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## **Institutional Evaluation Programme**

*Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and  
Innovation in Romanian Universities Project*

**“MIRCEA CEL BATRAN” NAVAL ACADEMY CONSTANTA**

### ***EVALUATION REPORT***

***APRIL 2013***

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## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Governance and institutional decision-making.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Teaching and learning .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. Research .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5. Service to society .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6. Quality culture .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>7. Internationalisation .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>22</b>



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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy Constanta.

The evaluation took place in 2012-2013 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in 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.

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

### 1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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



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

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

## 1.2. The Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy Constanta’s profile

Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy is a proud institution. It has a long history in a country that has experienced changes and discontinuities. It sees itself as a Polytechnical Higher Education Military Academy. A month before the first evaluation visit the Academy celebrated its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This history gives the Academy confidence and pride. In 1990 the existing Academy was divided, leaving only the military part of its government-funded clientele at the Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy. The 150 uniformed naval cadets make up less than 10% of the current student enrolment which is fast approaching 2 000. The rest are civilians in a separate faculty preparing students for the merchant marine without government funding.

In 1990 the old civilian side was reconstituted as a new merchant marine institution in Constanta. It kept the state-funded civilian numbers, leaving the Academy a small residue on which it built up to the current strong position on a self-funding student fee basis. Without this the Academy would not be viable as a free-standing university. There are few working contacts and the other institution was mentioned only in passing. There is no inclination at the Academy to change the status quo or merge.

The Academy, however, believes that the performance of its best civilian students now justifies their attracting scholarships within government rules.

The Academy sets great store by quality. This is seen as essential to its identity and work in a global seaborne economy. It wishes to maintain the highest quality and reputation rather than expand. It values its dual identity, military and civilian, judging the economic and character-forming, professional and pedagogical benefits to outweigh differences between the professional cultures and career paths. Cadets and merchant marine students access the high quality simulators and other equipment at the Academy both groups benefitting from the same investments. Navy cadets proceed to officer status and in-navy military training at the Naval Training School nearby after graduating. They have an assured career path.



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Merchant marine students also follow a four-year programme. They seek employment in the national and other merchant fleets, shipping companies and harbour authorities. A natural career step after graduating is a Master's degree at the Academy in a specialist area linked to their employment. The navy and merchant navy shipping companies are involved in planning and decisions at the Naval Academy.

The ambitious and energetic rector was appointed in 2010 for an initial 2 years mandate, renewed for ongoing 4 years in 2012, based on free academic elections, in compliance with Educational Law no.1/2011. He is open to ideas and in management style and this bodes well for change within the wider constraints. Change is hampered by the tight legal and regulatory requirements of central government, especially on the military side. The rector is strongly committed to quality systems to monitor and enhance performance. ISO 9001 is seen as an essential complement to national (ARACIS) quality requirements. The Academy must meet rigorous quality standards from multiple European as well as national sources.

The Academy values and generates feedback and open information flow in a continuous evaluation and enhancement process. Information feedback flow down is more complete than flow up. There is no confidential military information to which students have intranet access which would be a problem for their study. Excellent simulator and other equipment allow innovation and good practice in learning-teaching. Small size allows for a high level of face-to-face and informal interaction with a tight central management core. Multiple media outlets are used to enhance information flow.

The global recession and declining numbers of young people in Europe make these hard times; but the global merchant marine market is growing. Its demands and those of ever-changing naval technology create pressure for innovation. The Academy management is well aware of these environmental changes. The internal culture mixes traditional conservatism with professional keenness to further enhance quality and stature. Current plans to change the faculty and department structure will test how well change can be carried through.

### 1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation report of the Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy Constanta (hereinafter the Academy), together with appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in November 2012. The visits of the evaluation team took place in December 2012 and March 2013 respectively. Between the visits, Dr Catalin Popa provided additional information.

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the following team:

Chairperson	Vice-Rector for teaching	Assoc. Prof. M Pricop
Secretary	Head of Scientific Research Office	Dr A Toma



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Liaison officer	Vice-Dean of Merchant Marine Faculty	Dr C Popa
Members	Dean of Merchant Marine Faculty	Prof A Beazit
	Dean of Navy Faculty	Assoc. Prof. V Dobref
	Vice-Dean of Navy Faculty	Eng. D. Atodiresei
	Vice-Rector for Long-life Learning	Dr A. Popa
	Department Director	Assoc. Prof O. Tarabuta
	Navy Faculty Student	Sfarc leftimi Ionut
	Merchant Marine Faculty Student	Giosanu Stefania

The self-evaluation report together with its appendices was sent to the evaluation team in November 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy took place from 10 to 12 December 2012 and from 10 to 13 March 2013 respectively.

