



Review of the
University of Medicine and Pharmacy
'Grigore T. Popa', Iasi

Report of External Evaluator

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INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of an overall assessment of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy 'Grigore T Popa' Iasi (hereafter described as the University), commissioned by the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The report is based upon information contained in an Institutional Quality Self Evaluation document produced by the University, perusal of the University website and in the light of information and impressions generated during a site visit to the University during 11th to 14th May 2010.

It is pleasing to note that all members of the University community co-operated fully in the review process and appreciation is extended to them for the considerable courtesy and hospitality provided throughout the exercise. Particular thanks are due to Professor Dragos Pieptu, Vice-Rector International Relations who responded promptly and effectively to requests for additional information and meetings and to Ms Oana Sarbu of ARACIS for her efficient and thoughtful co-ordination of the review process.

Although the primary purpose of the review was to assess the procedures for Quality Assurance within the University, it was considered incumbent upon the external evaluator to provide an outside perspective on other components of the University operation and to comment on those aspects of the administration of higher education in Romania which impinge upon the smooth functioning of the University.

QUALITY AND GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

An institutional commitment to quality requires that the following conditions are satisfied:

- There is a clearly described quality assurance process which is readily available to all members of the community;
- There is a schedule which provides for external reviews of all academic and administrative units at least every five years:

- There are annual internal reviews of teaching, learning and research performance;
- The results of all external evaluations are available to the entire community;
- Effective, demonstrable action is taken on recommendations emanating from evaluations and that these are reported annually.

The Self Evaluation report identifies the key elements of the Quality assurance programme within the University and which are described in greater detail in the 'Manual of Quality Management Systems'. The data derived from these sources indicate that most of the essential conditions identified above are in place and, as Quality becomes more closely embedded into the culture of the University, it is likely that further improvements and efficiencies will result.

Commendations

- *The University has introduced and embraced most of the key elements required for effective quality assurance processes.*
- *A high degree of satisfaction was expressed by staff and students about their experiences at the University. The staff who attended meetings during the review are enthusiastic and strongly committed to advancing the reputation of the University. Students demonstrated considerable pride in the University and confidence in the quality of education that they are receiving.*
- *Undoubtedly, a contributing factor to the high morale of the University community is the effective use of information technology to share information about administrative decisions and institutional goals. Such transparency helps to overcome the communication gap between senior management and the rest of the community which occurs on many campuses.*
- *Students indicated satisfaction that their concerns are considered and addressed responsibly and fairly by the University and they are satisfied also that they are consulted and participate appropriately in matters related to governance and decision making.*

Recommendations

- *A schedule of external evaluations should be developed to ensure that each academic and administrative unit undergoes assessment by external evaluators every five years.*
- *The University should examine current procedures for performance evaluation and identification of annual work loads and job descriptions with a view to improvement and consistency across units.*
- *The library is the cornerstone of any University and it is essential that staff and students are enabled to remain abreast of the latest developments in their field of interest. The budgetary constraints under which the University is currently operating militate against extensive new acquisitions and, instead, the University uses on-line data bases to ensure access to the latest information. This is an eminently acceptable and sensible arrangement as long as access is convenient and universally available. The current shortage of terminals in the library requires that the University must endeavour to enable students to access library data bases from home and to create a WiFi environment in as many parts of the University as possible.*

TEACHING

It is recognised that teaching and research should be closely integrated; however, for purposes of the present report, these vitally important academic activities will be considered separately.

PEDAGOGY

Student evaluations of teaching are a regular feature of course assessment within the University and the students are satisfied that this is a useful exercise and that the evaluations are conducted in a fair and transparent manner. Not surprisingly, the students reported considerable variation in the quality of teaching between different teachers but they are satisfied that problems identified through the evaluations are addressed by the University.

The general impression created from the Self Evaluation Report, the University website and meetings with staff and students is of traditional teacher-centred didactic teaching. This contrasts with international trends in medical education which favour student-centred, small group teaching with emphasis on problem-based learning. It should be noted that there are some teachers within the University who are using innovative approaches but they represent a small minority of the teaching staff.

It is understandable that staff are reluctant to abandon tried and tested methods of teaching. New, innovative approaches require considerable investment of time and energy without any guarantee of a successful outcome. However, teachers should be encouraged to seek continual improvement in their teaching methods and the University could facilitate this culture by establishing a Teaching and Learning Resource Centre to assist those who wish to improve or innovate. Responsibility for the proposed Centre could be assigned to one or two staff with a particular interest in pedagogy. They could be charged with responsibility for exploring and evaluating international trends in third level teaching, serve as a resource for staff who wish to innovate and assist those who, on the basis of student evaluations, are perceived to be experiencing problems in being effective teachers. Finally, in order to raise the profile and quality of teaching within the University, there is merit in considering the introduction of an annual award for excellence in teaching.

