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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

University Petru Maior (UPM) in Tîrgu Mureș

EVALUATION REPORT

August 2014

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Calitate și diversitate
a universităților din România





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University Petru Maior in Tîrgu Mureș. The evaluation took place in 2014 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:



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- 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. “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu Mureș’ profile

The “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu Mureș (hereinafter UPM) is a public university located in the city of Tîrgu Mureș, the seat of Mureș County in the northern-central part of Romania. Named after the important regional scholar Petru Maior (1760-1821), the university is firmly embedded in its community and is recognised as one of the most important providers of professional graduates by the local labour market. “Being a university for the community” seems to be a well-regarded motto for the university, yet strengthening the university’s internationalisation efforts or making it a bigger national player (see chapter two on the current strategic aims) will affect the current profile very strongly.

Structurally, the university consists of three faculties: the Faculty of Engineering with two departments, the Faculty of Science and Letters with three departments and the Faculty of Economics, Law and Administrative Sciences, also with three departments. An additional Teacher Training Department provides pedagogical training for future teachers across the faculties. The institution offers a variety of undergraduate and graduate programmes. In the academic year 2013/2014 UPM is offering an overall portfolio of 23 Bachelor degree programmes (of which five are part time) and 20 Master degree Programmes (of which one is part-time). Doctoral studies are organised via the so-called Institution Organiser of PhD Studies (IOSUD). UPM’s doctoral school was established in 2007, yet so far only offers one doctoral programme in Romanian literature.

According to the self-evaluation report (p. 4), UPM’s total staff amounts to 296 employees: 145 full academic staff, 14 external lecturers, 86 auxiliary staff (e.g. teaching assistants) and 51 non-academic staff. The total number of students amounts to 3 609 students, of which almost 90% are enrolled at the Bachelor level. With a share of 1 754 students, the Faculty of Economics, Law and Administrative Sciences covers almost half of the study places in total.

A new education law was passed in 2011. The law introduced several important changes to the organisation of the universities. The current university charter dates from 6 September 2011.

1.3 The evaluation team

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



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- Prof. Dr Christina Ullenius, former Rector, Karlstad University, Sweden – team chair
- Prof. Dr Johan Cloet, former Vice-President, Thomas More University College, Belgium
- Prof. Dr Rainer Leisten, former Vice-Rector for Education of University, Duisburg-Essen, Germany
- Mr Mateusz Celmer, student, Wrocław University of Technology, Poland
- Dr Oliver Vettori, Director Programme Management and Quality Management, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria – team coordinator

The review team is most grateful for the hospitality shown by the university, as well as for the open and trusting atmosphere, which they experienced throughout the two visits. All the interviewees were very forthcoming with the information the team was seeking and the visits were very well and efficiently organised. The team was particularly impressed by the level of language proficiency shown by all the participants in the interview sessions, be it staff or students, and by the dedication and loyalty of UPM's members for their university. The review team would especially like to thank the Rector, Prof. Dr Calin Enachescu, for his great support and the Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and International Relations, Prof. Dr Liviu Moldovan who has done a very commendable job as liaison for the IEP team.

1.4 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group assigned by UPM's rector and followed very closely the IEP guidelines for institutions. The self-evaluation group consisted of ten members:

- Prof. Liviu Moldovan, Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and International Relations and main coordinator of the evaluation as well as IEP liaison for UPM
- Prof. Tatiana Danescu, Vice-Rector for Didactic Activities
- Assoc. Prof. Micea Dulau, Director of the Quality Assurance Office
- Prof. Alexandru Morar, Faculty of Engineering
- Lector Giordano Altarozzi, Faculty of Sciences and Letters
- Assoc. Prof. Szabo Zuzsana, Faculty of Economics, Law and Administrative Sciences
- Eng. Radu Boarescu, General Administrative Director
- Irina Birsan, representative of the university's registrar
- Andreea Sancelean, PhD student and member of the student league
- Nicolae-Marius Culda, student and president of the student league

All ten members were also present for the self-evaluation group meeting during the first site visit.

The institution submitted the self-evaluation report and about a dozen annexes in December 2013. The two site visits took place on 24-26 February and 14-17 April, respectively. The IEP evaluation team found the report to be very well structured and informative. Nevertheless,



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there were several additional documents, which the team requested between the two visits (e.g. a detailed operational plan, examples of the curricula documents and the syllabi or a copy of the contract between the rector and the Senate). Overall, the university was very forthcoming with any kind of information, and all documents were uploaded on the evaluation platform in a timely manner.

