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*Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and
Diversity of the Romanian Universities*

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad

EVALUATION REPORT

January 2014

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Quality and Diversity
of the Romanian Universities





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Table of contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Governance and institutional decision-making**
- 3. Teaching and learning**
- 4. Research**
- 5. Service to society**
- 6. Quality culture**
- 7. Internationalisation**
- 8. Conclusions**
- 9. Annex**



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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad. The evaluation took place in 2013 in the framework of the project “Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 Law on Education and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management;
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.



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The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. Aurel Vlaicu university of Arad's profile

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad (UAV) is a relatively young comprehensive university. It originates in the establishment of the Institute of Sub-engineering in 1972, and was established as a comprehensive university in 1990. It is located in the city of Arad in the Region 5 West of Romania, close to the Hungarian border. The university is well respected in the community.

The rector of the university, Prof. Ramona Lile, has been in her post since spring 2012. Her four-year term is renewable for a further four years. The university has three pro-rectors responsible respectively for education and quality assessment, scientific research, and academic transparency and international affairs. The university comprises nine faculties: the Faculty of Design (FD), Faculty of Physical Education and Sport (FEFS), Faculty of Engineering (FI), Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection (FIATPM), Faculty of Economic Sciences (FSEC), Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work (FSEPAS), Faculty of Exact Sciences (FSE), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FSUS) and Faculty of Theology (FT). Each faculty has one department only, but several study programmes. The team was told that the national requirements for establishing departments mandate one department in each faculty, and respectively, national legislation requires the university to have faculties even when they coincide one to one with departments.

The university has 460 staff members, of which 215 full-time and 125 part-time academic staff and 120 administrative staff. The staff is relatively young; the team was told that the average age of staff is 42 years.

Due to the financial crisis, as well as demographic and legislative changes, UAV's student numbers have decreased from approximately 14,400 in 2008-2009 to 7 702 in 2012-2013. At the same time, its total disposable income has been nearly halved from 43.7 million RON in 2008 to 26.47 million RON in 2012.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation committee appointed by the Senate of the university. The self-evaluation process was co-chaired by Florentina Daniela



Munteanu (Pro-Rector, Scientific Research) and Sorin Florin Nădăban (Dean, Faculty of Exact Sciences), and comprised the following members:

- Alina Diana Zamfir – Pro-Rector (International Relations)
- Dan Ovidiu Glăvan – Dean - Faculty of Engineering
- Cristian Ioja – President of the University Senate – Faculty of Theology
- Radu Cureteanu – Pro-dean – Faculty of Economic Sciences
- Lucian Copolovici - IUCDISTN
- Mirela Valea– Director of Finance-Accountancy Department
- Eugenia Țigan – Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection
- *Secretary:* Alexandru Toma Sava, PhD student – Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The self-evaluation team first discussed the goals of the self-evaluation process, then organised a series of free discussions with staff and students of the university to discuss the points requested in the self-evaluation. These meetings resulted in a series of reports, which were used by the self-evaluation team in writing the report. The draft was sent to all faculties, and the deans discussed it with staff and students. There was no student representative in the self-evaluation team, which the IEP team considered somewhat puzzling. The students were only represented by Mr Sava, who, as a PhD student, is also employed by the university. The self-evaluation team made some changes to the draft based on the suggestions from members of the university community, for example some additional weaknesses and threats were included, particularly in relation to UAV's funding difficulties and the external financial environment. The final self-evaluation report is available on the university website. The self-evaluation report is accompanied by an extensive list of appendices.

The self-evaluation report of the UAV was sent to the evaluation team on 21 March 2013. The visits of the evaluation team to UAV took place from 17 to 19 April 2013 and from 12 to 15 November 2013 respectively. In between the visits the UAV provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Fuada Stankovic, Former Rector, University of Novi Sad, Serbia, team chair
- David Vincent, former Pro Vice-Chancellor, Open University, United Kingdom
- Laust Joen Jakobsen, Rector, University College Copenhagen, Denmark



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- Ieva Baltina, student, University of Latvia, Latvia
- Terhi Nokkala, Research Fellow, University of Jyväskylä, team coordinator

The team thanks the Rector Ramona Lile and her team for the cordial reception and discussions during the evaluation process. Special thanks go to Pro-Rector Florentina Munteanu who expertly ensured that the team had all the information and facilities necessary for conducting the evaluation.



2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university has a strategic plan for 2012-2016, in which the general mission of the university is formulated as follows:

- AVU takes upon itself the mission of promoting, on a first rate level, the development of some cultural, educational and specialised competences based on knowledge, innovation, continuous learning and intercultural actions;
- AVU has as its main mission the training of specialists in fields and domains required by the labour market, in the spirit of democracy values, love for native country as well as of human personality development;
- Scientific research represents a fundamental dimension of the assumed mission and incorporates academic staff, researchers and students in research groups and centres that create knowledge and innovation in order to develop science, technology and socio- economic progress.

