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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

### Constanța Maritime University

#### 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 *Constanța Maritime University*, thereafter CMU. 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.



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. Constanța Maritime University’s profile

CMU is in the port city of Constanta, on the Black Sea. Two other public institutions and one private HEI are also located in this city. Following recent reforms in the Romanian higher education system, CMU faces several contextual changes and challenges. The former law of national education, in force for 16 years, has undergone frequent amendments over time, thus creating an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty for the future. A new law of education entered in force in January 2011, and it has already been amended twice.

These reforms are occurring in a changing international context: a worldwide economic crisis to which Romania responded with drastic austerity measures, some of them with direct impact on the higher education sector; Romania’s entry in the EU which introduces different societal requirements and regulations; joining the Bologna Process which modifies the higher education system and its traditions; and a worrisome declining demography (although CMU does not seem to be affected by the latter at this point). All this makes for an unstable environment and blurs the horizon for the future.

CMU’s legal status is that of a public university partially financed from state funds, accountable to the Ministry of Education, but at the same time controlled by the Naval Authority and advised by the Ministry of Transport. As a consequence of this threefold accountability to overseeing authorities, there is the risk that CMU could become embroiled in a complex set of relationships with the three.

Historically, CMU came to independent existence when it separated from the Naval Academy – also located in this port city – in 1990. In 2000, CMU became proactively dynamic and started to expand: between 2005/2006 and 2009/2010 the number of full-time students doubled, the number of part-time students multiplied by four, and the number of Masters’ students nearly doubled. At the start of this 2013/2014 academic year there are almost 6 500 students in the two faculties, half of them enrolled in full-time programmes, the other half part-time. The university does not own a training ship, but it boasts of several state-of-the-art simulators and well-equipped laboratories, as well as smaller sailing and rescue boats and an



e-platform for distant and part-time education. The website offers a wide range of information on the institution in both Romanian and English.

CMU serves civilian fleets. Since Romania has a minor commercial fleet of its own, the institution trains deck officers and marine engineers for foreign fleets; therefore the international dimension takes on major importance. In this context CMU even opened a branch in another country – Aktau, Kazakhstan – becoming the first Romanian HEI to do so. At the same time it is also moving into new fields of maritime education (see below).

### 1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by an ad hoc committee comprising 10 members: the vice-rectors, a dean, heads of administration, quality assurance, human resources, international cooperation and one teacher. Although no student was officially part of the self-evaluation (SE) group, the team was assured that students well contributed to the process and to the content of the report, which was confirmed by the students themselves.

The SE group found the process enriching; in particular it was an occasion to become more fully aware of CMU's strengths in the traditional specialties, but also of the need to focus attention on the new specialties undertaken, as well as the fact that some processes needed updating. The benefit for an institution of going through the self-evaluation process is a common phenomenon in this institutional evaluation process. Typically, the group members involved in the SE acquire a deeper understanding of how their institution functions and begin to define solutions to problems or new approaches.

CMU's well-documented self-evaluation report, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in April 2013. The two visits of the evaluation team to CMU took place from 15 to 17 May and from 6 to 9 October 2013, respectively. In between the visits CMU provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation. To reflect on the conditions in which the evaluation took place an unfortunate event should be mentioned: two weeks before the second visit, the team was informed that the police had entered the university to gather evidence for an accusation of corruption. An uneasy atmosphere ensued which made the visit more difficult than the first one.

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

- Prof. Henrik Toft Jensen, former Rector, University of Roskilde, Denmark, team chair
- Jacqueline Smith, former analyst, OECD, France, team coordinator
- Spyros Amourgis, former President, Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Greece
- Prof. Jürgen Lüthje, former President, University of Hamburg, Germany



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- Fernando Galán Palomares, student, University of Cantabria, Spain (excused for the second visit)

The team thanks the Rector, Prof. Violeta Ciucur, her colleagues and students for their hospitality and their willingness to contribute to the discussions and to share their experience. Special thanks go to the liaison person, Edith Padaneanu, who has been very helpful in meeting the team's requests.