CURRICULUM

The undergraduate curriculum of the University follows the traditional European model of medical education with students entering university directly from second level and undergoing two years of preclinical training, followed by four years of clinical training before they are qualified to apply for residency positions. There is nothing inherently wrong with this programme which has served the needs of medical education for many decades. However, it is useful to note that many leading medical schools, even those that admit students directly from second level, are now completing the pre-residency training in five years and are eliminating the strict demarcation of preclinical and clinical training. Rather, they are integrating basic and clinical sciences from the first year. Proponents of this trend argue that it better serves the training needs of the modern doctor. Accordingly, it is

recommended that the University consider a review of the current curriculum in the light of emerging international trends and seeks to become a leader in the reform of medical education in Romania.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is always useful to consider the particular characteristics that will distinguish the graduates of one University from those of another. The involvement of students of the University in community-related activities imbues them with a strong sense of social responsibility and, as the Rector indicated, ensures that they graduate with an appreciation of liberty and social justice. In addition to these commendable qualities, it may be useful for the University to assist students to acquire such important life skills as an ability to communicate effectively in several languages and a basic knowledge of business practice.

Commendations

- *Student evaluations of teaching form a regular component of assessment of teaching quality.*
- *Students expressed considerable satisfaction with the quality of teaching and their academic programmes.*
- *The quality and reputation of graduates of the University are highly regarded.*
- *The involvement of students in community-related activities provides them with valuable additional qualities.*

Recommendations

- *Staff should be encouraged to assess regularly their teaching methods and to consider innovative approaches to teaching and learning.*
- *Establishment of a Centre for Teaching and Learning should be considered to facilitate innovation and to assist teachers become more effective.*
- *The University should implement an annual Award for Excellence in Teaching.*
- *The University should review the current curriculum in the light of emerging international trends in medical education.*
- *Consideration should be given to the incorporation of training in important life skills into the curriculum.*

RESEARCH

The discovery of new knowledge is an essential component in the mandate of any major higher education institution and it is encouraging to note that the University has emphasised the importance of research within its institutional mission.

The University has two Centres of Research Excellence. These are the Centre for Pain Research and Therapy under the Directorship of Professor Mungie and the Centre of Immunology and Cancer Research under the directorship of Professor Carasievici. Both Centres enjoy excellent leadership and are staffed by a cadre of talented, enthusiastic researchers who are asking important scientific questions and conducting leading edge research. Although the physical facilities in which the Centres are located are not of the highest standard, the instrumentation is modern and state-of-the-art. The Centres have potential to make vital contributions to our understanding of the physiology and biochemistry of major clinical problems. Therefore, it is disturbing to report that this potential may not be realised because of bureaucratic intransigence and inflexibility within government. A moratorium on hiring is preventing the Centres from using grant funds to hire the additional researchers required to conduct the research, strict adherence to arbitrary regulations is preventing purchase of essential accessories and reagents and service contracts for expensive equipment are extremely difficult to maintain. Budgetary control and accountability are understandable in the current financial crisis but over-zealous application of such control is preventing optimal return on the considerable investment made in establishing these centres. Thus it is recommended that the University make representation at the appropriate level to ease these inhibitory restrictions.

Discussion with other staff members emphasised their commitment to research and their appreciation for the internal research grant programme introduced by the University. The proposal to establish a University Research Centre to co-ordinate and facilitate research activity is also welcomed and warrants strong support. However, these positive endorsements of research activity must be balanced by concern about the relatively poor showing of the University in such international comparators of

research performance as the ISI Citation Index. Some staff expressed the view that many Romanian researchers are relatively recent inductees to the global research scene and have difficulty publishing in international high impact journals. Although this thesis may be somewhat simplistic, there could be merit in the University establishing an international scientific advisory board to mentor and counsel University researchers. Opportunities should be made available also for University researchers to spend time in the laboratories of distinguished international scientists and, thereby, benefit from exposure to the culture of productive research environments.

