

Outwardly, it appeared that research had taken a significant dip in progress in the last two years if measured by the number of published research papers. It was explained that the growth of papers up to 2010 was linked to government grants, which required publications as part of the contract. These grants had been reduced significantly in the past two years. It was noted that the engineering faculty produced half of the research papers for the university and that overall, the university had had a very large number of PhD students in relation to the numbers of professors identified as supervisors. The numbers of new PhD entrants were, however, falling. Support for supervisors or the training of new supervisors was still to be embedded in the research arrangements of the university. More generally the team noted that heads of department were regarded as being at the forefront of the research agenda in faculties although the dean was responsible for resourcing policy.

The team was advised of a well-developed structure of support for research in one of the faculties they visited ? the faculty of theology. Doctoral students have two formal meetings with their supervisors in May and November of each year. Papers are published by a research centre based in the faculty. The faculty keeps track of graduates for three years after graduation and there is an active alumni association. The faculty organises four or five national and international conferences a year. There are strong links with institutes in the world outside Sibiu. The faculty gave the appearance of having a thriving research environment. The team viewed this as an example of good practice.

It was noted that while the engineering faculty contributes significantly to the published papers for the university the dean had indicated that, at the present time, he was concentrating on taught provision rather than research. This was largely connected to an exercise being conducted across all faculties to establish the academic and financial viability of taught programmes. However, as taught programme grades were linked to research criteria, deans acknowledged that there is a need to reflect on what this said about the status of research in their faculties. It was acknowledged that this was the first time the ARACIS taught programme evaluation exercise had taken place and that perhaps it had not been approached, tactically, in the right way; the implication was that, with hindsight, some subject specialisms might have been dropped.

A large number of research centres seem to operate in the university although these were not identified in organisational diagrams. It emerged that these research centres are often built around a single professor although there is some involvement of post-doctoral staff and research students. Some professors felt that this worked reasonably well but admitted that practice was variable across departments. In practice it appears that these entities are research groups rather than research centres. There is a clear determination, at the most senior levels of the university, to tackle this problem. Non-active centres/groups would be closed and the intention is to concentrate on a smaller number of centres and demarcate them in four main categories ? international; national; regional and local. The team encouraged the university to ensure that there is a clear distinction between genuine research centres and those which are, in fact, research groups.

The future direction of research in the university appears fluid with new initiatives to create PhD schools in discipline domains, for example, theology, humanities, engineering and the ring-fencing of funds to support work at PhD level. The team finds as imperative the creation of an appropriate administrative mechanism to support this work. Performance indicators (PIs), such as the numbers of published papers, are important but these had only just been set up on a national level. Previously PIs focused on process rather than outputs such as the submission of grant applications. One PhD student commented that, in terms of the research environment, communication amongst research students is improving. Weaknesses in the system, from the student perspective, included limited library resources and no real access to financial support to aid exploring material outside the country. In addition there are limited opportunities for doctoral students to gather together outside their discipline domain/doctoral field. The team noted that a number of HE institutions in Europe organise an annual research week to help bring together PhD students from across disciplines and develop their interaction with each other, more experienced researchers and employers interested in applied research. This was something that might be considered at LBUS. The team recommends that a first step might be the development of a university-wide community of doctoral students to facilitate the sharing of experience.

Research_at_LBU

The team was able to explore all these aspects of the research culture and operation at the university with a range of staff and students who are at the centre of this research activity. It was clear that the decrease in government financial support badly disrupted the impetus around research in the last two years. There was, perhaps, a disproportionate impact on staff morale and, as a consequence, the university was looking to provide greater incentives for those engaged in research or research studies. This was a conscious decision of the university's management and the team endorses this approach.

Research methodology, as part of support for doctoral studies, was found to be present in the university only as a general support and was not embedded in research study programmes. Research students confirmed that they felt that they were being held back by the lack of discipline specific research methodology training as part of their PhD programmes. Given the reduction in the number of PhD students studying at the university, the team recommends that this is an opportune moment for those students to be provided with focused support in the area of research methodology. This would meet the expectations for third-cycle studies in the Bologna Process. There was also merit in building aspects of personal competences in PhD studies alongside the core activity of deepening knowledge. This would help advance the employability prospects of doctoral students.

The team are of the strong opinion that some key building blocks for a thriving research environment still need development. This view was reinforced by a report on 'Research, Development and Innovation at LBU' current status, assessment and development prospects', written by the Vice-Rector for Research, and provided to the team as part of the additional documentation requested following the first visit in December 2012. The team found this report to be a comprehensive and honest appraisal of the current position of research in the university. In particular, there were a number of weaknesses identified in the report, which suggested that relatively urgent action was required to address these shortcomings. The team understood that there was a wider national context regarding some of these concerns. The team notes it is of critical importance that the university develop a clear and rigorous action plan to tackle these various matters. The strong research tradition in some quarters of the university should be used as examples of good practice to support those faculties where there is less experience and evident weaknesses. This would aid the development of a more widely based research culture that could enhance the quality and standards of research across the university.