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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

THE EMANUEL UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

EVALUATION REPORT

January 2014

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Quality and Diversity
of the Romanian Universities





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the *Emanuel University of Oradea* in Romania. The evaluation took place in 2013 (first visit May 2013, second visit November 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 conducted 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.

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. The Emanuel University of Oradea (UEO) and the national context

The Emanuel University of Oradea, in the north-west of Romania, is a confessional private, not-for-profit higher education institution, founded by the Emanuel Baptist Church of Oradea in 1990. Since 1995 UEO has operated within the ecclesial context of the Baptist Denomination and the Romanian Baptist Union. It operates under the authority of the Ministry of Education in Romania: a temporal licence was granted in 1995 and a final institutional accreditation in 2002.

UEO's mission is both academic (in teaching and research) and missionary. As the only fully accredited evangelical Baptist university in Europe, UEO aims at higher education for the next generation of pastors, community leaders, business people, teachers, social workers and musicians not only for the Romanian evangelical context but also beyond it. At present UEO offers five Bachelor level programmes and four Masters programmes in the areas of theology, social work, music, philology, and management studies with 24 staff members and a total of 313 students enrolled (2012/2013).

Under the provisions of the National Education Law of 2011, Romanian higher education institutions (HEIs) have been classified into three groups: advanced research universities; teaching and research universities; and teaching universities. UEO is one of the HEIs that have been classified as a teaching university, although it is an institution active in research, with its own publishing house. In 2009 UEO was also rated as an institution of *High Confidence*, as a result of an external institutional evaluation organised by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

1.3. UEO's self-evaluation process

Prior to the first visit, the IEP evaluation team received a 17-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER), in response to the IEP guidelines and requirements. The SER described UEO's institutional context, the norms, values, mission and goals, the governance and management structures, quality assessment practices, as well as a SWOT analysis of the institutions' strengths and weakness. The SER annexes included data on students, staff, and funding as well as a two-page strategic plan of the university for the years 2012-2016. The team was also provided with the university's charter.

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation team, composed of senior governors, academic staff members and two students. The self-evaluation team was chaired by Prof. Dr Paul Negrut, President of the University Senate. The self-evaluation process and drafting of the report was carried out under the responsibility of the university's rector. Data



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gathering and information processing were carried out by all institutional units, a process facilitated by the university's modest size.

The IEP team appreciated the work done in preparing the SER and had open and frank discussions with UEO's senior management staff, academic staff and students during evaluation visits. The IEP team appreciated their willingness to provide additional information and clarifications and – most importantly – an expanded and more detailed strategic plan before the second evaluation visit, in response to the IEP team's request. The IEP evaluation team is convinced that it has been possible to get an adequate understanding of the current situation of UEO, and the challenges it faces in the years ahead.

1.4. The evaluation team

The self-evaluation report of UEO, together with the annexes, was sent to the IEP evaluation team (hereafter "the team") in April 2013. The two visits of the team to UEO took place from 20 to 22 May 2013 and from 6 to 8 November 2013, respectively. In between these visits the UEO provided a new and more detailed strategic plan of the university as a response to the team's request after the first visit.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Sijbolt Noorda, President emeritus University of Amsterdam, Chair
- Áine Hyland, Emeritus Professor of Education and former Vice-President, University College Cork, Ireland.
- Eva Reka Fazekas, Student, University of Szeged, Hungary
- Dr Apostolis Dimitropoulos, Independent Expert in Higher Education Policy, Greece, Team Coordinator

The team would like to thank Prof. Dr Paul Negrut, the President of the University Senate and Prof. univ. Dr Corneliu Simut, Rector, Marcela Tundrea, senior administrator and liaison person with the team, and their colleagues at UEO for their welcoming hospitality and the efforts made to ensure that the two visits and the whole process were well-organised, smooth-running, and as productive as possible.

Special thanks are also offered by the IEP team to the deans, as well as the academic staff, students and external partners who participated in the meetings held, for their preparedness to discuss relevant matters, and share knowledge, experiences and views on UEO.



