

## EVALUATION REPORT - PETRE ANDREI University of IASI (UPA)

Written by the short –term foreign expert: Teréz Kleisz PhD



First, I would like to express my special thanks to all members of the academic staff, the university leadership and the Student League who were involved in the preparations and the implementation of the evaluation process in May of 2011. I was impressed by the help and attentive care provided throughout my visit, all my professional requests were fulfilled. Those colleagues who were asked to translate the documents did a fine and efficient job, not only arranged interviews and kept me informed about happenings but even organized some special programs that made me understand better the cultural background and history of the city Iasi. I was very satisfied with the detailed and honest information I got from everyone I managed to contact.

It has been an honour to be selected to be one of the members of the evaluation committee .

### **The efficiency of the institutional procedures of programme quality assurance.**

#### ***Mission, Values and Competitiveness:***

Petre Andrei University has had a relatively short history and the 20 years of its existence weren't without serious leadership struggles and legal battles. The new legal phase has been in place since 2009, and over this period management practices and operations have been reshaped, internal quality procedures have been re-structured or introduced. Having arrived from an external context and not knowing the problematic details what is obvious to me is that in spite of the institutional crisis ( 2004-2007) the study programs have been constantly developed and they have increased in number too throughout the difficult periods, the teaching staff has matured professionally and proper recruitment practices were in operation, the headquarters building and other facilities improved greatly , the mission of the university has remained intact. The objective has been to serve the people of Moldova region from the onset following the legacy of Petre Andrei. The slogan : "University in the Community" expresses the institution's engagement to make the people around informed citizens by means of transmitting knowledge and research results and to develop human resources for enhancing the potential of the region that includes areas which in 2005, according to Eurostat data was grouped within the poorest regions of the EU's 271 regions in terms of GDP per inhabitant. ( North-Eastern Region reached only 24% of the EU27 average).

UPA ensures the entry of appr. 1000 graduates a year to the Moldova labour market. UPA seems to be very much embedded in the social life of the city and the region, a lot of partnerships have been formed since the launch resulting both R & D opportunities and internship offers for the students' practical education. On the top floors of the university building media enterprises are to be found and through partnership agreements the studios often broadcast university events, conferences, and host programs and public debates built on the skills and knowledge of the academic staff. The ones whom I had the chance to discuss issues clearly showed the validity of the intellectuals' traditional roles, i.e. engaged in providing useful, accurate, and scientifically rigorous information to policy makers and to the members of the community raising their awareness on local and regional

public policy , creating social spaces to involve multiple audiences and to foster the climate for responsible actions. Public opinion shows that academia has still retained its credibility and it represents a value-added asset in an era when politicians and political institutions are often losing the trust of the people. The university's self-evaluation document expressed an image of establishing itself as a regional leader in the market of academic services for Moldova area. The project *Regional Cooperation for Entrepreneurial Excellence* reached approximately 5000 citizens in the 6 counties of North- Eastern Development Region who attended the free courses given by the university lecturers thus making the culture of Petre Andrei better known to the broader community. UPA's involvement in community and civic projects recently achieved national recognition when it was awarded the TROPHY 10 for Romania by the Media Trust Realitatea TV.

Examples of student volunteering, such as the charity work they are undertaking and the public projects and campaigns induced by their active participation were mentioned regularly. (like setting up UNESCO clubs in Moldova and pro-democracy associations, contributing to the national campaign entitled Together Against Corruption, monitoring the national elections, collecting bags of clothing for the homeless, donating Christmas parcels to the elderly and to the children etc.) The Student League has just been preparing for a project against discrimination funded by Soros which combines research, awareness raising and advocacy.

This pro-community perspective has an impact on shaping the university's research strategy as well: doing applied science is their main goal. Until the new Law on Education this year Petre Andrei University as a private entity wasn't eligible for funding from the National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education , so the institution's research orientation had to concentrate on those directions which proved to be alternatively fruitful in terms of generating external funds additional to their own budget. EU and UN developmental programs were targeted in partnerships with other public and business organizations. IASI City Council approached the university to be a leading partner in designing its strategy development plan Agenda 21 that triggered numerous research projects to identify and highlight the challenges. Petre Andrei University contributed to the EU TAIEX Network as well in 2010 that aimed to work on the prevention of social exclusion. Over the last 3 years the value of UPA's research and development contracts reached 3 million euros.

