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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

### SPIRU HARET UNIVERSITY IN BUCHAREST

#### *EVALUATION REPORT*

*December 2013*

Team:

Lothar Zechlin, Chair

Richard Lewis

Lennart Olausson

Kotryna Peilakauskaitė

Dionyssis Kladis, Team coordinator



Quality and Diversity  
of the Romanian Universities





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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the *Spiru Haret University* (SHU) in Bucharest. The evaluation visits took place from 22 to 24 May 2013 and from 21 to 24 October 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 for Education (Law 1/2011) 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 evaluation 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 and international 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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Rather than using a standardised, externally defined set of criteria, the evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are a form of the “Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)” cycle and 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 the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

## 1.2 SHU’s profile

Spiru Haret University (SHU) is a private non-profit university that was founded in 1991 within the “România de Măine Foundation”. On 5 July 2002 it was accredited as a higher education institution, a legal entity of private law and of public utility, and part of the national system of education under Act 443. According to the background paper titled “Overview of the higher education system in Romania” that was prepared for the evaluation of the Romanian universities by IEP and to the 2015 Green Paper “Toward quality and leadership in Romanian higher education” (p. 8), there are 112 universities in Romania (56 public universities and 56 private ones). Important points to note are that private universities in Romania do not receive any public funding for their operation; their income is based on student fees, the financial contribution of their founders and any other external revenue. In general, the specificities of the private universities in Romania are outlined in articles 227-231 of the Romanian Law for Education (Law 1/2011). Furthermore, there will be specific references to private universities for certain issues where appropriate in the present report.

SHU has been developed over the years as a network-type institution. The philosophy behind this development is outlined in the self-evaluation report (SER) (p. 5) as follows:

SHU, a private higher education institution, was created within a social and political context open to the democratic changes in Romania.

To avoid domestic traditional patterns that were obstructing access to academic studies in Romania, as a private non-profit institution SHU has developed a specific network-like structure that crosses several boundaries such as restriction of mobility, restrictions of the social costs and occupational restrictions.

The implementation of the system was enabled by the initiation of certain educational programmes to scale down the effects of this restriction, along with the development of a state-of-the-art IT technological structure.

As explained by the leadership of the university, in the beginning SHU had only a few faculties with full-time study programmes and a small number of students (around 1 000). Later on, part-time programmes and distance-learning programmes were added leading to the rapid expansion of the number of students. This expansion reached its peak in the academic year



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2008-2009 with the total number of students amounting to 312,000. Out of this number 223,000 (71%) were distance-learning students. The team was told that the expansion of SHU's distance-learning programmes aimed to meet the huge social demand for higher education in Romania after 1990. For that purpose, this expansion covered all the county capitals in Romania, but also various European countries to meet the needs of the Romanian Diaspora. In 2009, the team was told that all the distance-learning programmes of SHU were closed by a government ordinance. This resulted in a rapid decline of the number of students, with the result that in the academic year 2012-2013 there were 18,784 students, of which 16,241 (86.5%) were full-time students, 2 482 (13.2%) part-time students and only 61 (0.3%) were distance-learning students (SER, p. 6). Furthermore, as the team learnt during its meetings with the university leadership, the total number of students has fallen even more in the academic year 2013-2014 to 13,000 students (more specifically, 2 600 new students registered in September 2013 and 8 600 graduated, leaving the university with a cohort of 13,000 students).

Following the above-mentioned development policy, SHU has retained over the years its organisation as an institution of network-like structure which now includes 24 faculties in six Romanian cities: 14 faculties in Bucharest (in five different locations) and 10 faculties in five other Romanian cities, namely Braşov (three faculties), Constanţa (two faculties), Craiova (two faculties), Râmnicu Vâlcea (two faculties) and Câmpulung Muscel (one faculty). A 25<sup>th</sup> faculty in the city of Blaj has been closed down. In the academic year 2013-2014, the 24 faculties offer 88 Bachelor programmes (53 full-time, 27 part-time and 8 distance-learning) and 44 Master programmes.

All the above study programmes have been accredited by ARACIS (the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) during the period between May 2010 and December 2012. In parallel, in 2011 the above study programmes were subject to the ranking procedure of all study programmes in Romania according to the Law 1/2011 and they were all ranked in the two lowest categories D and E of ranking. Furthermore, in 2011 SHU was subject to the classification procedure of all Romanian universities according to the Law 1/2011, and was classified in the category of "universities mainly for education". Finally, the institutional accreditation of SHU was reconfirmed by ARACIS in 2012 through an external institutional evaluation which rated SHU as a "university of limited confidence". Because of this low rating, SHU is now subject to the repetition of the external institutional evaluation by ARACIS a year after the previous one. However, it should be noted that this new institutional evaluation of SHU by ARACIS is not at all related to the current evaluation by IEP.



### 1.3 The evaluation process

#### The self-evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the self-evaluation group consisting of ten members (including one student) that was chaired by Prof. Manuela Epure, PhD, who is the Vice-Rector for research and who was also the liaison person of the university with the evaluation team. The self-evaluation group prepared the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which was uploaded on the electronic platform of the project along with the related annexes on 19 April 2013.

The evaluation team appreciated the work done in the SER, which covered almost all issues and was supplemented with a significant amount of informative appendixes and annexes. In this regard, the evaluation team considered the SER a comprehensive, informative, frank and critical analysis which reflected the strong commitment of the people of SHU towards improvement.

#### *The two site visits*

The two site visits of the evaluation team to SHU took place from 22 to 24 May 2013 and from 21 to 24 October 2013. During the two visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of SHU with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders, namely:

- The leadership of SHU
- The leadership, members of the academic staff and students from six (out of the 24) faculties of SHU, all located in Bucharest (in three out of the four campuses in Bucharest)
- Members of the Academic Senate and the Administration Board
- Members of one student association (of the Faculty of Architecture)
- External partners

The evaluation team also had the opportunity to discuss with key actors of SHU issues related to the following crucial areas:

- Education
- Research
- Quality assurance
- Financial management

There were also intense and in-depth discussions with the Rector, Assoc. Prof. Aurelian A. Bondrea, and with the self-evaluation group. Therefore, the evaluation team had the opportunity to meet the broad spectrum of actors at SHU. All meetings and discussions were



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efficiently organised by the Vice-Rector for research, Prof. Manuela Epure, who acted as the liaison person between the university and the evaluation team.

The evaluation team would like to express its gratitude to the people of SHU for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues during the site visits. Finally, the evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Assoc. Prof. Aurelian A. Bondrea, and his team for the organisation before and during the two visits and for their warm hospitality.

In between the two visits the university provided the evaluation team with requested additional documentation, which was provided to the team in due time.

### ***The evaluation report***

The present evaluation report is harmonised with the aims of IEP as outlined above. In this respect, it focuses on the current strengths and weaknesses of SHU regarding its capacity for change, in view of the surrounding opportunities and threats; it expresses a number of recommendations that may be taken into account for the future development of the university.

The evaluation report takes into account all the data provided to the evaluation team in the SER and corresponding additional information. Furthermore, it should be noted that the overall analysis, the comments and the recommendations are based on two intense visits: a two-day first visit and a three-day second visit. The evaluation team also collected a significant amount of information on the Romanian higher education system, especially regarding the recent reform, but it is not possible for the analysis to go into such details. The comments and recommendations, therefore, are confined mostly to major issues of concern within SHU. The recommendations, together with the corresponding reasoning and analysis, appear underlined in the text of the evaluation report, while a summary of recommendations is presented in the last section of the report. Finally, it should be noted that throughout the body of the evaluation report, many ideas of the evaluation team appear, which should not be considered as real recommendations but as reflections which SHU may consider.