The institutional leadership, in their conversations with the team emphasised the importance of high quality education and the integration of the university into the European field of higher education institutions as the main strategic goals of the university.

2.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

Governance

The governance of the university is complex, with several intersecting layers. The highest decision-making body of the UAV is the Senate, which comprises elected representatives of tenured academic staff and of the student body. The Senate has 43 full members, and 6 permanently invited observers, including the members of the recently established advisory body, Academic Council. The Senate members elect a president for a four-year mandate amongst themselves. The Senate also sets four commissions to prepare policies in their respective fields; these comprise the Academic Commission, Social Commission, Strategy and Improvement Commission and Budget and Finance Commission. The members of the commissions are selected amongst the Senate members.

In accordance with the law, the students hold 25% of the seats in the Senate; in other areas of the university management their participation is uneven. For example, the Academic and Social Commissions have student representatives, while the Strategy and Improvement Commission and Budget and Finance Commission do not. The students met by the team



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seemed fairly happy with their representation, and their own capacity to advance issues important to them with the university management. They did not, however, seem to think that university strategy or budget, for example, would be a student concern.

The Senate meets once every three months or more regularly when necessary. The mandate and decision list of the Senate is extensive; its opinion is required, for example, in cases when a faculty teacher wants to work for a certain period in the university's research institute IUCDISTN - Institute of Research, Development and Innovation in Natural and Technical Sciences.

The day-to-day management of the university is the responsibility of the rector and Administrative Council, which, in addition to the rector, comprises the three pro-rectors, deans, the chair of the academic council-as permanently invited observer, and head of administration. The Administrative Council meets once per month or more. The rector does not have a set of funds at her disposal which she could direct to new initiatives. Instead, after a discussion in the administrative council, the Senate must take a decision of directing such funds.

In 2012 the university established a new advisory body, Academic Council, comprising five members. The Academic Council meets frequently and is chaired by the previous rector, following a vote in the Senate. The other members of the Council are appointed by the chair, although it is also possible to allocate the power to elect the members to the Senate. The Council was established in 2012 when the current senior team was elected, and it was felt that some continuity in the university leadership was required. It is the team's view that adding stakeholder representation in the Academic Council would be a good option to bring employer opinion on board while avoiding, at the same time, the creation of another separate body (a separate stakeholder council, for example) and possible legislative restrictions on including externals in the Senate.

The members of the Academic Council are permanent observers in the Senate, and may also be invited to the quality assurance council. Additionally, the university governance structures include the deans and representative Faculty Councils, as well as directors of Department and Departmental Councils.

The evaluation team was unable to establish a clear picture about the link between the vision, missions and strategic goals of the institution. The evaluation team received a strategic plan for 2012-2016; a comprehensive document which contains strategic goals, priority areas and performance indicators for the university. However, when the team asked the various university bodies and functionaries about the university strategy, this document was never brought up nor were the goals mentioned. It appeared to the team that there is limited ownership of the strategy.



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Funding

The university receives approximately 45% of its total budget from the Ministry of National Education based on the numbers of enrolled students and their required teaching hours. Additionally the university receives earmarked funding for scholarships, student accommodation and capital investments. An approximately similar share of the funding is earned by the university through student tuition fees and other generated income, such as student accommodation rents and renting out other university property and facilities. The remaining ca. 10% of the total budget comprises competitive project funding from national and international research and development projects. The university has very little financial income from projects with private partners. According to legislation, the faculties are not independent budget holders. Instead, funding is allocated by the Senate directly to the departments following the same formula used by the ministry.

The university's total budget has decreased from 43.7 million RON in 2008 to 26.47 million RON in 2012. The decline is evident both in public funding and the university's own funding, albeit with annual fluctuation in the categories. Although the absolute value of the university's own funding streams has also declined, it has risen proportionately as national funding has fallen.

The university has coped with the declining funding through a combination of imposed and self-directed measures. The national authorities imposed some years ago a ceiling of teaching hours per staff member, which resulted in reduced staff costs. When highly paid members of the staff retired, the posts were left unfilled, due to the government moratorium on new recruitments. The contracts of fixed-term staff members working in externally funded projects were not renewed after their contract expired. Overall however, the number of staff has not diminished to the same extent as the number of students. Similarly, the university reduced the salaries of staff to the minimum level allowed by the national standards. Recently the moratorium on new recruitments has been lifted, and the university has been able to fill some empty posts. Tenured academic staff can only be hired if there is a vacant position; research staff can be hired on fixed-term contracts when necessary research funds are available. The university has also cut down sharply on its capital investments in order to cope with diminishing budgets. The university has earlier been able to accumulate a reserve of five million RON of own funds. It is trying not to touch this capital in the current circumstances and only receives the annual interest.

