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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

**“1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia**

### ***EVALUATION REPORT***

*December 2013.*

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Quality and Diversity  
of the Romanian Universities





## 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>12</b>
<b>4. Research.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. Service to society .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6. Quality culture.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7. Internationalisation.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>8. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>



## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia. The evaluation took place in 2013 in the framework of the project “Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 Law on Education and the various related normative acts.

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

### 1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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



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

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

## 1.2. “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia’s profile

“1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia (UAB) was founded 1991 in Alba Iulia, a city of roughly 60,000 inhabitants located in an agricultural, rural area in the centre of Romania. It comprises four faculties (History and Philology, Orthodox Theology, Science, Law & Social Sciences). From those, the Faculty of History and Philology and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology were the “starting nuclei”, with their activities anchoring UAB in the historical and cultural heritage of Alba Iulia. The Faculty of Science, established in 1995, and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, established in 2003 are nowadays considered the “big faculties” in terms of student numbers. The older faculties were described by some staff members as the “soul” or “spirit” of the university. UAB offers the full cycle of studies, and currently there are 4 303 students enrolled. The biggest share of students (77%) are studying at undergraduate level, where 29 Bachelor programmes are offered, four of which are distant learning programmes. 21 % of UAB students are enrolled at Master level, 29 programmes offered and 2% in four doctoral programmes. The university has 330 employees, out of which 164 are academic staff (SER, p. 2, p. 12). In recent years, major work has been undertaken to restore the historical centre of Alba Iulia, the Alba Carolina Fortress. This has a direct link to the university, as most of UAB’s buildings are located within the fortress, therefore, UAB can claim rightly to have a beautiful campus.

UAB presents itself as a self-conscious institution which is proud of its over 20 years of existence and the results achieved during that time. The team met with highly dedicated staff and satisfied students. UAB wants to be recognised by its performance, quality and continuity, which can be seen as the strategic orientation of the institution. Values for defining principles and policies are transparency, entrepreneurship, quality, tradition, ethics and equality. (SER p. 2-3)

As main challenges, UAB staff mentioned the economic situation. As elsewhere in Romania, student numbers have dropped in recent years by 30%, from little more than 6 000 students to 4 300 between 2009 and 2012. The highest level of decline was in the field of distance learning, offered at UAB only at Bachelor level. Here, student numbers decreased by roughly 60%, from 766 students to 296, as the demand of the respective target groups was exhausted (SER Appendix Nr. 6 & 8).



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Another challenge stated by UAB staff is over-regulation by the national government. It is stated in the SER that the university has full autonomy, for example, in defining and implementing its own teaching and research profile or when it comes to the design of its internal quality assurance system (SER p. 3, p. 6). However, during the site visits the team got the strong impression that UAB's autonomy seems limited on many sides, mainly from the law and the ministry as well as due to a politically unpredictable environment. For example, this is relevant when it comes to discretionary power, how to organise the university structure, the autonomy to design curricula and budgetary restrictions. The team also observed that documents provided by UAB, be it operational plans, reports or, regulations on processes etc., often name their compliance with the regulations of the Ministry of National Education and the relevant law.

### 1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process and preparation of the report were undertaken by:

- Prof. Dr Lucia Căbulea (Vice-Rector for Education, Institutional Strategy and Quality, also coordinator and contact person for EUA),
- Prof. Dr Moise Ioan Achim (Vice-Rector for Research and International Relations),
- Prof. Dr Manuella Kadar (Director of the Centre for Management of Research, Development and Innovation),
- Dr Teodora Popescu (Director of the Centre for International Relations),
- Dr Letiția Trif (Director of the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy, also contact person for EUA),
- Mr Lucian Vasile Găban (General Director of Administration),
- Ms Janeta Lepăduș (student representative on the Board of Directors),
- Ms Anca Barbu (student representative in the Senate),
- Mr Cristian Dima (President of ALUMNI) and
- Ms Simona Pârvu (secretary at the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy).

According to UAB, the self evaluation group was built along the IEP guidelines, assigning topics to the different members. The Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy was responsible for collecting the data and presented a draft version of the self-evaluation report (SER) to the self-evaluation team. The final version of the SER was discussed in the Senate and each member of the academic community was to be informed about the report. The self-evaluation report of UAB, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in April 2013. As the evaluation team learned during the first visit, the SWOT analysis, an integral part of the SER, was not discussed in the Senate, due to limited time to



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prepare the report. In this context, the evaluation team also learned that each faculty has its own, more critical and substantial SWOT analysis.

The visits of the evaluation team to Alba Iulia took place from 20 to 22 May 2013 and from 14 to 17 of October 2013, respectively. It should be noted that the rector was not able to participate in the second visit due to an unexpected sudden obligation outside the country, which the evaluation team was told only upon arrival for the second visit. Therefore, the evaluation team met with the vice-rector for research and international relations instead, as the representative of the rector during his absence.

The SER itself contained many general statements promoting UAB as well as long lists of objectives which were not of true help in providing information about the university. As a whole, the report was neither very analytical, nor self-critical. Rather than highlighting crucial aspects and covering them in 25 pages, ready-made material prepared and used in other contexts was supplied in the form of appendixes for the evaluation team in which to search for valuable information. In the SER itself, no figures or graphs were used to provide further evidence; also, many tables and figures in the appendixes contained several numerical errors making it more difficult for the evaluation team to develop a sound basic understanding of the institution. Therefore, it was agreed after the first visit that UAB provides some additional material, including a reviewed SWOT analysis. During the site visits, the evaluation team gained the impression that the SER is well-known among the UAB community.

