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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

ECOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST

EVALUATION REPORT

December 2013

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Quality and Diversity
of the Romanian Universities





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Ecological University of Bucharest. 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. Ecological University of Bucharest’s profile

The Ecological University of Bucharest (UEB) was the first private university to be established in Romania after 1990. The university has developed a strong identity associated with environmental issues, though in recent years it has been expanding to other areas with strong demand. Like many private universities, UEB has traditionally presented a strong commitment to teaching activities. However, in recent years UEB has been feeling the need to develop some engagement in research. The university is not very large and its scale favours an atmosphere of close relationships and good collaboration among stakeholders.

Like many other universities, UEB faces a very challenging environment. The complex context faced by UEB is due to a multifaceted set of factors. The Romanian system of higher education has undergone, like many of its European counterparts, a period of intense and rapid massification over the last decades. However, in recent years, demographic changes have negatively affected the patterns of demand and UEB has been facing a very adverse context in this respect, since it has created very intense competition for students among public and private higher education institutions. Like most private institutions, UEB has suffered from the convergence of an adverse demographic decline and the expansion of public-subsidised and more established public higher education.

The adverse context regarding student demand has created significant financial challenges for UEB. Being a private institution, it is significantly dependent on tuition fees for its revenue and the decline in student demand has inevitably conditioned its financial strength and its capacity to articulate a coherent and long-term strategy regarding important issues such as research, graduate education, or internationalisation. The university has also been showing difficulties in tapping into alternative sources of funding such as private donations and revenue from services to industry and other external stakeholders.

The context of significant competition among universities has also been enhanced by the recent economic and financial crisis. Higher education is often regarded as a counter-cyclical sector that tends to be relatively spared in times of recession since many individuals take the



opportunity of investing in their training at a time that the labour market may not be very promising. Nevertheless, the scale of the crisis has not left higher education unscathed through the crisis. Moreover, this will tend to affect, in particular, private institutions that do not receive financial support from the government.

To these financial limitations should be added a context of significant limitations to institutional autonomy. Despite being a private university, and like the rest of Romanian public and private higher education institutions, UEB faces very detailed national regulations that hinder its capacity to develop an autonomous strategy of development, and also a context of legal instability that undermines the potential to pursue its mission and strategy in a consistent manner. These issues are part of a wider problem of limited institutional autonomy affecting management and creating serious systemic constraints felt throughout the Romanian higher education system.

The challenges faced by European universities are not restricted to a national level, but are increasingly taking a European and international dimension. In fact, one of the major driving forces for recent changes in universities has been the process of reform of the European Higher Education Area, to which the Bologna Process is central. Among the major priorities of the Bologna Process mention ought to be made of the structural changes associated with the introduction of the three cycle system (Bachelor/Master/doctorate), the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms, and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study across Europe. The development of the Bologna Process has led to intense discussions and policy changes in many European countries and Romania is no exception.

Current trends require universities to be more responsive and capable of reflecting on their mission and refining their major priorities. However, universities often face significant constraints regarding their capacity to live up to those challenges. On the one hand, for many European universities this has only recently become a major issue of concern and they are still adapting to those changing times. On the other hand, many European universities also have a limited degree of institutional autonomy, though this has improved in recent decades.

Despite the challenging context, we hope that the following report may help the Ecological University of Bucharest to better fulfil its mission and priorities.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was developed in good collaboration across the university. The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a team appointed by the administrative body of the university and composed of the following members:



- Associate Professor Nicolae Galdean (responsible for the self-assessment report and contact person for EUA);
- Professor Dorin Jula (Pro-Rector for Research and Quality Management);
- Associate Professor Janina Mihaila (member of the Quality Assessment and Assurance Committee of UEB);
- Lecturer Nicoleta Caragea-Hrehorciuc (member of the Quality Assessment and Assurance Committee of UEB);
- Senior Lecturer Elena Banciu (member of the Quality Assessment and Assurance commission of UEB);
- Lecturer Zoltán Marosy (responsible of the Quality Assessment and Assurance Department of UEB);
- Mr Vasile Mustatea (counsellor of UEB's President); and Mr Octav Nicolae (student member of the Council of the Faculty of Communication Sciences).