The team met the full self-evaluation group twice during its initial visit. It was evident that the process had been taken very seriously and the task addressed very thoroughly, concentrating the data gathered into a concise report supported by extensive annexes. The self-evaluation work drew on wide participation from all parts of the institution as well as stake-holders. There was evident widespread interest in the process and report and in the subsequent team visits in December 2012 and March 2013. Over fifty people attended the team's concluding presentation on 13 March.

The evaluation team (hereafter the team) consisted of:

- Henrik Toft Jensen, former Rector, Roskilde University, Denmark, Team chair
- Nejat Erk, former Vice Rector, Cukurova University, Turkey
- Simona Dimovska, student, "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University Macedonia
- Chris Duke, RMIT Australia and University of Glasgow, Scotland, former President, USW Nepean, Australia, team coordinator

The team thanks the staff of the Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy for their courteous reception and warm hospitality. The Academy was open and non-defensive about everything that was asked. It entered fully into the developmental spirit of the review, starting with the rector who spoke to this effect at the first meeting and showed keen interest and an open mind throughout. All the staff were helpful, especially and outstandingly Dr Catalin Popa, the liaison person. The student groups were also outstanding in their thoughtfulness, seriousness, and eagerness to provide useful comment and advice.



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## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

### 2.1 What is the Academy trying to do?

The Academy is a strong, proud, purposefully-led and ambitious institution dedicated to producing top quality officers for the naval and maritime marine services. It seeks high quality rather than growth in size and student numbers. It wants to further enhance its international profile and standing, and to significantly enhance its applied research performance, staying close to its employer market and clientele. The rector highly values quality, is a champion of ISO 9001 and wants to embed a culture of quality. With this goes innovation in curriculum, teaching-learning processes and the learning environment.

It is fully committed to retaining and drawing the two streams closer: the smaller military student stream preparing naval officers under military regulation, and the larger civilian intake looking to employment in the merchant marine. The latter require strong internalised discipline for their future employment at sea, but the students have more freedom and less training demands than the cadets. The Academy sees mutual benefit in this combined mission. The team supports and commends this, in broad principle for a healthy democracy as well as in its detailed pedagogic and economic senses.

The Academy seeks to invest more in its already generally good teaching infrastructure, and to improve student-centred learning. Its wish to be vocationally outstanding means connecting more to the world of work. The team took the view that it should be possible to extend more practical taster experiences back into the first years of their study. Here the heavy load of theoretical work without clear relationship to maritime activities may seem to have too little relevance. The fundamental theoretical disciplines should be more oriented towards the expected learning outcome of the educational programmes.

There is no desire to merge with other military and security-oriented universities. Closer links and collaboration are sought for advanced teaching and training after graduation, and for high-level research, where opportunity and security considerations allow. Examples of academic and practical aspiration include developing and attracting resources and expertise for PhD teaching, and creating new courses to meet new needs and opportunities, for instance at Master's level in offshore drilling, with teaching in English as well, to be able to support the new oil activities in the Black Sea. This might enable the Academy to recruit high-level, non-Romanian graduate students and strengthen its links with EU and NATO countries.



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## 2.2 How is the Academy trying to do it?

The Academy's strong open leadership, open communication and multiple channels, and the will to make changes in and modernise its structures, are central to the strategy and approach. The rector seeks to inspire and enthuse the whole Academy to a shared vision and purpose, and to fuel active participation. Student and staff feedback are encouraged, despite the military authority structure especially on the Navy side. Strategically and pedagogically, clarifying the different set-up for the academic and vocational dimensions of naval education is a preoccupation.

Harmonious and close-working relations and formal links mean that the legally required divided management between the Administrative Council chaired by the rector and Senate seems to be smooth and collaborative. Relations between the faculty and departmental structure and the overall Academy structure and leadership also appear good, despite a naturally conservative instinct among some academic staff in an old and prestigious institution.

There are frequent regular meetings at faculty, department and central levels. There is an annual three-day, whole-institution planning session each September. The Academy works well: both within the legally required dual governance of Administration and Academic Senate, and also in answering to the requirements of two Ministries, education and defence. Academy governance has no external representation, but key clients like the navy and merchant navy shipping companies are involved a lot in planning and decision-making.