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

- Öktem Vardar, Rector, TED University, Turkey, team chair
- Carmen Fenoll, Professor, former vice-rector, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain
- Hans Beunderman, Professor, former vice-rector, TU Delft, The Netherlands
- Clau Dermont, student, University of Berne, Switzerland
- Lil Reif, researcher, Danube University, Austria, team coordinator

The team would like to thank all members of UAB as well as external stakeholders involved in the meetings for dedicating their time and for their openness to share their views of the institution. The team thanks the Rector of UAB, Prof. Dr Daniel Breaz and his Vice-Rectors, Prof. Dr Lucia Căbulea and Prof. Dr Moise Ioan Achim for their kind hospitality, as well as the director of the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy, Dr Letiția Trif and her team for the preparation and smooth running of the visits. A special thanks to Ms Adina Petrescu for ensuring translation and clarifications whenever needed and ensuring good and timely transition throughout the schedule. Also, we would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr Mihai Gligor, Head of the Department of History, Archaeology and Museology, whose passion for Alba Iulia gave us an invaluable insight into the history and locality of UAB.



## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

### 2.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

UAB's vision is to become a "standard at local and regional level, through the creation of research centers focusing on excellence, with major implications in the socio-economic development for the community". It sees its mission in forming specialists for the labour market, "covering primarily the demand for qualified human resource locally and regionally as well as nationally/internationally" (SER, p. 3). When asked during the first visit about his priorities, UAB's new rector, who was elected in March 2012, mentioned internationalisation, promoting young researchers (development of human resources), establishing support departments for internationalisation and for research, establishing research centres with external partners and expanding e-learning. These more operational strategic priorities differ from the priorities mentioned by Senate representatives, which in a long-term strategy focus more on maintaining the educational level, strengthening the relation between education and research, and securing the financial resources necessary for the functioning of the institution.

At present, UAB is focusing on all functions available to universities: teaching and learning, research and service to society. However, the team gained the impression that overall time allocation tilts towards teaching (given the high level of contact hours and teaching loads). In order to reach its objectives, UAB envisages a modern and flexible management, which is responsive to the demands outside the university (mainly, the labour market). It has been emphasised both during the site visits and in the SER, UAB wants to be a university with good internal communication and a "family" atmosphere. Decision-making at UAB is envisaged as "consultation processes involving the entire academic community, based on specific procedures" (SER p. 9).

### 2.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The management structure of UAB includes a) the Senate, b) the Management Council,<sup>1</sup> consisting of the rector, the vice-rectors, the deans, the general director of administration and a student representative; c) the Faculty Councils, d) the Department Councils and e) the Council for Doctoral Studies. At faculty level, deans are responsible for the management of the faculties and departments are managed by the heads of departments.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there are several central support units.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the Faculty of Orthodox Theology

<sup>1</sup> In some documents the Management Council was named also "Administrative Board", "Board of Administration" and "Board of Directors".

<sup>2</sup> In some documents, the head of department was also named as "director".

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy; Centre for Distance Learning, Low Frequency and Continuous Training; Centre for Information, Career Guidance and Counselling, Centre for the Management of Research, Development and



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has a special position within UAB, as it is linked to the Archbishopric of Alba Iulia, with several lines of responsibilities in teaching and research reporting to a) the university, b) the Archbishopric of Alba Iulia and c) the National Conference of Theology.

In 2012, the new rector was elected, based on his vision and management programme, which the team finds positive for the harmonious governance of the university. The vice-rectors are selected by the rector and approved by the Senate. Deans are appointed by the rector from among the candidates proposed by the faculties and finally approved by the Senate.

The Senate as the main decision-making body is composed of 19 members (UAB Charta p. 31) and operates through routine voting. Daily business is conducted through the Management Council. When asked why the director of the doctoral school is not part of the Management Council, UAB explained that this is due to the legislative framework. Therefore, the director of the doctoral school is a permanent guest of the Management Council's weekly meetings. Similarly to this, it is practice at UAB that members of the Management Council attend Senate meetings as guests, even though they are not part of the Senate because of their function; the same applies for heads of departments. This approach is intended to ensure good communication between the main management bodies and positions, so members of the Management Council and heads of departments have a good picture of how issues are discussed inside the Senate, representing UAB's community (staff and students). Other means to communicate decisions to the wider community of UAB are information via intranet or the monthly newsletter of the university, including Management Council decisions and resolutions of the Senate (SER p. 9). Communication within the university works well, and major sources of complaints reported from staff were linked to ministerial restrictions. Students seemed well-represented in various councils and involved in decision-making. The student organization at UAB, the Students' League, provides a network of communication and cooperation. However, it should be noted that resources of the Students' League are limited and the participation of the students could be enhanced. UAB could support student participation by stronger recognition of their work, for example through mentioning associational work in the diploma supplement or, to give another example, by allocating some secretarial support or a certain budget, which facilitates the representative work and thus their effectiveness, to the student associations.

In addition to the top level management bodies the team noticed a wealth of councils and commissions both at the central level and in the faculties, including councils at the level of the departments, building up a quite complex picture of responsibilities and processes in decision-making. Based on these observations and information given in the SER, which are emphasising the involvement of all members of the UAB community in decision-making, the governance system at UAB can be clearly identified as a collegial one.

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Innovation; Centre for International Relations; AETERNITAS publishing house. Furthermore, UAB has a spokesperson heading the Division for Institutional Marketing and Image.





