



UNATC

This is a specialised institution which operates from two campuses. The University has a relatively traditional management structure: an executive of rector and one vice rector (although two would be expected), a senate and faculties and within that various small departments. There are a number of very small units working within this structure and one wonders whether there might not be some sense in considering the structures to see whether they are fit for purpose. Are they effective? Is the University well and effectively managed? The normal functions of teaching and research seem to work very well, but there are evidently issues of management that appear to be less effective.

Early discussions were dominated by the view that the University was undergoing severe financial difficulties - this was apparent from the poor state of the first building we visited and which was our base. No lift, no obvious support for disabled staff or students, much of the infrastructure looked to be in a poor state of decoration and there were obviously health and safety hazards scattered round the building. If there were a fire it could be catastrophic as there are numerous impediments in corridors that are dangerous and would not normally be allowed or expected.. The second, newly acquired building, in the centre of the city is of a quite different order. New decoration, state of the art equipment, the sense of energised research in the most favourable conditions. It is hard to imagine that these two buildings belong to the same institution.

The University website is poor, short of information and with no obvious search facility. It does not offer an attractive first stop for the University, does not indeed do it justice. If the University wants to attract students from overseas who would pay high fees to attend, the current website simply will not do. Nevertheless, the impression one forms in spite of first appearances is of a first class vocational school meeting a national need, offering teaching of the highest order.

Meetings

It is difficult to make real sense of the meetings in this context. The students are not in any sense typical, nor are their employers. Much work undertaken is short term and dependent on auditions. The number of 'real' employers is therefore very small. Nevertheless, a number of issues were raised. The university could make better use of its expertise and skills in consultancy work, leading to useful income; the university is not good at talking with its various partners - are there areas that are developing that the university is not covering? Does the university speak often enough with those outside, working in the 'real' world, to see whether it is fulfilling its function properly? While the university might be excellent at what it does, teaching and researching in a very precise area of activity, the world outside is changing and the curriculum must naturally follow those changes and adapt accordingly.

The student meeting was badly interrupted by a series of fire alarms - annoying but also worrying - it seems this happens often enough not to worry those present - but in the case of a real fire, this could be dangerous. A number of issues emerged: while it is clear that students evaluate their teaching staff at the end the year there seemed to be little genuine feedback about any criticisms raised in the proceeds; some students claimed there was a lack of communication between staff and students about the evaluations and teaching quality; the insufficiency of the tutorial system; the apparent lack of a student handbook; the lack of suitable changing rooms for students who have to change in the corridors. Students commented that there was a lack of visibility of Erasmus opportunities on the university website and this would indeed seem to be the case. No major issues emerged, however, and a meeting the following day with a small group of students was enthusiastic and entirely positive.

Issues

There is clearly an underlying problem with the financing of this specialist vocational school but one also gets the sense, with some notable exceptions, of a lack of energy and dynamism in the management of the university. How is it, for example, that a major university can allow itself to function with only one vice-rector when it would expect 2. What does that tell the outside world? Every institution needs to have energetic leaders to think and to take the institution forward, seeking new ideas and harnessing the ideas that evolve from the grass roots. It may well be that the government is not contributing sufficient funds for this specialist vocational school that surely needs special consideration. The somewhat random state financing of different formations, theatre and film, may well be justified - but could the university be encouraged to think differently, given the paucity of funds, where could it usefully make changes, could it teach differently, has it adequately embraced the challenges of the Bologna process? We heard many complaints about the Bologna process as it may well be difficult to do what it used to do in three years - but other institutions have adapted, found new teaching methodologies, sought to restructure - are there too many middle managers in this small institution - is it too departmentalised? If, for example, PhD students cannot reasonably complete their theses in three years, have the subjects of the theses been adequately defined and limited in scope? There clearly are some developing ideas about new areas of activity - in particular in research, where the infrastructure now exists, and in pedagogy where there is real potential. The University must seek ways of raising further income - through consultancy, through external activity, through fund raising, through the use of an active alumni association. What I did not really get a true sense of is how the institution sees itself developing over the next five years - what are the real priorities, where can changes usefully be made. It may well be that institutions of this kind could benefit from greater autonomy - they are very different from the traditional pattern of universities - the students are selected and are highly motivated; they are enthusiastic in their support of the university and blind even to those areas which might be improved. Many have chosen a particular skill and their futures are defined in ways that are not for the more traditional university student. In short, this university should surely be considered as different and, perhaps as a consequence, be given more freedom and to seek alternative funding methods. On the other hand, a University like this one cannot rest on its laurels - it cannot afford to be passive and submissive. It needs energy and dynamism as new directions open up and new technologies present themselves. It needs to be efficient, perhaps, and more energetic in its managerial processes.

