved.

Students were also aware of the procedures that are carried out for evaluating the teaching staff. Although clear improvements have been made in past years, students were unhappy that they were not able to clearly see the implementation of the results of the teaching staff evaluation.

Comments/Recommendations:

- The evaluated institution is encouraged to try to motivate students to take more responsibility and ownership for the development of the institution.
- To ensure proper functioning in the future, MSU must increase efforts towards attracting more students, by implementing active and diversified strategies towards this scope.
- Increase awareness among students of the existence and activities developed by the Centre for Career Guidance and Labour Market Relations.
- Continue efforts to digitize the administrative process of submission, collection of certificates, diplomas, etc.
- Encourage establishment of clear procedures for election and proposal of student representatives within different bodies, in which, ideally, only the student's association (ASUSM) should be involved.

Research

According to the SAR, MSU supports and promotes fundamental and applied research in the fields of natural sciences, engineering sciences and technologies, social sciences, humanities and arts and agricultural sciences. MSU has also developed a Research-Development-Innovation Strategy for 2022-2026. The strategic mission of organizing and conducting fundamental and applied scientific research is geared towards solving current socio-economic problems and achieving technological transfer of the results of university scientific research set out in the MSU Development Strategy (2021-2026).

During the reporting period, MSU conducted research in partnership with different education and research institutions from the Republic of Moldova and has signed approximately 150 bilateral agreements with research and innovation organizations from 38 different countries, that stipulate provisions on the joint efforts to identify research directions in relation to pressing societal problems, to carry out research and innovation at a high quality

level, including the use of the partners' infrastructure, efficient use and dissemination of the results etc. According to the provided documents, MSU has a good dynamic in terms of scientific events participation and organization, publication of scientific papers, as well as developed patent applications (with a light decrease in recent years). There is a visible rise in the number of scientific publications of academic staff as well as in their quality.

As a result of the merge with 13 research institutes, the scientific staff at MSU increased to 1053, of which 871 are full-time teaching and 182 are external staff. To provide opportunities for continuing doctoral studies, 6 doctoral schools operate within the MSU. In order to support the technology transfer activity, MSU has created the necessary organizational framework by establishing the Office of Innovation and Technology Transfer as a separate structural subdivision. The research and innovation are based on adequate financial support, with an increase in flows from national research projects and institutional funding, while sources from co-financing by economic agents, the provision of research services and international projects are fluctuating. In the immediate past years, as the number of grant applications increased, the ratio of successful application somehow decreased.

Comments/Recommendations:

- Continue to equip all research and teaching laboratories with equipment and resources so they can meet the requirements, at least at a minimum level, of dealing with current scientific topics in the fields assumed by the institution.
- Continue efforts to link scientific research to the needs and requirements of economic and societal needs.
- Identify and support the development of long-term research, including inter- and transdisciplinary approaches.
- Perform regular analysis of the results of research activity and setting up mechanisms to increase scientific production and international recognition of MSU researchers.
- Continue efforts to direct the results of scientific research towards publications and other results with national and international relevance.
- Continuous development of master and doctoral studies by offering more comprehensive programs.
- Increase support for MSU researchers to apply for national and international research grants and to participate in research-related events.

Internationalization

International cooperation is considered as an important aspect of MSU's activity, as it contributes critically to the strengthening of quality, to the streamlining of research and the educational process, but also to the creation of a competitive academic community in a continuous institutional development. Intensifying the process of internationalization of the MSU is one of the priorities of the strategic plan for 2021-2026. As it can be concluded after analyzing the available documents and after on-site meetings and discussions, MSU has created an institutional framework that encourages the international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and research-development-innovation activities as well as the cultural openness of its members.

Academic mobility makes it possible to significantly deepen cooperation between institutions, but also has wider connections, a positive impact on overall scientific and cultural cooperation. In this sense, academic mobility is encouraged by academic staff members through different tools: announcements on the MSU website, on MSU social media channels, and through regular information and guidance sessions. During the reference period, about 120 students benefited from academic mobility, studying at different university centers in EU countries. Students from partner universities have also benefited from academic mobility within MSU, although their number was not very high. The academic mobility is recognized according to the Inter-institutional Agreement and the provisions of the Study Agreement. As for the participation of teaching staff in teaching or research mobility, these are carried out in accordance with the inter-institutional agreements signed between MSU and partner institutions. During the reference period, about 50 teaching staff benefited from teaching or training mobility in different university centers in EU countries, while 33 teaching staff members from partner universities carried out teaching activities in MSU Faculties. In the current academic year, three foreign faculty members (Poland, Spain, Turkey) are employed at the Faculty of Letters.