It seems surprising to the team that most of the staff met by the team expressed little concern about the budget cuts. The SWOT analysis in the self-evaluation report refers under "Threats" to "Profound and chronic underfinancing of the Romanian higher education system" (p. 23) but the team was given little sense of the negative impact of this under financing on the work of the university despite the fact that its total income (in RON) fell by



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DEVELOPMENT AND
INNOVATION FUNDING



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26% as recently as between 2011 and 2012. Its staff either genuinely believe that the cuts are not hindering the university activities, or they are uneasy voicing their concerns. Only lack of research funding seems to be a concern.

The university has been able to acquire some national and international research projects, and collects a 30% overhead from project funding. This overhead allows the university management some flexibility in terms of new initiatives and strategic capacity. For example, the management has established the Hotel Akademos, which may provide the university with some extra income and will serve as a training facility for the students in tourism.

The university does not appear to have any shortage of available facilities or space, at least in part because of the near halving of student numbers since 2008. Instead, the university plans to convert two currently empty properties into a training school for teachers and a retirement home for training social workers.

The team believes that countering the financial restraints will require a lot of short-term crisis management, which is made difficult by the complex governance structure and difficult decision-making procedures, and the team wonders whether it may be difficult for the rector to coordinate such a complicated process. The team also notes that it is unusual for the former rector to wield such influence over the strategy process of the university, but that in UAV the arrangement seems currently to be working well.

2.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The university collects annual reports regarding the various parts of its activities, including quality indicators, student satisfaction surveys and data concerning staff activities, such as publications and conferences. These are analysed by the respective commissions of the Senate and taken into account in further strategic planning.

2.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team would like to offer the following observations about the strengths of the university:

- The university demonstrates confident and consensual, if often informal, relations between all key constituents;
- The university and its leadership show commitment to quality and to increasing external funding, and see these as ways forward amidst a volatile operational and financial environment;



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- The university has some capacity to launch new initiatives in order to improve its financial situation. One such example is the newly-established Hotel Akademos which is it is hoped will both generate income and operate as a training facility for students studying tourism.

At same time, however, the university governance contains certain weaknesses:

- It seems to the team, that the university has complicated and labour-intensive management structures and processes for a relatively small institution, which puts unnecessary strain on the time of the university leadership as well as those of the academic staff involved in management activities;
- As a fairly young institution, the university lacks a long-established reputation, making it challenging to find its place amongst Romanian and European universities;
- Although the university has elaborated a strategic plan, there seems to be incomplete translation of strategic priorities into institution-wide action plans and incomplete ownership.

In order to help the university to improve its strategic management capacity, the team would like to offer the following recommendations:

- The university should identify targets and benchmarks for strategic priorities. Similarly, an assessment of the risks associated with strategic priorities should be conducted;
- Strengthen the participation of, and feedback from the constituents of the university community in the implementation of the university strategy;
- Defining a distinctive image for the institution will help the institution to be recognised amongst the large Romanian higher education system, as well as for acquiring international partners;
- The team also recommends that the university consider extending the Academic Council to include employer representatives, in order to formalise and consolidate stakeholder representation and gain valuable knowledge about the needs of the region's employers;
- The team also recommends that the university provide training to students to effectively participate in the decision-making process.



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3. Teaching and Learning

3.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

From the discussions with the university representatives, the team concludes that offering high quality education is the university's most important aspiration. This is supported by the elaboration of the educational mission in the strategic plan 2012-2016, which states that the university

has an educational offer in accordance with labour market demands. Quality must be on a high level regarding the educational content and based on excellent pedagogy. Of great importance for work quality is the participation and involvement of the students.

Quality assurance is done through:

- scientific content of syllabuses;
- pedagogical development;
- well-planned academic offer;
- international character;
- candidates' recruitment;
- systematic use of the best university competences in all the syllabuses.

3.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The university offers 39 programmes at Bachelor level, 25 at Master level and two programmes at PhD level, one in theology and one in philology. The university aspires to establish more PhD programmes, but this has so far been prevented by national legislation concerning the establishment of PhD programmes, which require prior operation first of Bachelor degrees and then of Master degrees in the relevant discipline, as well as qualified personnel to supervise PhD studies.

All study domains in Romania have been evaluated and assigned into categories from A to E based on their resources and performance. Amongst UAV's Bachelor and Master programmes, eight are rated in category A, 21 in category B, 17 in category C, seven in category D, and 11 in category E. Additionally, the university reviews programmes using the ARACIS evaluation



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template every five years and decides whether they should be kept or put on hold, in accordance with labour market and student demand.

As is the case with many other Romanian universities, the number of UAV Bachelor students has declined over the last five years. Undergraduates have fallen from 10,983 in 2008-2009, to 5 736 in 2012-2013, and Master students from 3 417 to 1 935. To accommodate changing student numbers and demands in the labour market, the university has put some degree programmes on hold (for example rail vehicle engineer, chemical engineer), and established new ones (for example, entrepreneurship programme for those aspiring to establish their own company). The team was told that the faculties also visit local high schools to promote their programmes to prospective students and raise aspirations for higher education. The university faces competition for students from a private university in Arad, as well from the wider region and nationally.