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2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The norms and values of UEO are derived from its denominational mission as documented by the university's Charter. As a private, not-for-profit, confessional institution for higher education UEO functions in an ecclesial context under the authority of the Emmanuel Baptist Church, a member of the Union of Baptist Churches of Romania.

The mission of UEO is to promote education, research and missionary-relevant theology.

The team was told that UEO is the only accredited Baptist Church university in Europe. Its distinctiveness is further enhanced by its overarching institutional objective to promote integrity and excellence, based on the fundamental principles of the Baptist denomination.

Already at the first visit, the team gained the impression of a highly-regarded institution that, in a relatively short period of time since its foundation, has fulfilled its purpose and has developed deep roots in its surrounding societal context.

External constraints

During discussions with UEO staff the IEP team observed the external constraints set by the wider socio-economic, as well as political and legal context within which UEO operates.

The team noted quite a few operational difficulties as a consequence of national bureaucratic legal provisions, accreditation requirements and procedures that disproportionately burden a modest size institution, with a small number of academic and administrative staff. Moreover, the declining number of students enrolled in recent years seriously challenge the long-term sustainability. Also for an institution with a strong sense of mission there are operational limits.

Governance, management and academic organisation

UEO is a small higher education institution organised in two faculties, the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Management. The Faculty of Theology offers four undergraduate programmes (in theology, social work, music and philology) and three Masters programmes (theology, social work, music). The Faculty of Management offers one undergraduate and one Master programme in the field of management.

As already mentioned, the number of students enrolled has decreased sharply in recent years (from 451 in 2009/2010 to 313 in 2012/2013). The decline is partly in line with a strong national decrease of high school leavers and higher education students in Romania. UEO achieves, however, a remarkably high rate of completion of studies (with an average of 96% in 2009 and 93% in 2012).

In order to develop its research mission and its service to society, UEO has set up a research centre and a publishing house. In addition to these UEO has a library of over 61,000 books, which supports educational as well as research activities.



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As a private institution the UEO does not receive government funding. Its main sources of revenue are private sources (mainly from churches and private donations) and student fees by a proportion of about three to one. Income from research activities is low, representing less than one fifth of total income, but this ratio has increased in recent years. The team also learned that UEO has an endowment that exceeds over five times the average annual expenditure, thus securing the institutions' medium-term sustainability and allowing for investments and medium-term strategy development.

In terms of UEO's governance structure, the Board of Trustees, as in other cases of private higher education institutions, is an essential component, linking UEO to its community and ensuring its accountability to its stakeholders, the Baptist Church of Oradea and the wider evangelical communities of Romania. The overall governance structure is clear and straightforward and seems to be working well. Institutional governance of such a small institution, with a total of 24 members of academic staff, relies heavily on informal processes of communication, while staff must simultaneously perform a variety of roles and participate in the different institutional bodies (Senate, Administration Council, Faculty Councils, Department Councils) and functions (Rector, Deans, Heads of Departments, etc.).

Given its size, the number of formal administrative bodies and duties, all required by law, is seen by UEO staff as an inflexible bureaucratic burden rather than an effective structure. Simplification would be welcome. At the same time, the division of tasks and responsibilities between academic leadership positions, administrative council and board of trustees should be clearer. In this context it remained unclear to the team how and to what degree student representatives exactly contribute to the decision-making processes.

Strategic planning and organisational development

The team focused on UEO strategic planning and particularly the challenge of the institution's survival and sustainability raised by the sharp decline of student numbers — about 50% in three years — and the institution's financial dependence on student fees. Initially the SER provided only a two-page text as the institution's strategic plan for the years 2012-2016 that did not fully address the challenges and future development of the institution. The team felt in the course of the first evaluation visit, that the university had not yet addressed in a coherent, effective and strategic way the challenges it faces, although many useful and practical ideas came up in the discussions with the university's deans and other members of the central administration that could contribute to a stronger and more coherent strategic plan. Therefore, as a follow-up to the first visit, the team asked UEO to further develop and elaborate their strategic plan, addressing the challenges UEO faces in a coherent and effective way.

