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## **Institutional Evaluation Programme**

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

### **TRANSILVANIA UNIVERSITY OF BRASOV**

#### ***EVALUATION REPORT***

*April 2013*

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**Performance  
in Higher Education**





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## 1. Introduction

This report is an outcome of the evaluation of the Transilvania University of Brasov (UTBv). 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. These evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system.

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

Coincidentally, in 2010 UTBv, on its own initiative and in accord with an objective in its 2008–2012 Strategic Plan, requested the IEP to carry out a full institutional evaluation, which was completed by June 2011. (See 1.5 below.)

### 1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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

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



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- Norms, values, mission, goals: *What is the institution trying to do?*
- Governance or activities: *How is the institution trying to do it?*
- Monitoring: *How does the institution know it works?*
- Strategic management and capacity for change: *How does the institution change in order to improve?*

## 1.2. Transylvania University of Brasov's (UTBv) profile

What is now UTBv came into being in 1971 as the result of the merging of the Polytechnic Institute of Brasov (founded in 1956) and the pedagogic Institute of Brasov, and it has had its present name since 1991 (Ministry Note no. 34096/25.03.1991). Over the years, faculties concerned with diverse professions and the humanities were added, making UTBv a comprehensive university. It is currently the largest higher education institution in the region, with 18 faculties, 21,519 students, 788 academic staff and 578 administrative, support and general staff (2011–2012). The further development of research, with respect to both capacity and outputs, is a strategic priority and many of the faculties participate actively in the new R&D Institute and offer doctoral degree programmes via the interdisciplinary doctoral school. Life-long learning and distance learning programmes are also offered.

Brasov (population 228,000) and the Centre Development Region (2,522,000 million), located in the southern Carpathian mountains, confer many advantages on UTBv. Brasov is a designated “pole of growth” (one of only seven nationally) and has access to many natural resources as well a strong industrial heritage. Brasov's multicultural and multiethnic nature also offers a firm basis for the further development of a strong international profile. Improved communications with the capital and other regions are planned.

UTBv's vision and mission benefit greatly from its adoption in 2007 of a single over-arching theme that influences and shapes as appropriate its research and teaching activities, namely sustainable development. Although, even under the new Romanian Law of National Education the autonomy of public universities is still significantly constrained in comparison to many other countries, UTBv operates to maximise use of the autonomy available. Also, given the high degree of autonomy of individual faculties within the university, rectors and Senate have been highly effective in achieving institution-wide agreements. These have allowed far-seeing and bold university-wide initiatives such as the adoption of a “single theme” for research and teaching, the huge investment in the R&D Institute and the establishment of a multi-disciplinary doctoral school.

## 1.3. The Evaluation Process

As for the IEP review of 2011, a high level Self Evaluation Group (SEG), authorised by the rector and the Senate and coordinated by the liaison person was primarily responsible for the self-evaluation process.



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- Prof. Dr. Simona LACHE, Vice-Rector for University Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation – coordinator and Liaison person for EUA team
- Prof. Dr. Mihaela GHEORGHE, Vice-Rector for Didactic Activities – contact person for EUA team
- Prof. Dr. Doru TALABA, Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and IT
- Prof. Dr. Gheorghe SCUTARU, Director of Interdisciplinary Doctoral School
- Prof. Dr. Maria POPESCU, Director of Quality Assurance Office
- Lecturer Dr. Carmen BUZEA, Quality responsible within the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Senate representative
- Cooperating Prof. Dr. Liana BALTES, Quality responsible within the Faculty of Materials Science and Engineering, Senate representative
- Eng. Alina POPESCU, University Registrar
- Mr Dacian ZAINEA, Doctoral student, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, students' representative
- Ms Adriana BIEA, Student, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, students' representative.

As in 2011 also, the rector's, vice-rectors' and chancellor's offices, university registrar, the 18 faculties, central support departments and services all supplied supporting data, information and documentation to the SEG for evaluation and incorporation into the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and its appendices. The SEG organised information and consultation meetings on different topics in different sectors and at different levels. Participants were invited to disseminate the results of these discussions and related information to the members of the university they represented, and to communicate the resulting feedback to the Steering Committee. This feedback helped shape the SER, especially the later drafts. The Steering Committee expressed appreciation for the strong support they received from the institutional leadership. A supportive website was also established to facilitate the transparency of the self-evaluation process ([www.unitbv.ro/calitate/EUA20122013.aspx](http://www.unitbv.ro/calitate/EUA20122013.aspx)).

The SER of UTBv, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in early November 2012. The two visits of the evaluation team to UTBv took place from 3 to 5 December 2012 and from 4 to 7 March 2013, respectively. Complementary data, documents and draft policy statements were requested, and were supplied on 24 January 2013, in very good time before the second visit.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Professor Henrik Toft JENSEN, former Rector, Roskilde University, Denmark, Chair
- Professor Thierry CHEVAILLIER, former Vice-President for Resources, University of Burgundy, France
- Professor Elena DUMOVA-JOVANOSKA, former Vice-Rector for Education, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, FYR Macedonia



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- Ms Emilia TODOROVA, Student Leader, Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom
- Professor James P GOSLING, former Director of Quality, National University of Ireland – Galway, Ireland, Team coordinator

Ms Camilla Georgsson, former Chairperson of the Swedish National Union of Students, was the student member of the team during the first visit to UTBv but resigned because of a new national obligation. Ms Emilia Todorova joined the team before the second visit.

The team found that the SER, together with the supplementary data supplied later, gave a good picture of UTBv, its history, present situation and intentions.

The chair and members of the evaluation team thank the Rector, Professor eng. Ioan Vasile ABRUDAN for his welcome and hospitality, and his evident commitment and support for the IEP evaluation process. The team also thanks the vice rectors, the chancellor, the faculty deans, academic staff, administrators, the highly supportive external partners and the many students involved, for their frank and open engagement.

