



Fondul Social European
POSDRU 2007-2013



Investește în oameni!

Proiect cofinanțat din Fondul Social European prin Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007 – 2013

Axa prioritară 1 „Educația și formarea profesională în sprijinul creșterii economice și dezvoltării societății bazate pe cunoaștere”

Domeniul major de intervenție 1.2 „Calitate în învățământul superior”

Titlul proiectului „Dezvoltarea și consolidarea culturii calității la nivelul sistemului de învățământ superior românesc - QUALITAS”

Contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894



REPORT

**of the foreign evaluator for the
University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest**



Date: 10.04.2015

ETS – FOREIGN EVALUATOR EXPERT

Name... **Olav Aarna**.....

Signature: *Olav Aarna*

INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION OF UPB

Institutional evaluation of the University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest (UPB) took place during March-April 2015. The foreign evaluator received the Self-Evaluation Report (SER on 94 pages) prepared by the UPB on 23 March 2015. The site visit took place from 2 April till 4 April 2015.

0. Legal Framework

During the site visit to the UPB it has been discovered that the legal framework for higher education (HE) contains two gaps related to the implementation of the Bologna process agreements in Romania:

- 1) The description of the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) includes also the measure of student work load in hours to get one ECTS credit. The Law on Education (<http://www.uvt.ro/files/b6d6b3353366d7f01829e4a6d3dd4f6bb7b7aa5a/>) or any other legal act does not define the number of hours ECTS credit contains. Obviously each higher education institution (HEI) has to define this unit itself, which contradicts the requirement of transparency, transferability and comparability of credits.
- 2) The National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education contains general descriptions (professional and transversal competences) of qualifications in different subjects (subject benchmarks). However, the proper link between the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for higher education (HE) in Romania with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) is missing. At the moment it is unclear how the professional and transversal competences describing subject benchmarks relate to the Dublin descriptors describing expected learning outcomes (LOs) of three cycles of higher education (HE). More specifically, no legal act does not contain generic LOs of three types of HE qualifications, which according to the criteria for the Bologna self-certification have to be compatible with the Dublin descriptors.

1. The Model for External Institutional Evaluation

Legal framework for the external evaluation of HEIs and study programmes is established by the Law on the Approval of the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 Regarding the Education Quality Assurance (http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/Law_87_2006.pdf), and the Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter Methodology) (http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/Methodology_for_External_Evaluation.pdf) The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) has developed a **comprehensive normative framework for the external evaluation of HEIs** and their study programmes. The model developed (areas, criteria, standards, standards of reference and performance indicators) is aiming at promoting the quality culture in Romania. Particularly, the model for institutional accreditation is built on three pillars:

- 1) **Institutional Capacity**: the institution is coherently organized, has an adequate management and administration and the material basis and financial resources necessary for a stable functioning, in the short and medium term, as well as the necessary human resources for achieving its stated mission and objectives.
- 2) **Educational effectiveness** refers to the organization of teaching, learning and research processes in terms of content, methods and techniques, resources, selection of students and teaching and research staff, which would enable the institution to achieve the

learning and research outcomes stated through its mission, which must be clearly formulated. The evaluation criteria for educational effectiveness refer to:

- a) the design of objectives and outcomes, which should be:
 - clearly formulated and easy to understand;
 - adequate for the aimed academic qualifications (Licence or specialization in a certain field, Master's or Doctorate) and differentiated by discipline and/or study programme;
- b) the organization of the learning framework, through:
 - plans, study programmes, teaching methods, student evaluation criteria and techniques;
 - the adequate recruitment and development of academic staff;
 - the resources and learning facilities made available, related to the financial activity of the organization;
 - organization of the teaching, learning and student examination flows;
 - student support services, including extracurricular activities.
- 3) **Quality Management** concentrates on those strategies, structures, techniques and operations through which the institution demonstrates that it evaluates its own performance related to education quality assurance and improvement, and has information systems in place which demonstrate its learning and research outcomes. The importance of this area consists, both on the emphasis put on the quality assurance approach of the institution towards all its activities, and on the presentation of information and data to the public, proving a certain quality level.

The Standards of Reference and/or their levels in the **Methodology** are recommendations only. Institutions are invited to elaborate and adopt their own Standards of Reference.

Nevertheless, the **external evaluation process itself is too bureaucratic and too much concentrated on documentary evidence only**. This basically relates to the aim and organisation of site visit. The main **aim of the site visit should be to collect evidence, that what is claimed in the SER is also implemented in reality**. Positive **accreditation of a HEI approves sustainability of the institution and efficient functioning of its quality assurance system**.