The report was prepared by the self-evaluation group and was published on UPM's website and therefore available to every member of the institution. Nevertheless and even though most of the university representatives whom the team had met during the visits were aware of the existence of the report, it apparently had not been read by all of them. In addition, although the report is quite analytical and contains a SWOT analysis of the university's most important areas of activities, the review team observed a certain lack of awareness when it comes to the challenges the university is currently facing and has to face in the near future. Some associated recommendations can be found in chapter 6 of this report (quality culture).

During the two visits, the team met almost a hundred members of the university, including the entire senior management, representatives from the Senate, teachers and students from all three faculties, graduates, administrative staff as well as representatives from the regional labour market and the university's stakeholder council. The team was impressed by the high level of satisfaction expressed by each university member and stakeholder regarding the university.



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2. Governance and institutional decision making

2.1 Vision, mission and strategic planning

The IEP methodology uses the university's vision and mission as starting points in reviewing what the university is trying to do. UPM has delineated and described several elements of its vision and mission in the self-evaluation report (page 4 f). In terms of the vision, the university is proud of its motto to act as "a university for the community" yet also strives for a role of stronger national and even international significance. The team felt that it is necessary to carefully balance these different orientations and to develop UPM's profile in a more specific way. Overall, the vision and mission statements of UPM are clearly stated, yet also very general and unable to help form a distinctive profile for UPM. In this regard, the team particularly **recommends specifying UPM's profile in a way that makes the various contributions to the region visible**, e.g. by dedicating some space in its strategic documents, where the motto "a university for the community" is further operationalised and where it is shown how the motto is translated into practice. Thereby, UPM's strategic profile could help the university to become an even stronger driving force for the development of its region without compromising its broader profile as an internationally oriented academic institution.

It seems a sensible starting point to begin with a thorough scan of the environmental conditions of the university and the future challenges that arise from it. Overall, the university is facing hard and turbulent times, because the legal changes are putting more responsibilities on the university, but also because of demographic changes and the dependency on government funding. The current Romanian law on higher education can certainly be regarded as an important contextual factor, and governmental control seems to be a serious constraint when it comes to university organisation, the educational profile, the management of the institution's human resources as well as the university expenditures. However, even though the rather unstable legal and political environment seems to make long-term planning more difficult, **the review team strongly advises UPM to adopt strategic instruments of risk assessment and environmental analysis and then revisit the institution's vision and mission statements as well as the strategic plan for the next four to five years**. There certainly are important "degrees of freedom" within the present legal and political framework and by taking a more proactive and strategic role (i.e. putting less focus on the uncertainties and apparent restrictions), UPM could well benefit from it.

The strategic plan for 2013 – 2016 identifies a set of strategic goals for the university. However, the goals themselves seem to be directly derived from the "election programme" of the current rector and do not really set the stage for the current and mid-term developments. The team observed an interesting paradox: on the one hand, the actual strategic plan is not providing the university with clear directions but, on the other hand, the management team is pursuing several strategic aims (e.g. forming a consortium with the University of Medicine and Pharmacy; forming strategic alliances with international universities in the form of joint



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degree programmes), which are only to a very small degree represented in the strategic plan. **Thus, it is recommended to make the implicit objectives and strategic considerations more explicit and then to revisit and update the current strategic plan by formulating a concise strategy with clear priorities and measurable outcomes as well as a link to budgetary planning.** This strategic plan should then be translated into an equally concise and measurable operational plan.

Among all the strategic options currently discussed, the idea of close cooperation with the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tirgu Mures in the form of a consortium with a possible merger seems to be one of the most important steps for UPM in the years to come. At the time of writing this report, UPM and the University of Medicine and Pharmacy have already signed a first contract and set up the basic consortium structure. It is, however, unclear, which opportunities and threats might arise from such a plan: this should be evaluated more closely. **As a first step, it seems sensible to identify criteria for determining if the consortium will be successful** (e.g. at the end of each milestone but also as an on-going monitoring process). **Secondly, the most important risk factors (short term, midterm, long term) on the way towards a potential merger with UMF should be identified, leading to a concrete action plan in order to address the risks and opportunities.** Overall, the process of a merger and the need for a clear strategy should not be underestimated as can be seen from dozens of recent examples across Europe. Drawing on the experiences and expertise of their peers from other European institutions, **UPM is thus also advised to establish a strategic advisory and coaching group including international peers, for accompanying the potential merging process.** Last but not least, it seems sensible to think about additional strategic partnerships with other institutions in the region or abroad.

2.2 Decision-making processes

The positive communication climate at UPM is something the team wants to commend very strongly. By negotiating and discussing most issues on various levels, the university achieves a high level of participation and decisions are well accepted. There is an observable sense of “belonging”, and even the external stakeholders show a high degree of commitment and active involvement. UPM is characterised by a structure and culture of shared responsibilities and strong bottom-up decision-making processes.

