



Report

of the foreign evaluator for

“Universitatea Eftimie Murgu”
din Reșița

FOREIGN EVALUATOR EXPERT

Date:June 2017.....
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Signature:



Foreword

On May 15th 2017, I received an invitation from ARACIS to participate in the evaluation of UEMR. My participation was finalized by a contract which was accepted May 24th.

As is customary with institutional ARACIS evaluation, the foreign expert participates in the activities of the institutional group whereas the programme group is composed exclusively of Romanian auditors.

Personal background

I have been a full member of the French accreditation agency for engineering programmes, Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs – CTI, for two 4-year mandates (which cannot be extended) and one 4-year mandate as an “expert” to CTI, participating in CTI international promotion and helping the full members during the evaluation visits.

I occasionally collaborate with foreign accreditation agencies. My most recent involvements were with Belgian AEQES¹ (2016-2017: intermediate evaluation of computer science programmes in French-speaking universities and institutes), with Spanish ANECA² (2015, institutional evaluation of National Polytechnic University of Armenia in Erevan) and with ARACIS (2015, institutional evaluation of Technical University in Iași; 2016, institutional evaluation of UNEFS in București).

Considering this background, I focused my attention on the normative quality aspects present in UEMR.

Preliminary work

The [English] university self-evaluation report is an 88-pages document structured in nineteen short chapters grouped in three thematic sections. It gives a synthetic overview of the institution with pointers to extensive annexes (written in Romanian).

The self-evaluation report addresses items expected from a quality point of view without giving details on programmes offered by UEMR. The university has clearly identified the main threat as the decline in student application, but this is not followed by an analysis on the strengths which could give leads on compensation actions. A complete SWOT (strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats) analysis would have been a plus to show that UEMR staff has an objective knowledge of its institution and its place in Romania, notably in relation to its competitors.

1 Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité dans l'Enseignement Supérieur, agency for quality evaluation in higher education

2 Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación



AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Membră cu drepturi depline în Asociația Europeană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior ENQA
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Bd. Mărăști nr.59, sector 1, București, România

Mission

Missions are presented in the mandatory normative requirement part. They are developed in standard “administrative” form with all legal references.

From my point of view, they are not sustained by a strategic vision clearly exposing some breaking difference compared to competitors, notably Timișoara university. UEMR claims to be a university “in the region for the region” but does not substantiate this motto by rational points able to improve its fame among possible employers (from outside) looking for local opportunities.

UEMR deliberately chose to conduct applied research, not fundamental research. This is a very sensible choice considering the local potential business partners and their contractual needs.

UEMR also claims unique features or capabilities in its engineering programmes but does not highlight them. Such an emphasis could help promote the university towards new candidates, possibly beyond its traditional recruiting area, all over Romania.

Recommendation: *UEMR should develop a communication highlighting its unique traits and explaining how it stands out from its competitors (own domains of excellence).*

Resources

Student candidates

UEMR has interesting indicators about students.

One of them shows the continuous decline of the total number, reducing UEMR to the rank of “small” university. This decrease in attractivity does not seem to be fought by an aggressive communication.

A second indicator analyses the evolution of the population in every programme, year after year. It shows, as is now usual in Europe, that the main failure rate is concentrated on the first year. UEMR breaks the raw failure number into detailed categories. From this analysis, the main cause is insufficient results to which is added in the engineering programmes about 25% of personal resignation (the students realizing they are probably not capable of providing the required effort to succeed in their studies). All in all, the failure rate is roughly 50% in engineering and 20% in other programmes. Once the first year is passed, loss in students is moderate but for engineering programmes: graduation rate for bachelor cycle is ~26% in engineering and 60-66% in others.

Surprisingly, graduation rate for master cycle is 65-70% (with a low 55% in economics) where a higher 80% is usual because students are supposed familiar with expected requirements in a university environment.

A third indicator shows the programmes “employability factor” as the ratio of working graduates 6 months after graduation. Engineering programmes demonstrate a superior job qualification (~80% versus



less than 40% after bachelor and figures 10% lower on average after master³). This indicator should be used to promote engineering programmes towards candidate students and help them choosing an adequate training.

Teaching staff

The constant decrease in student number has important consequence on the teaching staff: the number of legally authorized positions follows the student trend, maintaining a supervision ratio of 17-20 students per permanent professor (considered as an upper limit by Western European standards). This is a global figure, it varies widely among the programmes due to the specific failure rates.