### **1.4 The evaluation team**

The evaluation team consisted of the following members:

- Lothar Zechlin, former Rector, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, as team chair
- Richard Lewis, former Vice-Rector, Open University, United Kingdom
- Lennart Olausson, former Rector, Malmö University, Sweden
- Kotryna Peilakauskaite, undergraduate, Vilnius University, Lithuania
- Dionyssi Kladis, professor emeritus, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as team coordinator



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## 2. Strategy, governance and institutional decision-making

### 2.1 Philosophy of SHU: Norms and values / Vision - mission - strategy

According to the SER (p. 7), the vision of SHU is “to reach the highest possible ranking among Romania’s universities and increase the competitiveness of its study programmes both nationally and internationally.” The mission of SHU comes as a consequence of its vision and, according to the SER (p. 7-8) and to the University Charter (art. 4), it is

to generate and disseminate knowledge to society via the following:

- a) basic and ongoing training at undergraduate and graduate levels for personal development; the professional insertion of the educational process’ beneficiary; and the competences achievements in the social and economic environments;
- b) research, development, knowledge and innovation transfer, at individual and collective levels, in sciences, arts and letters, in performance and physical and sports development, and by their aggregation and dissemination.

Following the above vision and mission statements, SHU has developed its Strategic Plan 2010-2014, focusing on the following strategic objectives (p. 2):

1. Actual university autonomy - by asserting its own governing capacity under the current legal framework;
2. Future-oriented development - by implementing modern methods and technologies in the educational process and providing free access to the learning resources;
3. Promoting quality culture at the level of all University structures;
4. Student-centred learning;
5. Assuring budget sustainability of the institution and of each budget execution centre.

Apart from the above current strategic objectives, SHU also elaborates on its long-term strategic objectives for the period 2014-2020. According to the SER (Appendix 7), these objectives aim to the following:

- enhancing international visibility, by relations of cooperation concretised in common projects;
- diversifying the educational offer - by developing study programmes in English;



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- developing the relations with the business environment - for a better insertion of the graduates on the labour market, performing applied research for the benefit of the business sector;
- orientation towards lifelong academic programmes;
- promoting SHU's image nationally and in the European Higher Education Area."

The mission, the vision and the strategic objectives of SHU, as outlined above, were discussed in depth during most of the meetings of the evaluation team at SHU. From these meetings it has appeared that the relationship between the two poles of the dipole "education-research" is the dominant strategic issue for SHU today. This relationship seems to dominate the general debate in all Romanian universities, based on the terminology used in the Law 1/2011 with regards to their classification. For the evaluation team, the main problem with the classification of the Law 1/2011 is that it is perceived by SHU as leading or related to a differentiation between better and worse universities and not between different types of universities as it should be in accordance with the current international trends regarding classification of higher education institutions.

Since the research activity of a university is the main factor for the differentiation set by the classification of the Law 1/2011, it is quite reasonable that the concept of "excellence in research", although not appearing in the classification terminology, is present in all discussions. For the evaluation team it is clear that a university cannot exist without research. However, the position of research, the balance between education and research, the relative weight that each component deserves in the university's operation, as well as the type of research that is performed in a university, are top strategic issues for every university. They define the specific identity and profile of each university and its position in the whole spectrum of institutional differentiation.

The evaluation team considers necessary for SHU to clarify its identity and its profile as analysed above. SHU is a private non-profit university. For its own existence it has primarily to be attractive to new students (nationally and internationally), but also to new categories of students. Its attractiveness depends on the quality and the diversity of its educational offer. In this regard, SHU should primarily aim for excellence in education.

However, a university focusing on education cannot exist without research, even though it can be a good university without excellence in research. However, research and related activities should play a considerable role in its overall function. SHU should ensure research engagement of its entire academic staff aiming to enhance its educational potential and improve its educational programmes; should enhance its capacity to submitting competitive research projects that will bring external revenues; and finally should enhance its capacity to applied research but also to developmental projects and consultancy services that will reinforce its links with its external partners, bringing on the one hand additional external revenue and ensuring on the other hand opportunities for its students (e.g. internships) and



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its graduates (employability). Concluding, the evaluation team recommends that SHU reconsiders its strategy so that it aims to be an excellent university for education which for that purpose is required to develop research activities that will strengthen its educational potential and improve its educational programmes. Chapter 4 of the present report provides more detailed recommendations to strengthen research activities.

Furthermore, the evaluation team fully endorses the goal of SHU to improve its visibility and enhance its reputation, nationally and internationally. However, the evaluation team believes that SHU should not follow the mainstream race for visibility and reputation only through research. A university can achieve this goal also by promoting the whole spectrum of its strengths, its comparative advantages, and its specific profile. Especially in the case of SHU the evaluation team believes that its visibility and its reputation can significantly be improved by promoting its goal to be an excellent university in its overall educational offer and by positioning itself in the differentiation spectrum of Romanian universities. What is required furthermore is to develop and effectively implement an appropriate marketing policy. The development and implementation of such a marketing policy is something that the evaluation team also recommends to SHU.

Finally, and in connection with the above-mentioned strategic goals, the evaluation team considers it important for SHU to enlarge its educational offer to wider student categories in order to meet current demands of the Romanian society. In this regard, the evaluation team appreciates and endorses the efforts of SHU to further improve its postgraduate programmes with short-cycle courses.

Apart from its objectives, the strategic plan of a university should also be assessed with regard to its technical characteristics, i.e. its internal structure and the processes that ensure its effective implementation. The evaluation team is pleased to notice that the Strategic Plan 2010-2014 of SHU contains most of the appropriate elements for its implementation, namely a) the strategic objectives (short-term and long-term), b) the transformation of the strategic objectives into strategic actions through a concrete action plan (containing also the respective responsibilities assumed for every strategic action within SHU) and c) the development of a set of properly quantified key performance indicators for the assessment of the strategy implementation stage and of the accomplishment of the objectives. Thus, the importance given to key performance indicators in the Strategic Plan 2012-2014 should be noted. The plan mentions that these are set and calculated annually so that, “according to the results of the annual evaluation, the appropriate amendments to the action plan will be made and the fulfilment of the responsibilities assumed will be analysed.”

However, what seems to be missing here is prioritisation. The actions contained in the action plan appear in a neutral or horizontal sense without any prioritisation. This may be acceptable in theory, but in practice, priorities must be set in order to ensure that significant goals are not confused with less important ones. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends to



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SHU that the actions included in the action plan should be prioritised, cost-estimated and put into a time schedule within the validity period of the strategic plan.

Furthermore, for the evaluation team it is not clear which instruments oversee and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the strategic goals and the key performance indicators. In the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan (p. 6), it is written that “SHU has its own evaluation and control mechanisms for the implementation of the institutional development strategic plan, at various levels: University Senate, Board of Trustees, Faculties, Departments and the supervision aims at the performance indicators.” However, these bodies cannot play the role of such an instrument. The evaluation team would therefore recommend that SHU assign this task to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should also have the task to assess the validity of the strategic goals and the respective key performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.