The study programs within the MSU are also correlated with the Internationalization Strategy of the MSU, focus being placed on intensifying and increasing the quality of activities of international university collaboration and increasing the degree of internationalization of academic activities. According to MSU representatives, study programs are continuously benchmarked with similar study programs of international universities, ensuring the compatibility of the programs and the necessary premises for potential academic mobility. Additionally, the strategic priorities of the EU with reference to higher education and the skills demanded by the labor market were also considered and were reflected in the skills system and study contents.

Internationalization of the study programs at MSU is also achieved by coordinating the education plans with similar documents of partner international universities, increasing the academic mobility of students, co-opting foreign students, intensifying academic mobility and participating in international conferences of teaching staff, co-opting foreign teaching staff, or

cooperating with foreign universities within international projects.

Within MSU, are operating 11 joint study programmes (4 master's programmes and 7 bachelor's programmes), based on inter-university collaboration agreements regarding joint study programmes.

Comments/Recommendations:

- Actively seek and promote agreements to increase number of available student and teacher mobility opportunities.
- Increase efforts toward development and implementation of study programs in foreign languages.
- Increase the number of joint degree programs at Bachelor and Master level.
- Increase number of co-tutelle PhD programs.
- Actively promote both student and teaching staff mobilities.
- Further strengthen in-place partnerships with foreign universities and actively look to establish new international network for teaching and research support.
- Develop a strategy to increase awareness and disseminate good practices in the field of internationalization throughout the MSU community.
- Consider allocate more financial and human resources to the administrative structures in charge of exploring and developing international relations at MSU.
- Actively promote the university and its educational offer through University website, international educational web platforms and participation in educational fairs.
- Consider making most of the relevant information regarding MSU activity and study programs available in foreign languages.

Quality Management

MSU has established a quality management system since 2005, based on the quality assurance policy, the creation of a separate structural subdivision and a set of procedures governing the management, evaluation and continuous improvement of the quality of educational services provided. Quality assurance is achieved through the Quality Management System, which is supported by an organizational structure, resources and responsibilities. At university level, the Senate establishes the strategy, policy, objectives and priorities in the field of quality, it supervises their implementation, allocates and verifies the budgetary funds necessary to achieve the objectives. The Quality Council (QC) designs, monitors the implementation, and improves the Quality Management System, while the Board of Directors develops and proposes regulations and methodologies in the field of quality management. One important actor within the Quality assurance ecosystem is the Department of Quality Management (DQM), which implements and monitors the MSU Quality

Management System. At faculty level, the responsibility for quality assurance is placed on the Faculty Council, which designs the quality assurance process at faculty level and the Quality Assurance Committee which promotes the quality assurance policy, coordinates, monitors, and ensures the implementation of the Quality Management System at faculty level. A Quality assurance specialist, who is also a member of the Quality Assurance Committee at the Faculty, is appointed at the department and ensures proper functioning of the quality management activities and the promotion of the culture of quality at the department. Following the active involvement of quality management structures in promoting the culture of quality, the academic community is consolidated around the common institutional concept of providing quality educational services and ensuring the development of qualified staff.

The institutional quality assurance policy is focused on the principle of improving the quality of all services provided at the institutional level, strengthening the quality management system and the partnerships with the beneficiaries of educational services, diversifying and correlating study programs with the strategic priorities of the state and aligning the institutional quality management system with international standards.

As an example of good practice, MSU promotes students surveys on quality of teaching, surveyed employees and beneficiaries of educational services in order to identify problems and set priorities for the development of MSU Development Strategy 2021-2026, the DQM organized the Student survey on the Assessment of students' level of professional and personal development satisfaction, surveyed teaching staff on job satisfaction, etc. The outcomes of these surveys are examined at different levels (within the departments, Quality Assurance Committee meetings, etc.) to assess their relevance and applicability in the teaching-learning process and others MSU activities.