The team explicitly recognises the most impressive efficiency, helpfulness and courtesy of the Liaison Person Professor Dr. ing. Simona LACHE, and the hard work and dedication of the members of the steering committee and all others who worked with and supported the team in so many ways.

#### **1.4. Another IEP evaluation of UTBv two years ago**

In 2011 UTBv, on its own initiative, requested a full IEP evaluation, and following visits by a team (chaired by Professor Jürgen KOHLER, former Rector of Greifswald University, Germany and coordinated by James GOSLING) in March and May 2011, was provided with an Evaluation Report (available at <http://www.unitbv.ro/calitate/EUA20102011.aspx> and at <http://www.eua.be/iep/who-has-participated/iep-evaluation-reports.aspx>) in June 2011. Although IEP frequently does follow-up reviews, the time elapsed before they are carried out is normally three to four years; sufficient for recommendations in the evaluation report to be fully considered and, in many cases, fully implemented.

Although the timing of the present evaluation, which was determined by the timetable of the National project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching [ ] in Romanian Universities”, has meant that the time lapse will have been only two years, UTBv have requested that the present team explicitly take into account, and comment on, the university’s responses to the recommendations in the 2011 IEP Report.

The team accepts this task and each major section of this report will include an extra subsection listing the relevant recommendations from 2011 and commenting on progress to date with their implementation.



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## 2. Governance and institutional decision making

### 2.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

The current norms, values, mission, goals and strategic objectives for the period 2012 – 2016, which are broadly in line with those of a modern teaching and research-focused comprehensive university, are laid out on page 4 of the SER.

The evaluation team considers the rector and Administrative Council to be dedicated and professional and to be fully committed to the management and further development of this large comprehensive university (albeit they are constrained by the teaching loads required for academic administrators by the National Law). The team also encountered in the many faculties visited, managers, academic staff and students who are wholly engaged in the life and development of their faculties. However, the team found big differences in outlook, culture and engagement with immediate challenges in different faculties.

While the titles of the 18 faculties at UTBv show the important diversity of the university's roles and contributions, they did not in all cases indicate clearly to the team what they might expect on visiting them. For example, it became clear that what might be seen as cognate study programmes are found in different faculties: for example, supporting the tourism industry (in at least four faculties) and information technology (IT) (in at least two). Given that Tourism and IT are two of the areas of development of greatest potential to Brasov and its region, such fragmentation could restrict interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and research and may well be restraining UTBv's ability to contribute to its economic and social environment.

Another important issue is that declining student numbers are much more of a problem in some faculties than in others: eight of the 18 faculties had fewer Bachelor students in each of the last two full years (2010–2011 and 2011–2012) than in any of the three previous years. The team formed the impression that in at least some of these, the initiatives and amelioration measures being taken may be totally inadequate even to compensate for discipline or sector-related factors. Workshops on strategic planning for faculties, coupled with university-wide initiatives, could help to bring about more and more effective measures to counter the decline.

### 2.2. Governance and activities

The governance of UTBv is rational, transparent and effective, with the Senate functioning as a representative parliament and the Administrative Council as a government, and with decisions visible online to the academic community. Administrative Council meetings are held in rotation in individual faculties and are followed by open discussions with faculty staff (SER



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p. 24). The evaluation team welcomes UTBv's intention to establish *The Stakeholders Council of Transylvania University of Brasov*.

A clear and logical structure, but close examination of the university's organisational chart (SER, Appendix 11) indicates a significant imbalance with respect to the distribution of responsibilities. In particular, in addition to the five vice-rectors and the 18 deans, seven administrative units are shown as reporting directly to the rector. Consequently, at the same time as being both the leader and the manager of the university, he (or she) is expected to display competencies as an economist, a lawyer, a human resources manager, a real estate specialist, etc. It follows that there could be significant benefits if the proposed new chief administrator took responsibility for a wider range of functions than presently envisaged.

At the faculty level, there may be some risks with respect to the duplication of functions between a dean and the heads of individual departments, and even more so in single-department faculties. While the deans and heads questioned on this matter did not see it as an important issue, the team feels that a simple set of university guidelines to cover all faculties could ensure more even divisions of responsibilities and labour. Of course another option would be to promote amalgamations to create faculties with more departments of sufficient size.

Currently, all the evidence from interviews with students and managers indicates that the student representation system is very strong and that the levels and effectiveness of student representation and inputs to decision-making within departments, faculties and the whole institution are good. During the team's meeting with student representatives on the Senate, it was clear that they were active members and that individuals could participate in more than one of the Senate committees. There, they take opportunities to comment on reports and to add to them while they are being drafted, and their suggestions are usually well regarded by the other committee members.

However, the ability of the mass of students to communicate with, and benefit from the activities of, their representatives is constrained by inefficient communication with them. While this is a generally recognised limitation requiring constant and varied efforts by the representatives to ameliorate, there are, in addition, limited opportunities for the representatives themselves to interact with each other and to benefit from each other's experiences and insights. Expanding such opportunities could enhance their ability to contribute to management decisions and improve their advocacy of student interests.

### **2.3. Monitoring**

There are two major aspects to university-wide monitoring at UTBv, the first is concerned with the implementation of the current Strategic Plan. The other is monitoring the quality of teaching, research and administration and this is covered below in Section 6 (Quality Culture). However, the specifics of governance and, in particular the allocation of responsibilities for





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monitoring the quality of teaching, are of relevance here, and will be discussed further under the next sub-heading, *Strategic management and capacity for change*.

According to its preamble, the Strategic Plan 2012–2016 was developed, not just after internal consultation, but with additional inputs from external partners and stakeholders, and analyses of a wide range of relevant reports and public reference documents. Its seven sections cover most of the major aspects seen as most relevant to a modern university. In addition, the listed direct responsibilities (see SER, Appendix 12) of the Vice-Rector (VR) for Research and IT, the VR for Didactic Activities and the VR for Internationalisation include “[acting] in accordance with the University’s Strategic Plan and the annual operational plans”. However, no equivalent responsibility is listed for the other vice-rectoral roles, or for the rector. Therefore, while there clearly are annual action/operational plans and, by implication, regular monitoring of the implementation of the Strategic plan, this could be more explicit, and perhaps more substantive and effective.