However, such a system can also be very time consuming (particularly if every minor investment needs to be negotiated) and potentially inflexible. In addition, many important decisions are taken (or at least “pre-determined”) on the departmental level, making it harder to move in a direction that will be beneficial for the university as a whole, but not necessarily for every single department. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that the three faculties noticeably differ in size and student numbers. The evaluation team therefore suggests **to reconsider the balance between top-down and bottom-up decision making** (but without damaging the climate of mutual trust and constructive dialogue that appears to be



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one of the key strengths of UPM's institutional culture) and **to carefully move towards a system with accountable individuals in order to respond to the increasing dynamics and complexity of the institution and its environment.**

Yet in order to make this work it might also be necessary to redefine the role of UPM's senior management and to refocus the function of the Administrative Council: the processes in the present governance and management system are very time-consuming and the senior managers seem preoccupied with a variety of tasks and operational issues as is evidenced by the weekly agendas of the Administrative Council as well as the annual operational plans which appear as very detailed operative task lists. **The evaluation team thus recommends further minimising the number of operational issues discussed in the Administrative Council in order to make time for the considerable strategic challenges the university is going to face in the near future.**

The senior management team itself seems very dedicated and motivated but is significantly overburdened with their multiple duties and roles (including the roles of teachers and researchers). **The team thus recommends relieving the senior management of their teaching obligations or at least reducing them significantly.**

Students in general are satisfied with the way they are treated in the decision-making process. UPM seems to have a culture of active dialogue between students and the administration, the teachers and the university management: all issues can be brought up and negotiated. Students are represented in all decision-making bodies and express their satisfaction with the institutionalised as well as the informal feedback channels. However, the students seem to abstain from decisions which they perceive are not affecting them directly; in this regard, their role seems to be a rather passive one. In the view of the evaluation team, this could be changed **by providing student representatives with more effective training in order to fulfil their role in the university's decision-making bodies.** Another option would be to support them via an institutional mentor that introduces them to the procedures and underlying logics of higher education institutions. Examples of such practices could be provided by the European Students' Union (ESU), which could also assist with the trainings.

Last but not least, some structures and processes required by the law seem to not fit a university of UPM's size and profile, which results in a potential overburdening of the institution with commissions, centres and working groups and leads to a slightly over bureaucratic and crowded organisation as visualised in the organisation chart. This can hardly be resolved by UPM on its own, yet seems worth mentioning as a relevant contextual factor. However, UPM could benefit from using any freedom provided by the law to simplify its organisation, cf. chapter 1.2.

2.3 Finances and resources



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The self-evaluation report presented only some limited data on the financial situation of the university. However, upon request, the team was provided with some additional data, most notably the overall budget and expenditures plans for the institution as well as for the faculties. The most important source of income comes from the government as compensation for the students that are enrolled at UPM. As a result, the income is mostly regarded as the income of a department/faculty based on their student numbers, which can be problematic considering the faculties' different size and profile. Money does not seem to be a severe problem yet – but recently declining budgets are already a sign of a move in that direction. In addition, risk assessment is poor, although operative accounting and controlling instruments are in place. Associated with the recommendation of updating and refocusing the university's strategy plan, the evaluation team thus advises UPM to **adopt instruments for midterm and long-term risk assessment, risk management and financial planning**. Risk management plays an increasingly important role across Europe and many institutions have started to develop or implement these instruments.

In general, there is a high level of transparency when it comes to financial matters, mirroring the participative bottom-up decision-making culture as described above. There are clear and transparent rules for spending the budget, but they are rather technical and operational. Hence, as the major part of the institution's financial resources are allocated at the faculty level (or allotted to the departments), it seems sensible **to develop general strategic priorities and guidelines for the faculties to create their budgets**.

The overall infrastructure seems to be in good shape and the quality management processes for the maintenance of the infrastructure deserve a particular commendation. However, governmental control seems to be a serious constraint when it comes to university expenditures and human resources. The disparity between the university autonomy to earn funds and its autonomy to spend it in the way that best serves the university points to the need for decreasing governmental control for the latter.

Nevertheless, the university could pay a bit more attention to its strategically most important resource: investing at UPM seems to be mostly understood as investing in infrastructure. But the most important "capital" of a higher education institution is its staff, particularly its academic staff. Recruitment of new professors or hiring senior staff is a matter of long-lasting impact on the institution's academic profile. Currently the human resource management seems to be rather short term and hiring depends greatly on departmental interests, which will only partially mirror long-term institutional interests. The evaluation team **therefore recommends linking more closely the hiring of professors and the creation of new senior staff positions to the strategic plan and to put greater emphasis on the initiatives and activities for staff development**.