The last recommendation of the evaluation team in this section has to do with the procedures followed in SHU for strategy development. From its discussions with the rector, the Senate and the Administration Board the evaluation team realised that the strategy of SHU is developed in a more or less top-down approach. It is discussed at the level of the rector (and the vice-rectors) and then it is approved by the Senate (from the academic point of view) and by the Board (from the point of view of economic sustainability). It was also made clear to the evaluation team that a bottom-up culture exists only at the level of the faculties in SHU. The evaluation team understands the purposes that call for such a top-down approach in a private university. However, it believes that SHU will benefit from a parallel bottom-up approach for strategy development which should extend ownership of the strategic goals to the wider university community with the aim to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the achievement of the goals. Therefore, the evaluation team would recommend that the self-evaluation group, which has demonstrated its engagement and commitment, be tasked with the bottom-up aspect of the strategic development.

## **2.2 Governance and institutional decision-making**

At institutional level, the Romanian higher education system follows a dual governance model with the parallel existence of two collective management bodies, the academic Senate and the Administration Board. In this model, the Administration Board ensures the operational management of the universities and applies the strategic decisions of the academic Senate, which is considered the highest decision-making body at university level. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in the Romanian system the members of the administration board cannot be in parallel members of the Senate. This means that there is a complete distinction regarding membership between the two major bodies of a university.

While the Law provides precisely for the composition of the Administration Board in public universities, this is not the case in the private universities where the members of the



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Administration Board are appointed by the founders of the university (Law 1/2011, article 241, clause 7). In SHU the Administration Board consists of 15 members (13 founding members — including the rector — and two directors of the Administration). The president of the Board is one of the founding members and a former rector of SHU.

According to Romanian Law, the Senate should consist of academic staff and students with the proportion of students being at least 25%. This is a general rule applying to both public and private universities. According to the document regarding the election methodology in SHU that was given additionally to the evaluation team, for the Senate of SHU the following apply:

- a) The Senate comprises 35 members, out of whom 26 academic and research staff and nine students (article 10.1). This means that the proportion of students is 25.7%, i.e. exceeds the minimum provided by the Law.
- b) Each faculty shall have one representative in the Senate (article 11.1), which means that the 26 academic and research staff come from different faculties.
- c) The rector, the vice-rectors, the deans, the vice-deans, the directors of departments and the administrative director-general of the university cannot be members of the Senate (article 7).

Furthermore, the Senate elects its president among its members, but it should be noted that according to the Law 1/2011 (article 207, clause 1) the president of the Senate is not considered a management position for Romanian universities. The president of the Senate simply leads the meetings of the Senate and plays a representative role in its relationship with the rector (article 208, clause 2).

This dual governance system seems to function properly in SHU without any overlapping or conflicts between the Senate and the Board. The distinction of the responsibilities of the two bodies seems to be clear enough. And, as it was stressed by members of the Senate, they have no reasons for conflicts with the Board. Instead, they have to keep close and effective links and relationships with the Board.

Furthermore, the representation of all faculties in the Senate ensures an effective vertical internal communication in both directions (top-down and bottom-up), even though the federal composition of the Senate does not facilitate the development of a commitment to the institution on the part of the Senate members.

For the evaluation team, the governance and the decision-making potential of SHU would be reinforced by a more vital involvement of students and also by the involvement of external stakeholders. The apparent different approaches between public and private institutions in terms of governance are understandable. However, the evaluation team believes that SHU would benefit from the participation of a student representative in the Administration Board, similarly as the public universities benefit from this participation as stipulated by the Law.



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Furthermore, the evaluation team considers important that students' participation in governance at institutional level should be characterised by a commitment to the institution in addition to the commitment to a faculty. The establishment of a student association at central level would help students in building this institutional commitment and would also help in making the involvement of students more active, more substantial and more helpful. In this regard, the evaluation team would recommend that SHU encourages and facilitates its students to that aim.

Finally, the evaluation team recommends that SHU pays due consideration to involvement of external stakeholders in its governance structures and procedures. The involvement of the external stakeholders should become normal practice both at the faculty level and at the institutional level. Their involvement at the faculty level is needed in order to ensure the relevance of the curricula with the demands of the society and the economy and in order to foster the opportunities of the students to professional practice (through internships, placements etc.) and to widen the horizon of future graduates for employment. On the other hand, their involvement at institutional level will help SHU to widen its partnerships and its alliances in the society and the economy and, furthermore, to improve its visibility and its reputation.

### ***Management and financing***

The evaluation team was informed during its meetings and from the various documents it received that in its 23 years of existence SHU has not experienced financial difficulties. In the SER (Appendix 7) it is stated that the strategic goal "Providing financial sustainability" has been accomplished through "high-performance financial management", and it is added that SHU "never had difficulties regarding the cash flow and it sustained financially all of its activities." The evaluation team understands that this is one of the strengths of SHU as a private non-profit university. This situation was explicitly analysed in the meeting with the key-persons for financial management. It became clear from this meeting that SHU has created savings over the years, and currently has no debts and no loans being still stable in terms of financing. However, the economic crisis has started to affect SHU since Romanian families now have difficulties in sending their children to SHU. This situation has resulted in the decline of student numbers during the last three years (from 113,265 in 2010-2011 to 38,420 in 2011-2012 and to 18,784 in 2012-2013). This is a decline of 83.4% between 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 and a decline of 51.1% between 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. As for the current academic year 2013-2014, there is a further decline in the student number to about 13,000.

This huge decline in the number of students has resulted in a corresponding decrease in SHU's revenue. In order to cope with this problem, SHU has to look for alternative sources of funding. The efforts of SHU to increase its attractiveness to wider student categories have been mentioned earlier in this report. These efforts are linked to the development of



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alternative educational offers, e.g. short-cycle programmes (that do not require accreditation) or even offering courses or entire study programmes in English. The evaluation team appreciates and endorses these plans and recommends their continuation and their effective implementation. Furthermore, the evaluation team also heard during its meetings (especially with the top leadership) various similar innovative ideas. In this regard, some indicative recommendations of the evaluation team would be that SHU strengthens its efforts in order to be more competitive in attracting research funds nationally and internationally (including increasing overheads) in order to take advantage of European funds (social, structural, developmental) or in order to improve its contractual partnerships with economic and business entities in Romania. Furthermore, ideas such as the offering of clinical services by the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine or sport services by the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports should also be considered.

At the same time, and apart from the need to find alternative sources, the evaluation team considers it necessary that SHU should proceed to a strategic cost-benefit analysis of its overall functioning. This cost-benefit analysis should go beyond obvious measures like firing academic or administrative personnel and should touch even the operational structure of SHU with 24 faculties dispersed in six Romanian cities offering 102 Bachelor programmes and 33 Master programmes in 50 major disciplines. The evaluation team understands that the network-like structure of SHU was a strategic necessity in 1991; however, the conditions in 2013 are quite different from conditions in 1991.

The evaluation team would like to connect the above necessity with the demand expressed by the faculties for more financial autonomy. The evaluation team has been informed that it is not in the culture of SHU to allocate funds to the faculties as lump sums. However, the evaluation team believes that the faculties could enjoy some financial autonomy in order to increase the efficiency of budget allocation. Of course, this could be manageable only under the conditions that the faculties of SHU were regrouped into fewer clusters of bigger faculties sub-structured by departments.