Before the second visit the team was pleased to receive an expanded and elaborated strategic plan along the lines discussed in the course of the first visit. Although the expanded strategic plan included strategic objectives with targets and benchmarks, it lacked operational



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and action plans. The team, however, was pleased to hear that since the first visit key actions of that strategic plan had already been implemented.

During the second visit the team had the opportunity to analyse the new and expanded strategic plan, the process the institution employed for the plan's development and the institution's analytic thinking underpinning it, seeking to assess the institution's capacity for change, strategic management, sustainability and future development.

After in-depth discussions, in particular with the UEO academic leadership, the team formed the view that the expanded strategic plan in its current shape is a very positive first and important step that, however, needs to be further developed and operationalised. In terms of process, more emphasis must be placed on student participation, providing a platform for their views to be taken on board and a chance to influence and contribute to the institution's future development.

Similarly, the views of external stakeholders, such as future employers of graduates of the different educational programmes, particularly those at local level, should be sought and taken into account. These should include views on the institution's current educational offer, plans for future development and employers' needs in terms of required skills and competencies.

In terms of content, in the team's view, the strategic plan needs to further expand, develop and analyse the wider context and the changing international, national and local environment within which UEO operates. In such an in-depth analysis, emphasis must be placed on the challenges and opportunities arising, for example, by the gradual economic transformation of the region and the changing requirements in terms of skills and competences. In such a scanning of the wider external environment, it might also be useful to analyse other local and regional higher education institutions' strategies with the view to better identify opportunities, based on UEO's strengths and comparative advantages.

Furthermore, for the strategic plan to be meaningful and to ensure its successful implementation it should also include more concrete and quantifiable targets, accompanied by action and operational plans. Strategic objectives should be linked to institutional budgets and human resource requirements and constraints. Finally, a prioritisation of the strategic objectives is needed, taking into account the size of the institution and resource constraints for the plan's implementation, allowing for flexibility and adjustments of such priorities in the course of its multi-annual implementation process.

Summary of recommendations:

- The university is encouraged to continue its work on the new strategic plan, ensuring more participation of students and external partners and benefiting from their contributions to the institution's future development.



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- The strategic plan should further analyse the challenges and opportunities set for UEO by the wider context and the changing international, national and local environments.
- UEO needs to set priorities in its strategic plan, and include more concrete and quantified targets, and adequate action and operational plans, linking strategic objectives with budgetary and human resource requirements.
- UEO is encouraged to improve its governance structure by a clearer division of tasks between academic leadership, Administration Council and Board of Trustees.



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3. Teaching and learning

UEO's self-evaluation report defines the institution's mission as promoting "integrity and excellence in higher education" through teaching and research. It has therefore set as the main educational purpose: "to train workers for local churches and specialists in other fields, who would comply with the standards of contemporary scientific communities, good professionals who would incorporate their theology into their field of activity".

The IEP team noted that UEO organises and offers study programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate (Masters) level, accredited by ARACIS. The team also learned that UEO has aspirations, and is currently in the process of developing and gaining accreditation for a doctoral level programme in the field of theology.

The team also learned that UEO has partnerships with universities abroad, in the USA, Europe and South Africa, and frequently invites foreign academics to give lectures and teach in different courses. It has also hosted a small number of students from other countries, as part of its international activities. The team also heard of the financial obstacles UEO students face in undertaking exchanges and in engaging in outgoing mobility.

The team noted that the number of programmes offered with relatively few staff members imply heavy teaching loads, while opportunities for staff development are limited. The team was informed about the difficulties UEO faces in attracting teachers, not only because of costs, but also because of accreditation requirements in terms of minimum qualifications.