The bottom-up approach is also evident in faculties where decisions are generated through departments, with negotiations and voting being the basis for allocations. The budget is prepared by the central management, mainly based on the previous year's budget, then sent to the faculties/departments for comments and approved in the Senate at a later stage. In this context, the team would like to stress that it is difficult to define priorities and do things differently within UAB from one year to the next. Even the rector's management agreement strongly suggests this approach of "continuing along the same lines" (management agreement, Annex 1).

### **2.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?**

The SER reports assessment activities geared towards the management level of the university (SER p. 19). Furthermore, benchmarking is reported in order to understand the positioning of UAB in relation to other universities in Romania and abroad (SER p. 20). Still, it appeared to the team that UAB is currently somewhere in between processes, somewhat lost in between old and new periods, related objectives, activities and documents. This might be due to changes in the legal framework in 2011 and within the leadership of the institution itself. Also, the team observed that the position and responsibilities of the deans as members of the management council in relation to the heads of departments are not clear to some members of the staff.

Another observation is that a well-documented, widely accepted strategic plan was missing. Instead, the team was provided with several strategic and operational plans on different levels of governance and referring to different time frames (2008 – 2013 or 2012 – 2016) often not indicating at all if an objective and related activities is in the stage of planning or already completed. However, despite the team's doubts voiced during the visits, leadership seemed confident that UAB is on track and will find ways to address upcoming challenges.

### **2.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?**

During the two visits, the team observed highly dedicated staff and congratulates UAB for this capacity to create and apparently even keep this attitude, despite turbulences like drastic changes in student numbers and public funding. However, the team would like to stress that UAB's objectives are ambitious and it is doubtful that they match available means.

As to steering documents, in the team's point of view, there is a lack in operational documents of concrete activities to reach objectives. The same goes for defining milestones within a more concrete timeframe, indicating where the university stands at the moment.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For example, using the colours red, yellow and green for internal monitoring of the status goals to be achieved, especially if running over a longer period, thus avoiding in timing the status "permanent", which makes it hard to prioritise, but also to trace what actually has been done concretely.



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The SWOT analysis provided lists many issues that UAB invested in lately, rather than major strengths to build upon, key opportunities to exploit, and crucial weaknesses to address immediately.

Also, it was not clear to the team if steering documents are fully aligned. There were some inconsistencies in the documents provided to the team (names of units or positions for example). This might be partially justified by errors in the translation, but, as mentioned already for the SER and its annexes, there was a general impression, that important documents to steer the institution are not fully aligned and might need some more attention. The team would like to underline this observation because of UAB's stated objective to have good and transparent communication in general or the goal to provide quality of information on UAB's website (SER p. 8).

Rather than an "integrated structure", as it is described in the SER, the team gained the impression that UAB's management appears to have some parallel structures (multitude of councils) and processes seem to be duplicated. The overall operation seems highly complex—different entities with similar functions are working on similar topics in parallel at all kinds of levels.

The team noticed that management positions, structures, centres etc. are directed and staffed by academics, who exercise this function in addition to their full-time duties as staff members in the respective faculty, and therefore this creates an extra workload. The high number of management positions combined with academic positions creates an additional problem of resources when it comes to time allocation: in addition to teaching and research there are administrative tasks. UAB should gradually replace voluntary work with institutional structures so that academics return to their primary responsibilities, and expertise in institutional services is developed by administrative personnel.

Based on information given on the university's budget, the team did not find any indication as to how much free, discretionary or strategic funds are available. In this respect, it should be emphasised that UAB operates in a context (demographic changes, high level of competition between universities, unfavourable economic conditions) that requires targeted strategies rather than small improvements. Therefore, fund allocation and strategic priorities are becoming more important than ever. UAB mentions in some of its documents that it plans to identify strategic priorities within UAB's areas of activities. However, based on the observations during the site visits the team is not convinced if this is taking place, especially in an environment with a highly collegial approach as at UAB, where all decisions are taken through a democratic vote. While this consensus culture dampens potential internal conflicts through negotiation amongst the different parties, it also hinders ambitions from qualified minorities.



The team is not convinced that this governance model leads to a “university with a modern flexible management structure, able to quickly adapt to the demands of the labour market and the community”, as the SWOT analysis claims. Major/difficult decisions on strategy can hardly be made with such an extensive deliberation; this model does not seem appropriate to deal with possible future “crisis” scenarios. In this respect, the team was not convinced why the main responsibility for UAB strategy development is not that of the rector himself, as it is described in appendix 12 of the SER. It was the team’s impression that the extensive approach of collegial governance in combination with the legislative v. executive division in decision-making reduces UAB’s managerial effectiveness.

Based on these observations the team gives the following recommendations:

- Collegial governance is good for a small size university like UAB. It empowers academics, but is also slow and at times unable to produce strategies needed in a competitive environment. If the ambition of UAB is to grow in scope, student numbers, and research activities then a governance model should be developed, where faculties and departments are decentralised as far as implementation is concerned, but policy control, strategic management and quality management are dealt with centrally. In fact, strategy development should be led by the rector personally.
- UAB should review the number of committees and centres, involving less people in management and strategy development, thus creating more time for teaching and research.
- Based on the long-term strategy of UAB, realistic objectives, especially committed priorities and clear time frames and monitoring of progress are needed in the short term.
- Based on the SWOT analysis, the team thinks that UAB does not fully comprehend the weaknesses or threats it faces; nor its strengths and opportunities. A focused and concise SWOT would be helpful to better assess the present position and consider consistent scenarios for the further strategy process of UAB.