## 2. Governance and decision-making

As expressed in the SER, “CMU’s mission is to offer highly effective programmes for all cycles of studies, so as to train qualified specialists for the maritime transport and related activities”. The report considers that “the mission and objectives render the university as singular within the Romanian and European higher education environment, with continuous reference to national and international standards and an autonomous status” (SER, p. 3).

### 2.1 Institutional decision-making

Like other universities in Romania, with the new 2011 law CMU has undergone a change of governance structure leading to the election of a new rector, separating the function of rector from that of the Senate president, and creating harsher requirements on hiring and employment conditions. As imposed by law, the Senate is now independent from the rectorship, in fact the rector is no longer a member of the Senate although he/she may be, and often is, invited to attend the meetings; it is formally seen as the main decision-making body, and the administrative council becomes the executive body. While decision-making rests with the Senate, the rector bears responsibility for the institution: this structure which dissociates responsibility from authority could become a source of difficulties, potentially even paralysis of functioning, in case of disagreement between the rector and the chair of the Senate — the two top representatives.

The Senate composition includes academics and students, democratically elected by their peers, in the proportion of three to one, but no administration representatives, nor outside stakeholders. Five permanent Senate committees oversee issues of quality assurance, ethics, student counselling, student support, and education. The administrative council is formed by the rector, other members from the top management, and one student.

In the spring of 2012, a new rector was elected who was part of the previous leadership team, with the stated intent of ensuring continuity in governance. In fact, the team was under the impression that the roles and impacts of the previous and current rectors were almost interchangeable.

In theory the two faculties covering a total of seven departments are granted a large degree of academic freedom, the rectorate interfering only for across the board questions such as scheduling the use of equipment. In reality this freedom comes with constraining limits: the state imposes some disciplines, course content and schedules, and employment conditions are strictly regulated. Each faculty functions with its own council and its own committees, however the leadership decided that there is no need for a curriculum committee since the Administrative Board handles some of the curriculum issues in the course of its monthly (at least monthly) meetings, and since teachers constantly try to adapt their curriculum to what



their students need. The deans describe one of their functions as being the main providers of input data for the decision-making within the realm of the administrative board.

Deans and heads of departments maintain open communication helped by the fact that their offices are located close to one another. Informal relationships are important in their mode of communication and governance, as it seems to be the case throughout the institution; this may provide some degree of flexibility and adaptability in a highly state-regulated environment.

The formal structure indicates the legally required student involvement only, for example as members of the Senate and some, but not all, Senate committees; in that sense, at first, the team was surprised that no student officially took part in the self-evaluation group. However, CMU has a strong student union, one of the strongest in the country according to both staff and students. The union plays a major role in all aspects of university life; students have been able to influence significantly some organisational changes, but their role appears not to be formalised. Besides, students can turn to each specialty counsellor in case of need or to the rector directly.

According to external partners, companies look for top students while the naval authority verifies that the minimum level required to ensure adequate training is met. The external stakeholders think that basic requirements are definitely met at CMU “but (that) there is always room for improvement”. They identified CMU’s strong points as its training capacity, the quality and importance of the equipment, and the teaching staff.

## 2.2 Leadership

The rector was elected on the basis of a programme that became the 2012-2016 strategic plan. This plan clearly states the priorities of a leadership that intends to ensure continuity while being keenly aware of its European and international environment: the “Proposed management plan for the period 2012-2016 is developed [with] due respect for what has been done, for high performances obtained from past achievements, clearly stating the need for action in the coming years to meet ongoing challenges posed by a dynamic world which is in perpetual evolution”. Annual operational plans chart a more detailed course, which is evaluated each year in a report to the rector, and to the Senate.

The need for action mentioned in the previous paragraph has been expressed in two main directions:

- *the development of an international dimension*: a number of specific actions are listed below in section 7. According to several interviewees, most of the maritime crews nowadays are staffed essentially with East Europeans and Africans, thus many potential students come from these regions. The following two current initiatives come under this trend. The development and opening of the branch in Kazakhstan



started under the previous leadership team — a similar initiative had been attempted in Greece a few years earlier but did not materialise. A new initiative is being negotiated with Nigeria, which would bring up to 200 Nigerian students to CMU.