The team was impressed by the caring and supportive environment experienced by the students, and facilitated by the institution's size (a teacher/student ratio of 1:13) and its internal homogeneity. It noted that UEO aims at offering student-centred and research-based education as well as a tutorial programme for students. Time constraints did not allow the team to explore in depth and verify whether teaching practices and organisation of learning already do stimulate student-centred learning. The team, however, was left with the impression that a learning-outcome approach to teaching, curriculum design, and quality evaluation and assurance were not yet in place nor were the views and experiences of employers and alumni collected systematically, informing curricula revisions or new programme design and development.

The team explored how UEO's teaching and learning policy relates to the overall institutional mission, its contribution to the profile and identity of the institution, and the competitiveness of its graduates. The team noted that UEO is committed to the formation of graduates who combine moral integrity with professional excellence and was gratified to learn from many external stakeholders (employers, local social workers, civic leaders etc.) that the students and graduates of UEO are held in high regard for their integrity and social commitment.



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As already mentioned, UEO plans to strategically tackle the challenge of the rapidly declining number of students. It proposes to widen its educational offer in terms of programmes and target groups of students, and enhance its institutional profile and attractiveness. As suggested during the team's visits, the establishment of a school of practical theology may be a good step in the right direction. Moreover, Romanian communities living in other countries abroad and the Baptist and wider evangelical communities in other countries could be possible target groups for UEO's expanded educational offer. Furthermore, labour market transformations in the wider region of Oradea might also be explored with the view to identifying needs and further opportunities for UEO's educational offer. UEO could also consider developing new and flexible modes of delivery including online learning and outreach centres.

A coherent staff development policy also needs to be developed, as a continuous process. A staff development policy and strategy, based on peer-learning and diffusion of good practices across the whole institution, would further contribute and strengthen the institution's profile, identity and visibility in the national and international context.

Summary of recommendations:

- The IEP team encourages UEO to expand its educational offer in terms of programmes and target groups of students in the local, national as well as the international context, and develop new, flexible modes of delivery including online and outreach centres.
- UEO is further encouraged to systematically collect feedback from employers and alumni to inform curricular revision and programme development and design.
- A staff development policy is also needed, as a continuous process, based on peer learning and diffusion of good practices across the institution.
- Heavy teaching loads by staff might be reduced by encouraging student-centred and self-directed learning



4. Research

Research is an integral component of UEO's mission. As stated in the self-evaluation report the purpose of UEO's research is "discovering and capitalize on the relationship between the Trinitarian theology and the humanities, economics and environmental sciences, as well as that of the arts" and to "offer answers to the challenges faced by the evangelical churches and contemporary society".

To fulfil its research mission UEO has set up a research centre, run by a director. The research centre can establish different thematic research units within the institution. As the team learned, UEO is currently in the process of building up its PhD supervision capacity in the field of theology and has sought accreditation by ARACIS.

UEO already has a high proportion of qualified researchers, with over 80% of its staff having a PhD. Academic staff are encouraged to devote 40% of their time to research activities. UEO's staff is relatively productive and well supported by the institution's own publishing house. It appears, however, that research is predominantly an individual rather than an institutional process, while even advanced students do not seem to be significantly involved in staff's research activities.

The expanded strategic plan addresses research as a strategic priority, involving the development of a programme with research priorities to be supported by the institution's research centre. To enhance the institution's research profile, financial incentives and awards for research-active staff are to be introduced starting this year, while it is also aimed that all staff members will hold a PhD by 2016.

In the team's view, the development of an institutional research programme could indeed enhance productivity, efficiency and the institution's research profile and academic standing in the national and international context. For such a programme to be effective and successful, a small number of key research themes should be identified, based on interests and strengths of individual staff members. The introduction of financial incentives for staff for research, however, should be treated with caution as such incentives could create imbalances between research and teaching that might negatively affect the quality of education offered.

Summary of recommendations:

- The IEP team encourages UEO to develop an institutional research programme and identify therein a limited number of key research themes and priorities based, primarily, on the interests and strengths of its staff members.
- UEO is also encouraged to incentivise research activities with due caution in order to avoid imbalances that may affect the quality of its educational offer.