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3. Teaching and Learning

Teaching plays an important role at UPM. The university has implemented many structural elements according to the Bologna Process. By now all study programmes follow the three-cycle Bologna structure and although contact hours still appear to be the dominant “currency” when it comes to calculating teaching and learning, all programmes and courses seem to follow the logic of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The team requested some example of syllabi and found them all to be comprehensive and informative.

The way the learning activities of the students were structured and described were particularly impressive – although some students complained about course scheduling, which leaves some uncomfortable gaps and is challenging for students who do not live nearby. Overall, however, students expressed their high level of satisfaction with the teachers and the study programmes; this was also mirrored by the feedback of the alumni and the stakeholder representatives, i.e. prospective employers from the public and private sector.

There is, however, also some room for improvement: when it comes to the structuring of the programmes (e.g. modularisation of the curricula), UPM still seems to be at the beginning of the process. The evaluation team thus encourages the university to **continue the implementation of the Bologna principles with renewed enthusiasm, focusing on modularisation and student-centred learning**. Based on the views of the external stakeholders and alumni, the curriculum committees are also encouraged to further **integrate training on generic competences such as team working skills, leadership skills or entrepreneurial competences**.

Teachers seem to care about the learners and are continuously asking students about what they need, how they want to learn etc. This is a visible sign of an active feedback culture where students are taken seriously. Yet the teaching principles seem to be rather implicit; it is left to individual teachers what they understand by student-centred learning and how this should be translated into teaching practice. Even though the university collects a great deal of data from different surveys and sources, there is little information on learning or teaching effectiveness and on how the university ensures common standards. Consequently, the team recommends **developing a shared pedagogical and didactical framework in the form of a shared teaching and learning strategy, which would also defines some main parameters for staff development in teaching**.

Such a teaching and learning strategy could also provide important impulses for the development of the university’s assessment regime. The assessment of students’ learning is one of the most important levers for ensuring learning effectiveness and is a pivotal didactical element in each curriculum and course. At UPM, the dominant assessment form seems to be an end of semester exam (written or oral) as indicated by the structural importance of the



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examination weeks within each curriculum. Whereas such exams are ideal for assessing certain competences, they might not be suitable for assessing more generic skills. They also foster a type of learning that is very test-oriented, limiting the transferability of the students' learning experiences.

Therefore, the evaluation team advises the university **to increase the share of alternative assessment forms and to strengthen the fit between learning outcomes and student assessment.** Forms of formative assessment with regular feedback mechanisms might be a particularly effective way, although this will likely put some severe demands on the teachers who already have a relatively high teaching workload.

Overall, a lot of feedback and data are being collected on various levels (course level, department level, faculty level) and from various perspectives (students, graduates, employers), but it is still unclear how the data are used and if any real changes can be made on the basis of the feedback, especially when considering that actual changes are often enough impeded by external influences (e.g. demands by the quality assurance agency) and have to be negotiated down to the level of the departments. This raises the question about the cost-benefit ratio of the current quality assurance system (see also the recommendations in the quality culture section) and indicates **the need for evaluation approaches to be adapted to correspond to the different pedagogical formats and philosophies** that can be found at UPM.

When it comes to student infrastructure and student services, UPM seems very much up to date and the students clearly voice their satisfaction. Students in the later stages of their studies are apparently well supported by the International Office and the Centre for Career Counselling and Guidance. However, the instruments and approaches to institutional communication could be revisited: students need a great deal of information that is tailored to their needs. Beginning students in particular are in need of orientation and of being informed about student services, international opportunities or extracurricular activities. In the sessions with the students and graduates, the IEP team got the impression that the university **still needs to work on its information channels and on the way information is presented and made available for new and prospective students.** This is not a matter of transparency: the university is very keen to be transparent about its procedures and processes. But all too often academics and administrators alike tend to forget that communication does not always follow a simple sender-receiver model and that information is only valuable if it is obtained and understood by its addressees.

Additionally, the team felt **that the development of a bridging or orientation programme for beginning students in their first few weeks of studies could be an effective addition to the university's student services.** This also corresponds to some concerns voiced by the department heads that were interviewed by the evaluation team. Even though the department heads in general stated that they were fairly satisfied with the quality of their



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incoming students, there are still some competences and skills needed in the first year of studies, which are not always acquired in secondary school. Establishing courses to bridge the gap between what the incoming students bring with them and what the university needs might be one option to address this problem. So are mentoring and counselling services that focus particularly on first-year students.