#### **2.4. Strategic management and capacity for change**

Both the VR for Quality and the VR for Didactic activities are rightly interested in the quality of teaching in the university. The current office holders already work together very well, but to maximise their overall effectiveness it is important that the division of labour between them be logical and clearly understood: for example one vice-rector taking care of the inputs to the educational process and the other taking care of the quality of the outputs.

Thereby, in the broad area ‘quality of teaching’, the VR Didactic could concentrate more on new initiatives related to quality improvement. These could include didactic supports and training to offer academic staff the potential for continuous professional development and the maximum exploitation of new educational tools and methods. The VR Quality would then oversee the monitoring of the student evaluations of teaching, completion/dropout rates etc.; in this way creating an ongoing picture of the quality of the student didactic experience, and highlighting where actions may be needed.

In combination, these adjustments in responsibilities could lead to much more emphasis on quality improvement and a more transparent picture of the quality of teaching and learning.

#### **2.5. Therefore, the team recommends:**

- A re-evaluation of the ability of UTBv to contribute strategically to regional (and national) development in priority areas (e.g. tourism, IT and product design) where a number of faculties are already contributing, but apparently independently.
- That UTBv explicitly aim to maintain (and in targeted areas, increase) student recruitment, in spite of the negative demographic trend, by a combination of:



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- Central activities by the VR for Public relations and Image promotion, including benchmarking with universities seen as successful in this respect, and
  - Faculty measures that are enhanced by central supports including provision of training to deans, vice-deans and heads of department in strategic planning and crisis management.
- That UTBv continues with the recruitment of a senior administrator to take over all those areas of central administration that the law does not require the rector to directly oversee.
  - The preparation of short and simple guidelines on the division of labour between the faculty deans and the heads of their constituent departments.
  - That the coherence of student representation be improved by enhancement of the Student Representative Council.
  - More explicit and visible operational planning in relation to implementation of the Strategic Plan, as well as the updating of the Strategic Plan itself if required by changing circumstances.
  - Revision of the division of responsibilities between the vice-rectors for Didactic Activities and for Quality Evaluation to increase the effectiveness of their combined efforts.

## 2.6. Recommendations from 2011 evaluation

- [The Team recommended that] the university's next strategic plan (2013–2018), with its statements of vision, mission and key objectives, reflect the changed legal context and the significant advances already achieved by UTBv. However, the new plan will benefit if it is shorter, more quantitative and more insistent on delegated as well as "central" actions, all with finite and realistic timelines.

*Achieved: the new Plan (2012–2016) is shorter and more focused. The associated annual operational plans may have the desired level of detail with respect to delegated responsibilities and timelines.*

- [The team recommended that] UTBv reassess the blend of bottom-up and top-down strategies in planning and in developing teaching, research and transfer in order to ensure effectiveness in the coherent definition and implementation of its strategic objectives.

*Achieved: The preamble to the new Strategic Plan indicates substantial levels of pre-consultation.*



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- [The team recommended that] UTBv see its challenge in reducing the present very large number of faculties as a prerequisite to achieving large improvements in communications, management and decision-making, all of which may be crucial in the achievement of its greatest ambitions.

*Not achieved: Many small departments were amalgamated as a preliminary to faculty amalgamations (some later separated again).*

- [The team recommended that] both university and faculty administration be made more “professional” by the enhancement of administrative roles in support of more efficient and effective academic leadership.

*Ongoing: Administrative staff have been surveyed as part of an assessment of their training needs (SER, p. 24).*

- [The team recommended that] UTBv, via all channels open to it, lobby the government to allow rectors (and a small number of vice-rectors) of large universities become more effective and professional by abolishing the absolute requirement that they continue to carry a substantial teaching load.

*Partially achieved: required workloads have been reduced under the new law, but are still substantial.*



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### 3. Teaching and learning

#### 3.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

During its two visits to UTBv, the evaluation team visited eight faculties and met staff and students from a wide range of study programmes. These teachers and the students, who were from Brasov and its region as well as from many parts of Romania, were generally happy with their university and faculty but they raised some issues that will be discussed in turn here. However, other sources of information are also important, particularly when they expand the picture obtained by interviews. For example, successful students cannot be fully aware of the difficulties faced by the highly significant numbers of students who drop out in their first year, or otherwise do not complete their programmes of study.

Appendix 19 of the SER contains comprehensive data on non-completion rates for the university and the individual faculties over the last five years, from 2007–2008 to 2011–2012. Both total rates and first-year-only rates have been increasing; so that now about one in nine students drop out in any one year and nearly one in four first-year students do not advance any further. Rates are much higher in some faculties, reaching one in three during the first year or more in many instances. The human and societal costs of these high rates must be highly significant, and they are growing.

Generally, such phenomena have many causes that must all be given attention, and if possible fixed or ameliorated. Common causes and others that were raised during discussions include:

- Students lacking knowledge of relevant core subjects from high school are admitted. Everything that can be done should be done to limit the effects of constraints imposed by national admission regulations.
- Need to repair inadequate high school preparation. Special courses for relevant students are highly desirable and are already available for some programmes at UTBv.
- Students gradually realise that they are in the wrong programme: some departures for this reason are unavoidable but better advance information and adviser systems that provide frank explanations of course content and what is expected of students, may help a great deal.
- The design and style of delivery of the study programmes may be too traditional with inadequate practical aspects, and thereby too demanding for many students. Some programmes may introduce challenging topics earlier than necessary. Study programmes should be designed around sets of defined learning outcomes and competencies, have diverse teaching methods that are student-centred and require



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active and experiential learning through practical exercises and projects. Such reforms are already under way (Strategic Objective #3).