The self-evaluation group met several times and scheduled several meetings in the faculties (to meet professors and students) and with the deans and departments' managers in order to communicate the objectives of the assessment. There were also meetings with the university Senate. The self-evaluation process was perceived across the university as a positive learning experience allowing the institution to learn more about its activities.

The self-evaluation report (SER) of UEB, together with the appendices, was sent to the IEP evaluation team in May 2013. The visits of the evaluation team to UEB took place from 5 to 7 June 2013 (first visit) and from 22 to 25 September 2013 (second visit), respectively. In between the visits UEB provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation that was requested by the team in order to attain a better grasp of the university's activities and main challenges.

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

- Prof. Lucija Čok, former Rector of the University of Primorska (Slovenia), Chair
- Prof. Jean-Pierre Gesson, former President of the University of Poitiers (France)
- Prof. Erdal Emel, former Vice-Rector of the Uludağ University Bursa (Turkey)
- Mr Mateusz Celmer, students at the Wroclaw University of Technology (Poland) and European Students' Union
- Prof. Pedro Teixeira, Professor at the University of Porto and Director of CIPES (Portugal) , Team Coordinator

During the two visits, the team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of UEB with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders. The visits included several meetings with the leadership of UEB; with members of the academic and the administrative staff; with students;



and with representatives of public authorities and other external stakeholders. The team also visited some facilities of the university to enlarge its understanding about the institution.

The team wants to express its gratitude to all participants of the interviews for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues concerning the university during the meetings. Special thanks go to Prof. Nicolae Galdean who was the liaison person of UEB with the team and who was responsible for the efficient organisation of all the meetings and discussions. Finally, the team would like to express its thanks to the President Prof. Mircea Dutu, to the Rector Prof. Alexandru Ticlea, and to UEB for the friendly hospitality.

The discussions with the members of UEB have greatly helped the team to understand better some aspects of the university's internal organisation, its history and its dynamics. The participation of all those involved in the evaluation was very positive. The current report benefitted greatly from the engagement of the various internal and external stakeholders of the university in those meetings.

The SER provided very useful information about UEB, including the data from various appendices. The team found the SWOT analysis to be honest and noted that it could become a good departure point for future improvements and developments. The main challenge now will be to deepen the diagnosis found in the SER and to use it afterwards to address the perceived weaknesses and challenges. During the visits, the team found evidence that the SER was developed in good cooperation with faculties and departments and that it was widely disseminated among academic staff. Nevertheless, there has been a more limited engagement of students in the process, which is frequently a difficulty observed in this type of activity in many institutions. This should require additional attention from the university in future quality assessment activities. The evaluation team is also grateful for the significant effort undertaken by these persons to develop the self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation process has indicated that the university has good knowledge about itself, benefitting from previous experience with quality assessment at the national level.

The team believes that the preparation of the SER helped UEB to develop a better degree of self-knowledge through discussion of the current situation and collection of relevant data. This evaluation process was an important first step in deepening a self-evaluation culture. The team believes that the self-evaluation process has helped UEB to improve its degree of self-knowledge through discussion of its current strategy and a reflection on future developments. That development can only be achieved through a systematic and realistic approach linking strategic and operational plans to financial and human resources. The process should be based on critical reflection and on the mobilisation of the whole university.



2. Governance and institutional decision-making

During the two visits the team identified that the leadership of UEB shows a high level of commitment to the institution and that there is a general appreciation for this across the university and among the external stakeholders that the team has met. Since the establishment of the university in 1990, there is significant continuity in the leadership of the university and of its vision about the mission and purpose of the institution.

Nevertheless, the team felt that its vision requires greater elaboration and strategic thinking. As a private university facing a very challenging context, UEB needs to have a strong and differentiating identity that can increase its recognition and attractiveness for both prospective students and external stakeholders. The university has been trying to forge a distinctive identity, largely linked to environmental issues, though the team felt that it was insufficiently explored and that it was not always cogent with some recent developments that led to the establishment of certain study programmes. Although the team could understand the financial short-term motivations underlying the programme diversification to fields that were not obviously related to that vision, we considered that it creates significant challenges regarding the cohesiveness and sustainability of its strategy and identity.