To achieve this it is recommended to:

- 1) **Establish communication of evaluation team members already before the site visit** to allow them to prepare questions to be clarified during the site visit;
- 2) Arrange **site visit as a sequence of semi-structured interviews with internal** (top management, developers of the SER, teaching staff, students) **and external** (employers, alumni) **stakeholders in small groups** (6-8 people).

As a further development of the external evaluation process it is recommended to **consider introducing fully international external review process**. This means that the working language of the review process will be English. On the other hand, not all members of the peer review team have to be international, but the working language of the review process has to be English. According to the international standards involvement of students' and employers representatives (international or national) is mandatory.

2. Self-Evaluation Report

According to the Methodology the SER has two parts:

- 1) **Analytical part** is of a narrative type, has 20-40 pages, which varies by the size of the object being evaluated (study programme or institution), and represents the conclusions

reached by the management of the institution/study programme and by the academic community, including students, with regard to strengths and weaknesses, successes, threats, uncertainties or failures of quality assurance and to the future actions for improvement, in relation to the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in Part II of the Methodology.

- 2) **Justification part** includes documents, charts, tables, illustrations, etc., meant to support the analysis presented in the first part. These are complementary and based on data and information which exist in the institutions' databases.

The SER has to reference the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in the Methodology, so that its main chapters coincide with the three areas (institutional capacity, educational effectiveness, and quality management). In addition to the performance indicators mentioned in the Methodology, the SER may also refer to other indicators. The justifying documents and the **self-evaluation statements** must mention the accomplishment, at least, of the minimum levels. In the case of exceeding the minimum level for an indicator or standard, the respective level has to be demonstrated through justifying documents in the form of Standard of Reference specific to the programme or institution.

The **SER presented by the UPB** in general **meets the above requirements, but** unfortunately **doesn't contain any self-analysis**, incl. explicit self-evaluation statements. The reader doesn't get an answer to the following questions:

- What are the problems and areas for development for the UPB discovered during the self-assessment process?
- Who have been the authors of the SER?
- How the self-assessment process has been organised?
- What is the context the UPB is acting (legal framework, system of financing etc.)?
- What is the financial situation of the UPB, incl. general breakdown of revenues and costs?

Besides that, the English version of the SER involves some technical issues:

- Hyperlinks to all Annexes are empty (because there are no English versions of the annexes);
- The text contains many repetitions instead of cross-references (and therefore is much longer than 20-40 pages suggested in the Methodology);
- Terminology used is not consistent with the terminology used in the Methodology, e.g. learning results vs learning outcomes, valorization vs validation etc.

The criticism towards the SER is partially stemming from the template for the SER imposed by ARACIS.

It has to be emphasized, that **preparation of the SER report** isn't just a bureaucratic exercise. Usually a special working group is established at a HEI for drafting the SER and the results are discussed with stakeholders.

The **SER is a public document** addressing not only and not even first and foremost the external evaluators. The SER has to be understandable and meaningful for the people not involved in the methodology of external evaluation, details of the HE legal framework etc.

Recommendations:

- 1) **Revise the template and requirements for the SER to make it better readable and valuable as a public document;**

- 2) **Involve all stakeholders in the process of preparing the SER** to make it a useful instrument for internal quality assurance at a HEI;
- 3) **Provide detailed description of the HE system and quality assurance system for HE in Romania on the ARACIS web page** (in English and probably in other major foreign languages).

3. Institutional Capacity

The UPB is a modern university of technology with good international standing offering study programmes in all three cycles of HE in the field of engineering, technology, science, and management for more than 27.000 students. The UPB has **strong leadership, enthusiastic management team, motivated staff and students**. Based on these assets the UPB fulfils and in many occasions exceeds the evaluation standards.

During the period under review the UPB has made substantial progress in all aspects of university life. The Management Plan proposed by the Rector before elections in 2011 is a very good strategic document. Subsequently it has been transformed into mid-term **strategic development plan 2012-2016**. The strategy concentrates on the development of human resource, the university infrastructure, and the promotion of the university image. In this respect, an important role has been and is still played by the attraction of the EU funds needed to provide financial support to this type of activity, with the UPB coordinating or acting as a partner in a total of 25 SOPHRD projects. It has to be mentioned that **the strategic development plan has already been implemented to substantial extent** (about 80%). All the new regulations stipulated by the Law on Education (2012) have been implemented.