- *new fields of activities and education*: as a result of monitoring international trends, CMU has undertaken and been accredited or authorised to launch new subjects related to offshore industry and environmental studies (see below under “teaching and learning”). Another field is being considered, that of specific risks such as piracy. As one interviewee summarised they “become aware of international trends then decide what CMU needs to develop”.

It is noteworthy that when the abovementioned incident of the accusation of corruption occurred, the university leaders immediately took action and initiated discussions within the Senate.

### 2.3 Human resources

As in all Romanian universities, the human resources situation is particularly difficult. The latest annual report states that “the selection of teachers is a difficult operation because the requirements of the National Education Law No. 1/2011 are generally difficult to be met for people coming from industry...” (2012 Annual report of the Rector, p 1). Indeed, the law has introduced much stricter qualification requirements. In particular a higher education teacher must hold a doctorate degree, but in maritime education a significant number of teachers are former navigating officers, with valuable experience and knowledge but rarely a doctoral degree. A slightly relaxed provision of the law allows such persons to teach without a doctorate if for less than six hours per week and for practical courses. In addition, hiring for teaching was allowed only for positions when these became vacant. The apparent consequence of these measures is that it is not possible to increase the number of teaching positions, except for newly accredited programmes, and that half of the accredited positions remain “vacant”, i.e. are not filled by fully qualified persons in the sense of the law. In fact, according to an interviewee, “the problem is not getting more students [their numbers have greatly increased] but rather being able to hire more teachers”.

CMU tries to meet its need for teachers with several approaches: hiring “assistants” coming from active duty on ships under the provision described in the paragraph above, entering in consortium with The Polytechnic University of Bucharest to fill in for each other’s staffing needs, trying to attract and keep doctoral students from other institutions, enrolling doctoral students to teach undergraduates. All these occupy so-called “vacant” positions. As of writing this report, approximately 70% of CMU’s teaching staff hold a PhD and the others are working towards the degree. Many teachers are also former CMU students; in their own words “a big family” is developing, with a risk of inbreeding.



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With a total of 225 academics for 6 500 students the staff/students ratio may seem rather unfavourable. However, the specific conditions at CMU mean that the actual ratio may not be so unfavourable: half of these students attend part-time on weekends only; a number of these academics teach in both the full-time and the part-time programmes; and each year a number of cadets are at sea for their practicum. The academics interviewed claim that they had no difficulty adjusting to the rapidly increasing numbers of students and the students whom the team met agreed. They find their teachers well prepared, who can always answer their questions. This would indicate a good ability to adjust on the part of the education structure.

The situation may be even more difficult for administrative staff. In 2010 the number of administrative positions had to be reduced, and a position could be refilled only once for every seven vacancies. Obviously these measures have greatly increased the workload of each remaining employee, but have also lead to rationalising the tasks more and to outsourcing some services, such as security for example. The 7:1 requirement was eased in autumn 2013 to 1:1. Each position that becomes vacant can now be refilled.

In addition, in 2010 all salaries were reduced by 25%. At CMU, several situations partially made up for this drastic reduction. Some academics teach full-time students during the week and part-time students on weekends. They practically hold two jobs; this increases their income and somewhat compensates for the low salaries. Under the specific agreement, while CMU is responsible for education, the teachers sent to the Aktau branch are remunerated directly by the Kazakh institution. Since the remuneration is substantially higher than in CMU, a position in Aktau may become a sought-after assignment.

Meetings are held periodically with labour unions, but there is not much room for negotiations as much of the conditions and salary scales are controlled by legal requirements. A small margin is available for recognition of excellence which is determined by the department. Staff who comply with extra requirements, e.g. three ISI citations for publication instead of only one, may receive a special financial bonus so some incentive for improvement does exist.

The long-term staffing policy is to rejuvenate the aging academic staff. The expected change in state salary policy for the lower teaching categories may help the renewal.

On the subject of skills upgrading, the leadership feels that since many of the teachers are former naval officers, they know the equipment well and only need to update for recent modifications. In terms of staff development, mobility programmes and compulsory pedagogy courses were mentioned.

In summary, it appears that the staffing situation is much constrained by demanding legal requirements, economic conditions and the demography, but CMU seems to exploit to the maximum the limited margin available and to try to devise some compensatory measures.



