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ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
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ARACIS

Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior

External Institutional Evaluation

“Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University – Bucharest Romania

Foreign Expert Report

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Foreword

At the beginning of November 2014, I received notice from CEENQA¹ of a call for experts on a QUALITAS project for institutional evaluation of higher education institutions (HEI) in Romania. I applied and my candidature was retained. My name was passed to ARACIS and I was formally nominated at the 1st of January, 2015. ARACIS appointed me on the “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University (DCCU) of Bucharest.

ARACIS sent me on 5th of May the “Self Assessment Report” of the DCCU and the links to the Annex of this report. In addition on 18th of May, the ARACIS sent to me the documents on the composition of the evaluation team and the timetable and the detailed ‘Institutional Evaluation Programme’ for 28th (Thursday), 29th May (Friday) and 30th May (Saturday) 2015.

Logistical assistance from ARACIS was excellent I had enough time to prepare for the 2 and half days on site visit organized for the purpose of “Institutional Evaluation”.

My participation in the evaluation team – which was composed exclusively from Romanian auditors – was smooth and the members of the evaluation team were open and available any time when I did need to better understand the context of the various issues related with the institutional evaluation activity.

I had no language difficulties, all members of the ARACIS evaluation team were professional in English or French, myself, I could communicate at both languages, too. In addition, the DCCU dedicated an economist professor who had fluent English to translate me the speakers not only during the introductory and interviews sessions with professors and the staff of the University but also during the meetings with students, post-graduates and employers of the post-graduates. Briefly summarizing, both preparation for the site-evaluation and the organization of the on-site institutional evaluation were professionally organized.

Personal background and preliminary work

I am a full member of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB in Hungarian abbreviation) for Programs in Social Sciences from 2013 to 2018. In addition, I am a member of the Committee of the Economy and Law (IXth Division) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, since 2005.

The English version of the self-evaluation report (60 pages) has two parts. The part one (“Presentation of *Dimitrie Cantemir* Christian University”) has the following eight sub-sections (+74 Annexes): 1. Legal framework. DCCU Mission and Objectives; 2. Structure by study programs administered by the University; 3. Institution management and management structure; 4. Teaching staff presentation, 5. Physical assets; 6. Financial activity; 7. Students; 8. Scientific Activity; 9. International relations and university partnership. Part two “Criteria, Benchmarks and Performance Indicators”) composed by three main fields: A. Institutional capacity, B. Institutional effectiveness, C. Quality management- plus 65 Annexes.

General presentation: some remarks on the strategy of DCCU

¹ Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

Need to for time-balancing of the strategic objections: more focus on the middle-term perspective of action lines

In the first section of the part one, entitled “Legal framework. DCCU Mission and Objectives”, the sub-section 1.1.3. formulates the Strategic objectives of the University, according to that the core aim of the university “... is to become a strong education and research institutions, providing specialist training in the reference fields and meeting the demand for professionals, according to the Romanian society development needs.” (p.8)

I fully agree and support this very ambitious strategic goals which were translated or operationalised in 6 action lines: from modernization of education (i.e. improving teaching methods, continuously upgrading training modules (syllabus) in interaction of the requirements both business community and society, etc.), to develop internationalization both at the fields of teaching and research.

However, in spite of these action lines, the strategic goals did not make distinction between mid-term action plan and longer term vision of the DCCU. Rational behind my remarks are the following: Romanian higher educational institutions (similarly to the great number of the higher educational institutions in Europe) – including DCCU – have to confront – even in middle term – intensified competition, due to the drastic decline in student enrollment and due to the tougher international competition at the both national and international markets of the higher education. It would be advisable to complete and to make more operational the action lines presented in the self-evaluation report with to use the various suggestions of the Evaluation Team into *mid-term ‘action lines’*. This middle term action lines or design have cover both *the fields of education-training* (i.e. “Law” at both locations in Bucharest and in Babes –Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca), “Economy and international business”, “Finance – including its part-time version at Babes Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca”, “French language and literature – Modern languages” at “Lucian Blaga” University Sibiu.”.) and the fields of *research activities*, which may guarantee the sustainability of the competitive position of the DCCU within the Romanian higher education system - in both of private and public sectors.

Recommendation: DCCU should be encouraged to translate the long-term action lines related with its strategic objectives into middle-term targets in the fields of teaching-education and research using the input of the Evaluation team and the results of consultations with the employers, post-graduates and students..