Clearly, some of these measures would require much effort and additional resources, and may best be introduced gradually, ideally with consultation and careful planning at each stage. On the other hand, retaining students will increase overall numbers in later years, thereby generating more income to the university. Other, apparently extraneous, factors may also be critical to student success like location and standard of accommodation, the roles of university student associations, sports clubs and societies in promoting integration and motivation, or involvement in employment. Separate studies to evaluate their importance and assess countermeasures may be crucial.

### 3.2. Governance or activities

UTBv offers a wide range of study programmes to prospective students and organises all study programmes within Bachelor-Master-Doctorate (B-M-D) training lines. It is clear that much attention is paid to identifying opportunities and introducing new programmes and obtaining accreditation for them. The team commends UTBv on these arrangements and activities but is not competent to comment further on individual programmes or on the full range offered. However, two aspects attracted the team's attention.

UTBv has a wide range of distance learning, e-learning and part-time study programmes but it was not clear to the team exactly how these were classified, or how prospective students could quickly understand what would be required for a particular programme. There may be significant advantages to reorganising these programmes (or even just their presentation or the nomenclature used) to clarify their mode(s) of delivery and appropriateness to potential students:

- 'Distance Learning' could require very few visits or no time on campus.
- 'Blended Learning' programmes could have some time on campus, such as for intensive tutorial sessions or practical classes.
- 'Part-time' programmes could require regular attendance at defined (but convenient) times for persons in full-time employment. These may need to be distinguished from regular programmes that happen to have regular students and so-called "after hours" students in the same classes.

The team was particularly impressed with UTBv's ability to arrange or facilitate internships for all relevant undergraduate students every year. At their best, such experiential learning opportunities can transform students' appreciation of the topics they study in classes and help prepare them for successful employment. The importance of the support of the *Brasov Chamber of Commerce and Industry* to UTBv in this respect is clear. However, it is essential that all internships be monitored to minimise, or avoid completely, those that may be undemanding and of little didactic value.



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National authorities should be made aware of the success of UTBv with respect to its internship programme and should be requested to allow more flexibility between study fields, in the duration of placements and with respect to the timing of placements during the four years of undergraduate study programmes.

### 3.3. Monitoring

Effective monitoring with respect to teaching and learning in a university as large as UTBv must have a range of aspects, but also must not be unduly onerous or overly bureaucratic. Aspects required by the *European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in European Higher Education Area* (ESG) are summarised as “formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of [ ] programmes and awards”.

UTBv is subject to national approval procedures for all new programmes and periodic external evaluation (and re-accreditation) of programmes is performed by ARACIS — 34 programmes in 2011–2012. However, accreditation procedures seek to establish compliance with minimum standards and are not otherwise greatly concerned with continuous quality improvement, and may not even be aware of the specific goals of a particular university with respect to teaching and learning.

However, UTBv has the ability to preview applications for new programmes and for reaccreditation and should use this to its full extent to ensure standards commensurate with its ambitions. There is also “Internal evaluation of study programmes [which] is performed annually, under the coordination of the study programme coordinator and with the support of the quality structures” (SER, p. 21.) and these procedures should also require higher and more nuanced standards than the external processes.

Contributions by, and feedback from students are essential contributors to high standards and continuous improvement, and these are very evident at UTBv. However, the central system for collecting and analysing feedback on teaching is largely ineffective and, although clearly evident in some faculties, complementary methods for informal feedback are not yet common. These matters will be discussed further in Section 6 (Quality Culture).

### 3.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

Teachers, like all professionals, benefit from continuously available supports and training. Traditionally, most university teachers just modelled their classroom activities (and not always successfully) on the lecturers who impressed them when they were students. Also, while such basic teaching methods, done well, continue to be effective in facilitating student learning, active learning can be better promoted in more students by specific methods and technologies that require teachers to have particular competencies and a good understanding of relevant didactic principles. Clearly, some teachers acquire such skills informally, but for their widespread adoption more systematic approaches are essential. These issues and needs



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are explicitly recognised in UTBV's Strategic Plan 2012–2016 (Section 3, subsection 13) Areas where training and support are valuable include:

- Curricular (re)design with defined learning outcomes, appropriate assessment of learning, and alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications.
- Teaching very large classes or small classes.
- Computer-dependent packages and services such as 'virtual learning environments' (VLEs) like Moodle, checking for plagiarism etc.; student response devices ['clickers'] and assistive technologies for of students with special needs.
- Exploiting fully a range of technologies and internet resources.
- The sharing of experiences and the assessment of teaching innovations in an informed professional context.

### 3.5. Therefore, the team recommends:

- The continuation and redoubling of efforts at university, faculty and programme levels to improve student retention rates
- An internal review of UTBV's offering of distance and part-time study programmes
- An increased emphasis on monitoring the didactic effectiveness of student internships
- That the preliminary screening of applications for external (re)accreditation of study programmes and the annual internal review system for study programmes be calibrated explicitly to ensure continuous improvement and the attainment of university objectives with respect to teaching and learning
- That, given the effectiveness of the student internship system, more effort be invested in monitoring its operation and didactic effectiveness
- The establishment of a professionally staffed University Teaching Support Centre, perhaps with a new fully equipped meeting/training room in the rectorate building, where all academic staff can learn new skills and improve traditional approaches. The centre's activities could include a substantial research programme as well as, for example:
  - Short courses on specific techniques that are regularly repeated
  - Visiting speakers for novel topics or to help launch initiatives
  - Groups that share experiences e.g. at lunchtimes



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- A range of core and optional learning modules that can build to a Master level qualification
- Advice, consultation and supports to aid curricular design
- Special help to teachers not performing well
- Organisation of regional, national and international conferences, etc.