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### 3. Teaching and Learning

#### 3.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

UAB's mission in the field of teaching and learning is "to train specialists for the labour market, in response to the demand for skilled/qualified human resources locally, and regionally as well as nationally/internationally" (SER p. 4). Goals for the period of the new rectorate (2012 – 2016) are in the field of teaching and learning: modern education, which is formative and centred on students; linking teaching with research; organising study programmes in the field of continuous training as well as organising study programmes with universities and research institutions in Romania and abroad (SER p. 9).

#### 3.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The team observed study programmes in different fields, covering professional fields as well as scientific areas. Generally, the university is aware of the need to ensure the relevance of its programmes for the labour market. In order to reach this aim, UAB reported that existing study programmes are reviewed on an annual basis and claims as a strength the fact that its educational offer is "adapted to the needs of the labour market" (SER p. 22). At the same time, UAB mentions that it has "limited information with respect to the needs of the labour market" (SER p. 23). On the other hand, the team gained the impression that UAB is quite active in the field of internship placements, including placements in companies outside the country. There is a contradiction in this, also given the fact that UAB reports to have an active alumni association and well-developed partnerships in the region, nationally and internationally. Nevertheless, the team did not find much evidence for regular, formal mechanisms involving external stakeholders in curriculum design or review processes (as detailed in chapter five – "Service to Society").

Regarding content, curricula are not very flexible and there are not many options for students to choose courses within a certain curriculum; if so, courses are limited to specific areas (for example, foreign languages). But this was not seen as critical by the students the team talked to. The team observed that transdisciplinarity in the design of curricula is rather weak.

UAB reported that it constantly develops its study programmes and gave examples of how programmes were developed to meet the changing demands of the labour market, which the team finds positive. Among those examples were newly set-up programmes in English and linked to the internationalisation strategy of the university. According to the SER, closing programmes was not really considered an option and except when based on complete assessment of the long-term consequences (SER p. 12). The team observed some examples where unsuccessful programmes were closed in favour of a newly developed programme, which was also supported among staff members. Regarding Bachelor programmes, the team



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gained the general impression that they are rather specific, geared towards producing “specialists”, as the mission says. In this respect it should be noted that this hinders horizontal mobility between programmes and therefore might harm future compatibility in student exchange, whereas the trend in the European Higher Education Area is the opposite, towards broader programmes at Bachelor level.

The aim to train future graduates for the demands of the international labour market and the priority to develop international programmes and attract students from abroad will be dealt with in the section on internationalisation.

Due to its relatively small size, UAB seems to adopt student-centred teaching and learning to a certain extent. UAB involves students in deciding and commenting on the syllabus of courses, allowing adaptations, which the team finds positive. The team observed that there are good practices in learning outcomes and competencies assessments. In order to support academic staff in the development of necessary skills, UAB mentioned several projects, both at national and international levels, as a resource used for internal HR development. These are all positive observations and the team encourages the university to continue and develop this practice further, ensuring that academic staff in all faculties benefit from these practices.

### **3.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?**

Quality assurance in teaching is the traditional, collegial, self- and peer assessment and seems to work fine. There is a detailed questionnaire for students to assess teaching staff and courses provided on the web. In this respect, UAB reported that it is not implemented enough so far, as student participation is not sufficient yet. Implementation, feedback and mechanisms for improvements were not clear and convincing to the team. Instead, the team had the impression that it is rather the non-structured, informal feedback which is well-developed and has more relevance at UAB. Here, students seem to have the possibility to bring up their ideas and concerns if they are related to teaching and student services. Teachers are apparently open and easy to talk to, to the point that students do not feel the need for formal evaluations. Given the familial atmosphere at UAB, there are many possibilities to directly address questions, problems and issues, which is certainly one of the strengths of this university, building up its reputation for providing high quality education.

However, it should be mentioned that student workload is not assessed systematically. The questionnaire does not include open questions or space for individual feedback on issues which might be relevant to students, but not be seen by the staff of the university. Even though the small size and familial atmosphere offers many possibilities to students to give direct feedback for development, the relevance to do so also anonymously should be considered by UAB.



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### 3.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team observed a high level of contact hours, ranging from 22 to 28 hours per week, which is appreciated by students and staff. In some cases, the team observed a tendency to increase contact hours further. Also, there is a high teaching load for academic staff, 16 hours per week on average, which is accepted as a fact of life. The team thinks that this high level of contact hours and teaching load limits room for manoeuvre, for example when it comes to developing modern forms of student-centred learning, as it is not a stimulus for independent learning. The team would like to link this observation to the efforts undertaken by UAB to develop distant learning (e-Learning), inviting UAB to consider using approaches and technology from distant learning in regular, “full-time” studies on campus, in order to support the development of individual, independent learning skills, thus experiencing also other forms of learning apart from contact hours. Concerning the teaching load, this is also relevant to ensure space for other activities to be developed, for example, research activities among academic staff. In this respect, there are good examples at UAB, where even Bachelor students were involved in research, thus making not only a link between teaching and research for the students, but also creating more space for doing research for the academic staff. Still, the team finds the teaching load very high, especially if contrasted with UAB’s ambitions to improve research and develop further in the field of internationalisation.

The team had the impression that most of the courses for UAB staff training are conducted within the framework of certain national or transnational projects – a good starting point in UAB’s own words. The team praises UAB for their high level of awareness for the general use of projects in the field of developing teaching and learning. The team invites UAB to continue this when such projects come to an end.

Based on these observations, the following recommendations are made:

- UAB should use evaluations in order to make improvements, thus closing the loop of the quality cycle, and include evaluations of the student workload and the possibility for open questions in student feedback.
- Within the constraints of the law, UAB should consider reducing the number of programmes and combining them to offer a wider range of subjects. In this way, undergraduate programmes aim at producing generalists rather than specialists, leaving that to Master and PhD programmes.
- Where possible, reduce the number of compulsory courses in favour of electives (including outside the major) in order to increase the breadth of studies.