The other niche for strategic positioning is an effort to create international R & D partnerships in the geopolitical region between countries which only recently joined to the EU and those which aspire to join. Trying to build collaboration between countries or regions that are in different development phase regarding EU membership requires sharing competences gained by those who have developed one or two steps further on how to best use the R & D programmes available for stakeholders in member and pre-accession countries. The strategic network building has started, universities in Poland, in Lithuania, in Bulgaria, in Turkey, in Republic of Moldova, etc. have agreed to join to cooperate.

So far the institution has created several Research Centres following the 2002 launch of the Centre for Social Investigation such as like Centre for Legal Research, Centre for Economic Research, Centre for Political and Administrative Research. There are 6 full-time researchers within the academic staff at present, but obviously all faculty members are involved in research activities as well. The institution is proud to capitalize on research outcomes and integrate them into course content.

A university tradition has evolved to hold each year an Annual Scientific Session during the event called the Petre Andrei Days in order to increase the academic profile of the institution as a whole. Since 2009 public visibility has been enhanced by launching the New Series of the Annals in Social Sciences. There are other professional journals published by each faculty. The Faculty of Sociology has just been asked to take over the editing task of the periodical *Sociological Review* from the prestigious Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of IASI. Other colleagues are approached to edit thematic issues of national academic periodicals.

The academic publisher European Publishing House which focuses on social science books was established in 1991 and has been producing around 100 titles a year since. As they moved to the building of the Petre Andrei University some years ago the partnership with the academics is becoming more and more substantial. Now the number of scientific books published by their authorship has reached 20.

Since 2009 October the institution has created its International Relations Office and from the analysis of the newsletters UNIVERSITAS (sent to each member of staff) it is obvious that much effort has been devoted to contact building and partnership agreements have been signed. UPA has joined the International Association of Universities (IAU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Network for Business Studies and Languages (SPACE) and the network of Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI). The latter has a membership of more than 140 EU and non-EU universities.

The institution fully embraced the initiatives of Bologna Process, applied the three-cycle degree system and elaborated the common qualification framework. It operates quality assurance procedures, it values partnerships and seeks to promote transnational cooperation and mobility.

### **The efficiency of the institutional procedures for ensuring graduation standards.**

Quality is as much dependent on student ability and efforts as on the provision the institution offers. UPA puts an emphasis of motivating students to be achievers and to improve their capacities. 40 merit scholarships of 6 types are on offer. The institution wants to support the efforts of those who want to excel.

In Romania public servants have the right to study leave, so mature and older students are enrolling as well. The policy is to mix older and younger students in study groups because experience shows the learning climate will be much more challenging and motivating.

The university's ability to provide opportunities for good learning experiences was improved by the recently introduced assessment procedures elaborated by the Quality Assurance Committee. Implementation of the quality assurance assessment policy began in 2006/2007 academic year but it has been recalibrated starting with the academic year 2009/2010.

The necessity of a university-wide student evaluation system has been established which guarantees that every member of the staff and every course is evaluated at the end of each semester and both the students and teachers receive a response to their assessments. The student

surveys enquiring about the educational experiences were very favourable, on a scale of 1-5 the overall average was 4,7.

Having met with graduates nobody raised issues about problems in getting employment, so the labour market or occupational relevance of the degree programs seems to be achieved well. A study on graduate integration into the labour market conducted on the national level by Kienbaum Management Consulting ranked Petre Andrei University in 6th place. The Centre for Human Resources and Career Guidance, the Entrepreneurial Club, the Pro-job course contributed to the strong work experience and the extent of student volunteering helped achieve this result. UPA feels that demonstrating strong career paths works as a good promotional strategy to attract good quality students.

Since the beginning the institutional management system has put an emphasis on providing varied and institutionally diverse fields of practice experiences for the students. A lot of graduates were praising the extensive pool of professional practice they could acquire during their formative years. Employers acknowledged the learning outcomes as well.

The students positively mentioned a lot of extracurricular activities, among them cultural and artistic events they have a chance to either organize or participate in. ( 81% satisfaction rate)

### **The efficiency of the institutional procedures of supporting the educational process.**

#### ***Composition of the teaching staff:***

In order to attract good and able students and create an image of a private university as a quality institution UPA has always prioritised ensuring the quality of its staff. From 40 ( 2002) the academic staff has grown to 247. It is worth noting that demonstrating teaching skill is a requirement to be appointed.