Research

The University runs a small specialist press publishing about 10 volumes, mainly theses, per year. The doctoral school seems to be active and well populated, although the loss of senior staff through compulsory retirements at 65 has clearly had an impact and led to some staff managing more PhDs than one would normally expect. The definition and expectation of research did not emerge clearly from the various discussions; it is always difficult to assess the quality of research when it is essentially based on performance and not so much on publication - what is the expectation of staff working in these specialist areas - how do they publicise the kind of work they are doing to an international audience? The University has acquired a superb new building in the centre of the city with state-of-the-art conditions and equipment, which is already leading to some exciting research activity, of a kind indeed that would surprise the non-specialist, given its base in science and neuro-science. But has the university adequately considered the future of this activity - the equipment will age and will need to be replaced; the areas of work will need to be staffed. Is there a satisfactory medium-term plan in place to guarantee the future effectiveness of the resource? If money is short, how can this work be suitably financed? What plans exist?

The University Library belongs to another age. There is a policy of purchasing multiple copies for student use but this is not a pleasant working environment and seems and smells musty and dusty.



It cannot be considered in anyway as a research library and is at best a useful undergraduate resource. Without access to major databases it will always be deficient. On the other hand, being situated in the capital of the country means that first class resources can be found in near proximity.

International Activity

This does not seem to be a major priority for the University. One person acts as the conduit for Erasmus links and is the central point for all enquiries coming from outside Romania. It was not clear to me that the University had an international strategy: the Erasmus programme is quite small and not well publicised; the University sends staff and students, especially of film, to take part in international festivals but it was not evident to me that the University was seeking to establish itself in the international environment, although naturally it takes pride in the number of prizes that it has won at various international festivals. In many universities, such activity would be the responsibility of a vice-rector or equivalent, not a dedicated but relatively junior administrator.

Public Relations

The University is an effective promoter of its activities with a regularly updated page of events that are open to all. As previously noted, the website which is the first point of contact for many people badly needs to be redesigned and updated. Publicity and awareness is an important issue for this university as it continues to promote itself as the premier specialist institution in the country. *Facebook* is used extensively and while this might be an effective means of publicity it will not reach all members of the public, and in particular it may not appeal to those who hold power and direct finances at a national level. The University will need to consider whether it is reaching out far enough and whether a single dedicated and efficient individual is sufficient in this context.

Careers

The section on the website includes some interesting pages: there are details for opportunities available for students, resourced primarily by the person in charge of this area and further pages where students can advertise their skills and availability for any posts that might be forthcoming. It emerged that many such posts emerged as a result of contacts from former students yet there does not seem to be a formal alumni association, which is surely a lost opportunity for a university working in a very defined area of activity.

Performance: *Les Misérables*

The team was invited to attend a late rehearsal of a musical performance. The production was impressive in the context of a student production, evidence indeed of the high quality one can expect from students in the institution. If evidence of quality were needed, productions such as this will provide it.

Gaps

There does not seem to be a specialist counselling office in the university where students who need psychological support, and there must surely be some from time to time, can get such support. Nor does there seem to be an office or individual that deals with issues of disability - an issue for staff and students with handicaps. A caring institution should surely have both such areas covered and European legislation is coming to expect it of public institutions.



Conclusion

This is a University which takes highly-motivated students after an exacting entrance examination and trains them at the highest level for careers in the theatre and in film. It has an undoubted national reputation for excellence. This is not to say that it cannot be improved or modified, as my comments above will suggest. In the short term the university needs to find ways of arriving at a balanced budget without harming its teaching and research portfolios. There may not be easy solutions given the national context but a critical analysis of its management structure, its current programmes, its lack of external income and perhaps also a sense of self satisfaction might lead to some radical proposals that without changing the institution will enable it to thrive and prosper in the years to come. It cannot afford to stand still.


26/11/2016