This bias towards short-term issues seems to be part of a wider problem regarding the university's governance that seems to be mainly reactive to external constraints and changes. The team is aware that UEB is facing a very challenging context, with significant legal and regulatory instability and with a less than desirable degree of institutional autonomy. Moreover, the existence of a dual governance structure, with a rector and a president, also poses some specific challenges to an effective and cohesive strategic management. Nevertheless, and precisely because of the adverse external context, the leadership of UEB needs to place a greater emphasis on its medium- and long-term priorities and reflect on how best to attain them.

One of the aspects that beg further reflection from UEB's leadership refers to its approach to management. The team considers that the university tends to adopt a very centralised approach to management that pervades its various activities. The university does not seem to discriminate significantly in the way it approaches important and structural choices from daily and routine decisions and processes. This makes the organisational decision-making process cumbersome and burdens the higher ranks of the institutions, distracting them from more essential strategic reflection and choices.



Moreover, this makes the organisational structure unnecessarily centralised and complex, with negative effects for UEB's efficiency and effectiveness. This seems even more unnecessary given the good levels of dedication that the team could observe among the academic and non-academic staff. The leadership of UEB could benefit in many ways by reflecting on ways to delegate responsibilities and strengthening the intermediate leadership of the university. Less centralisation could create new opportunities for the involvement of the academic staff and it would make the university more responsive and increase the motivation and morale of those involved in those processes.

UEB faces serious challenges and this should encourage the leadership of the university to involve all of its constituents in addressing them. One of the instruments for that process could be the Senate. Like most of the other Romanian universities, both public and private, UEB has been adjusting to recent changes in the governance structure that have been implemented nationally and trying to find ways to use effectively the existing governing bodies to help the university to fulfil its mission. This is particularly the case of the Senate, which could become a significant forum for discussion of major issues for the life of the university and contribute to the aforementioned strategic reflection. The team considers that bodies with the power of the Senate could play an important role and contribution for strengthening the academic core of UEB.

Main recommendations:

1. The university should explore its vision in a more consistent manner and its implications for the teaching portfolio, the type and intensity of research, the student and staff profiles, the relationship with external stakeholders.
2. UEB should spell out more clearly an institutional strategy regarding its positioning and its specificity in Romanian higher education.
3. According to the team, UEB should emphasise more trust and decentralisation in the way it approaches internal decision-making, exploring ways of simplifying its organisational structure in order to be more efficient and effective.
4. UEB should think ahead and be more proactive in its relationship with the external context.



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3. Teaching and learning

UEB has traditionally focused on teaching activities and regards it as its major mission and asset to attract students and the attention of external stakeholders. This was confirmed by the team, who identified a general positive appreciation of students for the teaching staff's dedication. This positive impression of the students seems to be also due to the flexibility adopted by the university and the teaching staff regarding student support, teaching and assessment. Students are also very supportive of the practical orientation of the university, though they would like to see a greater effort in the promotion of the university.

Despite these positive aspects, UEB has been facing significant competition in the student market, especially due to the aforementioned retrenchment in demography and the way it affects potential enrolments. Moreover, like other private universities, the university faces the disadvantage of charging full-cost fees to all of its students, as it does not receive any major financial support from public or other private sources. Thus, the university has been focusing on exploring market opportunities in order to face the threat of declining student numbers, though the team felt that more and better efforts should be adopted in tracking prospective students.

UEB has made great efforts to follow the main developments of the European Higher Education Area and has achieved a formal implementation of the Bologna cycles and introduction of ECTS. However, the team found a limited awareness of changes in teaching and learning promoted by the Bologna Process such as student-centred learning. Moreover, the team thinks that the university should develop greater commitment regarding pedagogical innovation.

The satisfaction of students extended also to mechanisms of feedback about the development of teaching activities. In general, students expressed confidence about the impact and effectiveness of feedback provided. They were also generally satisfied with the pedagogical and scientific conditions offered by the university and in the way it tries to respond to students' concerns about major and routine issues.

However, the team identified some problems regarding relevant support facilities. Libraries and laboratories seemed to be underfunded and outdated and required major investments to make them adapted to the size of the student cohort and to an adequate pedagogical and scientific development of the existing study programmes. This lack of investment was also reflected in other ancillary facilities (e.g. canteens and accommodation), which are largely inexistent.



Main recommendations:

1. According to the team, UEB should strengthen and maintain good teaching and levels of commitment among the teaching staff.
2. UEB should think about how to become more competitive to attract more and better students and consider ways to motivate students to be more critical and proactive.
3. UEB should make additional investments in support facilities in order to strengthen the learning environment.