## 2.3 Monitoring

The central quality assurance unit staff conduct a full and systematic cycle of quality monitoring, data collection and reporting to meet the different national external requirements, and ISO 9001. These are integrated into a single system and annual cycle. Data are collected, analysed and reported through the academic structure and to the Senate. There are clearly efforts to enhance the quality and comprehensiveness of the data gathered, especially in terms of student feedback. The team noted confusion regarding the way some data are analysed and shared, limiting its utility as a tool for quality assessment and enhancement. It is important to learn from it as well as to meet external audit quantitative requirements.

The Academy would gain from a more detailed analysis and breakdown of some of these data, for example disaggregating students for analytic and remediation purposes. These could include full- and part-time modes, the performance and impact of students from elsewhere



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entering at different stages. This would throw light on which students withdrew or are required to leave and why. It should suggest new ways to increase completion rates additional to changes already made. Gender and social class as well as academic intake levels should be included.

Efforts are certainly made to see that the information gathered is digested and acted on, for example in terms of employment and deployment of the students graduated from the academy. The cost and administrative workload are high, but the predominant view is that the investment is necessary to sustain high quality and reputation.

## 2.4 How does the Academy change in order to improve?

Strong open leadership with the will to make changes and modernise structures is important to the Academy's capacity to change and develop despite constraints. These include the impact of the global financial crisis such as reduced resources, and reduced opportunities to recruit and promote staff.

They also include severe government restrictions through both Defence and Education Ministries, some forced by financial constraint, but others from caution in allowing institutions the freedom to innovate and be entrepreneurial. Being accountable to two ministers, and a regulatory compliance bureaucracy, limit the capacity to change. This delay and prohibition would discourage a less determined leadership. In some areas, such as capacity to operate entrepreneurially, the veto on generating income for approved academic purposes, appear to have little rationale.

There is some staff resistance to change, arising from the strength of naval tradition and disciplined military culture. Senior and top management are open-minded, non-defensive, and keen to improve, looking for new opportunities and alert to threats. Nonetheless, there can be an overall tendency to be more reactive than proactive. The rector, in particular, is keen to grasp new international opportunities and to be entrepreneurial, via contracts, exchanges, facility with other languages, etc.

The Academy's readiness to address new challenges is illustrated by structural changes under consideration at the time of the team's visit. In the present structure departments are arranged by subjects, for instance mathematics. The plan is to be more cross-disciplinary and arrange them instead after educational programmes. This implies that the fundamental theoretical disciplines will be clearly oriented towards educational programmes and competency outcomes.



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The present naval faculty and merchant marine faculty, reflect the dual military and civilian intake, is planned to be replaced by two new faculties, each with just two departments: a maritime and electrical engineering faculty with departments of naval electrical engineering and maritime engineering and weapons; and a navigation and naval management faculty with departments of naval engineering and management, and navigation and naval transport.

These changes, driven by a powerful pedagogic rationale, will require much effort to gain external approval and active internal support. The impact on the working life and relations of teaching staff will be considerable. The team commends the rector and his colleagues for taking on this challenging but clearly desirable task.



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### 3. Teaching and learning

The aim of the Academy is to prepare students to a high level in military and civilian careers. It imparts underpinning knowledge to equip them for changing technology and professional demands, practical skills, and also the capacity to go on learning via accredited and short course lifelong learning. Commitment to work-based learning is strong but there are difficulties.

The central conundrum for the Academy is how best to combine the academic and vocational aspects of teaching and learning for both naval and commercial students, especially for the naval cadets. The separation of two years of theory from the work experience that comes later is a problem not easily solved, given the amount to be learned and requirements from outside.

For cadets there is a high workload of theoretical work in physics, engineering and mathematics in the first two years, and little connection with the world of work until the third and mainly fourth year. Engineering is central to both degree programmes and to careers. Cadets speak of harsh and strict first-year life with a heavy workload. The volume of theory and rote work seems unconnected to hands-on experience.

On the other hand students praise the diversity of teaching styles and materials which allows for diverse learning styles. Among the strengths of the Academy are good communication with students; effective use of the internal network for communication with students; team work between teachers; additional consultations and preparation tutorials for students; and new possibilities for applying new learning and training methods. On the downside, although English is a compulsory subject no other subject is yet taught in English.

In the team's view, a modest "taster" of the application of theory would help motivation. Even for starting cadets coming from military secondary school the Academy is very demanding. There is tight discipline regarding attendance, military training and service as well as study. Students value occasions when they are taught by outside visiting lecturers from the military or civilian workplace who can explain authoritatively the link between theoretical study and work.