Commendations

- *The two Centres of Research Excellence enjoy good leadership, are well equipped and have a core of talented, committed staff who are asking important scientific questions.*
- *Other staff within the University recognise a responsibility to engage in research and, although the question was not pursued rigorously, students appear to be exposed to research activity.*
- *The University Internal Research Grant programme provides encouragement and incentive to University researchers.*

Recommendations

- *Representation should be made to the appropriate levels of government to remove restrictions that are currently preventing optimal return on the considerable investment made in establishing the Research Centres of Excellence.*
- *The University should consider establishment of an International Scientific Advisory Board to promote the scientific activity of the University and to provide counsel to University researchers.*
- *The University should enable researchers to spend time in the laboratories of distinguished international scientists.*
- *The University should establish an annual award for excellence in research as a means of promoting and celebrating research achievement.*

FUNDING

A ubiquitous concern expressed by all sectors of the University was the impact of government-imposed budget cuts on the institution's ability to maintain high quality academic programmes. Unquestionably, the political and economic context within which the University is currently operating presents considerable challenge and, in such times of severe economic constraint, academic institutions must have the autonomy to develop and implement innovative strategies for survival. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the situation in Romania. Thus every effort must be made to persuade government that universities have a vital role to play in the economic, social and cultural welfare of the nation and that they should be supported. Failure to support higher education at this time will have serious adverse consequences for the nation in the long term.

In recent years, Universities around the world have been funded from one or more of the following sources: state and/or regional government grants, student fees, revenues from commercial enterprise, philanthropy. It is useful to consider each of these potential sources in the current environment.

State/Regional grants

The global economic recession has impacted seriously on national economies with reduced tax revenues and increased demands for social benefits resulting in need for reduction of national debt and public spending. Under such circumstances, it is unlikely that the University should expect any increase in state grant and, indeed, the challenge will be to maintain as much as possible of the current allocation. As indicated above, there are compelling reasons for the government to continue to support excellent Universities but such arguments must be presented forcefully and, ideally, with the support of business and other interested groups.

Student Fees

It is evident that, within the current financial climate, students are unable to bear any increase in fees for tuition, services or accommodation. Indeed, students were appreciative of the University's decision not to increase fees in the current year. Yet,

as the major beneficiaries of University education, it is appropriate that they should contribute a greater share of the cost of their education than taxpayers who do not attend University. A possible solution to this dilemma would be for Romania to adopt a student loan programme similar to that used in Australia. Under this scheme, students may borrow funds from the state to support their University education and do not pay any interest on the loan until they graduate and obtain a job. The loan is repaid over many years, with the rate of repayment salary-dependent and calculated to ensure that the student suffers no financial hardship. Such a programme would enable the University to charge reasonable student fees and it may wish to champion the introduction of such a programme in Romania.

Revenue generation

Several potential revenue streams warrant consideration as the University seeks to generate additional income through creative entrepreneurial activity.

Foreign Students. Many potential students in North America and Asia seek admission to medical school and are willing to pay high fees for the opportunity to study medicine. The University is already accepting students from some foreign countries and, without denying places to Romanian students, should consider expanding the foreign student programme to other regions.

Commercialisation of research. Some of the research currently in progress at the University has commercial potential and with appropriate protection of intellectual property (IP) and marketing could result in revenue streams for the University. In order to realise this potential the University should consider establishment of an Office of Technology Transfer charged with responsibility to identify projects with commercial potential, advise on IP protection and market inventions to business and/or venture capital investment.

Commercial Services. The University has the capacity to provide valuable services to government and industry in return for fees. For example, the costs of undertaking second and third phase drug testing is prohibitively expensive in North America and, increasingly, major pharmaceutical companies are contracting such activity off shore. It may be possible for the University to

participate in such activity and receive substantial fees for the service. Investigation of such possibilities could be an additional responsibility for the proposed Office of Technology Transfer.

Philanthropy. Although the current financial climate and the lack of a culture of philanthropy in Romania militate against this as a major source of revenue, some opportunities may exist. For example, major companies operating within the country may be willing to donate surplus year-old inventory to the University. A donation of year-old laptops for every student would help greatly to overcome the problems of access to library databases and it could be argued that students trained on these computers would be likely to continue using that brand following graduation. It is strongly recommended also that the University begin to maintain close links with its graduates in order to optimise their potential role as champions, ambassadors and possible supporters of the University in the future.

Commendations

- *The University appears to be managing its limited resources prudently.*
- *The University has acted responsibly in maintaining student fees at acceptable levels.*

Recommendations

- *The University should mobilise support from the media and all levels of society to persuade government of the importance of Universities to the economic, social and cultural welfare of the nation and to resist any further reduction in state funding.*
- *The University should explore alternative sources of revenue including expansion of the intake of foreign students, commercialisation of research, generation of fee-generating services and solicitation of gifts-in-kind from business.*
- *The University should establish an Office of Technology transfer to explore and implement revenue generating commercial opportunities.*