## 2.4 Funding

CMU is a public institution that receives approximately 23% of its funding from the state purse. The rest of its funding comes from own funds, grants, and mostly tuition. The number of students who can be enrolled in the entire higher education system and the number of those supported by the state is determined each year by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance (ARACIS). Thus the student enrolment is controlled by the state, even for part-time students. Each year CMU is allowed to enrol up to 1 200 new students; 10% of these are state-funded, a few – 30 or so – receive CMU scholarships, and the rest pay a tuition which varies between RON 3 200 and RON 8 000 (equivalent to about 700 euros to 1 800 euros) depending on the type and level of enrolment – part-time or full-time, undergraduate to doctoral levels.

The University Foundation serves to fund vocational training, another education CMU offers which was not part of the current evaluation.

While salaries are financed from state funds and from tuition, investments, such as for laboratory equipment and for simulators, are financed from the institution's own funds. Foreign companies offer support in the form of internships for students, but not directly for equipment.

The university has attempted to establish a broad four-year provisional budget in relation to the four-year strategic plan. Since the institution derives most of its income from tuition, and the number of students is controlled, it would seem that it is fairly simple to establish a budget, even a long-term provisional budget. Actually, the use of funds, even its own funds, is strictly controlled by state regulations and offers little flexibility, budgets are sometimes not definitively approved by the state, possibly with reductions, until close to the end of the year to which they apply, with no carry over allowed from one year to the next. In addition, public funding has decreased in recent years. CMU tries to plan for this insecure financial environment by limiting the investments it could normally make: for example, between two possible objectives selecting only one in order to avoid having to “overspend” on a second project if funds are not released in time.

Under the conditions of a dire economy, restrictive regulations and unpredictable environment, efficient financial management is very difficult.

## 2.5 Governance – recommendations

In summary, in its nearly 25 years of independent existence, CMU has been subjected and had to adapt to a changing legal, economic and societal environment. Governance functions according to a new structure while ensuring continuity with past achievements. CMU has



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taken advantage of the limited margin available to maintain adequate staffing and meet financial needs.

Towards further improvement it is recommended:

- to try to implement a database system in support of management and development of strategy;
- to adopt staff development concepts and courses beyond the already compulsory pedagogy course;
- , the leadership should take an active role in preventing misconduct, for instance, by integrating better the university through a quality culture. .



### 3. Teaching and Learning

#### 3.1 Teaching

CMU strives to be among the best in its field. It adopted several points of the Bologna Process: a three-tier structure — four-year undergraduate, one and a half to two year Master, three-year PhD — ECTS, number of credits per degree, diploma supplement, and some of the principles: student-centred teaching, and the beginning of awareness of learning outcomes (although the university may not use the term itself).

Academics consider that there are three ways to understand: through analysis, engineering, and common sense, the latter being particularly important for seafarers. Consequently, in their approach to teaching they combine theoretical and practical studies, one of the most important points on their agenda. In fact, external partners stated that CMU students are well prepared, combining the two aspects. The government is pushing for even more practical training; right now, out of the four years of studies, one full year must be spent on board or in industry, although not necessarily during twelve consecutive months.

One of the fundamental questions is: what type of seafarers should be educated and trained for industry needs? According to interviewees, the number of specialists for port activities is decreasing, thus some of them may need to be relocated and perhaps retrained, and new fields are appearing. CMU tries to monitor international trends and adapt its educational offer. It trains officers and engineers for international teams of many countries; this is why in 2011/2012 the institution launched a new course on multiculturalism, and already several years ago it started developing language courses, especially English courses.

CMU tries to adapt to current trends in several ways. The institution used to own a training ship; in recent years they have invested more in simulators which offer a wide range of test situations, also as a way to cope with fast-evolving IT and keeping up with progress in this area. According to students these simulators fit the purpose well, and a ship feels familiar once they get on board. On the last day of the visit the team was invited to attend the launching of their new simulator for offshore industry activities. Safety courses are now taking account of nuclear energy and pollution. New courses, in some cases full degrees, on environment engineering, offshore industry are being introduced. CMU is even considering whether it should offer some training regarding piracy, a major challenge right now.