Recommendation: *the Ministry for Higher Education should allocate resources so that the supervision ratio does not reach an unacceptable level.*

Equipment

Visit of the facilities showed satisfactory technical equipment (for engineering programmes) and an effort to keep abreast with technology evolution. However, computer inventory is rather old and this questions the capacity of UEMR to offer state-of-the-art software applications to its students and researchers.

Recommendation: *UEMR should sustain a continuous maintenance effort during the next years to upgrade the teaching equipment, maybe through new sources of revenues.*

Training outcome

UEMR does not make a clear distinction between the bachelor and master levels: competences are not really different (for example in human management skills where a master graduate is supposed more autonomous than a bachelor graduate). UEMR explained that even employers in Romania have no specific requirement towards the two population as demonstrated by the seemingly equivalent wages offered.

Recommendation: *UEMR is encouraged to clarify the distinction between bachelor and master levels.*

Every programme is described in term of domain-specific and transverse competences. Transverse competences encompass “soft” skills such as management and communication. Domain-specific competences are directly related to the programme. Both competence categories are defined by a higher authority and are shared by all universities. It seems to me that UEMR is bound by this “external” definition and cannot “customize” the competence list by adding one or two competences which would distinguish its programme offer from the corresponding ones elsewhere. Consequently, in public opinion, all programmes are equivalent and the choice is made on criteria not related to the programmes

3 This “anomalous” situation may be related with the remark on bachelor/master positioning in the Romanian job market. See Training outcome above.



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themselves.

Recommendation: UEMR is encouraged to extend the competences description to highlight its unique features, within the limits imposed by legislation.

Students

Students did not express any complaint about UEMR.

Student representatives in the Senate and other committees can give their opinion which is considered by other members.

Programme and professor evaluation is conducted through electronic questionnaires. The only shortcoming is students have no feed back on the the follow-up, even in an “neutral” form.

Recommendation: UEMR should close the feedback loop of the evaluation process by returning information to the students.

Employers and authorities

The meeting with employers and authorities soon turned into a passionate arena where participants expressed their strong support to UEMR.

UEMR is located in a area plagued by a crisis caused by the transition from an economy based on base industries (steel works, machinery, equipment for power plants) to a not yet finalized future. Unemployment is rising and services like social assistance are developing instead instead of “self-sustaining productive” activities.

In this climate, local authorities consider UEMR as an indispensable tool helping to solve the crisis by providing skilled personnel. They may be the originators of the motto “a university in the region for the region” which may hinder UEMR development outside Caraș-Severin.

Employers acclaim the usefulness of the engineering programmes and regret that they graduate in insufficient number.

This shows a discrepancy between the real “production” of UEMR and employer needs: the majority of students graduate in economics or social sciences where job opportunities are in engineering (apart from the political support in social assistance).

Once again, this questions the capacity of UEMR to highlight its unique features, transform them into strengths and promote them outside its traditional recruiting area to find students able to complete the cycle(s) with success.

Employers did not suggest any lead to explore to try and correct the present situation but they consider any drastic event affecting UEMR would have adverse effect on the present economic situation.



Recommendation: UEMR should create closed links with employers to suggest development tracks to better suit economic needs.

Quality management

The self-evaluation report describes the quality system implemented at UEMR. The procedures and instructions are annexed to the report, with constant references to the Demming model (plan-do-check-act). However their number immediately questions the way quality is perceived in everyday activity: quality is supposed to help agents not to block their creativity. Due to the language barrier, I had no opportunity to discuss with people (outside management) to evaluate acceptance of the quality system.

From the management point of view, the quality system is the tool of choice to follow progress on the various improvement plans. It is the basis of human resources management (teaching and non-teaching staff).

A wealth of data is collected through the system (for example, the evolution of the student population) but it seems their worth is under-estimated and largely under-exploited. A careful analysis could provide cues to symptoms in student failure and eventually suggest corrective measures.

Quality culture is already ancient at UEMR as is demonstrated by a poster in the library exhibiting an (expired) ISO-9001 certificate. This culture if shared by all can be an effective and efficient tool to face the challenges to adapt UEMR to its changing environment.

Recommendation: UEMR should care to maintain usefulness to its quality system without restricting personnel initiative.

Conclusion

UEMR has implemented a thorough quality system which allows to easily identify points needing attention. Among these, student admission is too much based local recruitment which induces a threat on university future. Enlarging admission and changing student distribution among the faculties are key elements to face the foreseeable challenges. However, they require acting on factors external to the university (national reputation of UEMR, motivation of candidate-students in secondary schools, orientation of candidates toward programmes in adequation with job market, ...) in addition to a general communication effort based on UEMR unique features.

In my opinion, UEMR deserves a **fair degree of confidence** rating.