### 3.6. Recommendations from 2011 evaluation

- [The team recommended that] UTBV place much greater emphasis on key generic learning objectives for all of its study programmes including citizenship, research competence (including for Bachelor programmes), professionalism and those related to sustainable development; and enhance or create the facilities (including for staff development and training) necessary to achieve this.

*Ongoing: Strategic Objective #3 is a commitment to a "student-centred education process" and the associated sub-sections expand on this commitment.*

- [The team recommended that] the combination of research and teaching competences of UTBV's academic staff be ensured in processes for staff selection, development and management.

*Ongoing: Strategic Objectives #2 and #3 include commitments to this effect.*





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## 4. Research

### 4.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

It is obvious to the team that research is regarded as an integral and essential activity relevant to all full-time teaching staff at UTBv. UTBv's policy of concentrating much of its research investment on the Research Development and Technology institute (RTDi), and its focus on a single overarching theme, "Sustainable Development", are to be commended. The team considers these approaches to be appropriate given that UTBv is a medium-sized comprehensive university wishing to contribute effectively to the progress of science and to social and economic development; and, in the national context, seeking recognition as an "advanced research and teaching university".

### 4.2. Governance or activities

The governance of research at UTBv is clear, with the vice-rector of research overseeing a range of support functions and the single postdoctoral school. The substantial infrastructure of the RTD institute is now largely in place. The team's visit to the RTDi last December and relevant discussions during both its visits to Brasov, have convinced it that the RTDi is already a determining force in the conception and initiation of new research programmes. The team also saw good examples of contracted applied research and consultancy for external firms and bodies in Brasov and further afield.

The research infrastructure of the institute is taking shape, along with its equipment with up-to-date scientific material, the creation of its pluridisciplinary departments and the development of new interdisciplinary areas of research; all of which are enthusiastically supported by the researchers. While additional lines of research continue in the faculties (and are to be encouraged), the institute is having a substantial impact on the general orientation of research in the university. However, in addition, the university should place even more emphasis (if possible) on the recruitment of permanent researchers and the development of international exchanges for attracting doctoral and post-doctoral students in line with its research theme.

UTBv has 18 faculties and 18 doctoral programmes, but some faculties have (or clearly contribute to) more than one programme while, judging from the names of the faculties, the contribution of others is not so significant that it is evident in the name of any programme. Given the relative sizes and states of development of the faculties, this is how it should be. However, the names and large number of PhD programmes indicate lost opportunities for more cooperation within the broad areas of engineering and information technology. For example, there are separate programmes for informatics and computers and IT; and for



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silviculture and forest engineering. It is the team's general impression that the amalgamation of some (if not many) of these programmes could promote more interdisciplinary research.

Discussions with PhD students indicated that the doctoral school is working well. In contrast to the impression given by the supplied documentation (which describe PhD programmes as being in two cycles with just classes and 'individual study' shown for the first cycle), students are aware of their research topics and are engaged with them during the first year. This is good, as otherwise their enthusiasm for research could dissipate. Ideally, as they move on with their projects, students should continue to have access to advice and training on skills, the importance of which is commonly only belatedly appreciated.

As is already being done, the opinions of the students (and of graduates as they enter employment) on the content, balance, completeness and delivery of the first cycle programmes and courses should be sought regularly. At this stage of their student lives, they are even more capable of coming up with ideas for improvements. It struck the team that among the lists of disciplines covered during the first cycle of the doctoral programme, some areas are apparently absent, such as ethics/professionalism, time management and advanced IT skills.

### 4.3. Monitoring

While inputs to research, in terms of personnel, improved infrastructure and recurrent resources are essential and should be monitored to measure progress in infrastructural developments and success in applications for external funds, it is the quality and quantity of outputs (articles, books, patents etc.) that really matters. While UTBv has developed its own quality management system and software system (FRACS) to facilitate the monitoring of research performance, it is essential that they are adequate for the task, and that they are continuously upgraded, or supplemented, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. A crucial aspect (acknowledged in the SER, p. 21) is how UTBv's research outputs are seen on the global monitoring systems such as InCites/Web of Science (Thomson Reuters) and Scopus (Elsevier) used by international agencies (and by rating agencies).

In general, during the faculty visits, the team saw evidence of good efforts to be more productive in research, via publications in in-house, national and international journals. UTBv is committed to supporting the 'valuable series of the Scientific Bulletin of Transylvania University' (Strategic Plan 2012–2016, Section 4, subsection 6). However, while the in-house research journals the team saw had high design and production standards and, while assurance was given that they are included in international bibliographic databases services and their articles are citation indexed; it should always be clear that they are value for money, and, most importantly, for the efforts of their contributors. At the very least, all in-house research journals should have a good proportion of external contributors and be seen to refuse contributions not achieving general standards commensurate with international journals.



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#### 4.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

The team found the strategic management of research at UTBv to be impressive in its breath and ambition. In recent years, the overarching theme of ‘sustainable development’ (which also influences teaching programmes) was agreed, the construction and equipment of the RTDi were achieved, and a single doctoral school established, all indicating a considerable capacity for cooperation and change. The challenge is to ensure comprehensive implementation of the associated policies and effective management and motivation to ensure the desired research outputs. The greater the success in these respects, the easier it will be to agree and implement the further changes that, inevitably in a rapidly changing world, will be necessary.

#### 4.5. Therefore, the team recommends:

- Continuation of the implementation of ‘sustainable development’ as the main theme for research (and teaching) at UTBv.
- That UTBv should pay attention to the recruitment of highly capable, permanent researchers and continue to develop international contacts so as to attract the best foreign doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers.
- A review of the 18 doctoral programmes to identify opportunities for more cooperation and interdisciplinarity.
- That particular importance and weight be given to the opinions of doctoral students to ensure optimal operation of the doctoral school.
- Periodic reviews of UTBv’s ‘in-house’ research journals to ensure that they contribute to the achievement of higher standards of research outputs and are value for money.