### ***Academic structure/academic organisation***

As mentioned earlier, SHU has been developed over the years in a decentralised and network-like structure with 24 faculties operating in six Romanian cities. The purpose of this development has also been described earlier in the present report. However, the evaluation team would like to mention that it is not usual for a university to have five (5) Faculties of Law and Public Administration located in five (5) different cities or to have six (6) Bachelor programmes in accounting and management data processing and five (5) Bachelor programmes in finance and banking distributed in six (6) different cities. During the various meetings the evaluation team was not informed of any specific problems related to this reality. The evaluation team understands that this dispersion aims to serve the educational profile of SHU. However, the evaluation team would like to raise some issues that should be



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considered by SHU regarding multiple study programmes in the same field. How are these study programmes coordinated? How is good practice exchanged between them? Furthermore, the impact of this dispersion on research in the respective fields should also be considered by SHU. The fragmentation of the human potential and the respective infrastructure is a reality that undoubtedly affects both effectiveness and efficiency of research and it hampers the efforts for a critical mass of researchers to be ensured in all scientific fields. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that SHU reconsiders the reality of the parallel existence of multiple faculties and study programmes in similar fields and in different locations.

### ***PhD programmes and doctoral schools***

A second important issue regarding academic structure and organisation of SHU is the lack of a doctoral school. The establishment of a doctoral school depends on the capacity of a university to organise and carry out doctoral studies, or in other words on the capacity of the academic staff to supervise PhDs. According to the Romanian law of national education, PhDs should be conducted in a doctoral school. The precondition for a university to establish a doctoral school is the existence of at least three professors authorised to supervise PhDs according to the Law 1/2011 (article 166, clause 1). However, each doctoral school is assessed individually in order to be accredited in a specific study area (study domain). This means that in order for a doctoral school to be established / accredited in a university in a specific study domain, there must be at least three professors authorised to supervise a PhD in this specific study domain in this university. It should be noted that in Romanian universities there are 60 study domains, the list of which is defined by Order of the Ministry of National Education.

Currently, there are no PhD programmes operating in SHU since there are no accredited doctoral schools in any of the study domains in SHU. The evaluation team has been informed in its meeting with the self-evaluation group during the first visit that SHU has, however, 18 professors authorised to be PhD tutors. But since there are not at least three of them in the same study domain, they supervise PhDs in other universities.

The evaluation team is aware of another requirement for a university to establish a doctoral school in a specific study domain. This requirement is that the Bachelor and Master programmes of the university in the same study domain should have been ranked in categories A and B, except if the university is classified as a “university mainly for education” when its respective Bachelor and Master study programmes should have been ranked in category A (Ministerial Order on the methodology for establishment of doctoral schools, article 8 clause 1).

The evaluation team understands that these requirements create problems for SHU in its efforts to establish a doctoral school. It is aware that the establishment of doctoral schools and the development of PhD programmes are among the strategic goals of SHU and that this might be a legitimate objective which will allow SHU to improve its research capacity and its



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reputation as well. Nevertheless, given the strategic recommendation to focus on excellence in education, the pursuit for a doctoral school should not belong to the highly prioritised goals of SHU.



### 3. Teaching and learning

The evaluation team met committed students and academic staff in all meetings at both faculty and institutional levels. Students appear to be satisfied with their studies, studying conditions, available facilities and relationship with their teachers. Academic staff also seem to be satisfied with the overall working conditions at SHU and with the opportunities for their professional development. This situation signifies the existence of a good climate in the overall teaching and learning procedures which is strongly appreciated by the evaluation team. However, irrespective of the good climate, the evaluation team considers it necessary to raise some issues related to teaching and learning, but also to studies in the wider sense.

#### ***Student-centred learning***

A first issue is the one related to the concept of “student-centred learning”. It is a top issue in the current debate on higher education policy, and it is a key feature of the European Higher Education Area. The evaluation team is not sure to what extent the concept of “student-centred learning” is clearly understood and perceived in Romania and to what extent it is a constituent part of the current reform. In the background paper titled “Overview of the higher education system in Romania” (p. 14), the term “student-centred learning” is given the following content: “Students are considered partners in the higher education institutions and equal members of the academic community.” Similarly, the Law 1/2011 contains a separate chapter (chapter X) under the heading “Promoting the university focused on student”, the first article of which (article 199) states that “The students are regarded as partners of the HEIs and members of equal standing of the academic community.” Undoubtedly, these statements constitute a significant principle for the Romanian higher education system, which is already applied accordingly in the collective governance structures and procedures; nevertheless, these statements do not correspond to the concept of “student-centred learning”.

The above ambiguity in the perception of “student-centred learning” may also explain the difficulties in its implementation. The evaluation team notes that the SER of SHU (p. 18) includes the following references to “student-centred learning”:

The university and its faculties promote and develop student-centred education. Students are perceived as partners and equal members of the academic community and participate both in personal and professional training and development [...] Student-centred learning aims to adjust teaching methods to the students’ needs; according to students’ course evaluation there is a need to customize the knowledge transfer and competences building.



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These references present a much clearer and more concise perception of “student-centred learning” than the one presented either in the law or in the above-mentioned background paper. Furthermore, in the SER (Appendix 16 - SWOT analysis of the educational processes), “student-centred learning” is presented as one of the strengths of SHU.

The evaluation team is not sure whether the “student-centred learning” approach is implemented genuinely in SHU. However, it is crucial that it is high on the agenda. On the other hand, “student-centred learning” cannot be approached as simply a technocratic issue of didactic methodology; it is related with changes in attitudes. Therefore, its genuine implementation also requires changing the attitudes of the academic staff and stimulating them in order to apply the new approach, but it also requires changing the students’ attitudes. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that SHU builds on the experience gained so far from the implementation of “student-centred learning”, develops a foundation for sharing any existing good practices and further improves its capacity and its performance in this regard.

### ***Curricula development***

“Student-centred learning” is not only an issue for improving the quality of educational offer. It is also an issue for redesigning the educational offer. The genuine implementation of “student-centred learning” will offer the appropriate opportunity for curricula development and innovation on the basis of the learning outcomes approach, aiming to the enrichment of the competences and skills (especially the generic ones) of the graduates. Nowadays, curricula development and innovation is of utmost importance for SHU in order for it to be in a position to meet the demands of the labour market (long-term or medium-term) but also of potential students. In order to meet these demands SHU will have to adapt properly its curricula, but it may also have to close programmes or open new ones. Taking this into account, the evaluation team recommends that SHU continuously develops and innovates its curricula adapting them to the demands of the labour market (long-term or medium-term), but also to the demands of potential students, using as guiding elements the required competences and skills of the graduates on the basis of the appropriate learning outcomes. This adaptation may also require closing existing curricula or opening new ones.

### ***Widening the educational offer***

Improving flexibility of educational offer could become a competitive advantage for SHU and would allow it to meet the demands of the labour market and the society at large. It has been mentioned already earlier in this report that SHU has to address itself to new student categories in order to cope with the dramatic fall in student numbers. This is a strategic choice which needs to be transformed into educational action. In this regard, the flexibility of the educational offer is a key issue. In its strategic plan SHU has already included the establishment of short-cycle programmes (that do not require accreditation). In educational terms, the short programmes can be considered part of the lifelong learning procedures



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together with the postgraduate programmes for training and continuous professional development as provided by the Law 1/2011 (article 173). Furthermore, flexibility of educational offer can be achieved by incorporating in the programmes evening classes, courses during weekends, blended learning courses, etc. The evaluation team recommends that SHU should consider approaches to flexible educational offer similar to the ones mentioned above in order to widen its student clientele and in order to meet real demands of the labour market and the society at large.

### ***Linking with alumni***

Finally, the evaluation team recommends that SHU involves its graduates in redesigning its educational offer and in the curricular development and innovation. In this regard, SHU should strengthen its links with its graduates, stimulating the creation of an alumni culture. The establishment of an effective system of tracking graduates is a prerequisite to that end. SHU may benefit in various ways from the creation of an alumni culture. Systematic contact with graduates may prove to be an effective feedback system for the relevance of curricula with employment. Alumni could also be a source for revenue for SHU. And, finally, alumni can play an important role in the efforts of SHU to improve its reputation and to increase its visibility. In fact, alumni may prove to be a crucial marketing tool for SHU.