Resources (human, financial and physical ones)

Teaching staff

Teaching staff leads to supervision ratio of 15 students per professor (p.49), it is rather difficult to assess its optimal level, however, it seems to me that this ration – knowing the feedback from the graduates, post-graduates and their employers - guarantee the quality of education. Another favorable condition is the following: the majority of the teaching staff has academic degree (PhD) which may guarantee the high standard both in teaching research activities. The teaching-educational outcome of the DCCU is quite good evaluating the matching rate between the supply and demand of the knowledge. According to the survey carried out by the “Centre for Career and Counseling”, from the total no. of graduates (201-2014) from tenth more than every eights found job.

During the consultation with stakeholders organized for the Institutional Evaluation team, students, post-graduates and their employers – dominantly - praised the both professional and human quality of the teaching staff of the university.

Equipments

Visiting the premises of the universities, I had an impression that – globally - the students have the necessary infrastructure for learning and leisure activities. Especially I appreciate very much both the human quality and quality of equipments in the medical (health-care service). During the consultation with the students, they only complained on the lack of availability of some books at the library.

Partnership or stakeholders

Outcomes of the meeting with graduates, post-graduates and employers

Consultation with Graduates and post-graduates

During the consultation, from the 35 participants 9 were active during the meeting. Both graduates (students) and post-graduates praised the relevancy of both the BsC and MA courses offered by the DCCU.

The active participants' suggestions – in my view - were motivated by the intention to improve the quality and position of the university into the “market” of higher education. Their remarks belonged into the category of the so-called “constructive critics”. For example, in their experiences, the quality of books (including text books, manuals) is good in the university library, but their availability (quantity) is limited and do not help the learning activity. Similarly, the students studying finance and banking advised to use – beside the available basic-software in finance – but complete with more sophisticated software skills the curriculum.

Employers

Company representatives were invited to show express their view and experiences with the post-graduates employed by themselves. To illustrate the activity level of employers, it is worth to mention than from the 34 employers of post-graduates, almost all – only one exception - of them did participate actively in the consultation. They were satisfied with the fast adaptive and learning capability of the post-graduates.

Some of them advised to improve the technical existing infrastructure of the foreign language laboratory at the DCCU and recommended to further improve the foreign language ability of the students.

The employers' opinion was divided on the ‘practicality’ of the knowledge of post-graduates. Some of them indicated the need for high-quality generic knowledge and developed learning capability of the post-graduate. These employers said that this type of newly recruited post-graduates are capably to cope with the new challenges originated from the continuously changing economic and social environment. Such generic skill are needed as good ICT, language and communicational and cooperation skills. Others preferred the more practice oriented and “ready-made” post-graduates. For example, in the case of marketing specialization, the employers need post-graduates able to deal directly with customers (sales) and not only doing marketing analysis and assessment at the office of the company.

The majority of employers suggested to the University to jointly design thesis and they would be eager to be supervisor of the thesis of student too. Deeper involvement of practitioners in the academic work of the university, may speed up the feed-back necessary from the business



community, in addition may decrease the work-load of the teaching staff and use the more free time for the research related tasks.

Recommendation: *It would be advisable to develop systematic and permanent links with the employers. For example to use the employers input, (knowledge, experiences) beside inviting them to be involved into thesis supervisory task but also in designing, testing new curricula (training modules) better reflecting the market needs.*

Another important tool improve the high-value added partnership with the business community would be the creation of the institution of DCCU "ALUMNI" institution and invite an emblematic (successful) entrepreneur into the board of Senate.



Research and international cooperation

Evaluating the various functions of the higher-education institutions, beside the quality of teaching and the intensity of relations with the business and public services communities, the research activity represents the third pillar or function in their activities.

The University Senate did – in consistency with the National Strategy for R&D&I – formulate the DCUU level research strategy oriented by the EU level Framework Program for Research and Innovation 2014-2020 (Horizon 2020). The research activities at the DCUU organized at two levels: research institute (3 research institutes)² and faculty level (13 research centers). This structure/network of research activities may help collaboration between the faculties and create the necessary synergy to improve the quality of research capacity. Reviewing the “selected research activities” only between 2010-2015 (i.e. not all research activities) by funding sources, it indicates that both institute and faculty level projects initiated by the university teaching and research staff are dominated by the DCCU - or internal - funding. However, it is a good sign that the projects coordinated by other institutions but involving the DCCU teaching and research staff attracting mainly international - mainly EU - funds and other Romanian public and private funds.