There appear to be thorough arrangements to get personal feedback from students and to act on it. Individuals with problems can get extra tuition where required. Those who fail end-of-semester courses may get coaching and re-sit in the autumn. Employer feedback is taken seriously, influencing curriculum planning and revision.

There has been a poor response rate to formal student evaluation forms. Students criticise their own low motivation, while recognising later the need for rigorous grounding in the



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disciplines. The low response rate has been addressed by adopting an electronic questionnaire filled in at a dedicated time together, rather than the earlier paper-based hand-out version. The team commends the Academy on this and encourages further work in such directions.

Students now see clear signs that feedback is acted on. This is important to the Academy's culture, and for motivation and morale. The channels and means for securing this feedback could however be made still clearer and stronger.

While valuing opportunities for hands-on experience, students do understand the need for rigorous mathematical foundations. More frequent use of the equipment — laboratories, computers, simulation — especially by merchant marine students, is desirable, although this is labour-intensive in staff time. Academic staff should keep up their already good communication and use of new software and the e-learning platform between themselves and students; it has excellent results.

Expensive state-of-the-art simulators and different media to support learning mean that teaching is well adapted to diverse learning styles. Access to naval faculty equipment by merchant marine students enhances their experience and simulates application. The rector's plans to change the structure of the two faculties and to combine the seven departments into four stronger ones (see Chapter 2 above), should improve the quality of the student experience.

Overall, students are satisfied with their teachers' efforts, in that most of them are using modern teaching methods and are committed in their work. They find the combining of navy and merchant marine student groups good, in teaching and the use of resources. The cadets naturally observe and sometimes envy the greater freedom and informality of their civil companions. On the other hand they value the job security and career prospects where they have the advantage.

Budget constraints since the onset of the ongoing financial crisis mean that there is no money for performance-related payments, so this carrot for both navy and civilian staff to improve is removed. There is enthusiasm to teach well, to change where required, and to engage fully with students. However, some military staff, in particular, who value the Academy's naval traditions are more hesitant, and reluctant to adopt cross-disciplinary approaches. It was suggested that staff peer support could be used more. There are links up and down the authority chain to administration. Ultimately sanctions include dismissal for underperforming staff.

The rector is deeply committed to educational innovation and to infusing the Academy with a culture of quality and innovation. There is a question whether the multifaceted quality



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assurance regime inhibits creativity and innovation. Rigorous control is exercised by the ministries of education and defence. The team encourages the Academy in its efforts to be more adventurous, risk-taking and proactive, and to develop more student-centred teaching approaches and more active learning through the degree courses. It would help if the ministries could continuously review their regulations to enable institutional efficiency and innovation in line with policy.

The team heard no support for merging with other military institutions, nor any desire to separate the military from the civil and military work; quite the opposite. Closer linkage or merger with the navy research unit and training school located not far away was discussed. This is worth exploring as part of forward strategy, despite obstacles. Military secrecy and full officer status apply to naval graduates moving on to the training school. If attainable, more coming together would help address the pedagogic dilemma of separating theory from practice.

On the civilian side, given the Ministry of Education's own policy, the team wondered why it does not support more student scholarships for Academy merchant marine students who show top quality performance.

In summary, academic staff should continuously modify curricula and teaching-learning methods, as is now becoming the culture. Some of the teaching should be in English, starting perhaps with the more informal small groups and in courses most vital to internationalisation and for future employment options.



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## 4. Research

The Academy believes in a strong academic base to all that it does, meeting demanding international standards in both the naval and the civilian fields of employment. It recognises the mutual benefit that can come from direct connections between research and teaching; that is to say between generating and transmitting knowledge. Senior students could gain from direct participation in some research projects and teams. The Academy agrees with its present classification in the new national system. There is also an aspiration to acquiring leading research status if resources and a way can be found.

As a teaching and research university the Academy has no staff exclusively appointed for research. Research is part of the job description and accountability of every academic staff member. It is seen as demanding but essential to the careers of individual staff. High teaching load and lack of time are main practical obstacles for individual academics. Efforts are made to win more contract research and R&D business from the MoD and more European contract research. The Academy would like to build a PhD programme and recruit more top-flight staff. Started in 2009, the three-year Norwegian Co-operation Programme grant called RoNoMar is a major state-of-the-art achievement crucial to strategy and future success.