### ***Staff development***

Reinforcing academic staff development is a sine qua non for the success of the efforts of SHU in the field of teaching and learning. The traditional teaching methods may not be enough for staff development nowadays. An important task now is for the academic staff to adopt a “student-centred learning” attitude. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that SHU establishes staff development programmes. Furthermore, the evaluation team also recommends that one of the aims of these staff development programmes should be to improve the foreign language competences of the academic staff and especially in English language. This necessity goes in parallel with the strategic goal of SHU to develop courses or entire programmes in English.

### ***Promoting interdisciplinarity***

A question that was raised during the meetings of the evaluation team was whether there is room for flexible interdisciplinary educational offer at Bachelor or Master levels in Romania. The need to build on interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinary was mentioned in many meetings at SHU, and it is also a need recognised by the evaluation team as well regarding all three missions of a modern university (education, research, service to society). It was argued that this is not possible in Romania because all study programmes at Bachelor and Master levels should belong to a specialisation (study domain) that is strictly defined by a Ministerial Act. However, the evaluation team realised there are already such interdisciplinary study programmes in SHU, at least at Master level, e.g. Master programmes in “Applied mathematics in economics” and in “Mathematical and computer-based models in finance,



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insurance and stock exchange". The team was told that the real problem is that the interdisciplinary study programmes also have to be classified in one of the existing 60 study domains and, for that reason, they have to be established by one single faculty, i.e. by the faculty that belongs to the respective study domain. This means that it is not possible in Romania for an interdisciplinary study programme to be established jointly by two or more faculties from different study domains. However, the evaluation team considers it important that SHU keeps designing interdisciplinary programmes making full use of all existing legal opportunities to that direction.



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## 4. Research

In the section related to strategic issues, the evaluation team dealt with the position of research in SHU from a strategic point of view and has concluded with the recommendation that SHU should reconsider its strategy so that it aims to be an excellent university for education which for that purpose is required to develop research-related activities that will strengthen its educational potential. In this regard, SHU should reflect carefully to what extent it will focus on research, without feeling obliged to build its reputation on it. As indicated in the above-mentioned section, a university focusing on excellence in its educational offer cannot exist without research; however, it can be a good university without excellence in research. In this regard, the evaluation team has already presented ideas for the research orientation of such a university.

### *Internal organisation of research*

Nevertheless, the issue of organisation of research in the university requires some further elaboration. The evaluation team is aware of the research structures existing in SHU, as well as of the results of its research activities, as they have been outlined in the most recent report of the Central Research Institute of SHU for the year 2012. This is a remarkable production of results, which to some extent follow the logic expressed by the evaluation team in the section on strategy regarding the type of research activities on which SHU should focus in order to strengthen its potential for high quality education but also in order to attract new sources of revenues. However, the evaluation team considers the fact that the research activities are performed in 27 research centres under the coordination of the Central Research Institute a weakness for SHU. Of course, the evaluation team has been informed that the existence of at least one research centre for every accredited specialisation (study domain) is among the requirements set by ARACIS for accreditation purposes.

Under these circumstances, the evaluation team understands that SHU has to retain its 27 research centres where the current research activity of the academic staff will be carried out, even though in the SWOT analysis for research (SER, Appendix 10) the university itself considers the large number of research centres as a weakness. If however, there is a possibility to abstain from the above ARACIS requirement, the evaluation team would recommend that SHU reconsiders the number of research centres by closing or merging some of them after an internal assessment procedure.

The evaluation team has been informed of the initiative of SHU to group the overall research activities into five major research domains (science, social sciences, economics, humanities and arts & architecture). This initiative is evidence of the intention of the university to rationalise at least the map of its research activities. In this context the evaluation team recommends that SHU clearly distinguishes research itself from the support and coordination



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of research. The latter is a management task that should be organised at the central level of SHU, the former is done by individual researchers in faculties who need to find their partners for interdisciplinary programmes in other faculties. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that the Central Research Institute operates as a central research support unit that does not execute research itself but delivers a central management support to research at the decentralised level of SHU. This would include, among others, the task to offer support for preparing competitive proposals for research funding and for building related capacity by researchers and the task for fundraising by identifying new sources for research funding.

### ***Striving for a specific research profile***

The above recommendations of the evaluation team have to do with the organisation of the regular, everyday research activities of SHU. The evaluation team also considers it important and reasonable for SHU to strive to develop a specific profile based on research. In this case, the evaluation team would recommend that this profile should be built in a multidisciplinary approach that would exceed the profile of each individual research centre. In this regard, SHU should establish a small number (no more than four) of new multidisciplinary research centres following a developmental bottom-up process based on a careful internal evaluation of both existing research strengths and potential future prospects.



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## 5. Service to society

Establishing strong and close links with society is one of the major aims of any university nowadays, notably because offering services to society is considered the third mission of modern universities, even in the case of private non-profit universities. This relates, of course, to their accountability and public responsibility.

The evaluation team would like to emphasise here that the relationship between university and society is always a two-way relationship (“social responsibility of higher education” and “social responsibility for higher education”). Further on, this two-way relationship may be either direct or indirect. The direct relationship may refer, for example, to services provided by the university to the society in all its senses (including services provided through research projects, consultancy services, in-house training, partnerships for lifelong learning etc.) which may also lead, on a longer term, to income generation. The indirect relationship may concern both students (competence-building and capacity-building of students in related areas through internships, practicum etc.) and graduates (by enriching employment opportunities). Furthermore, the indirect relationship may also refer to the involvement of the society (i.e. external partners and stakeholders) in the governance and decision-making procedures of the university both at institutional and faculty levels.

From the various meetings at SHU and from the documentation that was provided, the evaluation team has come to the conclusion that the links of SHU with society are rather weak. The evaluation team would like to repeat at this point that meeting the needs of Romanian society was one of the driving forces for the establishment of SHU in 1991 and its development in a network-like structure (see the quote from SER, p. 5 in the section 2.2. of the present report). Whether this part of the founding purposes of SHU has been fulfilled or not is something that goes beyond the scope of the present evaluation and the present report. In any case, however, the need for strong and close links with society exists for SHU as well.

There are two points from the SWOT analysis of SHU that need to be mentioned here. The first one refers to the SWOT analysis for education (SER, appendix 16) where the following weakness is reported: “The employers, although involved in the study programme proposals, they lose interest in the process, e.g. practicum of students and absorption of graduates.” The second point refers to the SWOT analysis for research (SER, appendix 11), where there is a reference to the need for measures addressed to the business sector that will aim to identify new sources of funding (e.g. applied research and consultancy services to the business sector). These two points refer to different issues; however, they indicate the same reality, i.e. the weak links of SHU with the society.



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Following the above analysis, the evaluation team recommends that SHU establishes strong links with society in the wider sense. For a comprehensive university like SHU with a wide variety of specialisations, there is no dominant direction for the relationship with society to be oriented. Therefore, SHU should establish its links with a wide range of possible partners and in all possible directions but with different means and goals depending on the variety of specialisations and their relevance to society. The alumni of SHU can be quite a useful factor in establishing links with such a wide range of partners in society. The evaluation team does not recommend concrete actions here since many of the initiatives to be taken in this respect have already been outlined as recommendations earlier in this report in the sections concerning governance and decision-making (section 2.2), teaching and learning (section 3) and research (section 4).