While CMU tries to adapt the educational offer to current trends, some changes in the programmes have been introduced to comply with the requirements of the naval authority, and to keep up with IT progress. In some cases, diverging needs between curricula reforms and strict IMO-International Maritime Organisation requirements are difficult to reconcile. If efforts to keep up with international trends are evident, it is not clear that learning outcomes



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have been determined, for all courses in general and more particularly for the new ones. In addition, a driving tendency to keep up with current industry needs may lead to overlook the necessity to maintain coherent, well-integrated educational programmes. The latter implies long-term vision, but, according to some interviewees, a weak point of the Romanian education system is the limited foresight, and, as described above, current legal and economic conditions blur the horizon.

The seven departments are grouped in two faculties – Navigation and Naval Transport, Naval Electromechanics – with the faculty level filling an integrating role and avoiding duplication of courses; for example, humanities courses serve all the departments. Most of the theoretical courses are on sciences and engineering, based on traditional content, but a certain amount of humanities is considered important too, for example, a course on multiculturalism, communication, and especially English which is essential for seafarers. Following feedback from employers, more than a decade ago, the teaching of English has been well developed but could be further intensified.

### 3.2 Students

Approximately half of the students attend full-time and the other half part-time, on weekends. Part-time students are expected to be able to study the theory on their own, with documentation and e-courses and to be physically present at the university for seminars and lab work. Their programmes cover the same courses, over the same four years duration, with nearly the same length of weekly schedule – concentrated over the weekend – as the full-time students and they must take the same exams. In essence, it is almost the same full-time programme, only distributed differently over the week. For part-time students, it would seem that the option of extending studies over a longer period of time should at least be offered. However, according to the leadership, this structure of part-time studies is imposed by the state, and the students interviewed confirmed that they preferred this approach.

Teachers use a dynamic interactive pedagogical approach. They consider that their relations with students is one of collaboration – “students are partners” – because students spend several months on ships, then come back to CMU with experience and a CD of their installation on board, which serve to update course content. In return, students appreciate the student-centred approach and the open communication with their teachers. They feel well-prepared to be immediately operational on board. Those who already had experience on board stated that they felt at ease, not different from within the simulators. Assessments are based on memorisation and on analysis of situation “because in real life they need both”. The team was assured that exams always involve at least two examiners; Ideally, for fairness and objectivity, these examiners should be independent from each other, that is not teach the same courses to the same students.



The statistics provided to the team seem to indicate a fairly high and slightly increasing dropout rate. However, it is difficult to figure out exactly what is happening because the record keeping system may not reflect the different situations – there are students who are away on practicum, those who aim only for a Bachelor’s degree or only for a license from the naval authority, or both. The university needs a data record system that is better suited to its student population. Interviewees did agree though, that the dropout rate is higher for part-time students than for full-time. They added that end of secondary education exams have become more demanding, and therefore the performance level of students is getting higher, and the first-year dropout rate is decreasing.

The students whom the team met – all active students, involved in various committees or structures of CMU, or the student union – were all satisfied with their education, the academic staff, the conditions for learning at CMU, and the facilities. Some were even at a loss when asked what they would like to improve, although there was one suggestion to include geography in the course on multiculturalism. Others wish that more students were state-supported; in fact they believe that some students drop out because of their dire financial situations. Another reason they give for dropout is their belief that some students are just not cut out for this type of studies and profession. In addition, they wish that there were more positions on board and better access to simulators. Students are attracted to CMU by future opportunities to travel, or by the fact that they can acquire a dual qualification that will allow them to find employment on board or on land. They expect to work on the international scene, to earn most of their income from foreign companies, but they intend to bring it back to Romania, thus providing indirect economic benefit for the country.

Some students maintain professional contacts with CMU after they graduate: some work with the naval authority or port facilities based in Constanta, and, actually, a few graduates now teach at CMU. In that sense some informal follow-up does occur. But to the team’s knowledge, no alumni association has been set up, the university has not made specific efforts to keep track of its former students nor, therefore, to make use of the information they could provide.