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- UAB should seriously consider decreasing contact hours to 20, or even to 17 if possible (decrease to at least the minimum allowed by the ministry). Reducing contact hours strengthens student self-learning and gains time for pursuing other strategic goals.



## 4. Research

### 4.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

UAB's vision in the field of research is described as "creation of research centers focusing on excellence" and claims that "to become a university of advanced research and education, promoting excellence is a prerequisite" (SER, p. 4 & 14). It should be noted, that UAB is making a clear point in policy statements about combining teaching and research, considering both as the "basic components of academic activity", being "interdependent and inseparable components which mark the distinctive principal academic activity, consisting of training by research" (UAB Charta p. 11). To foster research is another priority of the rector.

### 4.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

Based on a previous unit, but with some adaptations, a Centre for Management of Research, Development and Innovation was established recently (CMCDI), which is headed by the vice-rector for research and international relations and managed by a director. Besides its responsibility to assess research activities, CMCDI is an "antenna", passing information on research funding opportunities, facilitating training sessions and helping academic staff with the management of research projects. As it was stated by UAB, this centre is working closely together with the Centre for International Relations (CRI), as there are overlapping areas for activities (conferences, PhD students and academic staff mobility etc.), which the team finds positive. Strategic directions in the field of research are developed by the Scientific Council of the Senate, headed by the vice-rector for research and international relations.

There are currently 16 research centres at UAB, organised at department level. In addition, the rector aims to establish new research centres together with external partners. However, the team was told that only a small portion of UAB's academic staff is active in those centres. The team learned that research centres are relevant as a kind of "virtual envelope" for research activities, in order to apply for certain types of funding. If a research project is awarded, the approach at UAB is to leave main parts of the funding at the level of the respective faculty or department.

UAB provides doctoral education in four disciplines (history, philology, accountancy and theology), organised in four doctoral schools and headed by the director of the Doctoral Studies Council<sup>5</sup> that is linked to the four faculties. Currently, there are 14 full professors working at UAB who are entitled to supervise doctoral theses. The approach is to organise supervision with a team of supervisors, thus moving away from one-to-one supervision. At present, approximately 100 students are enrolled in the doctoral schools, which can be seen

<sup>5</sup> Differently from the Charta, this position is named as "Head of Doctoral School" in the organisational chart, appendix 11.





as a high number given the small size of UAB; the number of accredited PhD supervisors is equally high. PhD theses seem well-embedded in research projects and students are motivated and satisfied. Overall, doctoral studies at UAB are strong and have a good reputation.

#### **4.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?**

UAB is monitoring research activities regularly and according to data provided,<sup>6</sup> research activity has increased during recent years. The team learned that all members of the academic staff are considered to be active in research, in part because of the institutional policy, which requires staff members to publish on a regular basis for career development. It is the team's impression that both research ambitions as well as the assessment of it at UAB are mainly based on and geared towards the national research system and its indicators. In this respect, some staff members mentioned having trouble finding adequate publishing opportunities in order to fulfil this assessment criteria, given the specifics and traditions of publishing results of different disciplines (for example, law) and which apparently are not reflected in the national system of research assessment.

#### **4.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?**

The team found the academic staff of UAB caught, to some extent, in a dilemma because of the pressure to publish combined with a high teaching load. This was more or less relevant in certain faculties and disciplines, but the team would like to emphasize the differences in the production of knowledge in the various disciplines and thinks that they should be taken into consideration. Requiring at least one publication per year from all academics might be effective initially to increase the quantity of research; however, in the long-term the team sees the danger of leading academics towards low quality publications to fulfil such requirements, which might damage the research culture.

Research performance in some cases was stronger in fields where student numbers are declining. The team perceived a tension between these fields and faculties recruiting more students, as the latter felt that they were somehow financing the research-active fields through tuition fees. The academic staff whom the team talked to did not seem to be aware that research is also generating income for UAB through overheads, as well as intangibles that are aligned with the strategic goal of the university to strengthen research. A communication strategy from the leadership of the university might help to soften these tensions and facilitate collaborations across fields and faculties in research.

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<sup>6</sup> Annexes of the SER, also based on additional documents on research activities provided by UAB during the second visit.



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It seemed to the team that there is little attempt so far by UAB to define strategic priorities in research with the aim of establishing new research centres.

The team found some very good initiatives which would be a valuable support to increase its visibility in research. For example, the team was told that the Faculty of History and Philology has an open access journal. The team encourages UAB to make use of this knowledge on how to establish and run such journals, as this might be useful across all research fields and follows a general trend.

Based on these observations, the following recommendations are given:

- The research policy and strategy at the level of the university should aim to organise the research centres with a more targeted focus on the institutional priorities, if possible in interdisciplinary areas, take advantage of well-established, attractive PhD programmes and try to create robust, visible centres with a critical mass of staff involved in them instead of many, but smaller units.
- Promote high impact publications, shifting from the quantitative approach (one publication requested per year) towards a qualitative approach that can be correctly appreciated and monitored as well.
- Be aware of differences across disciplines. The outcomes of some disciplines for the university's innovation potential can be different from papers in ISI journals.
- Develop measures to support academic staff in their research. Priority should be given to decreasing teaching and administrative load.
- The team recognises the efforts of UAB to professionalise and train academic staff (project management, language). However, at the PhD level UAB should also be more active in providing its PhD students opportunities to improve their skills in foreign languages, especially in English.