The team supports the Academy's wish to strengthen research, with the focus on applied research and R&D suited to a technological and vocationally oriented university. This commitment is balanced by the mission to sustain and enhance top quality vocational education. It is hampered by lack of resources especially with the global recession which means in particular lack of staff time for research.

It was not entirely clear how research performance is measured and evaluated. The Academy recognises that quantification of research output may need to be strengthened and performance directly rewarded. In supporting this, the team advises against indicators and measures inappropriate to an applied research and advanced specialist technological and teaching institution. Over-emphasis on unsuitable conventional academic measures such as refereed publications in top-rated journals may have harmful unintended consequences.

To enhance its research performance the Academy needs: clear, appropriate and realistic performance targets; to attract more research funds from contracts and grants, staying close to its specialised markets and its R&D needs; and to recruit, as budgets and availability of suitably qualified applicants allow, lecturers excellent in relevant, cutting-edge areas of strength. It could explore creating a larger critical research mass, especially with the navy research unit. The team found that some academic staff with experience from the navy and the commercial fleet could contribute to the research and development.



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In summary, there is strong commitment to enhancing research at every level of university, from senior administration and students as well. This needs to be backed up by strategic and practical plans for collaborative research. Several initiatives have been launched to raise the level of research and output; the high quality laboratory facilities now in use increase the potential for high quality research.

There is however no evidence of an overall research policy with clearly visible goals, priorities and an implementation plan. Improvement in the volume and quality of research should not be at the cost of the good teaching to which staff are committed, and on which the Academy's reputation is grounded.



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## 5. Service to society

The Academy is passionately committed to serving the navy and merchant marine by means of top quality professional preparation and updating. This includes serving and integrating with European and global maritime shipping needs and markets.

There is quite a creditable programme of extracurricular activities in the local region and the city of Constanta. The Academy does not however try to serve the local regional and city community through general outreach programmes as such. It could consider wider use of its high-level facilities for local community purposes if this is logistically feasible. At present it is barred by regulation from charging for services and use of facilities, cutting off an obvious entrepreneurial basis for widening support to its core academic business.

In terms of social justice and opportunity there is concern that the Academy serves only well-off families, especially those with a strong military tradition providing the backbone of the navy cadet intake. Fee levels and absence of significant scholarship resources prevent poor students from enrolling. The Academy can afford very little scholarship support, and for only a few students. This is essentially a matter for generous benefactors, long-sighted employers, and the national government.

The Academy teaches undergraduates in the part-time mode as well as full-time, relying on self-study and web-based support as well as tutorials. If this is proving successful for certain kinds of students it might be extended to support wider access, especially for more motivated, non-traditional students somewhat older than the average full-time undergraduate.

Three years ago the Academy created a strong Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) drawing on RoNoMar funds. Programmes provide professional updating through a range of courses. The arrangements appear well calculated to keep increasing the already large volume of tailored short-course professional updating work that is being provided. This work brings much needed supplementary income into the Academy. There is some flexibility in its use, but more would assist the Academy's commendable entrepreneurialism.

Different centre formats match different specialised client needs. Continuous efforts are made to meet and discuss with clients what is needed, especially with changing technology and resulting obsolescence. The Navy high command refers to MBNA as "our Academy", a mark of satisfaction and high praise. The Academy attempts to keep close to organisations that accept its students and which need to update courses.



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Most of the teaching and training staff employed in the Centre are from the world of work outside the regular Academy faculty. This gives the strength of relevance and current experience. It would be good if more internal staff could also teach on these courses that connect directly with the world of work. This might also link the entrepreneurial capabilities of the Lifelong Learning Centre to meeting external R&D needs in the shape of contracted projects and consultancies, thus generating more research income.

Universities in some countries have well-developed service learning programmes connecting the student to the local communities. It may be that student workload is too heavy for this, but there could be benefits in enriching student maturation and the development of their essential “soft” social skills. At the same time, the Academy should, in the team’s view, further strengthen links with its alumni to identify new needs and opportunities for student placements and work experience.

These are economically difficult and competitive times. Entrepreneurialism and innovation are needed for survival and success. The Academy needs to be even closer to its merchant market, co-identifying emergent needs. Port authorities have distinct needs for initial and updating education and training especially in relevant soft skill areas, as do the national and global fleet at sea.