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4. Research

Research is regarded as an important priority at UPM, which the university staff seems to be well aware of, and there are a lot of activities (e.g. hosting international conferences, which the university is actively pursuing; supporting PhD students and young researchers) where this priority is translated into practice. However, the internal SWOT analysis at UPM has also uncovered a number of problems that need to be addressed, most notably the low participation in international research cooperation and contracts, the improvable number of international publications, the still rather low degree of student involvement in research as well as the lack of impact on technological development in the region (cf. SER p. 14). This weighs even more because UPM selected as the success indicators for its research activities visibility, impact on technological development and student participation (ibid.). Consequently, in the view of the evaluation team, it is advisable to revisit the research strategy. By **developing a research profile that is aligned with its institutional profile**, UPM might not only be able to expand its success indicators (i.e. when it comes to the impact on the local and regional community) but could also identify additional research niches. The team acknowledges that striking a balance between aiming for becoming more visible on an international level and contributing to the development of the region's industry and service sector can be challenging. However, this makes the strategic choice of those research areas where the university can make a difference and which can also be connected to the most recent academic discourse in a given field all the more important. Overall, the good collaborations with regional corporate partners would offer a lot of opportunities for applied research; this potential reservoir seems to be exploited yet.

As a next step, the team **recommends preparing a university-wide research policy with clear and sustainable priorities and clear goals for the next three to five years**. Priority research areas currently seem to be established very much on a year-on-year basis, but investment in research usually takes considerable time before results are shown. Consequently, the publications planned for the year 2014 (as defined in the operational plan) are rather the output of efforts that were made in the years before that and not really a suitable "goal" for the next year. By taking a longer term perspective, the strengthening of UPM's research efforts could not only be made more effective but also more sustainable.

Structurally, research is mainly organised in the university's research centres, with the Scientific Council functioning as the body that prepares decisions for the Administrative Council. The process for establishing a new research centre (apart from the accreditation issue) remains still a little vague to the evaluation team. As many other processes in the university, it seems to follow the logic of a counter current process, though with a strong bottom-up orientation. Considering the important role of the research centres, it is important to build on the existing strengths of the departments with which the centres appear to be closely aligned, yet it seems also necessary to make the centres an integrated part of the



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overall research strategy. In order to keep the balance in this area and to fully realise the potential of the various centres, the team suggests **developing multi-year plans for each research centre that correspond to the overall research strategy and to update them regularly.**

When it comes to supporting young researchers, the university has launched some effective and commendable initiatives as mentioned above. There is a clear awareness that young researchers have to be carefully prepared for their careers and there are grants available in order to support them to conduct smaller research projects in the context of their PhD work. Considering that this support appears to be quite stimulating, it might be a good idea **to expand this programme also for post-docs and make internal grants available for small-scale projects.** The University of Medicine and Pharmacy with which the university wants to enter into a consortium structure might be able to help UPM to set up such a system, as it has a great deal of experience in this regard, making cooperation in research one of the most obvious areas to start from.

The focus on young researchers finally leads us to UPM's education at the doctoral level. The university currently offers one accredited PhD field in Romanian literature, which is managed by the doctoral school. Doctoral studies are planned for a period of three academic years, including a basic training programme that is the same for all doctoral students and individual research programme under the supervision of the doctoral supervisor. Very much in line with the university's community orientation, several doctoral students also teach at the local high schools – a fact that the team wants to particularly emphasise. UPM plans to offer at least three more doctoral programmes in a variety of disciplinary fields in the near future and the evaluation teams sees this strategic choice as a very important step forward to progress the university's research ambitions and to strengthen its educational profile. However, in order to avoid the pitfall of particularism and to make the doctoral schools an important pillar of UPM's overall research activities, the evaluation team advises UPM to **facilitate open structures for interdisciplinary work in the research centres and doctoral schools and encourage cross-faculty and cross-departmental cooperation (as well as cross-institutional cooperation within and outside of the consortium).** Bearing in mind that many of the most successful and promising research areas nowadays are of an interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary character, fostering of joint research projects could prove to be a vital step towards UPM's vision of becoming more visible on an international level.



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5. Service to society

Following its motto of being “a university for the community” the university is very well connected with the surrounding community. In the words of the university itself, “UPM is well aware that, as (a) public university, it is the beneficiary of societal investments and is expected to contribute to the welfare of (...) the society” (SER p. 8). There are relations to regional partners on various levels and with various functions, e.g. research cooperation, consultations or by involving external stakeholders in the future development of the university in form of a “stakeholder council” that advises UPM. In addition, UPM is also working together with a considerable number of political entities and decision-makers in a joint effort to develop Mureș County and Tîrgu Mureș in an economically and socially sustainable manner. Important collaborators include Tîrgu Mureș City Hall, the Mureș County Council, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the County School Inspectorate (cf. SER p. 12).