## 5. Service to society

### 5.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

UAB sees itself as having an important role in the development of the city of Alba Iulia and is aware of its socio-economic role for the development of the community. UAB states that it has an active role when it comes to the formulation of regional and local strategies for sustainable development (SER p. 11). Besides hosting conferences and contributing to cultural events in Alba Iulia, UAB sees its mission also clearly in the field of lifelong learning for the people in the region.

### 5.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

UAB reports to have developed collaborative partnerships with different stakeholders over the years, for example, with the Municipality of Alba Iulia, Alba County Council, Alba Prefecture, the Centre Regional Development Agency, the Chamber of Commerce, Alba School Inspectorate and other local institutions. Partnerships are promoted by the Bureau of Image and Marketing, described as the interface between the institution and the community (SER p. 10). Areas for collaboration are broad, be it for the organisation of cultural or scientific events, internship placements or areas of joint activity in the city's development based on certain expertise the university can provide. The team observed concrete examples in the field of history and archaeology, including joint activities with the National Museum of the Union. Another example is the establishment of palliative care in Alba Iulia, as a result of social awareness raised by research conducted at UAB. In the field of teaching, some professors are collaborating with companies for *à la carte* internal staff training. Furthermore, job fairs are conducted to bring together employers and future graduates.

In order to provide educational offers in the field of lifelong learning, UAB reports that it operates a distance education centre in the region, providing courses to the wide public in foreign languages, public relations and communication, accountancy, entrepreneurial skills, web page design, to name a few (SER p. 15).

### 5.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

As mentioned above, the Bureau of Image and Marketing is responsible for supporting the establishment of partnerships between UAB and the community and the SER gives a broad picture of many different activities in this respect. However, the team is not very convinced that there is much monitoring taking place at UAB with respect to its outreach to society, from an internal, strategic point of view. For example, UAB states that it has an Honorary Senate, a consultative body set up by personalities from economy and social life to elaborate proposals regarding the development of UAB, its structure, study programmes, research



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areas, etc. (UAB Charta, p. 47 and SER, p. 8), which the team finds positive. Still, this stands in contrast to the statement that UAB has limited knowledge about needs from the labour market (SER p. 23, p. mentioned also in chapter 3 in this report). The same is true for the role of the Alumni Association, described by UAB as important link to its graduates and thus, to the labour market, or the statement on the recent development of a database on graduates from 2012, developed by the Centre for Information, Counselling and Career Guidance (SER p. 15-17). These inconsistencies raise questions, such as how well the Honorary Senate is embedded in processes of the strategic development of UAB.

#### **5.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?**

There were several good examples reported in the SER and during the site visits, demonstrating that UAB is truly embedded in the city and the region. However, the team was not so convinced that the university makes full use of the potential it has, in terms of stable and structured development and management of its partnerships. For example, the SER mentions the importance and different forms of technology transfer processes (SER p. 15). In this respect, the team would like to underline that fully-fledged institutional support structures are needed to facilitate services, such as a Technology Transfer Office.

To summarise, the team recommends UAB to look into the way it is managing its links with the “outside” world and would recommend the following:

- Create platforms for stakeholders to discuss the development strategy of UAB, to comment on products, to develop partnership-cooperation opportunities, etc. They should be systematic, sustainable organisations, covering a fair cross section of stakeholders. For example, annual dates fixed in advance will help to maximise participation.
- Map in a dynamic and precise way the existing and potential relationships between the academic activities and the possible partners outside the UAB, in the Alba Region. Such mapping will allow UAB to analyse and review its performance and keep track of developments.
- Institutional structures are needed to facilitate services, such as a Technology Transfer Office.



## 6. Quality culture

### 6.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

Quality of education and academic research is a major concern at UAB, understood as the continuous improvement of quality in teaching, research and management at all levels and relevant functions (SER p. 19). In this respect, it should also be highlighted that for the period 2013 - 2016 UAB aims to promote an efficient institutional management, and to strengthen strategic management (SER p. 5).

### 6.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

In order to improve its quality, UAB has developed an Institutional Quality Management System (SIMC). Here, the team observed a very complex structure, involving all kinds of commissions at different levels (the Quality Assessment and Assurance Committee, the Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance, the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance at institutional level, Commissions for Evaluation and Quality Assurance at faculty level, commissions for internal assessment and quality assurance of education of each study programme; SER p. 19f.). There is a vice-rector for education, quality and institutional strategy and a Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy (CMCSI) is subordinated to the vice-rector. This centre is described as an “advisory and operational structure”, which is responsible for the coordination and implementation of all related procedures. At the level of departments, UAB reports to have quality managers and administrative services, supporting the implementation of quality evaluation and assurance. Furthermore, a body of internal auditors is mentioned, which consists of 30 staff members and is responsible for conducting the internal auditing on quality management at UAB (SER, p. 19-22). UAB has an extensive range of documents linked to the implementation of QM.<sup>7</sup> The overarching document is the Quality Declaration, stating vision, mission, values, principles and objectives for another document, the Quality Strategy. It should be noted, that the continuous adaptation (or improvement) and updating of all these documents seems to be a central concern. The same is for procedures, as UAB states: “every year new procedures are developed and existing ones are updated/improved” (SER, p. 21). UAB reports to apply six system procedures and 149 operational processes (SER p. 21).

### 6.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

<sup>7</sup> Regulation on Internal Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Education, Institutional Quality Management System, Regulation of the Quality Management and Institutional Strategy Centre, Regulation on peer-assessment, Regulation on teacher evaluation by students, Quality Manual “Quality Management”, Manual of procedures and documentation for the education management process and the Quality Code (SER, p. 21).