The majority of studies are based on face-to-face teaching, followed by an examination. Individual projects are also used as teaching methods. Some faculties use a Moodle-based learning platform. E-learning is mainly used to post extra materials online, and distance-learning courses are offered to limited numbers of distance-learning students. While there is some practical training and internship periods included in the studies, the students met by the team generally indicated they would like to have more practical training built into the curriculum. This seems to be, however, limited by the requirements of the national curriculum. There are examples of avoiding duplicate teacher positions, and making use of the teaching staff across faculty borders. For example, teachers from mathematics and the computer science department also teach courses in the engineering and economics department.

The university has a career counselling department, which provides students with training on how to apply for jobs or prepare for a job interview, as well as providing the best students with stipends to continue their studies in other universities.

3.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The university monitors the satisfaction of students in the educational offer and teacher performance through biannual questionnaires. Similarly, the university collects feedback from its own alumni as well as local employers in order to establish whether the skills of its graduates are able to satisfy labour market needs.

3.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team has observed several strengths pertaining to the teaching and learning function and activities of the university.



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DEVELOPMENT AND
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- It is evident that there are very close and supportive relations between students and staff in the university; this was also emphasised by both staff and students met by the team. This enables an easy, fast route for students and staff to communicate and address any cause for concern regarding teaching and learning;
- The university has maintained a focus on the quality of teaching despite financial restrictions. Similarly, the staff remains committed to their students and to improving teaching and learning;
- The university demonstrates a commitment to distance learning. There are some programmes which seem to effectively respond to the distance-learning requirements coming from their students;
- The university emphasises the importance of practical training in their teaching, although it is to an extent limited by the constraints of the national curriculum;
- The university involves local and regional employers in the design and development of the courses offered by the university.

The team also observed some weaknesses in terms of the teaching and learning function.

- Although there are several examples of good practice in terms of pedagogical innovation and e-learning, they are not generalised across the institution but appear to be limited to a few enthusiastic individuals;
- In the context of financial constraints, the university has chosen to limit its capital expenditure. While this may be necessary in the short term, the team observes that it is important for the university to be aware of the depreciation of facilities and to have a plan for necessary repairs, as also required by the Ministry of Education.
- While there are some examples of offering pedagogical training and in-service development to the members of staff, the uptake seems to be limited to some units or individuals, rather than being a transparent part of the comprehensive university strategy.

To remedy these weaknesses, the team would like to offer the following recommendations:

- The university should seek to extend pedagogical training for staff members. If the university chooses, it could for example consider making pedagogical training an additional merit in career progression;



- The university already offers continuous professional development (CPD) programmes to the labour force in Arad, in order to facilitate continuous updating of skills. The team recommends that the university extends this educational offer of CPD courses, which may both contribute additional income stream for the university and enhance the skills level of the labour force available in Arad and its region;
- The university should seek to expand the use of e-learning platform in all faculties, and to continuously update it to ensure cost-effective and innovative pedagogy;
- The university should also pay further attention to providing its students with transferable skills that are necessary in today's labour market. These may include, but are not limited to team work, communication or project management skills.



4. Research

4.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

Increasing the visibility of research of UAV is one of its strategic priorities. The self-evaluation report describes the mission of the university regarding research as follows:

Scientific research is another very important mission for UAV. It seeks to incorporate the teaching staff, researchers and students in research centres and collectives, generating knowledge and innovation with the aim of developing science, technology and aiding socio-economic progress.

This is further elaborated by the strategic plan, which emphasises, for example, the importance of attracting external funding, earmarking the university's own funds for research, research as collaborative activity and as a means of professional development, and the importance of freedom of research.

4.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The university has a research strategy which lays out the strategic objectives and priorities of the university in the field of research. The strategy has been to allocate strategic funding from the university's own funds to strengthen those areas that have already accomplished success, for example through acquiring nationally or internationally funded research projects or contributing ISI-indexed research publications. Also patents and H-index are taken into account. This strategic funding has taken the form of investing in equipment, allocating co-funding necessary for international projects, and front-funding projects that have received national or international funding, while waiting for those external funds to arrive in the university accounts. Those departments without similar success with external funds receive less support from the university. The extent of research activity is dependent on the availability of research funds and has declined due to the general reduction in government research funding. The university targets research funds through local, national as well as European initiatives. European structural funds are an important target.

Of the university's tenured academic staff, 90% hold PhDs and the remaining 10% need to acquire a PhD by 2015 in order to be able to keep their posts. PhD students are employed in research projects on fixed-term contracts but the team was told that they were not employed for teaching activities. Exceptionally research-active staff members may get a salary increase of up to 25% based on their research performance for five years, although this is monitored annually. The staff met by the team seemed to be relatively happy about the support given by the university to advance their research careers.