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5. Service to society

UEO is a small confessional university with a denominational mission founded to serve, primarily, Baptist churches in Romania.

In exploring the services UEO offers to society, the IEP team heard of the close involvement of the Baptist churches in the institution's strategic governance, through the institution's Board of Trustees, and the financial support they provide, reflecting the continuous appreciation of its services.

In discussions with external stakeholders and local authorities in Oradea, the team was impressed by their appreciation of the services offered by UEO to local society through the employment of its graduates, not only in local churches but also in local services including social work, and also through voluntary engagement by UEO students in a number of civic and non-governmental organisations.

In such discussions, it is worth noting that external partners stressed not just knowledge and academic competencies but also the personality characteristics of UEO's graduates, reflected in their high ethical values and their professional practices, thus signalling the success of UEO's overall educational objective of graduate integrity and excellence.

The overall view of the team is that UEO is well-rooted in its local community, serving real needs. If, however, external stakeholders and, particularly, employers of its graduates are more frequently given the opportunity to express their views and needs as to study programme design and evaluation, research programme design, as well as the institution's strategic planning, these links can further enhance the institution's stability and sustainability. An advisory board, for example, at faculty level, would be to the institution's benefit, as it would enhance the links between UEO's strategic positioning, priority setting, planning and future institutional development with real demands of the external environment.

Summary of recommendations:

- The IEP team encourages UEO to establish a more permanent advisory structure which would provide an opportunity for external partners and stakeholders to express their views and needs in study programme revision, development, design as well as the institution's future development.



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6. Quality culture

The IEP team was interested in the university's quality management, assessment and assurance, and the development and presence of a well-embedded quality culture. It, therefore, took note of the Committee for Quality Assessment and Assurance (CEAC) supported by relevant Senate Committees, including academic staff and students.

Accreditation of institutions and study programmes is a responsibility of the national agency for accreditation based on certain nationwide criteria and standards. As the team learned, all programmes offered by UEO were accredited by ARACIS in 2009 while the university gained a "high confidence rating" as an institution.

In addition to the externally-required processes, criteria and standards, UEO has developed its own internal evaluation processes and criteria. CEAC conducts internal evaluations and analyses of its educational offer on a yearly basis, including the evaluation of teaching and research performance of individual academic staff, as well as programme evaluations.

The team observed little systematic involvement of external stakeholders, and particularly, employers of graduates in the internal evaluation procedures of study programmes. It also noted that evaluation procedures are mainly a responsibility of academic staff without adequate support by well-trained "quality professionals". It finally took note of the possible tension between time-consuming bureaucratic overload of quality assurance processes on the one hand, and the informal feedback by peers in a small institution on the other hand. The team, therefore, encourages UEO to find a balance between the formal processes and the need for adequate, reliable and valid information, collected through evaluation procedures, on which staff development, curriculum design and revision, student performance and student support services can be based. A good example of such information could be the systematic collection of data on graduate employment and their career development.

Summary of recommendations:

- The IEP team encourages UEO to establish a more permanent advisory structure which would provide an opportunity for external partners and stakeholders to express their views and needs in study programme revision, development, design as well as the institution's future development.
- The IEP team recommends that UEO systematically collect data on graduate destination and career development.



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7. Internationalisation

The IEP team learned about the importance attached by the UEO to its international links and partnerships (as shown in section 3 – Teaching and learning), their gradual increase over the years as well as the strong interest and high ambitions for further enhancement in the future.

The team noted the international membership of UEO's Board of Trustees and welcomes the institution's expansion of educational offer to the international evangelical church communities in the most recent strategic planning. The team also formed the view that the fact that UEO is the only accredited university of the evangelical church in Europe includes a, yet unfulfilled, potential with regard to its international role and profile.