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The team observed that there is an active notion of quality assurance and management within UAB. As set out in the previous section, there is a complex structure to implement many different assessment activities, for different purposes. The team is aware that many of these activities are required by external stakeholders, as reported by UAB, to obtain funding, participate in research grants or receive accreditation for a study programme.

Collegial self-regulation, as the team observed, seems to work fine. Also, UAB is highly aware of all national and European regulations, guidelines, etc. referring to quality. However, the team gained the impression that most energy and time is dedicated to generate reports for different external bodies (ARACIS – the national quality assurance agency, Ministry of Education, etc.) to the detriment of own analysis and improvement. The team observed that the data produced are not used for strategic management. Also, as mentioned in earlier chapters, many of the activities in operational planning are defined to take place continuously, on a permanent basis, not using milestones or deliverables to check, which makes it difficult to monitor progress.

The structure of the SIMC and related processes and documents remained complex to the team after several attempts to gain understanding and clarification, with additional documents provided. In some parts, this might be justified by several inconsistencies due to translation, with different terminology being used in the SER, appendixes and additional information for the same topic, thus giving the impression that there are more commissions, reports or activities than there actually are. But even considering this aspect, the strong impression remains that the system might be inefficient and time-consuming. There is a constant revision of standards, norms and commissions, which gave the team the impression that improvements are introduced frequently, without being sure of the deficiencies of the previous implementation.

#### **6.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?**

Based on these observations, the team thinks that UAB has a reporting culture, rather than a quality culture – producing a vast quantity of redundant information. Strategy and reporting are mainly seen as a legal obligation and not as much exploited by UAB as an opportunity for the institution – in fact, as one staff member put it during the second visit: that these reports can be used as a basis for development.

Therefore, the following recommendations are given:

- UAB should find ways to decrease the burden linked to all sorts of reporting and to simplify its internal communication and management structure in order to have more time for its staff members to engage in research. Seriously consider reducing bodies



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involved in QA not needed by law and to clarify responsibilities. UAB may, for example, consider the possibility to centralise the responsibility for QA, the function of the dean, within faculties.

- The team encourages UAB to perceive external reporting as an opportunity for the development of the organisation and its primary process.



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## 7. Internationalisation

### 7.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

As set out in chapter 1.2, internationalisation is one of the rector's priorities during his office 2012–2016. In this respect, the SER states the objective of “increasing the international visibility of UAB” in all fields of action and across sectors, including also companies from abroad (SER p. 11). The team was told that the internationalisation strategy of UAB is based on clear pillars with clear numerical ambitions (for example, until 2016, 10% of UAB students will have been abroad for studies or internships).

### 7.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

In order to foster internationalisation, the Centre for International Relations (CRI) was established recently. The director of the CRI and a large part of the team are members of the academic staff and all departments are involved in the work of the CRI. This creates a direct line between the policy level and the concrete field of work (study programmes or research). According to the SER, UAB benefits from the Erasmus programme since 1999, and is the main funding scheme for student and staff mobility at UAB. Other sources come from projects or special national grants. Since its existence, CRI managed to raise numbers of outgoing and incoming students, academic and administrative staff significantly. Another support unit for internationalisation at UAB is the Centre for Managing Research, Development and Innovation (CMCDI), which has been addressed in chapter 4. Both centres are under the auspices of the vice-rector for research and international relations; the links between CRI and CMCDI were described to the team as working well.

UAB holds 180 partnership agreements with HEIs, research institutions and companies (SER p. 11). The team was told that UAB currently aims to give more substance to these agreements. This means that UAB now focuses on the development of strategic partnerships for closer collaboration, the aim of which will be to translate this into increasing student and staff mobility as well as in joint research activities.

In order to provide educational opportunities for students from abroad, UAB has recently developed some study programmes in English in the fields of business administration, archaeology or informatics. For students interested in studying programs taught in Romanian, UAB offers a preparatory year to learn Romanian before starting with the actual programme. The team was told that UAB has participated in several events and educational fairs, targeting countries with a shortage of highly qualified human resources, for example in Asia (SER p. 12).

The team noted that there is formal recognition of all international activities of the academic staff linked to their personal career development, which seems to work well as an incentive.





Also, UAB reported that it is providing courses to improve language skills to students and staff members – both academic and administrative (the focus is on English), using for this the resources from the Faculty of Philology. However, based on the visits as well as on the documents provided (SER, operational plan 2013, strategic plan etc.) the team would suggest that there is still space for further development.

### **7.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?**

As to incoming/outgoing students and staff members, UAB has good knowledge and monitoring of numbers in relation to achieved mobility, ongoing transnational projects and international conferences hosted at UAB. Especially in relation to student mobility, the team gained the impression from the meetings with students that procedures for recognition of credits received abroad run smoothly and that students are well-supported when it comes to spending time abroad. Based on the additional information provided by UAB, the team is aware that there have been major developments in recent years. In order to attract international students to Alba Iulia, the team was told that one major obstacle experienced so far, however, was not so much connected to language skills of students or professors, but to visa restrictions.

### **7.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?**

The team finds the aims and activities of UAB in the field of internationalisation highly convincing. Both the CRI as well as the CMCDI are working on the basis of clear management programmes with concrete and apparently feasible targets, which are possible to monitor. The team observed a well working approach when it comes to the transformation of objectives towards concrete activities and thus, verifiable results. The team would like to highlight it here, as it might serve as a good example for effective and efficient – as well as stimulating – management. It remains to be further explored whether UAB can position itself on the international market as truly remarkable. Growth in incoming students also affects the time allocation of teaching staff, this might affect the quality of education, but UAB seems to be aware of this and develops a cautious, step-by-step approach.