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The university has established a research institute, IUCDISTN – Institute of Research, Development and Innovation in Natural and Technical Sciences, in 2006. The research institute currently has 22 staff members, about 20% of whom are employed directly by the institute while the rest are seconded from faculties to work in the institute on a full- or part-time basis. It has been able to acquire some up-to-date equipment, and has secured a six million RON European Regional Development Fund for a research project. The equipment would enable the university to generate additional income by offering a possibility for research groups from other universities and institutes to make use of the facilities, but at the moment the IUCDISTN is not accredited by the government, so this is not possible.

The university also has a national mass spectrometry laboratory, which is one of the facilities enabling the university to take part in international projects. The university's goal is to have more accredited laboratories in the areas where they already have the required equipment and human resources.

The team was told that all staff in the university were research-active at some level. Research funding was considered to be general problem, but the staff members met by the team did not perceive lack of time available for research to be a cause for concern.

4.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

All staff members are expected to be research-active, research is taken into account in promoting staff and research productivity may also contribute to the salary increases. All staff members are expected to produce an annual report of their research output.

4.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team thinks that the university exhibits the following strengths in research:

- The university shows commitment to developing the research profile of the institution. All the staff members met by the team seemed to be deeply committed to doing research;
- There is a strategy of targeting resources to those research strengths which show particular promise;
- There are also good facilities available for the few research fields that attract funded outcomes;
- The university is actively engaging in attracting European research funding and establishing European collaborative projects.



There are, however, also some weaknesses in terms of the university's research function.

- Due to the limited resources of local companies and the fact that international companies are often branches without decision-making powers in terms of research and development expenditure, it is difficult for the university to obtain funding from local industry;
- The status of UAV as a research university in the Romanian HE system is uncertain. It was originally classified as a teaching-based university, in the 2011 classification of Romanian universities. Since then UAV's aim has been to be placed in a category emphasising research. While the old classification is in abeyance following an appeal in the courts, there is uncertainty about which direction the Romanian Government may be taking the classification exercise in the future, whether a new categorisation will take place and what criteria it may have;
- Due to the steady decline in public funding and student numbers, the university is increasingly dependent on short-term external funding, which makes long-term planning and improvement challenging or impossible.

The team would like to present the following considerations for the university:

- The team encourages that the university should drive research in all areas in order to improve teaching, but continue focusing the main research effort to the limited areas of excellence. The team also recommends that the university seek further support from local industries for research and development projects. Tailor-made projects, as well as sharing facilities with industry may both contribute to income generation and reduce costs;
- It is also very important that the university makes use of research results to innovate teaching. As a primarily teaching-oriented institution, research at its best contributes directly to updating the educational content and methods.



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5. Service to society

5.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

Local engagement is important for the university, which was long awaited in this region, and is supported by it. The mission of UAV in terms of service to society is phrased in the self-evaluation report as follows: "Besides its traditional missions, UAV also desires to adopt an important cultural function and civic role within the community, thus offering civic and cultural experiences."

The strategic plan 2012-2016 furthermore states the following:

Science must be used, science develops. For mathematical shaping, historical processes, technological innovation or any other domain, knowledge is important both for people and society. Innovation and cooperation with industry and agriculture is essential and important even for the development of democracy, social analyses, education of the grown up persons and regional and national employment.

5.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The university has some projects with companies located in the area, as well as the City Council of Arad. Little research income is generated through these projects, however, for several reasons. As has been noted, many of the companies lack the capacity to make major investments in new technologies or research services is limited and others are local branches of companies whose research takes place elsewhere. The university is trying to remedy this by establishing larger clusters to improve the absorption of new innovations.

Many of the graduates of UAV hold central positions in the businesses in and around Arad and through them UAV is able to connect with potential employers. An alumni organisation of former UAV students was established five years ago. The university also helps students to find internships in companies, although the team was unable to establish how large a portion of internships are facilitated by the university and how many were found by the students themselves.

The team was told that the Region 5 West where Arad is located has a lower than average unemployment rate in Romania. Through its alumni department the university monitors the careers of their graduates as well as the satisfaction of the employers regarding the skills of the graduates. The university aspires to adapt to the changing labour markets regionally, nationally and internationally by putting some of its programmes on hold and establishing new ones. Some students in high-demand fields were offered employment well before graduation, but others met by the team did seem to be worried about the possibilities of finding jobs after they graduate.



The university curriculum is greatly determined by the national curriculum. The team was told that the university aims to seek the employers' opinions in designing the content of the courses and study programmes to the extent that it is not determined by the national curriculum. The external stakeholders, however, viewed their ability to influence the course content as small.

The university does not have any formal channels for communication with external stakeholders. When asked, most of the representatives of external stakeholders thought it would be a good idea to have a more formalised stakeholder council. However, as underlined in section 2.2, the team encourages UAV to consider including stakeholder representation in the Academic Council, especially as the University Charter shows that positions in the council are still available.

Some of the faculties have established or are establishing lifelong learning programmes, although they do not yet cover all the fields in the university. The university does have a continuing education office and this field of activity seems currently under-developed given the university's mission to provide a service to the needs of the local economy.