Another significant need is for senior merchant marine engineers prepared in the mechanical and electrical fields to acquire advanced mechanical-electronics training to become the ship’s engineer on the newer, highly electronics-controlled merchant vessels. The Academy itself needs a new merchant vessel to teach to a high practical level but the cost makes this unattainable at present. The simulator facilities however give a strong quality and market advantage. The Academy is well aware of the fast-changing professional updating field. The awareness of the needs from the Black Sea offshore drilling activities is a good current example.

The international outlook of the Academy does not directly benefit the local community other than by strengthening reputation. It is however a jewel in the Constanta crown, giving the city and country high standing. Romania accessed the EU only recently, and its GDP remained low compared with other European countries. High recognition, influence and international partners are indirectly important to the wider community. We support the Academy in continuing to enhance its service mission in appropriate ways.



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## 6. Quality culture

According to staff the Academy has been and remains a leader within Romanian higher education in its quality assurance measures, and in addition the Academy uses ISO and International Maritime Organisation (IMO) measures and testing. The combination of ISO and Romanian quality assurance requirements and the need to reach competence levels in European as well as national military and shipping company employment areas together set a demanding framework, with frequent stock-taking, monitoring and reporting both naval and maritime marine.

It is hard to imagine an institutional head more thoroughly committed to quality as a key to institutional success than the rector. A firm advocate and early adopter of ISO 9001, he seeks to integrate this with other national and sector QA systems complementing what ISO can do. This aspiration is to embed a deep quality culture throughout the Academy so that various compliance requirements are fully honoured and used for feedback and enhancement, but become almost incidental to the living, imbued and universal culture.

The volume of work involved in meeting annual, quinquennial and other reporting requirements is costly and burdensome. The Academy pulls together the burdensome demands of several different quality systems, global, European and national, so that data-collection, analysis and reporting can be treated as a single ongoing system centred on ISO.

In general the workload is accepted as a necessary evil, essential for standing and market position, despite the estimated 10-20% increase in workload. If anything the specialised central quality unit will grow, but be redeployed to the two proposed new faculties. There are serious efforts to keep quality assurance connected to life in the departments for enhancement and not merely compliance. The robustness of quality reporting both top-down and bottom-up is crucial to winning the battle for an embedded culture.

In practice, arrangements for student evaluation and feedback are well administered. Barely half of the students had been returning evaluation forms, but this has improved with the use of new electronic methods. Students reported that they are seeing the results in better teaching and equipment. Staff are divided between sceptical compliance and enthusiasm for the benefits accruing. Quality is a contest between full commitment to and ownership of what is done, and doubt as to whether so much form-filling is worthwhile. Creating a deep culture of quality is central to strategy.

The Academy draws on other measures of quality such as number and quality of candidates for places available. Progress is monitored and students who are struggling tutored informally



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and in small groups. Additional teaching is provided where this seems necessary. These quality measures are used alongside regular reporting requirements through the levels of command. While meeting external audit requirements the Academy now needs to disaggregate and analyse its academic data, especially on failure, transfer, and dropout or withdrawal, to improve its institutional intelligence and if possible performance.

Failure and drop-out rates are monitored but needed presenting in a different way to be clear. The last three annual intakes of naval cadets showed loss through withdrawal or transfer to the civilian stream of 4%, 4% and 7.5% giving high completion rates. A few naval cadets transfer to the civilian side of their own volition or because they are not coping in the naval faculty. On the merchant marine side non-completion was higher at 20-30%, with slightly more being excluded than withdrawing in the first two years, and significantly more failing in the most recent year. The reason is unclear.

Students whom the evaluation team met were keen to make suggestions, among them for better peer development among staff. Naval cadets under military training were as willing to talk and suggest ways to improve as were the civilians. There is apparently good interaction and learning between military and civilian students within the courses and also in sport and private time outside the classroom.

In summary, high among the Academy's quality challenges is the costly and time-consuming need to continue integrating and streamlining data collection and audit systems. It must resist any tendency towards mere tick-box compliance, and embed a quality culture deep into the departments. It needs to analyse detailed data on student performance and completion for its own management and development. It should strengthen staff peer development, use appropriate quantitative targets in research, and follow through the full cycle of quality enhancement and continuous improvement.

To its credit, the Academy sees quality as essential to reputation, success and marketing. There is an unavoidable dilemma of student contact with the rector as the rector or as the commander in a military command structure. A good new approach to student feedback has been adopted, and there is evidence to students of action arising from their feedback.