#### 4.6. Recommendation from 2011 evaluation

- [The team recommended that] UTBv ensure that its concept of a full “supply chain” leading from basic research to application be fully developed and established in as many areas as possible.

*Ongoing: Strategic Objective #4 is comprehensive and implies an aim to achieve this recommendation.*

- [The team recommended that] UTBv maintain flexibility in the structures and supports it has to enhance research, in order to maintain high levels of ongoing or incipient output in all its research units.

*Ongoing: Strategic Objective #4 is comprehensive and implies an aim to achieve this recommendation.*



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## 5. Service to society

### 5.1 Norms, values, mission, goals

Cities, particularly regional cities, and universities, particularly comprehensive, research-focused universities, can have powerful symbiotic effects on each other and on the surrounding region. So it is obviously of great importance to the city of Brasov to have UTBv with its 21,000 students and hundreds of diverse academic, administrative and support staff. Not only are the social, cultural and economic aspects of the city greatly enhanced, but people of all ages have ready access to specialised education and resources, and the recruitment of suitably educated and trained staff—and the continuous professional development of existing staff—are much easier. Cities, regions and local companies that recognise these important advantages are proactive in interacting with and supporting their universities.

UTBv recognises the importance of such links in one of its seven strategic objectives, which stresses the importance of relationships “with the economic and socio-cultural environment [ ] at regional, national and international levels.” A related subsection in the Strategic Plan 2012–2016 is a commitment to set up “The Council of [Stakeholders] of Transylvania University of Brasov”. However, in all of these objectives and commitments Brasov city and county are not accorded explicit primary roles and perhaps there is an opportunity for UTBv to negotiate with them a mutual formal understanding that could consolidate, provide for supports and publicise to a much greater extent their mutual dependence and cooperation.

### 5.2. Governance or activities

The administrative Department of Liaison with the Economic and Socio-Cultural Community has been in place and active since 2005 (SER, p. 10) and cooperation with a range of city and regional bodies in support of community needs is substantial (SER, p. 11). In addition, the anticipated Stakeholders Council has the potential to enhance significantly the engagement of UTBv with its environment.

The representatives from 12 external companies and bodies who the team met last December were clearly appreciative of UTBv offers but also keen to have opportunities to provide feedback on graduate fitness for employment and other key parameters for the university. The availability of short internships to more than 10,000 students each year in local and national firms and institutions is also a testament to the existing good relationship between the university and the city and region of Brasov. Local firms and institutions facilitate the many part-time students at UTBv; and, in addition, researchers from most faculties support local firms and institutions. The new RTDi has the potential to provide for expansion of research cooperation and related services.



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### 5.3. Strategic management and capacity for change

UTBv's commitment to serve society at local and national levels is evident from its strategic objectives, and its active involvement is clear from the testimony of external stakeholders. Creation of the Department of Liaison with the Economic and Socio-Cultural Community provided permanent support for this aspect of the university's mission. Also, the imminent formation of the Council of Stakeholders shows that the need for further enhancement of communication with the 'outside' is seen as important, and implies that UTBv is ready to act on the basis of the feedback that will be obtained via the Council. This evident capacity for change indicates that UTBv will continue to be proactive in enhancing further its direct services to society.

### 5.4. Therefore, the team recommends:

- Continued engagement with the city council of Brasov and the regional authorities with a view to aligning more closely elements of the university's enterprise with the needs and objectives of the city and region, and providing a rationale for these authorities to consolidate and increase their support of the university.
- Greatly increased publicity for the roles of UTBv in serving the city, region, nation and society in general.

### 5.5. Recommendation from 2011 evaluation

- [The team recommended that] UTBv consider measures for a consistent, strategic and organisational involvement of external stakeholders, e.g. through establishing formalised cooperative structures.

*Ongoing:* Strategic Objective #6 is comprehensive and implies an aim to achieve this recommendation, including *the establishment of a 'Stakeholders Council of Transylvania University of Brasov'*.



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## 6. Quality culture

### 6.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

The vision of UTBv speaks of “Excellence, competitiveness and social responsibility”, its values are “transparency, performance, team spirit, equity, acknowledgement of merits, ethics and openness towards the community”; and each of its seven strategic objectives also implies the importance of ‘quality’ in all that it does and aims to do.

### 6.2. Governance or activities

UTBv’s explicit commitment to formal measures to enhance the quality of its administration and teaching dates from at least 2000, when development of its certified quality management system was initiated. In 2005, bodies for quality management at university and faculty levels were established and, in 2008, a vice-rectorate with responsibility for quality assurance was set up. The quality assurance office oversees a wide range of quality auditing and assessment processes, including an annual institutional self-evaluation procedure that reports to the Senate (SER, p. 20). Therefore, much has been achieved, particularly with respect to involving staff at all levels.

However, like ‘housework’ quality assessment and improvement ‘is never done’; it is a continuous process and even the full achievement of that ‘holy grail’ — a profound and complete ‘quality culture’ where every individual acts on their own initiative to enhance quality — would not obviate the need for effective assessment procedures. Moreover, at UTBv some aspects of its quality-related procedures appear not yet to be fully operational such as the system for the “internal evaluation of study programmes”. This was not prominent during discussions at faculty level and may need strengthening (and underpinning by staff training and supports) if UTBv is to achieve “a student-centred education process” (Strategic objective # 3). Also, as everyone at UTBv is fully aware, the mechanisms used for obtaining student feedback on teaching do not work, as there is a consistent “weak involvement of students” (SER, p. 20).

### 6.3. Monitoring

Clearly, there are many aspects to the effective monitoring of teaching, administration and research with respect to quality assessment and improvement. These range from informal, continuous processes within the remit of individual teachers, etc., to formal processes involving defined procedures, specified agenda items and schedules of reviews. UTBv recognises this and is striving to achieve efficiency and effectiveness by means of its quality management system and supporting structures at university, faculty and departmental levels. The present state is regarded as a ‘work-in-progress’ with, for example, recognition of the



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“limited participation in the quality evaluation actions, staff training and quality data communication” of departmental quality committees (SER, p. 20).