### **Teaching and learning – recommendations**

CMU exhibits a number of positive aspects in its course offer, educational approach, and in particular its efforts to identify and keep up with international trends in its field; this may be the area most influenced by the institution’s dynamic pro-active functioning. However, the team would caution that these developments need to be carefully monitored so as to remain part of a coherent, well-integrated education programme. The team offers the following suggestions:



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- To develop a data collection system that would allow tracking students through the full length of their studies, and calculating accurate dropout rates;
- To develop more coherent integrated curricula;
- To define learning outcomes and adapt courses accordingly, in particular for theoretical disciplines;
- To consider including geography in the course on multiculturalism;
- To continue efforts to develop foreign language skills and cross-cultural understanding.



## 4. Research

In the self-evaluation report, CMU describes itself as “an education and research institution that creates and capitalises scientific knowledge...” (SER, p.3); further on it considers scientific research as the main basis of training, and “the fundamental criterion for the assessment of academic qualification”. CMU admits that research is not its greatest strength, but gives major importance to this dimension of university functioning. The topic appears prominently in the SER. Leadership considers research very important because “it keeps moving things forward”. Research may not be the first priority at CMU, but the academic staff stated they try to emulate other more research-intensive institutions, in particular The Polytechnic University of Bucharest, and to use structural funds. In addition, as part of their employment contract they must engage in research and publish, either via CMU’s own publishing house or in foreign publications.

A vice-rector oversees the department of research and scientific innovation, and CMU has been accredited to deliver doctoral degrees. However, under the current legal requirements establishing a doctoral school is difficult. CMU has been able to overcome this difficulty by entering into a consortium agreement with The Polytechnic University of Bucharest; thus Bucharest and Constanța professors together compose the doctoral school in marine mechanical engineering field.

Since an academic must hold a doctoral degree to teach at higher education level – except under restricted conditions (see above under *Human resources*) – all teachers without such a degree are currently doctoral students, at CMU or elsewhere. The 47 titles of PhD theses listed all deal with research applied to maritime activities, but one or two subjects relate to offshore industries, a new field of studies at CMU. No student enters a PhD programme directly from a Master’s programme; it is considered necessary that they acquire professional experience first.

There are two research centres at CMU: one of them focuses on naval mechanical engineering and the other focuses on electrical engineering. From the list of titles sent to the team, the 44 research projects since 2004 are mostly concerned with applications to the field of navigation, but a few relate to the field of education, or learning, and one or two are more theoretical. The majority of the projects are launched in collaboration with another institution, in Romania or abroad, and are heavily financed by the partners. One of the research projects aims to evaluate whether students have acquired the knowledge and skills that this education is supposed to give them, thus it acts as an evaluation and feedback for teachers. Recently, new fields of research have been approved, such as maritime transportation.

When setting up research teams, CMU tries to integrate senior researchers with PhD and Master students so that the younger participants can be taught how to do research. The



department also tries to attract students to research in collaboration with institutions in Bulgaria, Turkey or Greece.

### **Research – recommendations**

CMU places emphasis on the development of research as a motor to keep progressing in its maritime field. Along that line the team recommends:

- To develop a research policy and strategy;
- To focus on applied research that is most relevant for CMU's form of education;
- To give priority to research in cooperation with other institutions, either national or international;
- To continue to involve students in research projects – PhD, Master, but also Bachelor students.



## 5. Service to society

On its website, CMU mentions as part of its mission to “bring a contribution to the local, regional and national development, through the involvement of academics at a social, economic and cultural level.” In the SER “CMU is seen as a source of highly qualified labour force for the port and maritime fields, and at the same time as a reliable partner able to provide scientific research studies and technical and economic analyses” (SER, p. 2).

Indeed through its research partnerships with other maritime organisations and the topics of its applied research, the university is contributing not only to Romanian, but also to European development of the maritime field of expertise.

Since Romania has a rather short shoreline, most of its maritime activities are concentrated in Constanța, thus CMU has a major role to play and does collaborate closely with the naval authority.

In addition, it can be said that CMU also contributes indirectly to the economy by training engineers and officers for foreign crews thereby contributing with cultural and financial input into their home base.

At this point it is not clear how this institution could extend its direct services to society but this leg of a university mission should definitely be included in a long-term development strategy and elaborated further.

Consequently, the team recommends:

- That more efforts be deployed to deliver services and to collaborate with local and national authorities, organisations and industries;
- To stimulate more projects on useful applied research in collaboration with local, national and international partners.