4. Research and doctoral education

Until recently, UEB has paid very limited attention to doctoral education and research activities, reflecting an institutional identity that has traditionally privileged teaching and training. This is confirmed by the fact that most of the staff present a limited engagement with research activities, which seems to be due to a variety of factors. Among these factors are limited time, the existence of insufficient institutional resources and support, and a heavy teaching load that makes it difficult for many of them to pursue a more significant research activity. This is reflected in a very small number of publications, especially in prestigious international academic outlets.

Although, as a private institution, it is understandable that UEB is not likely to become a research university, it is expected that it develops a visible research activity in order to strengthen its academic and external reputation. Thus, in recent times, the university has been recognising the need to develop a more visible commitment to research activities and doctoral education. Hence, UEB has been considering the development of research centres and their subsequent accreditation. Following these reflections, some research contracts have been pursued with companies and with the Romanian Academy.

Steps have also been taken regarding the development of doctoral education. The doctoral school may become an important development and play an important role in strengthening the quantity, quality and interdisciplinarity of the research produced. Its creation will open the opportunity for the university to expand its activities in advanced training and research, notably by combining the existing efforts across the university in a creative and innovative way. The UEB charter pays great attention to the doctoral level (mentioning aspects such as organising doctoral schools at the faculty level and regulation of doctoral studies). However, much of this is still to be implemented. In fact, the team felt that the role of the doctoral school is still being discussed and encourages the university to move forward in the establishment of doctoral education at UEB articulated with further investment in research facilities and activities.

One of the major obstacles to the establishment and development of doctoral education has to do with external regulations regarding the eligibility of supervisors. The team is aware that the university already has some members of staff who are qualified to supervise doctoral research and have been performing that role within other institutional frameworks. The team encourages UEB to reflect on how to internalise those capabilities in order to develop doctoral education at the university.



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These institutional weaknesses are aggravated by the pressure to obtain research funding. The financial stringency affecting the Romanian higher education system has led UEB, like many of its counterparts, to search for alternative ways to pursue its research activities. During the evaluation, the team became aware of the efforts that many faculty members have developed to obtain funding at the national and international levels. Although the team recognises these efforts and understands the pressures that led to this situation, it also considers that it creates the risk of pulverisation and hinders the coherence and effectiveness of the overall research mission. That also means that there is limited scope for definition of priorities and that these activities are more financially-driven rather than strategically-driven.

UEB aims to become more engaged in research activities and has established a small research office. This is a crucial aspect that could contribute to a stronger institutional activity in research, by making it a more proactive tool in supporting the current efforts to identify and target funding opportunities that can match the research profile of UEB. The role of such an office should not be limited to the dissemination of available opportunities of funding for research (though this is in itself already very valuable), but should focus also in helping the research teams in developing successful applications. These are often cumbersome and complex processes that will be more effectively dealt with by more experienced and specialised staff members.

The team considers that the leadership of the university needs to pay more attention to research activities. In particular, it needs to consolidate an institutional approach to research activities that may build on the university's main fields of activity and expertise. The university should examine the extent to which there is research strength across the whole institution and in each field. Being particularly oriented towards ecological issues, the university should therefore give particular attention to the way it may strengthen research in that field and the way it can liaise those developments with knowledge transfer.

On the other hand, and taking into account the size of UEB and the overall Romanian situation, the team considers that UEB should prioritise a focus on applied transdisciplinary research. One possibility that could be explored in this regard refers to the idea of a mobile research lab for onsite measures.

Overall, the team considers that the university needs to reflect on these challenges and that a greater institutional attention to the research mission and doctoral education are important aspects, also regarding the academic rejuvenation of the institution on a long-term basis.



Main recommendations:

1. According to the team, UEB should strengthen the research activities in a way that is adjusted to the university's experience and potential in research, namely by focusing on applied research that is linked to its profile.
2. UEB should consider the establishment of a single interdisciplinary research centre to promote greater collaboration and stronger proposals, and develop institutional capacity to support the preparation of successful research applications.
3. Regarding doctoral education, UEB should, on the one hand, consider the possibility of having one doctoral school for the whole university that may combine and strengthen the early development of this type of programme and, on the other hand, rethink and strengthen its academic staff, in order to be successful in developing research and doctoral education.