In a teaching institution, the monitoring of teaching and learning, and the use of feedback from students to improve individual and system performance are essential. However, while it is generally well designed, UTBv’s comprehensive, online system to enable student feedback on the teaching they receive is ineffective. Most importantly, the results generated are not taken seriously because too few students use it. The reasons for this may include all or some of the following:

- Cultural
- Related to timing (during, at the end, or after a course?)
- Mode (online, paper forms)
- Circumstantial (at will, or all together in class or computer laboratory)
- The effort required, “completing multiple forms takes too long”
- “Absence on system of teacher(s) students want to comment on” — According to the relevant regulation, every teacher is required to undergo evaluation only “at least once in 5 years” (UTBv SER: Additional information and Documents C1-2).
- Erroneous suspicions among students that system is not confidential.

Important efforts have been, and continue to be, made to improve student participation. The timing of the process has been changed and in faculties where entire classes complete the online forms during class time, the response rate was found to be considerably higher. Moreover, some students have noticed improvements resulting from this system. Therefore, perseverance, combined with examining the operation of equivalent systems in other universities and constantly trying out improvements, is essential. For example, one student commented to the team that lack of student interest in the system is compounded by the too low probability that particular teachers (who s/he wanted to compliment or suggest improvements to) will appear on the system at the end of a particular semester. This is because, as cited above, any one teacher may not appear for up to five years.

When working effectively, centralised student feedback systems can provide valuable (and actionable) information to management at department, faculty and institutional levels, and may in general be required by accreditation agencies. However, while focusing on the individual teacher, such systems cannot be adequate on their own. Programme coordinators also benefit from feedback on programme management (information provision, module sequencing etc.), and feedback from “fresh” and past graduates/alumni is also invaluable. Student representation systems, which are well developed at UTBv, also play essential roles.



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But the feedback from their own students obtained by individual teachers *for their own use* may be the most useful, particularly when this is gained early enough during a course or module for adjustments to be made. During faculty visits, individual academic staff — and students — testified to the team that this already happens at UTBv, and is effective. However, such feedback may be most substantial and useful when it is obtained according to a simple procedure that provides students with a little time for reflection and allows the teacher to evaluate his/her progress from year to year. The establishment of “trust” between teacher and students is essential and a good degree of confidentiality may be achieved by groups of 2–4 students jointly providing written feedback.

#### 6.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

Over more than a decade UTBv has demonstrated a capacity to develop and improve quality management systems and the Strategic Plan 2012–2016 indicates clearly that this capacity for development and innovation in quality assurance and improvement continues.

#### 6.5. Therefore the team recommends:

- That the range of quality committees, evaluation commissions and delegated responsibilities in departments and faculties, (especially faculties with one department) be reviewed with the objective of eliminating duplication.
- That student representatives participate directly in internal QA audits.
- The transfer of responsibility for the analysis of general feedback to the quality assessment office with an obligation to provide timely and concise reports to departments, faculties and relevant senior officers.
- Perseverance with efforts to achieve an effective general “student evaluation of teaching system”, and wider communication of the results and associated reports.
- Consideration of a modification to the general student evaluation of teaching system that would allow students and/or their representatives to nominate specific teachers for early evaluation.
- Preparation of brief guidelines on methods that may be used by teachers themselves to seek and use their students’ feedback to improve their own teaching and related administration.

#### 6.6. Recommendation from 2011 evaluation

- [The team recommended that] the revision and development of UTBv’s quality assurance activities be continued to ensure the achievement of comprehensive, balanced and sufficient systems (both ex-ante and ex-post) for the improvement and assessment of teaching, research and administration.





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Ongoing: The team heard of current activities and intentions (which are also outlined in the SER) and relevant measures are to be found throughout the Strategic Plan 2012–2016.



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## 7. Internationalisation

### 7.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

On reading the SER (p. 12) and from visiting the university international office, it is clear to the team that UTBv is making a substantial effort to become more internationalised; in particular the levels of staff and student exchanges are healthy. UTBv has also recently successfully applied for designation as a site for a *Confucius Institute*. However, internationalisation is not very prominent in UTBv's statements of Vision and Mission, in its seven strategic objectives or in the "sum of managerial activities" for 2012–2016. In fact, in the Strategic Plan, the term 'internationalisation' is remarkable for its almost complete absence, except as an 'add-on' as in "regional, national and *international*" (see subsections 1.7, 4.4, 4.8, 4.10, 4.11 and 6.7).

### 7.2. Governance or activities

The university now has an international office that is supporting the efforts of the faculties to increase the extent of internationalisation and its quality. Supports for outgoing and incoming staff and students are provided, but there is a definite need for more participation in English and other foreign language courses (and perhaps also related activities such as debating, book and film clubs). This need is constant and will grow. Indeed, in the team's discussions on internationalisation with relevant officers and staff, it was clear that the present sub-optimal level of linguistic competence among staff is limiting further developments. This applies in particular to the delivery of programmes through the medium of English, German or French etc. to foreign students, and to Romanian students who wish to consolidate their linguistic competence in this way.

### 7.3. Strategic management and capacity for change

The consolidation since 2011 of services to support all Erasmus and full-time international students in the International Office, the current development of UTBv's Confucius Institute and the already substantial international competencies of many staff are testimony to UTBv's capacity for change and growth with respect to internationalisation.

### 7.4. Therefore the team recommends:

- That internationalisation and related activities and goals be given much more prominence in any revisions of the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the university.