Finally, and given the variety of scientific areas of SHU, the evaluation team would recommend additionally that SHU considers the establishment of an advisory body consisting of external partners and alumni, in order to assist the rector in the relationships of the university with society. This advisory body would help the university to establish closer and tighter links with its external environment on an advisory (and thus informal) basis, avoiding in this way any conflicts with the formal governance bodies, and ensuring at the same time continuity and enhancing efficiency in the relationships between SHU and its external partners.



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## 6. Quality culture

The term “quality culture” defines the overall attitude of a university which focuses on the concept of “quality” and which thus applies to issues like quality assurance, quality assessment, quality improvement, etc. In the context of the IEP methodology, quality assurance offers the means through which a university will be in a position to know whether it is doing well and it is accomplishing its chosen mission and goals. It certainly comes from the necessity of going beyond data, figures, statistics, quantitative elements and it deals with the qualitative dimension. Quality assurance is a central element in European higher education today. Furthermore, it has also assumed a key role in the Bologna Process, while the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG), adopted by the European ministers in Bergen in May 2005, have built a European perspective and a European context for quality assurance in higher education. It is worthwhile to note that every country participating in the Bologna Process is committed to developing its own quality assurance system in compliance with the ESG.

In the European Higher Education Area the universities are required to implement their own internal quality assurance mechanisms and to develop a quality culture shared among universities throughout Europe. As stated in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework”. It is a task therefore for every European university to develop its own structures and procedures ensuring genuine quality assurance.

### ***The two approaches of Quality***

Quality in a university can be built from two different points of view and can be based on two different approaches. The first approach focuses on quality assurance processes that are control-oriented, while the second one focuses on quality assurance processes that are improvement-oriented.

The first approach controls whether (or to what extent) predefined standards and criteria are met by a university in its various functions and aims to certify whether the university (or the study programme) can or cannot be accredited (the “Yes or No” function of quality assurance as accreditation). Especially in Romania, the implementation of this first approach of quality assurance is also related to the following: a) the process of classification of universities into three categories (universities of advanced research and education, universities for education and scientific research and artistic creation, and universities mainly for education), b) the ranking of study programmes in five categories from A (best performing programmes) to E



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(least performing programmes) and c) the distinction granted to the universities in the context of their accreditation (universities with high degree of confidence, universities with confidence, universities with limited degree of confidence, and universities with no confidence). Therefore, the quality assurance system in which the Romanian universities operate follows the first approach, i.e. is control-oriented. Consequently, the internal quality assurance structures and procedures in the Romanian universities have adapted the same approach (ISO certification, standards etc.)

On the other hand, IEP follows the second approach, i.e. is improvement-oriented and its methodology is adapted to this approach (see details in the introductory section of the present report). The self-evaluation process is the basic element in the methodology of the IEP and focuses on the self-knowledge and the self-reflection of the university. While the control-oriented approach of quality assurance requires top-down procedures, the improvement-oriented approach is by its nature a bottom-up procedure requiring the involvement of the members of the community in the entire university operation. In other words, while the ownership of quality assurance processes in the control-oriented approach belongs to leaders, managers and experts, the same ownership in the improvement-oriented approach belongs to the community.

### ***Internal quality assurance in SHU***

As mentioned already, the internal quality assurance system of SHU aims to meet the requirements and demands set by the Romanian quality assurance system which is control-oriented. The overall internal quality assurance procedures in SHU are dominated by the Quality Management System (SMC) which operates as a circular and open system with ISO 9001 certification with the administrative support of the Quality Management Department (DMC). The overall internal quality assurance operation of SHU is steered by the Senate Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEAC). This Commission produces the annual quality assurance plan of SHU. A specific reference should be made to the Quality Management Handbook of SHU which covers all issues related to internal quality assurance at SHU. It is an extended three-volume document which is now in its fourth edition (the first one being in 2008). At faculty level, commissions of academic personnel, students and employer representatives in each faculty coordinate and monitor the evaluation and quality assurance activities. The faculty quality assurance commissions draw up annual reports for presentation to the faculty council meetings which are then forwarded to the DMC and the CEAC.

The evaluation team finds the overall structures, procedures and activities of SHU with regards to internal quality assurance quite remarkable in the context of the control-oriented approach of internal quality assurance that applies in Romania. The impression of the evaluation team is that there is an overload of internal quality assurance in SHU. This approach may be helpful to the university in meeting the demands and the requirements set by the Romanian quality assurance system and the above-mentioned structures and



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procedures may be effective in a control-oriented approach of quality. However, the question is whether these structures and procedures may be also effective in the improvement-oriented approach to quality.

The ISO 9001 system may be used as a typical example of the control-oriented approach. The evaluation team does not mean to undermine its value. However, it should be noted that the ISO 9001 is in fact a bureaucratic system that can only ensure a minimum level of quality as it simply sets standards of “best practice” and then controls whether these standards have been achieved. On the contrary, in the improvement-oriented approach, internal quality assurance aims to raise quality above minimum and to ensure continuous quality improvement.

Nevertheless, the main task of the present evaluation is to help the university realise how its internal quality assurance system will be effective in terms of the improvement-oriented approach. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that SHU, in parallel to its already existing structures and procedures, develops a more bottom-up driven internal quality assurance strategy aiming to the continuous improvement of the university and not simply to meeting the standards and criteria set by the Romanian quality assurance and accreditation system. Accordingly, this internal quality assurance strategy should be incorporated into the strategic development processes of SHU. SHU should utilise the self-reflection attitude that has been created in the context of the current self-evaluation process and use it as a source for the development of this bottom-up quality assurance strategy.

### ***External evaluations of SHU***

The evaluation team is aware that in the past few years SHU has undergone many external evaluations of various types, at various levels and for various reasons:

- a) In 2012, SHU was subject to external institutional evaluation by ARACIS and was granted the distinction of “university with limited confidence” (this evaluation being currently repeated by ARACIS aiming to the re-appraisal of the distinction)
- b) The 102 Bachelor programmes and the 33 Master programmes were accredited (or temporarily authorised) by ARACIS during the academic years 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013
- c) Following the classification process (2011), SHU was classified into the category of “universities mainly for education”
- d) Following the ranking process (2011), the study programmes of SHU have been ranked in categories D and E

The evaluation team understands that SHU has suffered — and still suffers — from an evaluation overload. The reasons are understandable they concern the need to ensure and improve the quality of the Romanian higher education system. However, the evaluation team also knows that evaluation overload does not necessarily lead to improvement in quality and does not necessarily help in building a quality culture.



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### ***Consistency with ESG***

The evaluation team paid specific attention to the consistency of the internal quality assurance system of SHU with part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The evaluation team is aware that most standards and guidelines of part 1 of the ESG have been incorporated into the requirements set by ARACIS to the Romanian universities for accreditation purposes. Furthermore, SHU has provided the evaluation team with an analytical document on the implementation of the SEG where all details can be found. This document also helped the evaluation team to search for further evidence in various meetings during the two visits. Therefore, it can be said that the evaluation team had a more or less good evidence for the consistency of SHU with the ESG.

### ***Summarising***

While appreciating SHU's efforts towards building and consolidating its quality management and quality assurance systems, the evaluation team would like to summarise by reminding that, as mentioned earlier, improvement-oriented quality culture is not about standards, rankings, or classifications; it is about attitudes, mentalities, and values; it is not expected to be imposed or regulated or monitored in a top-down approach; but it should be built in a bottom-up approach and then spread within the whole higher education community and affect all functions of the university. The involvement of each individual in this bottom-up procedure requires inspiration which in fact acts as stimulation. And conveying this inspiration is a very important role and task for the leadership of the university at all levels.