As extracted from the analysis of the available documents as well as discussion with MSU representatives, the Ethics Committee has somehow limited attributions and possible ethical issues are received by the Committee only after all other legal possible solutions are explored. The Committee only acts if requested, and it was not clear if it can act on self-request.

The external quality assurance in its various forms verifies the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives. The Evaluated Institution participates in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.

The evaluated institution proved to have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The policy has a formal status and is publicly available. The quality assurance policies at MSU reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach.

Comments/Recommendations:

- MSU principles of quality assurance of educational and research services, the methodology of quality management, the structures involved in quality assurance, as well as the procedures for ensuring educational effectiveness correspond to international standards.
- MSU benefits of the presence, functionality and effectiveness of quality management system structures as well as internal regulatory framework.
- The quality management system has organizational structure at all levels: institutional, faculty, department.
- Part of the scientific and teaching staff at MSU have experience in quality assurance procedures.
- In order to create a real climate of quality culture, the institution is encouraged to more actively promote the purpose and benefits of quality assurance procedures among both staff and students.
- The student satisfaction questionnaires should be filled at least once a year by the majority of students (at all levels). Consequently, the evaluation results should be considered for strategic decision-making. Both the results as well as the consequences are highly recommended to be made publicly available (as for example, on the institutional website).
- Increase efforts towards improving the activity of the Ethics Committee. If not available, develop a mechanism enabling the Committee to act upon the principles of self-request.
- Cyclical external evaluations should be performed with a higher frequency (ideally at 5 years interval), unless national laws and provisions recommend otherwise.
- Continuously carry out benchmarking studies in the field of quality assurance and align with national/international universities.
- Continuously collect feedback from the students regarding their career perspectives as they get closer to finishing their studies.
- To promote among different stakeholders (specially students) strategical decision-making and implementation carried out as a consequence of the results of the learning/development environment quality assessment.
- Further increase efforts to inform students on the available procedures to evaluate teaching staff.
- Continuous analysis of the information posted on the institution's website and its updating, as well as identification of the most intuitive sections for posting information for various categories of stakeholders.
- To communicate effectively and to publish on the institutional website any action planned or taken as a result of the monitoring and update of the study programs.
- Increase efforts of involving students and other stakeholders in the monitoring and review of the study programs.

Conclusions:

Moldova State University is one of the leading higher education institutions in Moldova, comprising 11 faculties running 62 bachelor's programs, 59 master's programs and benefiting of 6 doctoral schools (with a total number of 11401 students), being the largest higher education institution in the Republic of Moldova. The MSU is recognized in the field of international higher education and is part of an international cooperation network, having signed 110 bilateral cooperation agreements with higher education institutions from 28 countries. The objectives of the MSU set in the Development Strategy 2021-2026 derive from its mission, and represent 8 priorities: ensuring guaranteed conditions for quality studies; promoting research excellence; leveraging human potential and supporting cultural and sports performance within the institution; creating a student-friendly university environment; international academic openness and cooperation; digitization of the MSU; promoting the MSU identity and image and strengthening institutional management and financial capacity.

As resulted from the available documents and information, MSU has a strategy in place for internationalization, to promote study programs, for teaching staff policies, quality assurance, and development of doctoral studies, among others. The MSU encourages transparency and participation in strategic planning and decision-making, and actively involves in related activities the academic community (decision-makers, academic staff, students) and stakeholders, including representatives from the social and professional environment.

The evaluated institution proved to have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The policy has a formal status and is publicly available. The quality assurance policies at MSU reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. After analyzing the documents provided by the evaluated institution as well as documents available online or requested during the visit, it was clarified the organization of the quality assurance system within MSU; it was demonstrated that departments, schools, faculties and other organizational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students participate in quality assurance procedures; academic integrity and freedom is supported, that the Evaluated Institution is vigilant against academic fraud and that the Evaluated Institution is vigilant against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff and lastly. Also, the involvement of external and internal stakeholders in quality assurance was certified. It can be stated that MSU principles of quality assurance of educational and research services, the methodology of quality management, the structures involved in quality assurance, as well as the procedures for ensuring educational effectiveness correspond to international standards. However, in order to create a real climate of quality culture, the



institution is encouraged to further promote the purpose and benefits of quality assurance procedures among both staff and students. Also, MSU should more actively promote among different stakeholders strategical decision-making and implementation carried out as a consequence of the results of the learning/development environment quality assessment.

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