



Individual Report for the University Stefan Cel Mare in Suceava

Commendations and Recommendations

By Bastian Baumann, Independent Higher Education Consultant

On the basis of the self-evaluation report and different interviews undertaken at the University Stefan Cel Mare in Suceava (USV), I would like to make a few commendations and recommendations or suggestions for the university to continue its process of continuously enhancing the quality of its operations.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the management of USV as well as its entire staff for their kind hospitality and for having arranged my visit to the institution in an excellent manner.

The visit took place from 30 October until 1 November 2013. During the visit I had very fruitful and insightful meetings with the senior leadership of USV, teaching and administrative staff, students, graduates and employers. In addition I was able to look at all the different facilities, including research labs, dormitories, lecture rooms etc. on the premises of USV.

I have been able to use the knowledge gained through the discussions, which were mainly centred on questions that arose from the well-written self-evaluation report, to identify strengths of USV that should be further enhanced as well as some shortcomings, which should be remedied.

USV is operating in a challenging environment, in which the financial support provided for by the state has been decreasing significantly in recent times. The management of USV has been able to address this through a targeted approach, e.g. by successfully attracting European funds and increasing its income through applied and contracted research. USV is a rare example of a university that has been able to do more with less.

USV has been able to ensure that the activities it undertakes in order to ensure additional income are neatly suiting the implementation of its strategy of using its geographical location and thereby being very active in cross-border activities and also through focussing on specific areas of expertise in terms of applied research that contribute well to regional development.

Given that the additional income USV was able to generate did nevertheless not fully cover the cuts it faced in terms of public financial support, USV had to devise a strategy to compensate for the funding gap. The management of USV has been highly successful in doing so due to a very effective and efficient use of

resources. However, this also involved voluntary cut backs and sacrifices of staff. USV has been able to properly communicate this necessity as a temporary means of bringing the university back on track. Staff see the progress that USV has been able to make and have been highly supportive of the strategy of the past years. This is also an indicator that was confirmed through other observations as well that USV has managed to create a sense of shared responsibility of the entire community, which is a rather rare feature in universities. The fact that staff is often more loyal to their discipline than to their institution is by and large not the case at USV.

Commendations

USV is to be commended for its strategic management and the implementation of the strategy. USV has been able to cope with financial difficulties in a very good manner and has achieved impressive results given the limited resources. USV has been able to identify areas of priority, which is essential to maintain the level of quality. This is also visible in terms of staff satisfaction that is at a high level due to fact that staff realise that USV is on the right track and not only maintained its quality with less available funding, but even improved significantly over the last years.

USV is to be commended for its success in attracting new and more diversified sources of income. It should continue to be active in this area and also develop a more long-term strategy of financial sustainability, taking account of the fact that some European sources of income might not be available at the same level forever.

USV is to be commended for its well-structured dialogue with employers and graduates in order to ensure that degrees also take into account the requirements of the labour market. Also, the processes used to ensure that degree programmes are line with the National Qualifications Framework are appropriate and adequate. USV takes the implementation of the Bologna Process very seriously and thereby is becoming an institution that puts the students in the centre of the teaching and learning process.

USV should also be commended for its impact on regional development and using its geographic location as an advantage with different cross-border activities.

Recommendations

USV has a good structure for its internal quality assurance system with clear responsibilities. It would further improve its operations if USV would develop a specific strategy for how to fully embed a quality culture amongst its staff. Furthermore, it would be beneficial if the university would undertake an analysis

of how well it adheres to part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). It might wish to undergo an internal or external assessment of its compliance with the ESG in a detailed format, even in those areas that exceed the criteria required by ARACIS. It would also be advisable to ensure that the self-evaluation reports, which are already at a good standard, will become analytical in all its parts. Furthermore, it might be beneficial to explain more often how certain processes work. At times, the report remains a little too descriptive or use too little evidence to support the claims it makes.

USV should continue its endeavour to restructure its teaching, learning and assessment processes to be innovative, student-centred and competence oriented. Therefore, it should seek to offer further possibilities of professional development for its teaching staff to embrace this concept. In order to achieve this, it should analyse course and teacher evaluations with a view of identifying those who continue to use only traditional methods, i.e. ex-cathedra teaching and reproduction of knowledge in exams, and actively support a change a mentality with these individuals.

USV should use a mechanism to ensure that the number of ECTS credits allocated to specific courses is realistic in terms of workload of the students. In order to achieve this, the estimated time for individual study of students should be verified. It will be essential to involve students in this process, for example through a learning diary that students should fill in every week about how much time they spend on each learning activity. This process should be repeated on a regular basis, for example every 3 years, in order to ensure that the workload of students stays realistic.

USV should make sure that the Diploma Supplements are well understood also abroad. The format used and its content is already at a high quality level. However, the tables used for showcasing how much time is spent by a student on certain activities (4.3) need to become more elaborated. Romanian abbreviations should be avoided at all costs and that should also be more consistently taken into account for section 4.1 of the Diploma Supplement. Generally, USV should do everything within its remit to ensure that diplomas are handed out to students who have graduated faster than it is currently the case although part of the responsibility for the delay in awarding the degree is due to the overly bureaucratic procedure within the Ministry of Education.

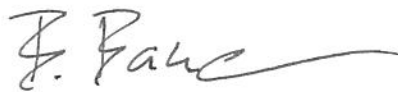
USV should ensure that student representatives are involved in all its operations. This also refers to informal bodies at all levels (but especially at the level of departments), both standing and ad-hoc bodies, to ensure that already in the process of developing suggestions, which will later on be discussed and decided upon in the official bodies, in which students are members, student views are included and students thereby become involved already at a stage that allows for proactive involvement.

USV should continue to keep internationalisation as a priority with responsibilities at the top-management level. It should continue its activities to seek a slightly more balanced mobility between outgoing and incoming students.

Given that USV has undertaken many changes in recent years, it should also place an emphasis on consolidating these changes in order to achieve a sustainable long-term impact of the endeavours. It needs to continue with its reforms, but ensure that staff is not overburdened by this and that no "reform fatigue" will develop.

In order to ensure and increase institutional loyalty of its staff and to further strengthen the psychological contract between staff and USV, it might be advisable to use the services of a human resources specialist with a psychology background to devise methods of how this could be best achieved.

USV may wish to ensure that staff always know whom to address with specific issues, problems, suggestions etc. and not always direct them at the top-level management, but rather at the people in directly in charge and encourage staff to follow this process of change management.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Baumann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bastian Baumann
01.11.2013