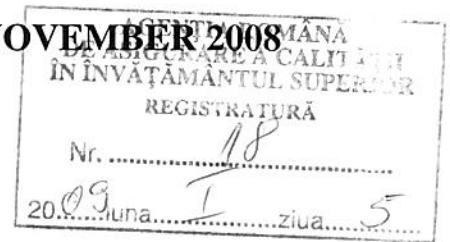


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**EXTERNAL EVALUATOR'S REPORT FOR ARACIS OF THE
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF THEATRE AND FILM „I. L.
CARAGIALE” (U.N.A.T.C.), BUCHAREST, NOVEMBER 2008**



Introduction

I was appointed as an International External Evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was subsequently invited to join the evaluation team for the audit of The National University of Theatre and Film „I. L. Caragiale” (U.N.A.T.C.) in Bucharest. The audit took place between Wednesday 19 November and Friday 21 November 2008 and was charged with evaluating the university's quality assurance processes with regard to all its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Research degree programmes (doctoral studies) were not included. The evaluation team consisted of the following members, in addition to myself:

Mission Director: Prof.univ.dr. Lazăr Vlăsceanu

Co-ordinator of the Evaluation Team: Prof.univ.dr. Mihai Coman

Representative of the Consultative Commission: Prof. Zoltan Rostas

Student Representatives: Papuc Mihai Adrian; Baicu Adriana

Expert Evaluators: Prof.univ.dr. Victor Munteanu; Prof.univ.dr. Liviu Malița;

Prof.univ.dr. Crișan Sorin Ion; Prof.univ.dr. Ulmu Bogdan; Prof.univ.dr Dana Duma;

Prof.univ.dr. Roșca Călin

The team was supported by Ms Oana Sârbu from ARACIS in her role as technical secretary.

The audit process began with introductory statements from Prof.univ.dr. Gheorghe Colceag, Rector of U.N.A.T.C., and Prof.univ.dr. Coman. Prof.univ.dr. Colceag welcomed the team to the university and explained that the university welcomed this audit at a time of change and hoped to be able to use the comments of the team to help the institution to move forward under its new, recently elected management team. We were also introduced to Prof.univ.dr Dan Vasiliu, Chancellor of the university, who

was to be our institutional contact for the duration of the visit. Prof.univ.dr. Coman thanked the Rector and explained to the team their various roles and outlined the programme for the audit.

This was followed by a tour of the university and its specialist facilities. After lunch I attended a meeting at the ARACIS headquarters with the President and his senior management team, making it back to the university in time for a meeting with three student representatives.

In my role as International Expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of the whole university and was allowed to move freely, talking to members of staff, students and other members of the audit team. This I did for most of the second day, at the end of which there was a meeting with a group of employers.

On the final day, I continued to develop my overview of the institution, concentrating my efforts largely on the research activity within the university. The audit concluded with a meeting of the evaluators, chaired by Prof.univ.dr.Vlăsceanu with Prof.univ.dr. Vasiliu in attendance.

In my opinion the audit was conducted in an open and collegial manner and created a forum where colleagues could enter a dialogue concerning the university and its programmes and activities. In this respect it was a well-run and constructive event and my thanks go to all concerned.

Managerial Structure

The management of the university is organised in accordance with its legal obligations, which are stated in the university's charter. The mission of the university is supported by a five-year strategic plan. In terms of structure, the university is led by a Rector, who is supported by a Chancellor/Pro Rector. Whilst the Rector's duties include the strategic leadership of the university and representing the university on judicial and public bodies, the Chancellor is responsible for, amongst other things, public relations, international partnerships and research. Accountability is to the University Senate which consists of a mixture of appointed and elected

representatives, including representatives of the students union and the appropriate trades union bodies.

The university is divided into two 'colleges' (Film and Drama), which are further subdivided into departments. Each college is led by a Dean and also has a professorial council.