In general, however, the idea of “service to society” is almost exclusively translated into catering to the needs of the labour market. Admittedly, this has some big advantages: labour market representatives seem to be very satisfied with the students and, at least during the evaluation visits, made almost no suggestions of what could be improved. Most students seem to be ready to work once they leave the university. Students come from the community and stay in the community. Consequently, companies benefit from this as their employees stay longer with them than they would otherwise. This clear orientation towards the labour market is even mirrored in the work of the Centre for continuous education which focuses almost entirely on a graduate mindset sought after by the region’s companies.

However, the evaluation team wishes to point out that the university’s motto “a university for the community” seems to indicate a much broader mission than just educating professionals. Universities are also important drivers of societal change and the economy is only part of the overall society the institutions are obliged to serve. Thus, the team suggests that the development of competences and mindsets such as citizenship or civic engagement should not be left to associated organisations like the student associations as indicated in the SER (cf. p. 9): rather, it is advisable to make such dimensions an integrated part of the university’s curricular and extra-curricular educational offers and to **further extend the competence of students to include the broader concept of employability, including the education of responsible, ecologically and socially conscious citizens.**

Teachers have an important function, not only as educators but also as institutional “ambassadors” and opinion leaders in various fields. UPM’s department for teacher education has a clear mission to contribute to secondary school teachers’ training. Expanding the target groups of their educational offers by establishing new programmes for primary school and kindergarten teachers seems to be of mutual benefit for the university (who



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approach new reservoirs of potential students) as well as for the region who get more and better trained educators, especially in the more rural areas. The evaluation team thus commends UPM's vision in this area and suggests **moving forward with its plan to offer educational programmes for primary school and kindergarten teachers, by drawing up a concrete operational plan for the next four years** in order to make this vision a reality.



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6. Quality culture

Developing a culture of quality that informs and supports the core processes of a higher education institution is a difficult and demanding task as it does not only require the implementation of formal and analytical processes but has to engage the institution's community as a whole and appeal to the values that inspire this community for further improvements. At UPM, dedicating time and efforts for quality assurance has started very early compared to most other Romanian institutions, with the effect that UPM has established a very mature and well-developed formal system in the past fourteen years. One of the main drivers of this process is the current Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and International Relations whose teaching and research specialisations are related to quality management, albeit in the industry sector.

Overall, UPM's quality assurance concept is shaped by three important factors. The national education law sets some important structural conditions (such as the establishment of a department of quality assurance or the establishment of so-called Quality Assurance and Evaluation Committees) and the current quality assurance system in the Romanian higher education sector is strongly based on the external evaluations and accreditations of programmes and institutions that are carried out by ARACIS (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and other agencies (such as the IEP evaluations this report stems from). The activities of these bodies and legally required processes are time-intensive, as is mentioned in the SER (p. 18) and can quickly run into the danger of becoming an overly bureaucratic exercise.

The second important influence on the internal quality management system has been the EN ISO 9001:2001 standard (later to be replaced by the ISO 9001:2008 standard), resulting in a very systematic approach to quality that involves multiple roles, recurring processes and an excellent documentation system. The overall framework, the process definitions and the responsibilities are further laid out in the university's quality policy and quality handbook documents. One of the most relevant elements of the system is a combination of internal audits, which are conducted periodically and lead to improvement plans for various units and processes and an institutional internal assessment process which is conducted by the Quality Accreditation and Evaluation Council on an annual basis, resulting in an annual and public quality self-evaluation report.

In general, the evaluation team found lots of signs of an already existing and very well functioning quality culture at UPM that might just tend a bit much to the rather formalistic and mechanical side of quality assurance. The system seems to be well accepted by the institutional community and the sheer volume of data that is collected through a great variety of instruments (student evaluations, graduate surveys, internal evaluation meetings, records of scientific publications etc.) is impressive. However, the evaluation team questions the cost-benefit ratio of the entire system. Thus, during the interviews it did not become clear how all the data are actually used (or if they are even useful for the intended function, considering



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that most survey-generated data can only provide hints of potential problems) or if the frequency of the various evaluation exercises is fully justified by the quantity and quality of improvement areas that emerge from them. As all such activities are, in addition, very time-consuming, the team recommends conducting a kind of “meta-evaluation” and **re-evaluate the current quality assurance processes in terms of their usability and impact**. One option for changing the system towards even more effectiveness and efficiency could be to decrease the number of the internal evaluation cycles and to put stronger emphasis on the follow-up phases instead.