I found a good mix of very experienced professors and junior lecturers. The average age is relatively young, around 38-39 years old. A lot of former bright students who excelled in their studies were recruited to join the staff.

The staff/student ratio is: 1/17.

Young staff members were very satisfied with the attention the university management is giving them in terms of supporting the process of getting a doctoral degree or going to international and domestic conferences. ( 1 international, 2-3 domestic is generally given to each.) The new leadership was praised as well for the changes in access to power structures and for inclusion of bottom-up initiatives.

As the size of the teaching staff is relatively small the leadership of UPA facilitates internal communications so that everyone at the University is aware of the proceedings. This is the only Romanian private university which has an Employees' Union.

The teacher evaluation framework is composed of the following elements: 1. teacher self-evaluation 2. peer-evaluation ( each has to evaluate 4-5 colleagues whose work is known to him/her). 3. peer observation. 4. Student evaluation

All the elements of a teacher's work (teaching, participation in university boards and international bodies, research, publication, conference papers etc.) are aggregated into a „total number“. The totals staff members achieve are compared to each other within each faculty according to the appropriate level required of the teaching position (Professor, Reader, Lecturer, Assistant ). There will be people at the statistical medium and persons below and above that average. Individual reviews follow the assessment by the Head of the Departments, and faculty councils discuss the results and their implications as well. In the future the university wants to relate the assessment to financial incentives and sanctions as well but at this moment the policy is to refine the procedure and methods, integrate the individual goals and institutional/collective interests and make it acceptable to reluctant academics.

Teachers receive bonuses for Easter and Christmas and on the occasion of their birthday. Supplementary pension contributions are paid by the university. In order to build community cohesion there are some social events as well. Last year a big New Year's Ball was organized at a hotel attended by 80 % of all employees.

The compulsory teaching materials are made easily accessible to students as CD-s have to be made from the needed texts for each course. With the help of the European Publishing House more than 20 e-books have been made available recently containing course materials on specific subjects. These publication have been issued with an ISSN number so they are for public use.

The teachers were very much valued by their former students of their time and for the care they were giving to them. Mentoring, tutoring and a collaborative spirit was appraised by graduates who even highlighted accessibility at weekends in their private time.

### **The internal evaluation results of the study programmes' quality.**

Students' evaluations were very favourable : they rated the quality of programs above 4,0 on a scale of 1-5. I've studied more closely the courses within the Faculty of Economics when I met grades as high as 4,56; 4,92; 4,89; 4,69; 4,23;

Learner-centered perspective : Former graduates really valued the personalized teaching methods of the professors, they expressed thanks that lecturers always found time for their personal and professional development.

Course schedules: Last year students raised the issue of modular teaching and learning in the Senate and after consultation they introduced a model which concentrated lectures for all the courses in the first 6 weeks followed up by a seminar and project- phase offering a clear-cut time-budget for the learners. Next year there is to be an initiative to try out real modular teaching and learning in concentrated periods. Students praised this experimental spirit in the organizational culture.

MA study programs are designed with the help of employers and partner organisations.

### **The students' use of the academic infrastructure**

## **Learning environment:**

UPA has got a modern, well-equipped 13 floor building and with an other building in the city the capacity reaches 10 000 m<sup>2</sup> space for educational purposes. A newly built hostel serves the student community in a fashion which is suitable to host foreign students if the Erasmus program will develop. Internet access is free. Spaces for sport and leisure are offered through partnerships but there is big room for improvement in that aspect. There is no swimming pool even in the whole city, there are no cycling paths either.

The student evaluation of the infrastructure showed a satisfaction rate above 90 % in nearly all dimensions ( facilities, utilities, elevators, access for the disabled, classrooms, clean toilets), only the limited number of parking places hit 56 % satisfaction and the hostel earned 79 %.

The university library is a student friendly space with 4 practitioners for assistance. The head of the service is a very experienced expert who worked decades before at the prestigious Eminescu Library of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University and this fact has generated a very good level of cooperation between the two libraries, they share documents, copies of periodicals, books.

The number of items: 35 000 books, the number is growing as a result of donations as well.

Each year a written Guide to the Library is published and disseminated to the students. At present 1800 students are registered for a reading permit. Proper bibliographical research for theses is regularly done.

The Library provides all the compulsory course materials in CD format and presents and collects all the publications of academic staff.