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- That UTBv commission a ‘needs analysis’ to identify measures needed to achieve the necessary expansion of the linguistic competences of its academic staff, administrators and students.
- That UTBv consider asking the local authorities and businesses in the city and region to support the creation of a significant number of ‘international’ stipends or scholarships for outgoing students participating in exchange programmes.
- That UTBv assure the continued success of the international office by the provision of increased resources as these are required.

### 7.5. Recommendation from 2011 evaluation

- [The team recommended that] internationalisation at UTBv be given the resources and strategic emphasis that its importance deserves.

*Ongoing: Reorganisation of vice-rectoral responsibilities and the centralisation of relevant services in the university international office have improved effectiveness and enhanced the process of internationalisation at UTBv.*



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## 8. Conclusion

UTBv is vital to the continued development of its home city and region and has demonstrated courage and foresight in focused planning and undertaking large-scale initiatives. However, even more courage and initiatives are necessary if it is to reach its potential in helping to transform its region and gaining international recognition as a key university in Eastern Europe. The evaluation team, while conscious of the limitations in its understanding of UTBv and the “not always fully clear” constraints under which UTBv must operate, has made a series of recommendations under six headings that are listed in full below. However, many of these relate to just four areas that appear to be in particular need of enhancement:

- Regional roles and of internationalisation
- Teaching, by means of more training for teachers and feedback from students
- Student success, by reform of recruitment and measures to improve retention
- Management and administrative efficiency and effectiveness

But to return to a greater level of detail, and in summary, the evaluation team recommends:

*Under governance and institutional decision-making:*

- A re-evaluation of the ability of UTBv to contribute strategically to regional (and national) development in priority areas (e.g. tourism, IT and product design) where a number of faculties are already contributing, but apparently separately.
- That UTBv continues with the recruitment of a senior administrator to take over all those areas of central administration that the law does not require the rector to directly oversee.
- The preparation of short and simple guidelines on the division of labour between the faculty deans and the heads of their constituent departments.
- That the coherence of student representation be improved by enhancement of the student representative council.
- More explicit and visible operational planning in relation to implementation of the strategic plan, as well as the updating of the strategic plan itself if required by changing circumstances.



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- Revision of the division of responsibilities between the vice-rectors for didactic activities and for quality evaluation to increase the effectiveness of their combined efforts.

#### Under *teaching and learning*:

- The continuation and redoubling of efforts at university, faculty and programme levels to improve student retention rates.
- An internal review of UTBv's offering of distance and part-time study programmes.
- An increased emphasis on monitoring the didactic effectiveness of student internships.
- That the preliminary screening of applications for external (re)accreditation of study programmes and the annual internal review system for study programmes be calibrated explicitly to ensure continuous improvement and the attainment of university objectives with respect to teaching and learning.
- That, given the effectiveness of student internships system, more effort be invested in monitoring its operation and didactic effectiveness.
- The establishment of a professionally staffed university teaching support centre, perhaps with a new fully equipped meeting/training room in the Rectorate building, where all the professors and lecturers can learn new skills and improve traditional approaches. The centre's activities could include a substantial research programme as well as, for example:
  - Short courses on specific techniques that are regularly repeated
  - Visiting speakers for novel topics or to help launch initiatives
  - Groups that share experiences e.g. at lunchtimes
  - A range of core and optional learning modules that can build to a master level qualification
  - Advice, consultation and supports to aid curricular design
  - Special help to teachers not performing well
  - Organisation of regional, national and international conferences, etc.

#### Under *Research*

- Continuation of the implementation of 'sustainable development' as the main theme for research (and teaching) at UTBv.



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- That UTBv should pay attention to the recruitment of highly capable permanent researchers and continue to develop international contacts so as to attract the best foreign doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers.
- A review of the 18 doctoral programmes to identify opportunities for more cooperation and interdisciplinarity.
- That particular importance and weight be given to the opinions of doctoral students to ensure optimal operation of the doctoral school.
- Periodic reviews of UTBv's 'in house' research journals to ensure that they contribute to the achievement of higher standards of research outputs and are value for money.

#### *Under Service to Society*

- Continued engagement with the city council of Brasov and the regional authorities with a view to aligning more closely elements of the university's enterprise with the needs and objectives of the city and region, and providing a rationale for these authorities to consolidate and increase their support of the university.
- Greatly increased publicity for the roles of UTBv in serving the city, region, nation and society in general.

#### *Under Quality Culture*

- That the range of quality committees, evaluation commissions and delegated responsibilities in departments and faculties, (especially faculties with one department) be reviewed with the objective of eliminating duplication.
- That student representatives participate directly in Internal QA audits.
- The transfer of responsibility for the analysis of general feedback to the quality assessment office with an obligation to provide timely and concise reports to departments, faculties and relevant senior officers.
- Perseverance with efforts to achieve an effective general "student evaluation of teaching system", and wider communication of the results and associated reports.
- Consideration of a modification to the general student evaluation of teaching system that would allow students and/or their representatives to nominate specific teachers for early evaluation.
- Preparation of brief guidelines on methods that may be used by teachers themselves to seek and use their students' feedback to improve their own teaching and related administration.



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### Under *Internationalisation*

- That Internationalisation and related activities and goals be given much more prominence in any revisions of the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the university.
- That UTBv commission a ‘needs analysis’ to identify measures needed to achieve the necessary expansion of the linguistic competences of its academic staff, administrators and students.
- That UTBv consider asking the local authorities and businesses in the city and region to support the creation of a significant number of ‘international’ stipends or scholarships for outgoing students participating in exchange programmes.
- That UTBv assure the continued success of the international office by the provision of increased resources as these are required.

### **Envoi**

Clearly, much progress has been made — even since 2011. Clearly, also, research, teaching and some faculties urgently need to develop further; and in all of these areas the leadership and coherent support of the central executive will be essential. The IEP evaluation team wishes the university, its management, staff and students the best of luck with their many good initiatives in administration, research and teaching, and in their combined roles in continuing to enhance the university, the city of Brasov and its region.