To sum up: The team had a very positive impression of the internationalisation strategy and its implementation. Still, there is a potential risk that too fast a pace might affect the quality of teaching and research. Therefore, the team encourages UAB to continue with a step-by-step approach. Special attention should be paid to offer enough opportunities for students and staff to improve their proficiency in English, as it was mentioned already chapter 4 for the particular context of PhD studies.



## 8. Conclusion

The team believes that UAB's ambition to become a teaching and advanced research university should not be a goal in itself and, at least, efforts to realise such an ambition should not harm the current strengths of UAB. Growth of UAB at its own pace seems more suitable for the university, given also a realistic consideration of means available.

It is the team's hope, that the reflections and recommendations presented in this report and the evaluation exercise as a whole will help UAB to develop its internal processes towards a lighter, simpler way forward. In the team's view, this would create more space for the many intentions that UAB has on its list and getting closer to its realisation.

The team observes several examples of capacities to change and praise the university for them:

- In several fields there appears to be an entrepreneurial attitude. UAB could use these examples to inspire the community, despite the external constraints of the law.
- Some of the support centres function very well. These could be used as best practice models for other support centres, thus enhancing the leverage for change.
- The team observed several young academics that could in the future perform in key positions at UAB. The university would benefit from the dedicated investment in these talents.

The team encourages UAB to develop scenarios with academic staff, students and external stakeholders to identify where the university should be in 20 years — in education, new programmes, research, internationalisation and cooperation with potential partners.

The team is confident that the good attitude and committed dedication of UAB staff towards its institution and the region as well as the many already existing activities are the "fuel" for the next years to come and wishes UAB all the best for its further development.

## Recommendations

### Governance and institutional decision-making

1. Collegial governance is good for a small size university like UAB. It empowers academics, but is also slow and at times unable to produce strategies needed in a competitive environment. If the ambition of UAB is to grow in scope, student numbers, and research activities then a governance model should be developed, where faculties and departments are decentralised as far as implementation is concerned, but policy control,



strategic management and quality management are dealt with centrally. In fact, strategy development should be led by the rector personally.

2. UAB should review the number of committees and centres, involving less people in management and strategy development, thus creating more time for teaching and research.
3. Based on the long-term strategy of UAB, realistic objectives, especially committed priorities and clear time frames and monitoring of progress are needed in the short term.
4. Based on the SWOT analysis, the team thinks that UAB does not fully comprehend the weaknesses or threats it faces; nor its strengths and opportunities. A focused and concise SWOT would be helpful to better assess the present position and consider consistent scenarios for the further strategy process of UAB.

### **Teaching and Learning**

5. UAB should use evaluations in order to make improvements, thus closing the loop of the quality cycle, and include evaluations of the student workload and the possibility for open questions in student feedback.
6. Within the constraints of the law, UAB should consider reducing the number of programmes and combining them to offer a wider range of subjects. In this way, undergraduate programmes aim at producing generalists rather than specialists, leaving that to Master and PhD programmes.
7. Where possible, reduce the number of compulsory courses in favour of electives (including outside the major) in order to increase the breadth of studies.
8. UAB should seriously consider decreasing contact hours to 20, or even to 17 if possible (decrease to at least the minimum allowed by the ministry). Reducing contact hours strengthens student self-learning and gains time for pursuing other strategic goals.

### **Research**

9. The research policy and strategy at the level of the university should aim to organise the research centres with a more targeted focus on the institutional priorities, if possible in interdisciplinary areas. Take advantage of well-established, attractive PhD programmes and try to create robust, visible centres with a critical mass of staff involved in them instead of many, but smaller units.



10. Promote high impact publications, shifting from the quantitative approach (one publication requested per year) towards a qualitative approach that can be correctly appreciated and monitored as well.
11. Be aware of differences across disciplines. The outcomes of some disciplines for the university's innovation potential can be different from papers in ISI journals.
12. Develop measures to support academic staff in their research. Priority should be given to decreasing teaching and administrative load.
13. The team recognises the efforts of UAB to professionalise and train academic staff (project management, language). However, at the PhD level UAB should also be more active in providing its PhD students opportunities to improve their skills in foreign languages, especially in English.

#### **Service to society**

14. Create platforms for stakeholders to discuss the development strategy of UAB, to comment on products, to develop partnership-cooperation opportunities, etc. They should be systematic, sustainable organisations, covering a fair cross section of stakeholders. For example, annual dates fixed in advance will help to maximise participation.
15. Map in a dynamic and precise way the existing and potential relationships between the academic activities and the possible partners outside the UAB, in the Alba Region. Such mapping will allow UAB to analyse and review its performance and keep track of developments.
16. Institutional structures are needed to facilitate services, such as a Technology Transfer Office.

#### **Quality culture**

17. UAB should find ways to decrease the burden linked to all sorts of reporting and to simplify its internal communication and management structure in order to have more time for its staff members to engage in research. Seriously consider reducing bodies involved in QA not needed by law and to clarify responsibilities. UAB may, for example, consider the possibility to centralise the responsibility for QA, the function of the dean, within faculties.
18. The team encourages UAB to perceive external reporting as an opportunity for the development of the organisation and its primary process.



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## Internationalisation

19. The team had a very positive impression of the internationalisation strategy and its implementation. Still, there is a potential risk that too fast a pace might affect the quality of teaching and research. Therefore, the team encourages UAB to continue with a step-by-step approach.
20. Special attention should be paid to offer enough opportunities for students and staff to improve their proficiency in English.