Comment: Compared with UK institutions, U.N.A.T.C. operates a very democratic managerial structure with direct elections for key managerial posts. The UK has adopted a more corporate approach to the management of its universities, as it moved towards a mass higher education system. U.N.A.T.C. is a relatively small university and its management systems and structures appear to work well for it, assuring that the professoriate have a sense of institutional ownership.

Teaching Staff

The staff base for U.N.A.T.C. reflects the university's status as both an academy and a conservatoire and much effort is invested in maintaining this balance between its twin missions. This is not always an easy task, but the university appears to be adept at managing it. The university, therefore, employs a mixture of full-time and part-time academic staff, supported by a team of administrators. Many of the staff either have, or are studying for, doctoral degrees and nearly all staff are recognised as leading practitioners in their field. Part-time staff, in particular, are often active practitioners in the industry. This is important for the university, as it enables it to keep abreast of developments in the industry and to make use of up-to-date skills and experience on its teaching programmes.

Due to the nature of much of the teaching, which is practical and studio-based, the staff-student ratios are necessarily small and it is important that the university is able to maintain these in order to continue to deliver a high-class education to its students.

Comment: The staff profile at the university is similar to that of a comparable UK institution. Staff are leading practitioners in their field and it would appear that teaching is of a high quality.

Facilities

U.N.A.T.C. is housed in a former police barracks in Matei Voievod Street in Bucharest. The building contains a number of practical rehearsal studios, construction workshops, film studios, design studios, computer labs, editing suites, recording studios, etc. in addition to a library, some general purpose teaching rooms (seminar rooms, for example) and academic and administrative staff offices.

Considering that the building was not designed for its current purpose, the university makes extraordinarily good use of its facilities. This in part reflects well on staff who have committed their own time in the past to equip and maintain practical studio spaces. It is also clear from recent refurbishments and updating of equipment in a number of spaces that the university itself has a commitment to investing in its facilities. This is to be welcomed.

The university also has recently opened a Hall of Residence for students at very reasonable rents.

The library holds an impressive collection of books on theatre and film. It functions more as a book repository than as a modern learning resources centre.

Comment: Facilities are well used and it is clear that both staff and students feel a sense of ownership of the facilities. It is important that the university continues to invest in its physical infrastructure in order to keep pace with both industry and comparable institutions throughout Europe. This is particularly the case for film, as the industry changes in response to the development of new digital technologies.

Students

U.N.A.T.C. has around 900 registered students on undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate degrees. In my discussions with students, I found them to be highly enthusiastic, energetic, committed, articulate and intelligent. Graduates

from the university are keenly sought by employers in the theatre and film industries, which reflects well upon the skills that they acquire whilst studying at the university. Employers spoke very highly of the students and the skills they bring with them. An extremely high proportion of students find employment and develop successful careers either directly in film, television or theatre, or in a related creative industry (such as marketing, advertising, events management) where they can directly apply the skills and knowledge they have learned at university. In fact, many students are already working in the industry before they graduate.

The students are very motivated to learn and appreciate the unique learning environment of the university. In conversation, students mentioned the excellent staff-student relations, the high standard of teaching and pastoral care and their appreciation of being able to learn alongside leading figures in the industry. A number of students talked of the university as being like a family.

A very high percentage (80% in Theatre and 34% in Film) of students proceed onto Masters level programmes and 63% then continue to doctoral studies. These are very high conversion rates and reflect, perhaps, the loyalty that the university nurtures in its students.

I was very impressed by the excellent standard of English of many of the students. I understand that students attend language courses alongside their other studies and a number also participate in the Erasmus-Socrates exchange programme.

There is also a student forum, whose feedback is published on the university website. Additional course feedback is collected from students on an annual basis and fed back into programme development planning. I understand that the Students Union and the university are currently working together to try to increase the number of students who participate in feedback.

Comment: It is quite often the case that students in arts universities are deeply committed to their subjects and are especially hard-working and loyal to their institution. This is certainly the case at U.N.A.T.C. What is unusual, though, is to find such high graduate employment rates in theatre, television and film, whereas in the

UK these are industries that are noted for their high levels of unemployment. The university and its students are to be congratulated on this, as they are on the excellent conversion rates from undergraduate to postgraduate study.