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## 7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key issue in the European Higher Education Area; consequently, it should be high on the strategic agenda of any European university today. An internationalisation strategy may be based on the relationships established by a university with international partners at various levels. This relationship may be built at the institutional level (e.g., inter-university relationships, relations with international organisations, partnership in international networks and consortia), at the level of the faculties (e.g., joint or dual study programmes and degrees), at the level of research units/activities (e.g., participation in international research projects and financing by international resources) or at the level of individuals (e.g., mobility exchanges of students and staff, attractiveness of international students and staff, involvement of students and staff in international events and activities).

Therefore, an important part of the internationalisation strategy of a university will be to develop the appropriate conditions that will help establish and/or further improve the above relationships. However, it should also be taken into account that the above relationships will be built on and will be facilitated and further improved by the international visibility of the university, its overall profile, its reputation, and the way in which it promotes its qualities internationally. All these should be considered a constituent part of an internationalisation strategy.

The evaluation team is aware that internationalisation has a significant position in the strategic plan of SHU. However, the team considers it extremely important for SHU to improve its internationalisation agenda as it does not seem to be among its strengths. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that SHU develops a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will cover all the above-mentioned dimensions, taking advantage of all opportunities that the existing legislation in Romania allows for. This strategy should aim among others to ensuring requirements for further involvement in international projects and to fostering new partnerships with universities abroad. The evaluation team was informed of existing ideas and plans in SHU for establishing strategic relationships with areas like Eurasia, Middle East and Africa and strongly endorses them as they may improve internationalisation dynamics in SHU.

Furthermore, an effective internationalisation strategy should be built step by step starting from the human resources. For the evaluation team, developing an internationalisation culture inside the university and building an internationalisation attitude among the students, but primarily among the staff, are key preconditions for any internationalisation strategy to be successfully promoted and implemented.



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The performance of SHU in terms of Erasmus mobility and in terms of attracting international students and teaching staff is an example for the need to combine measures with attitudes. In order to stimulate Romanian students to participate in an Erasmus programme, the recognition of the periods of study abroad must be ensured in advance according to the respective learning agreements; however, the results will be poor if the appropriate attitude is not built among students, but also among professors. In order to attract international students, the possibility to attend courses taught in English must be ensured for them; however, the appropriate attitude of the professors needs to be built in order to improve their competence in teaching in English.

Following the above analysis, the evaluation team recommends that SHU should establish a comprehensive policy in order to improve its performance regarding Erasmus mobility (both incoming and outgoing) and attractiveness of international students and staff. This policy should contain concrete measures (e.g. recognition of study periods abroad for outgoing students, inclusion of courses taught in English courses for incoming mobility students and for international students, improvement of the competence of professors in teaching in English) in parallel with the establishment of an internationalisation culture and attitude among students and staff.

As mentioned in the beginning of the current section, the international visibility of SHU is a key element for a successful internationalisation strategy. For that reason, the evaluation team would like to refer to the related recommendation also made earlier in this report, for SHU to establish an effective marketing policy aiming to improve its international visibility by promoting its qualities internationally.



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## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

### 8.1 Conclusions

SHU is a university under continuous change since its establishment in 1991. Furthermore, the specific situation of Romania and of Romanian higher education — public and private — together with the current trends in the European higher education and in conjunction with the current economic crisis, form a rapidly changing and challenging landscape for SHU, and for any Romanian university. Additionally, SHU also has to meet major challenges derived from the crisis of 2009 with the closure of all its distance learning programmes and the dramatic decline in the number of students since then.

SHU has therefore to adapt its strategy to this new landscape, in order to fulfil its mission and cope with the difficulties. The evaluation team is aware of the strategic plan 2010-2014 and is also aware of the analysis that SHU has already done in its SWOT analysis regarding its strengths and its weaknesses together with the opportunities and the threats deriving from the new landscape. Taking the above into consideration, it can be said that SHU has the qualities and the potential to respond to changing conditions and therefore has the potential to change. In this respect, the evaluation team believes that what is needed now is for SHU to clarify its strategic objectives and adapt them to its real potential and to its real strengths. In other words, SHU has to combine ambitions with realistic goals; this is the concluding recommendation of the evaluation team.

Following the previous paragraph and in connection to the major recommendations made earlier throughout the various sections of this report, it can be said that the above-mentioned clarification of the strategic objectives of SHU should result in the clarification of its profile and its identity. For that purpose, SHU should focus on excellence in education developing the appropriate research activities which will strengthen its educational potential and which in parallel will create its specific research profile. It is this profile and this identity that will offer SHU the possibility to increase its visibility and will improve its reputation (nationally and internationally). In parallel, SHU should consider (or reconsider) rationalisation of its educational offer in time (for example alternative and flexible study programmes, lifelong learning, short-cycle programmes) and in space (reconsidering geographical dispersion or multiplicity of similar study programmes). SHU has two ways of facing the decrease in revenue, first one is to try to attract new categories of students and second one to rationalise its educational functions.

In the previous paragraph some key issues have been mentioned, to which the evaluation team attaches greater importance. The recommendations have been outlined in detail in the body of the report. These recommendations are intended to be the evaluation team's own



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contribution to the process of change and to help SHU to make the most of the opportunities open to it and to cope with the threats it may face in the future. At the same time, this evaluation report aspires to function as an inspiration for SHU as a whole, but more specifically for all those people, leadership, students and staff, who are concerned by its future. The evaluation team hopes that the evaluation work done, including the present report, offers a real help to SHU for its future steps. And it also hopes that SHU will seize the opportunity to realise and demonstrate its great potential.

## 8.2 Summary of recommendations

In this section of the report the main recommendations are summarised as they have appeared underlined in the respective sections of the text. In some cases recommendations that appear individually in the text of the report have been merged in the following summary for coherence purposes. Furthermore, in order for the recommendations to be able to stand autonomously in this specific section of the report, a slight rephrasing was necessary in some cases.

### ***Section 2: Governance and institutional decision-making***

1. The evaluation team recommends that SHU reconsiders its strategy so that it aims to be an excellent university for education which for that purpose is required to develop research activities that will strengthen its educational potential and improve its educational programmes. In this regard, SHU should clarify its strategic objectives and adapt them to its real potential and strengths, therefore combining ambitions with realistic goals.
2. The evaluation team fully endorses the goal of SHU to improve its visibility and enhance its reputation, nationally and internationally. However, the evaluation team believes that SHU should not follow the mainstream race for visibility and reputation only by research. A university can achieve this goal also by promoting the whole spectrum of its strengths, by promoting its comparative advantages, by promoting its specific profile. Especially in the case of SHU the evaluation team believes that its visibility and its reputation can significantly be improved by promoting its goal to be an excellent university in its overall educational offer and by positioning itself in the differentiation spectrum of Romanian universities. What is required furthermore is to develop and effectively implement an appropriate marketing policy. The development and implementation of such a marketing policy is something that the evaluation team also recommends to SHU.
3. Concerning development and implementation of the strategy, the evaluation team recommends to SHU that the actions included in its action plan should be prioritised, cost-estimated and put into a time schedule within the validity period of the strategic plan. Furthermore, the task to oversee and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the strategic goals and the key performance indicators should be assigned to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body



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should also have the task of assessing the validity of the strategic goals and the respective key performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases where the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved. Finally, the evaluation team believes that SHU would benefit from a parallel bottom-up approach for strategy development which should extend ownership of the strategic goals to the wider university community with the aim to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the achievement of the goals. Therefore, the evaluation team would recommend that the self-evaluation group, which has demonstrated its engagement and commitment, be tasked with the bottom-up aspect of the strategic development.