5. Service to society

One of the major challenges faced by European universities refers to their capacity to develop activities that are economically and socially relevant for their local, regional, and national environment. This relationship with their external environment is one of the dimensions of universities' missions that has been receiving increasing attention in recent years. This poses significant challenges to universities since it constitutes a complex and multifarious network of institutional and individual relationships within universities who continuously show their contribution to the various communities they are serving.

UEB is perceived as having a positive contribution to the local environment and this has improved over the years. It is clear that the university regards the economic, cultural, and social relevance of the activities developed as a relevant part of its mission. The university has shown significant activity in consultancy and services to external stakeholders in several fields related to its main expertise. There are several examples that show that the university's contribution in its fields of expertise is recognised locally and nationally, especially in activities related to environmental issues.

During the evaluation process, the team observed that the university is perceived by many external stakeholders as having a very positive contribution to the local environment. An important part of this positive image is due to the fact that graduates from the university have a good reputation among employers and UEB is appreciated for its emphasis on practical and professional training. The team also noted during the interviews the appreciation for the academic staff among stakeholders. Moreover, the team identified a general perception that this has improved and that the university has been trying to strengthen its links with external actors. Thus, there are several positive examples of collaboration including internships, joint projects, and recruitment of graduates.

One of the areas in which the university is also starting to take initial, but promising steps is in its relationship with its alumni. The Alumni Association is very recent and therefore largely unexplored as a vehicle to link with external stakeholders, though the potential is significant. The team considers that this requires a much greater effort and institutional support in order to provide an important return for the life of UEB, and that the university should face this not merely as a potential source of additional revenue to deal with short-term financial constraints, but more as a long-term relationship.

Alumni can be a source of support and feedback for UEB's activities and can help the university to develop its mission more effectively. Alumni can also provide an important



network for the dissemination of lifelong learning activities. Regarding this aspect, and although there are some initiatives, the role of the university in continuing education and lifelong learning is still very limited and it can be significantly improved through a stronger partnership with alumni. This could also be important from a financial and reputational point of view, helping the institution to generate other revenue and increase its visibility among external stakeholders.

As is the case with many other European universities, the team formed a general perception that the relationship with the outside community could still be improved. Many existing collaborations seem to be the result of individual ad-hoc initiatives, often taking place outside the institutional channels. Although this is often a privileged vehicle in the development of interactions, the experience of many institutions indicates that it is not necessarily the most adequate for an institution that wants to regard this dimension of service to society as an important part of its activities. If UEB wishes to regard the development of the so-called third mission as a major part of its mission, it needs to make a stronger institutional commitment to those activities that can encourage, help, and sustain individual and institutionally-led initiatives.

Main recommendations:

1. According to the team, UEB should sustain the level of engagement with external stakeholders and focus on the fields that are stronger and more distinctive to its profile. Particular attention should be given to the Alumni Association in this respect.
2. UEB should explore those relationships to support applied research and consider the possibility of cross-subsidisation between consultancy and applied research.
3. UEB could also explore possible opportunities in lifelong learning as a way to generate revenue and increase the visibility of the university.



6. Quality culture

In recent years, quality has become a growing concern in higher education for policy makers and institutions. This has led to a rise in quality assurance mechanisms that aim both at self-improvement and accountability purposes. In many countries, regulators have placed increasing demands on universities regarding quality issues and the need to make their daily commitment to permanent quality improvement more explicit. Therefore, one of the major aims of the IEP process is to help institutions to develop a stronger quality culture.

In the case of Romania there is the perception among universities that more attention is being paid to quality enhancement. In the case of UEB, the team thinks that the university has been developing some institutional awareness about quality and accreditation. This has been fostered by previous national experiences with accreditation and quality assessment processes.

The team formed the impression that the existing QA system at UEB seems to be mostly driven towards external and accountability purposes. This may be partly explained by the fact that the experience of the university has been mainly related to national processes of accreditation and inspections and enhanced by a context of mistrust between regulators and the private sector. Regardless of the explanatory factors, the team considered that there is limited emphasis on self-evaluation and QA as a tool for institutional improvement.

One of the first steps for an institution to develop an effective quality system is to know what is happening and how it is happening. UEB has been developing its capacity to document its activities and the current evaluation process may have provided an important stimulus in this respect. In general, the main pieces of information were available and with sufficient level of detail. This is certainly an important step in building a quality culture and needs to be deepened and refined.