The opening hours are from Monday to Friday 8-19 only but according to staff students are satisfied with that schedule. Complaints come from those who would like to use the services of the library in the summer holidays but it remains closed in that period.

I've heard from one of the committee members that the number of seats are below Romanian standards but the librarians assured me that if the students needed more learning spaces during examination periods, lecture theatres in the building are offered to them. At the time of my visit there were a lot of empty places

## **The credibility of information disseminated by the institution with regard to the study programmes.**

The institution practices proactive marketing and recruitment efforts as it wishes to maintain its reputation and to expand and enhance the quality of incoming students.

The main website details the mission of the university, the study and research programs, the degrees offered, links to the faculty websites and admission requirements – but only in Romanian.

Open Doors Days are for potential learners to get a first-hand knowledge about university life. Caravan Days are specially targeting high school pupils. Each „caravan team” consists of both students and professors. UPA has developed a partnership with four top high schools in Moldavia

and a high school journal called ALECART is produced by these pupils who document their experiences with the university and its students.

Since the autumn of 2009 the University Public Relations Department consists of a Press Bureau, a Promotion Bureau and a Media Production Unit with 12 full time employees. In the academic year 2009/2010 the promotions strategy centred on celebrating the 20 year anniversary of UPA, this year's strategy utilized another celebration: Petrei Andrei was born 120 years ago. Last year the PR strategy planned 80 events but at the end The Annual Activity Report detailed 200 items. I was impressed by the evidence-based character of the report: event – description – media representation, clippings were listed in the substantial document.

### **Good practice aspects**

As Petre Andrei University joined the EMUNI network they had the right to join its annual conference in 2010 by the theme Innovation and Employability. Universities Challenge. They have invented a method which is valued as really worthwhile by the members. UPA is set to be employing this model more in the future. It operates as a multiconference, its opening session and keynote speeches are broadcast simultaneously via video-conferencing, followed by afternoon sessions and workshops organized by member universities in their own surroundings addressing the topics and challenges of the theme as appropriate in their own social context.

There is a merit scholarship framework that aims to stimulate the student improvement in different aspects of personal development. There are 6 kinds of merit scholarship awarded to students.

The promotion of the university's offerings targeting high school pupils through ALECART and the Caravan teams and the data gathering of potential learners at the registration phase.

Community forums and participatory involvement in strategy development.

Incentive system for employees: bonuses for Christmas, Easter, birthday, opportunity for an employee to study free of charge in one of the study program of the university and for a first degree relative a 50% deduction of the tuition fee is guaranteed.

The partnership with the academic publisher European Publishing House. ( publication chances for the academics; e-book formats of course materials).

### **Statement related to the confidence granted to the institution**

*I propose a "high degree of confidence" grade.*

## **Recommendations for the institution's activity**

Learning lessons from the factors that prevented the institution from utilizing the ERASMUS framework for student and teacher mobility in the last 2 years and concentrating efforts to making up for the lost opportunities. Support services are needed to improve the learning and teaching skills of staff in foreign languages to prepare them for international work.

It must be a priority to improve and sharpen the research focus within the activities and increase the success rate of research grant applications. The new Law will open up opportunities to compete for national funds as well. Besides identifying niche areas for the university's research centres to achieve accreditation by the national body, it would be benefit the institution's competitiveness. Establishing a professional support structure to assist in the proper development of grant proposals and for reporting the achievements after winning them. Broadening the scope would need more intensive international partnerships in the area of research that would create a base for carving out doctoral program as well.

It is appropriate to approach one or more international indexing and abstracting services in the respective disciplines in the fields where UPA has got expertise. Efforts in indexing the journals and scientific publications should be continued.

Supporting efforts of the faculties to become members of international academic associations.

Promotion of the university's offer should harmonise with promoting the city of Iasi, especially as it intends to apply for EU European Capital of Culture initiative.

The university website should be available in foreign languages as well.

Establishing clearer procedures in formalized ways, as well increasing transparency and depersonalizing.

## **Recommendation to ARACIS**

Organizing the meetings with the student groups, graduates, leadership and academics does have an appropriate pattern in the evaluation process. The inspection side of the external evaluation automatically puts the institution on the defensive, defending their achievements, not disclosing to outsiders their weak points. In my mind proper constructive evaluations are those which trigger self-reflection across the board, which question previously unquestioned received practice. How to induce that sort of reflective atmosphere is a key challenge for ARACIS evaluation committees.

Pécs, 05-06-2011.

  
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