Research

Research activity within the university is managed by the Chancellor and is organised through two research centres. These are The Pilot Centre of Scientific Research and Artistic Creation in the Domain of Theatre and Choreography and The Centre of Excellence for Scientific Research and Artistic Creation in the Domain of Cinematography and Media, both of which are accredited until 2011.

All academic members of staff are contractually obliged to engage in research and they are supported in doing this in a number of ways. Researchers operate in teams around key themes and common interests, enabling younger researchers (or those new to research) to gain support from more established and senior researchers. This also enables practice-led researchers to work with theoreticians and historians on collaborative projects. New researchers are encouraged to register for doctoral study to allow them to develop key research skills for their future career development. The university also runs its own university press, committed to publishing and disseminating the work of its scholarly community. Researchers at the university are also involved in collaborative research projects with colleagues at the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism of Bucharest and The National University of Fine Arts.

The research activity at the university is robust and growing. It is supported by a vibrant research environment and staff appear committed to their research and scholarly enquiry.

Comment: As with many arts universities, the research community at U.N.A.T.C. is still struggling to find ways to articulate practice-led research, partly within its own research community, but also within the broader research community, which is modelled upon a more systematic and scientific paradigm. The issues around practice-led and creative practice as research are ongoing ones for the subject communities,

but the Drama and Film research communities in the UK are well advanced in this respect and creative practice is now well-established and accepted by the wider academy and the research funding councils. I would encourage the university to develop its international collaborative links, as there is much to be learned from the experience of colleagues across Europe and elsewhere.

Quality Management

The university shows a strong commitment to issues of quality assurance and enhancement. Quality assurance is managed effectively through the university's committee structures. The university regularly reviews its courses and gathers student feedback to inform this process. The university also publishes an annual internal evaluation and quality assurance report which notes areas of good practice and areas for improvement. This report feeds into the institutional planning processes.

The university delivers curricula that are informed by the needs and concerns of industry, as well as by academic priorities and the university's close working relationship with the relevant employment sectors ensure that this continues to be the case. The university clearly enjoys the confidence of the industry, evidenced by the excellent graduate employment statistics.

Recommendations and Conclusions

I am happy to declare my full and complete confidence in the quality assurance processes at U.N.A.T.C., as well as the quality of its programmes. This is a unique institution in many ways and successfully balances its twin missions as a university and conservatoire. This is impressive and I saw many instances of good practice during my time at the university.

In such circumstances, one is tempted not to offer any recommendations, but in the spirit of helping the university to continue on its onward journey, I offer the following recommendations:

1. To continue to invest in the physical infrastructure and facilities, as and when funds allow.
2. As the digital infrastructure becomes more advanced and robust, the university should consider developing programmes and courses that it could deliver on-line or through a mixture of face-to-face and on-line delivery (blended learning). The university might, therefore, consider in the future investing in a Virtual Learning Environment system. This could produce an additional income stream for the university, especially through the delivery of short courses, which could be further re-invested in the university.
3. To continue to develop international links and collaborations to support an international curriculum and research activity.
4. To develop a training and mentoring programme for those new to teaching in Higher Education. The university makes excellent use of industry professionals in its teaching, but many of the best come to the university without any teaching experience. A system that allowed staff to develop their teaching skills and gain the support of more experienced teachers would be welcomed. The completion of training could even be incentivised through salary progression, as it is in many UK universities.
5. I understand that academic salaries are such that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain the very best staff. This was an issue brought up by both staff and students alike. This is partly a problem that is outwith the university's jurisdiction and, in any case, is not something to be solved in the short-term, but it is worth the university being cognizant of this as an ongoing issue.

Finally I should like to express my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues from the evaluation team, U.N.A.T.C. and ARACIS for making me welcome in Bucharest and for the professional, open and humane way in which the audit was conducted.



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