The growing prominence of debates on quality in higher education policy has led universities to document their activities more effectively and in greater detail, though it has not necessarily stimulated significant analysis of the data produced. Nevertheless, it is less clear to what extent this influences strategic and management decisions at UEB. The team identified some gaps in the translation of a strategic vision into more operational steps. This is a pervasive problem faced by many universities, due to the fact that governments and national agencies ask for intensive efforts to collect extensive data and stimulate an accountability attitude rather than an improvement one. Hence, data is used to a limited extent in supporting and framing internal decision-making and the definition of priorities.



Another important aspect regarding the development of a quality culture refers to the way quality issues pervade the different activities of the university. Rather than the fulfilment of certain rules and requirements, quality assurance is expected to infuse the attitudes of the different actors. The team thinks it is very important that UEB re-evaluates the adequacy and effectiveness of some of its current mechanisms of quality assessment in order to make its role more effective and visible across the university.

One of the most relevant dimensions of quality enhancement refers to the teaching mission, which is particularly valued by UEB. The team noticed that pedagogical training and other staff development tools do not seem to be available in the university. Therefore, those interested often need to go elsewhere and fund themselves. Despite the existing limitations, this is an area that could benefit from greater attention from the university's leadership by making those opportunities more available to those staff members interested in enhancing their professional skills. This should favour a soft approach rather than the pursuit of an administrative obligation or imposition.

The development of a quality culture aims at gathering feedback from multiple stakeholders and improving their perceptions about the university. This is an important development in moving from a paradigm of quality development focused on public accountability to quality development as a multidimensional tool to monitor and improve the relationship between the university and its multiple internal and external communities. The team identified efforts in collecting feedback from external stakeholders such as employers and alumni and encourages UEB to pursue further these activities. However, the team also observed a limited involvement of students as active partners in QA.

Overall, the team considers that the university has developed several aspects contributing toward a quality system that may assess and enhance all its various missions. Relevant steps have been taken in this regard, though there is large room for improvement. The university faces significant obstacles, not the least given the impact of financial limitations to staff numbers (academic and non-academic). Nevertheless, the size, the cohesiveness, and the atmosphere prevailing at UEB creates a favourable environment for the university to explore the possibilities of seeing quality assessment less as a mechanism of public accountability and more as an instrument of self-improvement to enhance the university's commitment to education, research, and service to society.



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Main recommendations:

1. The team recommends that UEB's organisational culture should be less determined by external controls and more focused on strengthening institutional choices and objectives.
2. The QA system at UEB should not be restricted to the fulfilment of administrative duties, but needs to use the information collected in a way that may support UEB's strategic priorities.
3. The university should reflect on the costs and benefits of its current QA procedures.
4. The team also recommends that UEB's institutional culture should combine not only sanctions but also rewards and incentives and that the management of human resources should give particular attention to ways of exploring the potential of staffs' capabilities.



7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is one issue that has attained increasing visibility among European universities' strategic priorities. Many institutions have been striving to attain greater internationalisation through training and research activities. The current trends in higher education clearly underline this necessity and the move towards a more integrated higher education framework in Europe is only a more visible development of a broader and deeper trend. Hence, growing mobility among students and staff is likely to become a central issue for many universities, especially within the European Higher Education Area.

UEB has been trying to develop some activities related to internationalisation, especially regarding teaching, and the team identified a willingness to strengthen the internationalisation dimension in several of the activities of the university. The university has been trying to expand its educational offer in foreign languages (e.g. some modules or courses), namely as a mechanism to overcome the language barrier for foreign students. The university has also started to reflect on possible internationalisation developments such as foreign language programmes. Nevertheless, most of the developments are recent and still in an early phase.

In general, the team identified a limited exploration of the current possibilities of internationalisation for the university. The participation of students in internationalisation activities, especially in Erasmus mobility, is very limited and recent. This has been hindered both by financial issues and by limited programme and curricular flexibility. Although the university has a limited capacity to address the former, it certainly can do more regarding the latter issues. The team also observed a very limited internationalisation of staff and research activities and thinks that the university should develop strong efforts to improve that situation significantly.