5.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The university has established an alumni office, which collects feedback from the graduates of the university, as well as from employers regarding the skills required in the labour market. The team was told that the alumni office also acts as a link between local businesses and the university. However, not all of the external stakeholders met by the team were aware that they may contact the university through the alumni office and indicated that they did not always know how to reach the university.

5.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

In terms of service to the society, the university has the following strengths:

- The team sees that the existence of UAV is a driving force for the entire area and the university is well embedded to the surrounding community, with established links and long-standing collaboration with the major stakeholders and partners. The existence of the university contributes to the vitality of the social, cultural and economic life of Arad, and the university attracts significant employers to the region;
- The university offers teacher training for pre-university schools and thus plays a significant role in maintaining the school system in Arad;



- The university organises life-long learning programmes at the request of companies, thus contributing to the maintenance and upgrading of the skills levels of the local labour force;
- The school visits conducted by the faculties of UAV contribute to raising the aspirations of school-age children in the region and thus to increasing the future education levels of the population.

However, the team would like also to note the following weaknesses:

- Although some of the faculties offer entrepreneurship training for their students, the uptake of such training still seemed limited to the team. Similarly the business incubator facilities are underdeveloped;
- The university's formal engagement with external stakeholders seems insufficient and not conducted on a regular basis at the institutional level.

In order to build on the university's strengths and to remedy the weaknesses, the team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university's consideration:

- Establish a one-stop office for employers and industry to contact the university. This office should be the low-threshold contact point for any local businesses to approach if they desire collaboration with the university;
- Coordinate and integrate at an institutional level the professional development and entrepreneurship services which are currently separately handled by the different faculties. In this way the university will be able to identify more efficiently and facilitate the broader educational offer directed to the community.



6. Quality culture

6.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The high quality of its education was emphasised as the strategic aim of the university by all the members of the university community met by the team.

The university's self-evaluation report lists several quality-related strategic objectives for the university. These include the following:

- Quality assurance and sustainable development;
- Targeting quality and encouraging educational and research performance;
- Creating a research and educational framework compatible with European standards.

6.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The university has put in place multiple layers and bodies involved in quality assurance. The university has a quality assurance department and quality assurance council at institutional level, as well as faculty-level quality assurance committees, which analyse data concerning the quality of education in the institution. The faculty quality assurance committees also make recommendations about putting certain programmes on hold or establishing new ones for reasons related to labour-market needs and student demand. The institutional quality assurance committee forwards the quality assurance reports to the Senate, and makes recommendations on how to solve any arising problems. The Senate makes a decision about solving problems or making changes to the programme offer.

The students met by the team seemed happy with their possibilities of influencing the quality of their teaching. They indicated that should any problems arise they felt comfortable bringing it up with the teachers directly. Each cohort also has a student acting as a "head of the year", whom the students can turn to with any potential problems.

In 2013 the ARACIS conducted the regular quinquennial evaluation of the quality of the UAV. The ARACIS evaluation team has proposed the rating "trust" on its quality instead of the previous "high trust", and ARACIS made a series of remarks regarding issues the university was expected to change. The university reacted speedily, remedying some of the points immediately and making a plan for remedying the others in due course. The UAV also indicated that it wants to be re-evaluated as soon as 2014 to see whether the problems pointed out by ARACIS have been successfully solved and the university can regain the rating "high trust".



It is the impression of the team, however, that the main focus of the quality assurance in UAV is on consistency of quality and following certain procedures as a routine. There seems to be at present few mechanisms for identifying or driving forwards quality enhancement, but one of the the university present and future concerns is the implementation of efficient quality enhancement.

6.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The quality of the educational offer is monitored through student feedback surveys, comprising both open questions and numerical evaluations, collected at the end of each semester. Similarly, the academic staff members evaluate their own teaching and research performance annually, and colleagues evaluate each other. The team was also told that the university uses the ARACIS quality assurance template to periodically evaluate its own programmes.

6.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

While the university has strengths regarding its quality culture, the team also identified several problems, which require addressing.

Strengths:

- Quality is recognised as a strategic aim of the university;
- The university has put in place all the standard procedures and processes for quality assurance, which allows it to track quality across the institution. Quality is reviewed at all levels of the university, so the institutional leadership has the tools for acquiring up-to-date knowledge about the state of quality in the institution;
- The university conducts periodic review of its study programmes according to the ARACIS template, including a self-evaluation report, and an evaluation team. This also enables the university to prepare itself for future ARACIS evaluations;
- The university has shown that it has the willingness, the procedures and the capacity to act rapidly on quality concerns. The rapid response to 2013 ARACIS review is an example of this.