## 6. Quality culture

Quality assurance (QA) structures are well in place: a Senate committee, a printed description of procedures which are periodically revised and updated, and specific QA commissions within each faculties and departments. The SER shows concern about QA in all aspects, whether in academic or administrative functions. Yet during the meetings, the interviewees described the efforts to meet the legal requirements dictated by ARACIS; these requirements are seen as an exact translation of the ESGs. Only two academics and one student compose the Senate committee; except for their formal position, their role and function appeared rather discreet.

However, quality issues are not new at CMU: CMU has been evaluated regularly by ISO9001 and a problem identified in these processes was then corrected. CMU has been evaluated by Bureau Veritas (yearly), the Romanian Naval Authority (certificate renewed annually), two years ago by ARACIS, and now by IEP. Practically every year some form of evaluation takes place and sometimes leads to corrective actions. In addition, as it is striving to be among the best in its field in Europe, CMU tries to benchmark with similar institutions in the Netherlands, Norway, Ireland, and aims to continually develop the education process.

For the day-to-day QA activities, a commission supervises the content of courses in each department and decides after discussions with teachers. At faculty level, decisions are made regarding schedules and content after discussions of the semester reports. And annual reports are sent to the rector following approval by the faculty committee. Three types of procedures are in use – academic, managerial, and administrative – and are updated once a year. New legal provisions and internal requirements dictate these updates, and each procedure has its own cycle.

The academic procedure is the most widespread and includes assessment of staff by students. Teachers rely on their feedback to update courses. Often at the end of a course they ask for the students' reactions and discuss QA issues with them. Only samples of students fill in course evaluation questionnaires at the end of each semester; teachers and administration consider that requesting all students to fill in questionnaires would be too time consuming to analyse and burdening for the already overloaded staff; however, this is because the questionnaires are administered only – or mostly – in paper form. A more systematic electronic version would provide more wide-ranging information in a short time.

While this does not sound as though it happened, teachers stated that in case of a negative evaluation they would start putting themselves in question and would request more input from students. In addition, every year, teachers are anonymously evaluated by colleagues. Teachers concur that the most important points for academic improvement are feedback from students and discussions with colleagues.



Regarding the Aktau Kazakh branch it is not clear where the responsibility for quality assurance rests; the Kazakh institution pays salaries directly, but CMU grants the degree and delivers the diplomas; therefore CMU should clearly be responsible for quality at this branch.

Another point related to quality is that of ethics. In the first principle listed, the SER states “The university promotes [.....] the principle that no one is above the law” (SER, p.3) and further “Any diploma, be it for Bachelor, Master or PhD degree is useless if it is not backed by an appropriate cultural and moral environment. This is why one of the strategic directions is to improve and maintain the health of the maritime academic environment by preventing misconduct ...” (SER, p. 8). In this respect it is reassuring that the leadership immediately acted when the unfortunate corruption related incident occurred and is planning to revise procedures as a consequence.

CMU also takes account of employers’ input to improve curricula content. In fact, external partners interviewed stated that CMU has high standards and prepares its students well for work on board ships. A sign of the adequate training is the retention rate on the job: after five years, 95% of the CMU recruits are still in the same job.

### **Quality culture – recommendations**

While CMU obviously shows a number of commendable concerns about quality, it is not certain that these are part of an all-encompassing policy that would result in embedding a quality culture beyond mere quality assurance measures. To this end the team recommends:

- That the QA committee should be more visible and take or ask for more initiatives;
- To instil a systemic and comprehensive focus on responsibility related to programmes in combination with individual responsibility, i.e. to raise quality concerns from an individual professor’s responsibility to a coherent educational programme;
- To develop an appropriate cultural and moral environment;
- To ensure the objectivity of examinations by involving at least two independent examiners.



## 7. Internationalisation

Since CMU educates officers and engineers for international fleets, internationalisation is an essential component of its mission and what its education involves, beyond what is most often found in other HEIs. Thus, as described above, CMU's international orientation is developing and translates into several specific measures; these, however, do not always appear to be integrated in a comprehensive approach.