In relation with the dissemination of the research results of the DCCU university staff it is worth to stress, that besides national and international conferences and development of new training material publication activities in the “scientific journals” are playing important roles. The DCCU – including not only the Bucharest campus but the other faculties operating in Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Timisoara, Brasov – are publishing a great number (17) journal professional journals plus three journals edited by students and graduates. According to the self-evaluation document, the following eight journals are the most representatives (p.39):

- Knowledge Horizons – Economics, indexed journal: EBSCO, Host; ProQuest, RePec, Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory, Open J-Gate, IndexCopernicus; Global Impact Factor;
- Cogito Multidisciplinary Research Journal, indexed journal: EBSCO, CEEOL, PROQUEST, INDEX COPERNICUS;

² The research institutes are as follows: „Multidisciplinary Scientific Research Dimitries Cantemir „ (ICSM), „International Institute of Human Rights” (IIHR), „Institute for History and Cantemir Studies” (IISC).

- Euromentor Journal, indexed journal: EBSCO, PROQUEST, Index Copernicus, CEEOL and CEDEFOP;
- Univers strategic, indexed journal: EBSCO;
- The Annals of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures of "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, indexed journal: CEEOL, Scipio, Fabula;
- Geo-Carpathica, indexed journal: Index Copernicus International;
- Quaestus, indexed journal: REPEC, DOAJ, Index Copernicus;
- FIAT IUSTITIA, indexed journal: EBSCO.

Recommendation: it would be advisable to assess the quality and viability of the existing great number of the professional journals edited by DCCU and to concentrate the available human and financial resources to focus on editing a limited number of high quality journals which should be competitive not only in the Romanian higher educational market but also in the international one. (Of course, the preparation to be present in the international market needs both timely and financially important preparation and concentration of resources.)

The DCCU has a *dense international network* in developing 29 partnership programs with 22 foreign universities. According to the self-assessment documents the main aims of these partnerships are as follows (p.19):

- organizing and implementing joint scientific research programmes, sharing information and results;
- organizing and participating to expert meetings, conferences, scientific symposia;
- developing research and teaching activities;
- cooperating with libraries and sharing books, magazines and specialized documents;
- organizing academic and scientific events;
- academic publications;
- valuing scientific research results;
- exchange programmes with professors and students by means of mobility programmes with high academic research objectives;
- increasing visibility in the European, academic and research area by means of joint actions.

In the future, it would be necessary to assess the impacts (both positive and negative) of these partnership-based research objectives on the quality of both teaching and research activities of the DCCU. For example, in reviewing the current research activities, only one case I found explicit remark on an international research consortium (e.g. "Education in a United Europe- Bilateral project of Romania and Turkey – DCCU – Faculty of Educational Sciences.)

Recommendation: the present extensive international partnership programs could give exceptional opportunities for the DCCU to transfer part of these programs into international research consortium with the aim to prepare successfully both national and international research tenders. The international research collaborations may enlarge both the available knowledge and financial resources of DCCU and could positively contribute to the sustainable development of the university even in the future context of the decline in the number of student enrolment.

Conclusion

After reviewing both the self-assessment document and consulting and discussing with both the staff members of the university and other members of the ARACIS Evaluation Team, as foreign expert – knowing that it is difficult for me to understand various contextual factors shaping both teaching and research activities – I am convinced that the DCCU has the all necessary resources to fulfill its mission (Self-evaluation report, p. 35). The staff is highly skilled and diversity of faculties in various regions of the country (15 faculties) are representing the necessary intellectual and institutional resources to guarantee the permanent renewal both of teaching and research portfolios. My recommendations aimed to call attention how to use more efficiently the existing resources – from an external perspective.

Finally, I am convinced the governance structure of the DCCU and the openness of the staff member for the constructive suggestions (critic) may strengthen the university position within private universities both in Romania and abroad. The large existing network of both international and national institutions created by the university may pay an important role in the further development of the “learning capability” of DCCU.

In my assessment, DCCU merits a **high degree of confidence rating**.


Csaba Makó

Budapest, 7th June 2015.