4. The evaluation team recommends that SHU reconsiders the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in governance and institutional decision-making. Regarding students, the evaluation team believes that SHU would benefit from the participation of a student representative in the Administration Board, similarly as the public universities benefit from this participation as stipulated by the Romanian Law, and therefore recommends reconsidering students' participation in the Administration Board. Furthermore, the evaluation team considers important that students' participation in governance at institutional level should be characterised by a commitment to the institution in addition to the commitment to a faculty. The establishment of a student association at central level would help students in building this institutional commitment and would also help in making the involvement of students more active, more substantial and more helpful. In this regard, the evaluation team would recommend that SHU encourages and facilitates its students to that aim. Finally, the evaluation team recommends that SHU pays due consideration to involvement of external stakeholders in its governance structures and procedures. The involvement of the external stakeholders should become normal practice both at the faculty level and at the institutional level.

5. The evaluation team appreciates and endorses SHU's plans towards developing flexible alternative educational offers, e.g. short-cycle programmes (that do not require accreditation) or even offering courses or entire study programmes in English in order to widen its student categories, finding alternative sources of revenue and meeting the demands of the labour market and the society at large. In addition, the evaluation team would recommend that SHU also consider initiatives like incorporating evening classes, courses during weekends, blended learning courses in the programmes. Some further indicative recommendations of the evaluation team in the same respect would be that SHU strengthens its efforts in order to be more competitive in attracting research funds nationally and internationally (including also the raising of overheads) in order to take advantage of European funds (social, structural, developmental) or in order to improve its contractual partnerships with economic and business entities in Romania. Furthermore, ideas such as offering of clinical services by the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine or sport services by the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports should also be considered.



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6. Apart from the need to find alternative funding sources, the evaluation team considers it necessary and recommends that SHU proceeds to a strategic cost-benefit analysis of its overall functioning. This cost-benefit analysis should go beyond simplistic or artificial measures like firing academic or administrative personnel and should touch even the operational structure of SHU with 24 faculties dispersed in six Romanian cities offering 102 Bachelor programmes and 33 Master programmes in 50 major disciplines. In the same sense, SHU should also reconsider the reality of the parallel existence of multiple faculties and study programmes in similar fields and in different locations. In parallel, the evaluation team believes that regrouping the faculties into fewer clusters of bigger faculties sub-structured by departments would also make it more manageable for the faculties to enjoy some financial autonomy in order to increase the efficiency of budget allocation.

### ***Section 3: Teaching and learning***

7. The evaluation team recommends that SHU builds on the experience gained so far from the implementation of “student-centred learning”, develops a ground for sharing any existing good practices in this regard and further improves its capacity and its performance in this regard. Besides, the evaluation team recommends that SHU continuously develops and innovates its curricula adapting them to the demands of the labour market (long-term or medium-term), but also to the demands of the potential students, using as guiding elements the required competences and skills of the graduates on the basis of the appropriate learning outcomes. This adaptation may also require closing existing curricula or opening new ones.

8. The evaluation team recommends that SHU involves its graduates in rescheduling its educational offer and in curricular development and innovation. In this regard, SHU should strengthen its links with its graduates, stimulating the creation of an alumni culture. The establishment of an effective system of tracking graduates is a prerequisite to that end.

9. The evaluation team recommends that SHU establishes staff development programmes for academics aiming to reinforce academic staff development and to embedding the new attitude of “student-centred learning”. Furthermore, the evaluation team also recommends that one of the aims of these staff development programmes should be to improve the foreign language competences of the academic staff and especially in the English language. This necessity goes in parallel with the strategic goal of SHU to develop courses or entire programmes in English.

### ***Section 4: Research***

10. The evaluation team recommends that, in case there is a possibility for a university to abstain from ARACIS’ accreditation requirement for at least one research centre for every accredited specialisation, SHU reconsiders the number of research centres by closing or merging some of them after an internal assessment procedure. Besides, the evaluation team recommends that SHU clearly distinguishes research itself from the support and coordination of research. The latter is a management task that should be organised at the central level of



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SHU, the former is done by individual researchers in faculties who need to find their partners for coordinated programmes in other faculties. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that the Central Research Institute operates as a central research support unit that does not execute research itself but delivers a central management support to research at the decentralised level of SHU. It would include among others the task to offer support for preparing competitive proposals for research funding and for building related capacity by researchers and the task for fundraising by identifying new sources for research funding.

11. The evaluation team also considers it important and reasonable for SHU to strive for developing a specific profile based on research. In this case, the evaluation team would recommend that this profile should be built in a multidisciplinary approach that would exceed the profile of each individual research centre. In this regard, SHU should establish a small number (no more than four) of new multidisciplinary research centres following a developmental bottom-up process based on a careful internal evaluation of both existing research strengths and potential future prospects.

#### ***Section 5: Service to society***

12. The evaluation team recommends that SHU establishes strong links with society in the wider sense. For a comprehensive university like SHU with a wide variety of specialisations, there is no dominant direction for the relationship with society to be oriented. Therefore, SHU should establish its links with a wide range of possible partners and in all possible directions but with different means and goals depending on the variety of specialisations and their relevance to society. The alumni of SHU can be a quite useful factor in establishing links with such a wide range of partners in the society. In this regard, and given the variety of scientific areas of SHU, the evaluation team would recommend additionally that SHU considers the establishment of an advisory body consisting of external partners and alumni, in order to assist the rector in the relationships of the university with society. This advisory body would help the university to establish closer and tighter links with its external environment on an advisory (and thus informal) basis, avoiding in this way any conflicts with the formal governance bodies, and ensuring at the same time continuity and enhancing efficiency in the relationships between SHU and its external partners.

#### ***Section 6: Quality culture***

13. The evaluation team recommends that SHU, in parallel to its already existing structures and procedures, develops a more bottom-up driven internal quality assurance strategy aiming for the continuous improvement of the university and not simply meeting the standards and criteria set by the Romanian quality assurance and accreditation system. Accordingly, this internal quality assurance strategy should be incorporated into the strategic development processes of SHU. SHU should utilise the self-reflection attitude that has been created in the context of the current self-evaluation process and use it as a source for the development of this bottom-up quality assurance strategy.



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### ***Section 7: Internationalisation***

14. The evaluation team recommends that SHU develops a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will cover all possible dimensions, taking advantage of all opportunities that the existing legislation in Romania allows for. This strategy should aim among others to ensure requirements for further involvement in international projects are met and to foster new partnerships with universities abroad. The evaluation team was informed of existing ideas and plans in SHU for establishing strategic relationships with areas like Eurasia, Middle East and Africa and strongly endorses them as they may improve the internationalisation dynamics in SHU. For the evaluation team an effective internationalisation strategy should be built step by step starting from the human resources. Therefore, it is recommended that SHU develops an internationalisation culture within the university and builds an internationalisation attitude among the students, but primarily among the staff, as key preconditions for any internationalisation strategy to be successfully promoted and implemented. This internationalisation culture and attitude among students and staff will also help SHU improve its performance regarding Erasmus mobility (both incoming and outgoing) and attractiveness of international students and staff. However, they should be part of a comprehensive policy which is recommended by the evaluation team and which should contain concrete measures to that aim (e.g. recognition of study periods abroad for outgoing students, inclusion of courses taught in English courses for incoming mobility students and for international students, improvement of the competence of professors in teaching in English).