A vice-rector oversees international relations but also institutional development, which are all regrouped under the office of international relations, office of communication programme, office of communication, department for IMO courses, and Kazakh branch, as per the organisational chart. The Erasmus programme does not appear on the chart, yet its office has more staff than the international office and according to interviewees its functioning may be linked to the IMO office. In addition, the Erasmus programme is headed by a person from the research department, and for accounting purposes is listed with research. All this draws the picture of a somewhat disintegrated internationalisation structure.

The teaching of English, an essential language for seafarers, was developed originally in response to suggestions from outside stakeholders; students wish that teaching of English were intensified and that other languages were offered as well, but they admit that this would be costly. As part of the policy to develop the international dimension, a course on multiculturalism was launched two years earlier; students appreciate this course and suggested that geography be added to it. Entire programmes are now taught in English, thus CMU can attract foreign students. According to an interviewee, it is difficult to attract large numbers of foreign students because all maritime institutions offer the same type of education so "you have to be better (than the others)".

The international office played a major part in organising the Kazakh branch, preparing the modules, the documentation, and handling all the official correspondence for this project. According to the leadership, CMU is the first Romanian university to have established a branch outside the country. This project started in 2012 as a two-year programme. Now second year students come to CMU for the remaining part of the training, no new first year enrolment took place and the extension programme may not last beyond the completion of this first two-year cycle, apparently because the Kazakh institution did not renew its request. For the internationalisation policy it would be important to analyse the reason why only one cycle could be completed, and to see what lessons could be learned for future international initiatives, particularly in preparation for the probable intake of a large number of Nigerian students in the near future.

The Erasmus programme is closely related to the department for IMO courses because they all deal with on-board activities. Several agreements with different foreign companies, in



particular from Norway and Japan, mean that up to 150 CMU students can train on ships. Other types of mobility programmes, for teachers as well as for students, are also implemented. Finally, CMU participates actively in several international organisations. In October 2013 it is hosting the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly of IAMU, the International Association of Maritime Universities currently chaired by one of CMU's vice-rectors.

### **Internationalisation – recommendations**

- In order to increase its international impact, the team would encourage the institution to deliver even more teaching of and in English.
- It is also recommended to continue on the path of an internationalisation direction, but to make sure that this takes place within a quality culture of all educational activities, and as part of a coherent long-term strategic plan.



## Conclusion

The Constanța Maritime University exhibits many positive aspects; this is shown in particular in its appeal to students, as expressed in the fast growing enrolment during the last few years. The institution launched several initiatives to both enlarge its geographical impact – the Kazakh branch, a similar previous attempt, an agreement with Nigeria, research projects with different international partners – and keeps its educational offer in line with current practices such as new courses in English and on offshore activities, supported by several state-of-the-art simulators. The university shows concern about the future, trying to identify the needs of the maritime industry and to plan accordingly.

CMU is engaged in the European development of maritime universities, as member of associations, partnerships, and benchmarking. At the same time it maintains close relations to local stakeholders who expressed high regards for the institution. The university showed its concern about meeting all legal requirements, and its efforts in this direction, but it may experience difficulty in handling unforeseen problems.

The overall impression is that of an institution with business awareness – important nowadays – which offers a solid education. This must always be accompanied by constant concern about educational and academic values.

Over this report the team has presented a number of recommendations which can be summarised as follows:

- Regarding governance: for the leadership to take an active role in dealing with all types of situations, and to develop strategies and data systems in support of management;
- Regarding teaching and learning: to integrate the curricula more fully, taking learning outcomes into account, while continuing to develop new courses, and to put in place a statistical record system that will allow better tracking;
- The quality committee should be in closer contact with the education activities of the university to secure good teaching and fair examinations;
- To develop a research strategy focusing on applied research and on collaborative projects with other institutions, involving students as well;
- To pursue and reinforce collaboration with local and national authorities;
- To continue with an internationalisation direction, but making sure it is part of an overall long-term strategy guided by academic values;



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DEVELOPMENT AND  
INNOVATION FUNDING



IEP  
EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme



EUA  
European University Association

- And to develop the quality assurance concerns towards a quality culture, fostering a systemic and comprehensive focus on responsibility related to programmes in combination with individual responsibility.