Internationalisation should not merely be the result of individual initiatives; it needs a significant institutional engagement to support and promote internationalisation activities more deeply in making internationalisation a strategic objective. In the case of UEB, there is a recently established internationalisation office. The team identified a lot of enthusiasm and goodwill in this office, but with limited institutional support. Concurrent to this, the team could not identify a strategy regarding internationalisation. Despite the difficulties and financial and organisational limitations, UEB has the capacity to make internationalisation an important dimension of its institutional life and several of the recent steps in that direction should encourage the university to move decisively along that route.



Main recommendations:

1. According to the team, UEB should develop a clear strategy for internationalisation, including particular attention to the promotion of the university.
2. UEB should also cultivate a much greater institutional commitment to internationalisation and devote much greater attention to teaching in foreign languages (especially English), which is important for attracting incoming students and for the internationalisation of its teaching activities.
3. The team also considers that UEB should be more proactive in promoting incoming and outgoing Erasmus mobility, develop a more effective support structure to attract more foreign students, and consider giving greater support to the internationalisation of the academic staff in teaching and research activities.



Conclusion

The team considers that UEB faces a very complex context that poses serious threats to its viability and sustainability. Hence, the university needs to change and has shown a willingness to change.

The observations and recommendations of the IEP team, presented in this report, were devised in order to help and support UEB in this process. Many of these changes will require significant rethinking of the university and additional investment.

In this challenging situation, the team encourages UEB to dare and take risks in order to attain a more solid and sustainable situation.

Major recommendations:

Governance and decision-making:

1. The university should explore its vision in a more consistent manner and its implications for the teaching portfolio, the type and intensity of research, the student and staff profiles, the relationship with external stakeholders.
2. UEB should spell out more clearly an institutional strategy regarding its positioning and its specificity in Romanian HE.
3. According to the team, UEB should emphasize more trust and decentralisation in the way it approaches internal decision-making, exploring ways of simplifying its organisational structure in order to be more efficient and effective.
4. UEB should think ahead and be more proactive in its relationship with the external context.

Teaching and learning:

5. According to the team, UEB should strengthen and maintain good teaching and levels of commitment among the teaching staff.
6. UEB should think on how to become more competitive to attract more and better students and consider ways to motivate students to be more critical and proactive.



7. UEB should make additional investments on supporting facilities in order to strengthen a good learning environment.

Research and doctoral education:

8. According to the team, UEB should strengthen the research activities in a way that is adjusted to the university's experience and potential in research, namely by focusing on applied research that is linked to its profile.
9. UEB should consider the establishment of a single interdisciplinary research centre to promote greater collaboration and stronger proposals, and develop institutional capacity to support the preparation of successful research applications.
10. Regarding doctoral education, UEB should, on the one hand, consider the possibility of having one doctoral school for the whole university that may combine and strengthen the early development of this type of programme and, on the other hand, rethink and strengthen its academic staff, in order to be successful in developing research and doctoral education.

Service to society:

11. According to the team, UEB should sustain the level of engagement with external stakeholders and focus on fields that are stronger and more distinctive to its profile. Particular attention should be given to the Alumni Association in this respect.
12. UEB should explore those relationships to support applied research and consider the possibility of cross-subsidisation between consultancy and applied research.
13. UEB could also explore possible opportunities in lifelong learning as a way to generate revenue and increase the visibility of the university.

Quality Culture

14. The team recommends that UEB's organisational culture should be less determined by external controls and more focused on strengthening institutional choices and objectives.
15. The QA system at UEB should not be restricted to the fulfilment of administrative duties, but needs to use the information collected in a way that may support UEB's strategic priorities.
16. The university should reflect on the costs and benefits of its current QA procedures.
17. The team also recommends that at UEB the institutional culture should combine not only sanctions but also rewards and incentives and that the management of human



resources should give particular attention to ways of exploring the potential of staffs' capabilities.

Internationalisation

18. According to the team, UEB should develop a clear strategy for internationalisation, including particular attention to the promotion of the university.
19. UEB should also cultivate a much greater institutional commitment to internationalisation and devote much greater attention to teaching in foreign languages (especially English), which is important for attracting incoming students and for the internationalisation of its teaching activities.
20. The team also considers that UEB should be more proactive in promoting incoming and outgoing Erasmus mobility, develop a more effective support structure to attract more foreign students, and consider giving greater support to the internationalisation of the academic staff in teaching and research activities.