Weaknesses:

- It seems to the team that the institution's engagement with quality has an emphasis on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement. The quality processes are



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geared towards checking the standards rather than improving them in an innovative manner;

- The team was not able to fully establish the task division between the Quality Assurance Department and Quality Assurance Council and the Faculty Councils, which may be an indication of overlapping tasks or unduly cumbersome procedures;
- While the cordial and informal relations between students and staff of this relatively small institution allow an easy way for teachers to address individual quality concerns by students, dependency on personal contact at the same time risks inconsistent action, unless more formal procedures to ensure consistency are in place and upheld.
- The paper-based rather than electronic QA system delays analysis and response to quality concerns, which often require fast action. Similarly, it complicates longitudinal analysis of the overall development of quality and increases the amount of work needed in quality assurance. However, some of the faculties have already implemented the electronic QA system, which enhances the efficiency of answering to the quality issues raised by the students.

In order to remedy these weaknesses the team would like to offer the following recommendations:

- Increase emphasis on and train staff in quality enhancement;
- Generate efficiencies in quality assurance administration by inspecting the task division of the current bodies engaged in quality assurance and by moving from a paper-based to electronic system of collecting the periodical surveys from students and staff.



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7. Internationalisation

7.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university would like to receive more international students and internationally-educated staff, as well as increase the international exchange rates of both its staff and students. It would like to increase the international visibility of the institution, integrating the institution as part of the European higher education area.

In its self-evaluation report, the university states amongst its strategic objectives the following points, which pertain to its internationalisation:

- Creating a research and educational framework compatible with European standards;
- Gaining international visibility;
- Active and responsible academic participation on national and international levels.

7.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The university has some emerging international activities in the field of education and research. The university has 42 Erasmus exchange agreements for students and staff. However, the annual Erasmus student exchange has been low and unbalanced with ca. 40 outgoing and ca. 20 incoming. The staff figures are even lower, with a maximum of eight outgoing and eight incoming staff members. The small grant is one of the major hindrances for local students to leave for Erasmus exchange. Courses completed during the exchange are fully recognised. The university has an Erasmus exchange office to help students and staff who aspire to participate in exchange. There seems to be some courses that are organised in English on a regular basis but otherwise courses are presented in English if and when a need arises. It is, however, unclear to the team whether these courses have the regular quality assurance procedures in place in terms of resources, teaching and examination. The students met by the team indicated that they would like to have more courses presented in English and other foreign languages, and that they would like to receive more language training.

In research, the university has acquired several European Union funded projects either through the 7th Framework Programme, Regional Development Fund or Lifelong Learning Programme. The Romanian Government guarantees matching funds for projects that have received European funding.



The university has developed regional, cross-border cooperation especially with Hungarian and Serbian universities and is involved in several regional projects. The university also has partnerships with non-European universities in the field of education or research. The university has emerging collaboration with a Chinese company looking to invest in the Arad region. While the collaboration agreement will first pertain to exchange of facilities, it may include training later on.

The university has taken active steps to recruit staff members who are of Romanian origin but who have spent time abroad for a Master, a PhD or a postdoc. Currently the university employs fourteen Romanian, foreign educated staff members.

7.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The university has a pro-rector with explicit responsibility to monitor and advance international activities. The university also takes part in the European Graduate Barometer, which enables the university to see itself in a larger, comparative picture.

7.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team has recognised the following strengths and weaknesses in the domain of internationalisation.

Strengths:

- Internationalisation is a strategic priority of the institution;
- The university has successfully made use of research to internationalise the institution, in a situation where its capacity to internationalise its education is somewhat limited;
- The university has made several active attempts to bring back the Romanian academic diaspora. In this way, the university has been able to gain valuable experience in internationalisation at home, through those Romanian scholars who have studied or worked in institutions outside Romania for extended periods of time;
- The team detected amongst UAV's students a willingness to internationalise, to compare systems, to learn about different cultures, and to gain more languages.

Weaknesses:



- The university does not seem to have an overall strategy on how to achieve the international visibility it desires;
- While students and staff show a willingness to internationalise, the actual numbers undertaking, for instance, semester-long exchanges abroad are fairly small. Therefore, it seems to the team that students and staff require more motivation and encouragement for taking sustained periods abroad;
- Due to the limited number of courses taught in foreign languages, there are limited opportunities for overseas students to study at UAV.

Finally, the team would like to suggest the following recommendations for the university to consider:

- The university should establish strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be achievable and a concerted action plan should be drafted to chart the way for achieving those;
- The university should also involve the administrative staff in international activities in order to enable them to learn from best practices abroad;
- Prioritising language training for both staff and students would enable them to fully engage with international activities;
- The university could rebrand the Erasmus office as an international office and expand its activities to cover all aspects of internationalisation;
- The university should disseminate best practices inside the institution for encouraging students to study abroad;
- Finally, the university should establish a strategy for delivering quality-assured courses in English and other languages. The quality, facilities and procedures for courses taught in foreign languages should be the same as for those taught in Romanian. As this is necessarily an expensive activity, the university should carefully consider those courses for which a foreign language delivery is feasible.