In addition, the quality management system could also be more closely connected to the current strategy development process in two ways: during their visits, the evaluation team got the impression that – with exception of graduate surveys and the stakeholder council – the quality management system is focusing very much on the internal side of the institution, which is strongly related to the process-orientation of the ISO logic. However, important contextual information such as the number of annual high school leavers in the region or the career development of the alumni in the first five to ten years after graduation seems not to be available or is not tracked at all. By **including environmental analyses and external monitoring instruments** in the university’s quality assurance repertoire, the institution could gain some necessary information to feed into its mid- and long-term risk assessment and strategic planning as suggested earlier in this report. In addition, the current “checking” phase of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Act-Check) cycle as implemented at **UPM could be strengthened by defining criteria for success and failure or suitable quality indicators even in the “planning” phase**. In other words, the definition and operationalisation of effective and “doable” strategic or operational goals is one part of an institutional quality management system that should not be underestimated.

Last but not least, in consideration of the fact that the European Standards and Guidelines are the third most important influence on UPM’s quality assurance system (albeit a little less obviously visible than the other two), the team sees some room for improvement that is linked to the lack of an overarching teaching and learning strategy as stated earlier in this report. The processes for developing and changing a curriculum seem rather complicated and involve various cycles of negotiation and debate in the university. Such a system can be an important element of quality assurance, but is not very suitable for flexible change. In addition, every new programme needs to be officially approved by ARACIS and rejection is not exactly a rarity. Intended to guarantee common standards, this can also be an obstacle for innovation, especially as the Vice-Rector for Didactic Activities does an excellent job in organising the curricula and taking care of all the technicalities (for meeting external standards) but is not in a position to impose strict demands on the departments and the individual teachers with regard to pedagogical principles and structural issues. The evaluation team thereby proposes to **strengthen the role of the Vice-Rector for Didactic Affairs with regard to defining common quality standards for teaching and curricula structures to be applied in the curriculum development process**.



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7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation seems to be very high on the university's strategic agenda. The vision to transform a primarily regionally oriented university into a national and even international institution – though in need of careful balancing as mentioned earlier in this report – is pursued via three strategic courses. First, UPM wants to further increase the level of mobility (students, academics and even administrative staff) through its participation in European programmes such as Tempus, Erasmus+, Minerva, Leonardo da Vinci or Jean Monnet. According to the SER (p. 9), the university currently has about 51 bilateral Erasmus agreements and several others within other frameworks. The evaluation team commends UPM's commitment to further invest in its international partnerships, yet also wants to point out that many higher education institutions have recently come to realise that effective international cooperation is not so much a matter of the quantity of the partner institutions, but of the quality of the relationship. Too high a number of partnerships is just not sustainable and thus does not create much added value. **The team thus recommends revisiting the university's internationalisation strategy in order to reduce the number of partner universities and to develop more strategic partnerships with those remaining.**

The second strategic option UPM is currently trying to expand is joint study programmes with other universities from abroad. Recent efforts include cooperation with universities in Italy, Turkey and the US, and the evaluation team indeed encourages UPM **to further pursue this strategic development of joint programmes, potentially even at doctoral level.** As a consequence, the university would need to develop and offer even more courses in English, but this seems to coincide with frequently voiced student demands and faculty plans anyway. And judging from the impressive level of language proficiency on the part of both staff and students the challenge should not be overly high.

Last but not least, the university strives for more visibility with regard to the scientific and research part of its mission. In the recent past, one of the main activities to achieve this goal is the effort to host international scientific events and conferences at UPM. So far, the university seems fairly satisfied with the increasing attractiveness of UPM for such events and has also established a unit that focuses on their organisation. However, the most effective and sustainable way to become an internationally more recognised player would be to increase the number of publications in a variety of international journals or books. The team's suggestions to raise the effectiveness of UPM's research efforts are contained in chapter 4 on research.



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8. Conclusion

UPM is characterised by a very communicative and participative culture based on mutual trust. There is an observable sense of “belonging” of all university members to an institution that they conceive as a “university for the community”. Even the external stakeholders show a high level of satisfaction and active involvement, and UPM appears very confident in mastering the challenges it will need to face in the coming years, not least on the way towards a possible merger or at least a very close association with the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Tîrgu Mureș.