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## 7. Internationalisation

Merchant transport is a global industry. Standards and requirements are global. The navy is part of NATO as well as a national service. The Academy thinks and plans in terms of a global and European fleet. Two shipping company chiefs whom the team met among external partners were from German and French companies.

Internationalisation is at the heart of the mission and identity of the Academy, permeating how the Academy thinks. It is highly international in outlook and strongly connected with other countries and authorities. Staff and students see this as essential for success. Students look for international experience and often also jobs.

Fluent working use of English is seen as necessary for student employment abroad, and to attract overseas staff and students especially through Erasmus and EMILYO – “military Erasmus”. Romania’s minor language world status limits the Academy’s international character. Wider and better use of English as a language of communication, and increasingly as a language of instruction as well as a subject to learn, is deemed necessary to a more international future.

Naval cadets already require a high level of competence in English as well as science and mathematics to enter the Academy. Requirements are rising for English language study for civilians, especially the specialised technical English language of the sea. The team was impressed by the understanding and use of English especially of naval cadets. Students are concerned that not enough staff speak English confidently enough for the internationalisation which they seek.

The Academy is keen to add to its significant number of bilateral and multilateral partnerships and enable more experience aboard for its students. It seeks more exposure to students from overseas, expanding Erasmus and EMILYO numbers. Many Academy students are eager to get experience working abroad during and after their education and training. Some look to employment with NATO and international shipping lines. Others set their sights on command posts in the Romanian Navy.

The approach to research and R&D is already international. The big 2009 RoNoMar contract is the leading example. Transborder work with Bulgaria is important. Training at sea for more senior students gives some international experience. Many maritime R&D needs are global, such as reducing the pollution of the global fleet to check global warming.



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The Academy would also like to recruit more international students. This is the most common meaning of internationalisation in higher education generally but it first needs and intends to develop the capacity to teach in English as well as teach it as a subject. Internationalisation is therefore at the heart of the Academy's identity and plans.

The team commends this and recommends continuing the quest for more research linkage and contracts abroad, keeping a globally oriented outlook at the heart of forward planning.



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## Conclusion

### *Summary of findings*

The Academy is a strong, proud, purposefully led and ambitious institution. It aims for high quality rather than larger size, and further enhancing its international profile and standing. It values its dual mission with both the military navy and the civilian merchant marine. It plans to draw these closer together and to increase the mutual benefit.

It has a good teaching infrastructure and wishes to add to it. It sees ways to improve its teaching methods. Priorities are more student-centred learning and more early-years connection to the world of work. There is a strong professional updating programme driven by new technology and mid-career needs. The Academy seeks to improve its research performance and output, mainly in applied research and R&D, and to stay close to its employer clientele. It has a permeating culture of service to the navy and the merchant marine fleet with both of which it engages systemically. It connects to the local community so far as constraints allow. Here the internal constrains as well as the external constrains should be removed.

The Academy intends to embed a culture of quality and to innovate in curriculum, teaching-learning processes and the learning environment, despite some inertia and regulatory constraint. Improvements will be aided by the planned reshaping of faculties and departments. There is no wish to merge with other universities. Closer collaboration and linkage with the navy's training school and research unit is attractive.

### *Readiness to address new challenges, threats and opportunities*

There is some reluctance among older academic staff to change, mainly from the strength of the naval tradition and disciplined military culture. On the other hand most staff and students generally, are keen to learn and to change, improve their English and have some instruction conducted in English because of the international character of military and civilian employment. There is general enthusiasm for more international contact and experience.

Most senior and top management are open-minded, non-defensive and keen to share their ideas and commitments. Small size assists the rector's open and participatory management style, despite the demands of a military command structure. There is an entrepreneurial quest for new opportunities. These are pursued as rapidly as constrained resources and government regulation allow.



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There is tension between the proactive leadership style and a more reactive inclination. This is well handled by regular use of multiple means of discussion, face-to-face and via communication technologies within a small university, and a serious and open attitude to feedback. The Academy strives for a quality culture going beyond compliance. The rector, with many staff and senior students, is keen to grasp international opportunities, and to be entrepreneurial over contracts, exchanges, language facility etc. Two-ministry accountability and a heavy regulatory legal and compliance bureaucracy cause delay and limit the capacity to act and change rapidly. There is energy to engage with these rather than make excuses.