From the operational point of view the current strategic development plan suffers in two respects:

- Objectives with measurable indicators are missing;
- The list of objectives is very long and detailed (4.5 pages in the SER), actually a list of activities to be performed.

It is recommended in the process of preparing the new mid-term development plan for the UPB to **define a limited number of strategic objectives with measurable indicators**.

4. Education Effectiveness

The programme portfolio of the UPB contains 87 Bachelor's level study programmes in 17 fields of study, 177 Master's level programmes in 22 fields of study and Doctoral programmes offered by 14 doctoral schools, all offered in the full-time mode. The programmes have strong link with the labour market needs. The UPB has a separate faculty offering programmes in English, French and German. During the period 2010-2012 the study programmes at UPB have been revised to be included into the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education.

The UPB has assumed the role of contributing to the development of the EHEA. This means particularly implementation of the ECTS and the LOs approach in full scale, and extensive mobility of students and staff. In case of study programmes in engineering, the **EUR-ACE Framework Standards for the Accreditation of Engineering Programmes** (<http://www.enaae.eu/eur-ace-system/eur-ace-framework-standards>) could serve as a good source of generic LOs for the first two cycles of HE. These are described in terms of six categories of programme LOs:

- Knowledge and Understanding,

- Engineering Analysis,
- Engineering Design,
- Investigations,
- Engineering Practice,
- Transferable Skills.

Although the UPB has 181 cooperation agreements with universities in 46 countries from Europe, America, Asia and Africa, the mobility of students is very low.

Areas for development in the field of study programme development and implementation are:

- 1) Systematically develop and implement the LOs based approach to accomplish **constructive alignment**: establish clear structure of programme objectives, programme LOs, module/subject LOs and students' assessment;
- 2) Establish more flexible and efficient **rules and procedures for recognition of prior learning**;
- 3) **Increase the mobility of students**;
- 4) Further develop **international learning environment**.

In the framework of the LOs based approach the **study programme management** becomes a crucial aspect of management. In this respect establishing study programme committees should be considered.

5. Quality Assurance

The UPB has chosen ISO9000 as a reference for developing its quality management system (QMS). In the framework of the Bologna process the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, <https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/ESG - draft endorsed by BFUG.pdf>) have been developed will be approved by the Ministers' Conference in May 2015. Obviously the implementation of the ESG will substantially influence the development of the QMS at the UPB and in Romania.

According to the Law on education the UPB has established support structures for the QMS – the **Quality Council** at university level, the **Quality Committees** at faculty level, and working groups at department level. The Quality Assessment and Assurance Commission, together with the university top management have established qualitative and quantitative to assess and monitor quality. The UPB is also a partner in the EU sponsored project “Improving the quality of the national higher education system in accordance with changes in the knowledge-based society and labour market dynamics”.

The UPB has also defined adequate means to achieve the objectives set in the strategic development plan:

- 1) University integration into an **international evaluation** process, to increase its worldwide reputation and visibility;
- 2) development of **internal self-assessment mechanisms and procedures** to increase the quality of all the activities of the University;
- 3) regular **self-assessment** of bachelor, master and doctorate studies;
- 4) participation in the **exchange of best practice and of high performance academic governance**;
- 5) promoting **transparency** of the quality of teaching;
- 6) **annual evaluation** of teachers by **students**, through **self-assessment** and
- 7) **peer review**;

- 8) annual evaluation of **the results of the study programs**;
- 9) presentation on the **University's website** of the information on the state of the institutional quality.

The management of the UPB has also taken actions to implement the recommendations made by during previous external evaluation.

The university web page in English is not very informative. In this respect it is recommended to **use the web page of the Department of Computer Science (www.cs.pub.ro) as a good example.**

According to the Methodology annual expenses for salaries in a HEI must not exceed the percentage from the total income which ensures its sustainable functioning. For sustainability of a HEI this ratio is recommended to be between 50 and 60%. The SER claims that in 2014 salary expenses amounted to 207.75 million RON of the total expenses of 463.37 million RON or 44.8%. This means that the academic, administrative and support staff members of the UPB are underpaid. On the other hand, the university is not able to change the situation because of the lack of autonomy with respect of financial management of salaries.

Therefore the **Government of Romania is recommended to consider changing the present rigid salary system in HEIs**, establishing probably only minimum salary levels for different employee' groups on state level as a result of social dialogue, but offering more freedom to the HEI management for differentiating the employees' salaries based on their academic or other merits.