Still, there are some “burning issues” within the institution and in the institution’s environment that need to be addressed in order to help UPM further develop its role as a driver for regional development and gain more importance on the national stage and greater visibility in the international higher education area. Among the most important factors to be considered are:

- A strong governmental control of university expenditures.
- The need to further develop UPM’s profile in the light of the upcoming consortium with the University of Medicine and Pharmacy and the institution’s international ambitions.
- The need to ensure long-term financial stability.
- The need for a more formal didactic framework and renewed focus on student-centred learning.
- The need to further increase research productivity and research impact.
- The need for a more favourable cost-benefit ratio in all processes related to quality assurance.
- The need to foster UPM’s participative organisational culture while making it more flexible and less prone to individual interests.

In this report, the team formulated a number of recommendations with regard to these improvement areas. The most important recommendations are:

With regard to governance and institutional decision-making:

- To specify UPM’s profile in a way that makes the various contributions to the region visible.



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- To adopt strategic instruments of risk assessment and environmental analysis and then revisit the institution's vision and mission statements as well as the strategic plan for the next four to five years.
- To make the implicit objectives and strategic considerations more explicit and then to revisit and update the current strategic plan in order to formulate a concise strategy with clear priorities and measurable outcomes as well as an explicit link to budgetary planning.
- To identify criteria for determining if the new consortium with the University of Medicine and Pharmacy (UMF) is successful.
- To identify the most important risk factors (short term, midterm, long term) on the way towards a potential merger with UMF, leading to a concrete action plan in order to address the risks and opportunities.
- To establish a strategic advisory and coaching group including international peers, for accompanying the potential merging process.
- To reconsider the balance between top-down and bottom-up decision-making processes.
- To carefully move towards a system with accountable individuals in order to respond to the increasing dynamics and complexity of the institution and its environment.
- To further minimise the number of operational issues discussed in the Administrative Council.
- To relieve the senior management of their teaching obligations or at least reduce them significantly.
- To provide student representatives with more effective training in order to fulfil their role in the university's decision-making bodies.
- To adopt instruments for midterm and long-term risk assessment, risk management and financial planning.
- To develop general strategic priorities and guidelines for the faculties to create their budgets.
- To link the hiring of professors and the creation of new senior staff positions to the strategic plan and to put greater emphasis on the initiatives and activities for staff development.



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With regard to teaching and learning:

- To continue the implementation of the Bologna principles with renewed enthusiasm, focusing on modularisation and student-centred learning.
- To integrate training on generic competences such as team working skills, leadership skills or entrepreneurial competences in the curricula.
- To develop a shared pedagogical and didactical framework in the form of a shared teaching and learning strategy.
- To increase the share of alternative assessment forms and to strengthen the fit between learning outcomes and student assessment.
- To adapt evaluation approaches to correspond to the different pedagogical formats and philosophies.
- To work on the information channels and on the way information is presented and made available for new and prospective students (e.g. also in the form of a bridging or orientation programme for new students).

With regard to research:

- To develop a research profile that is aligned with the institutional profile.
- To prepare a university-wide research policy with clear and sustainable priorities and clear goals for the next three to five years.
- To establish multi-year plans for each research centre that correspond to the overall research strategy and to update them regularly.
- To expand the internal support for doctoral students and post-docs and to make internal grants available for small-scale projects.
- To facilitate open structures for interdisciplinary work in the research centres and doctoral schools and encourage cross-faculty and cross-departmental cooperation (as well as cross-institutional cooperation within and outside of the consortium).

With regard to service to society:

- To further develop the competence profiles towards the broader concept of employability, including the education of responsible, ecologically and socially conscious citizens.
- To move forward with the plan to offer educational programmes for primary school and kindergarten teachers, by drawing up a concrete operational plan for the next four years.



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With regard to quality culture

- To re-evaluate the current quality assurance processes in terms of their usability and impact.
- To include environmental analyses and external monitoring instruments in the quality assurance method mix.
- To strengthen the role of the Vice-Rector for Didactic Affairs with regard to defining common quality standards for teaching and curricula structures to be applied in the curriculum development process.

With regard to internationalisation

- To revisit the university's internationalisation strategy in order to reduce the number of partner universities and to develop more strategic partnerships with those remaining.
- To further pursue the strategic development of joint programs, potentially even on the doctoral level.

Envoi

The team wishes to thank UPM once again for an intensive and fruitful evaluation experience and for the openness and hospitality shown during both evaluation visits. It was a pleasure to be in Tîrgu Mureș and to be offered the opportunity to discuss a great variety of relevant questions with the staff, students, graduates and external stakeholders of University Petru Maior.

Based on what the team has seen during the review process, the well-developed organisational culture at UPM will ensure that the members of the university engage themselves in the future course of the university and will try to give their best in bringing "their" institution forward. The university is very well organised on its various levels with clearly managed and documented processes and a committed management team. The evaluation team wishes to congratulate Rector Enachescu for his energetic leadership, which seems essential for UPM's successful future.