### *Support and commendations*

We commend and encourage the Academy's continuing commitment to the following:

- An open style of management and communication within a firm structure and sense of direction led by the rector;
- Purposeful planning and innovation. Examples include the Lifelong Learning Centre for new updating short-course programmes, new masters' courses for new areas, for e.g. offshore drilling, consultative planning to change faculty-department structures;
- Managing the dual governance structure between Senate and administration harmoniously;
- Multiple and inclusive modes of consultation for learning-teaching and planning-management;
- Different ways of working for institutional and staff development and feedback such as the annual September three-day all-Academy planning meeting, and processes for review and enhancement throughout the academic year;
- Multimedia approaches to teaching-learning with recognition of different learning styles;
- Monitoring progress and problems and responding, for e.g. by supplementary tutorial time;
- Obtaining advanced teaching-learning facilities for use across a spectrum from self-directed learning to costly laboratory equipment allowing hands-on experience;
- Simulation and hands-on practice in many of the arts and skills of naval engineering and navigation;
- Connecting naval and merchant marine teaching Academy-wide and sharing the use of simulator and other facilities;
- Constructively managing differences between naval cadets and merchant marine students and curricula; optimising the mutual advantages offered;
- Deep commitment of leadership to building and embedding a quality culture, using quality tools and audit to enhance as well as assure performance;
- Commitment to work with and extend the full range of national, European and global external partners and clientele;



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- A clear and sustained commitment to internationalisation in all areas of Academy work;

### *Main suggestions and recommendations*

The team encourages the Academy to consider the following in order to improve further:

#### *Chapter 2 Governance and decision-making*

- Carry through the planned restructure of faculties and departments to enhance cross-disciplinary and peer learning between students, efficiency in the use of resources, and a sharper research focus;
- Develop a long-term research, graduate teaching and doctoral strategy with targets and indicators to enhance the Academy research profile in R&D and applied research;
- The strategic plan could be used more within the Academy to strengthen its focus and performance.

#### *Chapter 3 Teaching and learning*

- Be ambitiously creative, experimental and proactive in developing student-centred teaching approaches and active student learning throughout the courses;
- Seek all possible means to connect early years theoretical study with real-life application to enhance motivation;
- Include workplace soft skill requirements of port authorities and on board in curriculum development;
- Use more teachers from outside the Academy for new approaches and first-hand experience;
- Strengthen and actively use links with the Alumni Association to keep relevant to the workplace, win contracts, provide work experience and assist student employment;
- The team also suggests that the Ministry of Education allocate scholarships to high quality Academy merchant marine students in line with its policy (*Chapters 1.2 and 3*);
- The team strongly recommends that the Academy continues its efforts to create an international education in offshore drilling and other activities.

#### *Chapter 4 Research*

- Develop clear, relevant and appropriate metrics for research;
- Explore closer association with the naval training school and the navy research unit to enhance utility and high quality in work-oriented teaching and applied research;
- Encourage high quality publication without reducing the quality of teaching;



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- Set aside resources and financial support to support good young researchers at each stage of research and publication.

#### *Chapter 5 Service to the Community*

- Continue to expand the programmes of the Lifelong Learning Centre and connect its activities with departments' teaching, R&D and expertise for mutual gain;
- Continue to open new lifelong learning programmes that meet new needs, especially with changing technology and for mid-career professionals;
- Use net earned income from LLC short courses to strengthen the Academy in priority areas;
- Seek scholarships and other support for young people from poor families to attend the Academy;
- Consider creating service learning opportunities for young students to strengthen soft skills and connect more with the locality;
- Explore whether part-time study modes with new ICT can reach wider clientele in some subjects;
- Extend the use of Academy facilities for local community purposes and Academy income if feasible.

#### *Chapter 6 Quality*

- Increase efforts to embed a quality culture in all minds and practices;
- Refine the academic data base and interrogate it more thoroughly to learn more accurately where student withdrawal or drop-out, transfers and exclusion occur and why;
- Continue to ensure that the quality enhancement cycle is complete, following up with departments; and that feedback is used and results made evident in action especially to students;
- Use more peer-to-peer staff support, develop training of trainers arrangements and draw on other training and development approaches elsewhere.

#### *Chapter 7 Internationalisation*

- Progressively introduce instruction using English in some subjects, in less formal and then more formal classes, enabling the enrolment of non-Romanian students especially at advanced levels;
- Extend further the use of ERASMUS, EMILYO and other European, NATO and global opportunities to widen international exchange, learning, work experience and employment prospects;



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- Further internationalise and enhance European and global standing through bilateral and multilateral contracts and agreements, and thus attract more infrastructure investment to update Academy facilities onshore and at sea.