8. Conclusion

The team would like to conclude that UAV is a good university with solid education much appreciated by its students. The university is well embedded and appreciated by its local community and by its existence alone revitalises the city and region of Arad. The staff of the university is young, competent and extremely dedicated to giving the students the best possible educational experience. The university leadership recognises the challenges faced by the university and is committed to changing the institution in the face of these challenges.

The university operates in a challenging environment with volatile political and legal circumstances. The declining national funding for education and research, as well as the declining demography and the brain drain from Romania to the rest of Europe are particular causes for concern. The former is leading to declining student population, while the latter has resulted in an increased reliance on short-term funding.

Such a challenging environment makes it difficult for the university to make long-term planning and improvements. The situation requires consistent, solid self-analysis accompanied by clear strategic priorities and the flexibility to respond to the changing needs of its environment. In this task, the vision of the university leadership and the support of the university and local community are of the utmost importance.

Based on the material received and visits conducted during the evaluation process, the team is convinced that the university has the tools to do this. The team is confident that UAV will achieve its objectives and the recognition the university deserves.

The team would like to take this opportunity to thank the university once again for its welcoming, open, and constructive attitude during the evaluation and to wish the university best success in achieving its goals.

The recommendations made by the team are summarised below.

Summary of recommendations

Governance:

- The university should identify targets and benchmarks for strategic priorities. Similarly, an assessment of the risks associated with strategic priorities should be conducted;
- Strengthen the participation of, and feedback from the constituents of the university community in the implementation of the university strategy;



- Defining a distinctive image for the institution will help the institution to be recognised amongst the large Romanian higher education system, as well as for acquiring international partners;
- The team also recommends that the university consider extending the Academic Council to include employer representatives, in order to formalise and consolidate stakeholder representation and gain valuable knowledge about the needs of the region's employers;
- The team also recommends that the university provide training to students to effectively participate in the decision-making process.

Teaching and learning:

- The university should seek to extend pedagogical training for staff members. If the university chooses, it could for example consider making pedagogical training an additional merit in career progression;
- The university already offers continuous professional development (CPD) programmes to the labour force in Arad, in order to facilitate continuous updating of skills. The team recommends that the university extends this educational offer of CPD courses, which may both contribute additional income stream for the university and enhance the skills level of the labour force available in Arad and its region;
- The university should seek to expand the e-learning platform to all faculties, and to continuously update it to ensure cost-effective and innovative pedagogy;
- The university should also pay further attention to providing its students with transferable skills that are necessary in today's labour market. These may include, but are not limited to team work, communication or project management skills.

Research:

- The team encourages that the university should drive research in all areas in order to improve teaching, but continue focusing the main research effort to the limited areas of excellence. The team also recommends that the university seek further support from local industries for research and development projects. Tailor-made projects, as well as sharing facilities with industry may both contribute to income generation and reduce costs;



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- It is also very important that the university makes use of research results to innovate teaching. As a primarily teaching-oriented institution, research at its best contributes directly to updating the educational content and methods.

Service to society:

- Establish a one-stop office for employers and industry to contact the university. This office should be the low-threshold contact point for any local businesses to approach if they desire collaboration with the university;
- Coordinate and integrate at an institutional level the professional development and entrepreneurship services which are currently separately handled by the different faculties. In this way the university will be able to identify more efficiently and facilitate the broader educational offer directed to the community.

Quality culture:

- Increase emphasis on and train staff in quality enhancement;
- Generate efficiencies in quality assurance administration by inspecting the task division of the current bodies engaged in quality assurance and by moving from a paper-based to electronic system of collecting the periodical surveys from students and staff.

Internationalisation:

- The university should establish strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be achievable and a concerted action plan should be drafted to chart the way for achieving those;
- The university should also involve the administrative staff in international activities in order to enable them to learn from best practices abroad;
- Prioritising language training for both staff and students would enable them to fully engage with international activities;
- The university could rebrand the Erasmus office as an international office and expand its activities to cover all aspects of internationalisation;
- The university should disseminate best practices inside the institution for encouraging students to study abroad;



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- Finally, the university should establish a strategy for delivering quality-assured courses in English and other languages. The quality, facilities and procedures for courses taught in foreign languages should be the same as for those taught in Romanian. As this is necessarily an expensive activity, the university should carefully consider those courses for which a foreign language delivery is feasible.



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9. Annex

During the two visits, the IEP team interviewed the following people

First visit

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Florea LUCACI
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EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

Arad County Council – Ana Maria Dragoş

Prefecture – Radu Stoian

Arad City Hall – Ramona Varga

Romanian Commercial Bank - Morena Goldiş

Takata Petri Arad – Ioan Tristan Kiss

West TV – Andrei Ando

AD Tehnic – Raluca Balmuş

S.C. Compania de Apă S.A. - Marius Toma (Water Company)

VDL Rotech România – Silviu Niţulescu

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Leoni Wiring Systems – Cristian Popa

Continental Hotels – Constantin Bîja

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