The team recommends that UEO should develop a coherent and integrated strategy for internationalisation to fully use its unique potential. In this regard, UEO should set strategic priorities and criteria to inform its choice of international activities and relations, aligned to the institution's wider education and research strategy for future development. European Union programmes, and particularly the ERASMUS programme could be useful instruments for the enhancement of UEO's international activities.

The effective implementation of an internationalisation strategy would require balanced incentives and awards of achievements for units (faculties/departments) and individuals, while the successful monitoring of progress in this area of institutional policy will also require setting measurable objectives and developing relevant indicators of success.

Summary of recommendations:

- The IEP team invites UEO to develop an international strategy balancing their aspirations with their available resources, with clear priorities aligned with the institution's future development strategy, and balanced incentives and awards to units and individual staff.
- UEO is also encouraged to participate in European Union programmes, for example, ERASMUS.



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8. Conclusions and recommendations

The overall conclusion of the IEP team is that UEO is a highly regarded, precious yet fragile higher education institution, well-rooted in its community a relatively short period after its foundation and accreditation. The recommendations of the IEP team relate to the challenges UEO faces and, particularly, the sharp decline of its student numbers in recent years. The team's recommendations summarised hereafter have been reached after consideration of the structures and processes underpinning the university's operations and its capacity for implementing change.

Governance and institutional decision-making

- The university is encouraged to continue its work on the new strategic plan, ensuring more participation of students and external partners and benefiting from their contributions to the institution's future development.
- The strategic plan should further analyse the challenges and opportunities set for UEO by the wider context and the changing international, national and local environments.
- UEO needs to set priorities in its strategic plan, and include more concrete and quantified targets, and adequate action and operational plans, linking strategic objectives with budgetary and human resource requirements.
- UEO is encouraged to improve its governance structure by a clearer division of tasks between academic leadership, Administration Council and Board of Trustees.

Teaching and learning

- The IEP team encourages UEO to expand its educational offer in terms of programmes and target groups of students in the local, national as well as the international context, and develop new, flexible modes of delivery including online and outreach centres.
- UEO is further encouraged to systematically collect feedback from employers and alumni to inform curricular revision and programme development and design.
- A staff development policy is also needed, as a continuous process, based on peer learning and diffusion of good practices across the institution.
- Heavy teaching loads by staff might be reduced by encouraging student-centred and self-directed learning.

Research

- The IEP team encourages UEO to develop an institutional research programme and identify therein a limited number of key research themes and priorities based, primarily, on the interests and strengths of its staff members.



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- UEO is also encouraged to incentivise research activities with due caution in order to avoid imbalances that may affect the quality of its educational offer.

Service to society

- The IEP team encourages UEO to establish a more permanent advisory structure which would provide an opportunity for external partners and stakeholders to express their views and needs in study programme revision, development, design as well as the institution's future development.

Quality culture

- The IEP team encourages UEO to find a balance between the formal quality assessment and assurance processes and the need for adequate, reliable and valid information on which staff development, curriculum design and revision, student performance and student support services can be based.
- The IEP team recommends that UEO systematically collect data on graduate destination and career development.

Internationalisation

- The IEP team invites UEO to develop an international strategy balancing their aspirations with their available resources, with clear priorities aligned with the institution's future development strategy, and balanced incentives and awards to units and individual staff.
- UEO is also encouraged to participate in European Union programmes, for example, ERASMUS.



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Envoi

The IEP team wishes to thank the Emanuel University of Oradea for the excellent arrangements made in preparation for their visits, for all support provided to the team for their work and for the gracious hospitality and welcome. The team has enjoyed meetings and open and frank discussions with UEO staff, students and external partners. It had the pleasure to learn about the distinctive features of UEO, the challenges it faces, and the determination to address, tackle and successfully overcome them. The team hopes that UEO finds its comments and recommendations helpful and supportive in its planning for the future. The team believes that UEO has the ambition and capacity to fulfil its potential and be truly successful in its current plans and future development. In accomplishing its aspirations the team wishes UEO well.