

Evaluation_of_"Lucian_Bloga"_University

This report is the result of the evaluation of Lucian Bloga University, Sibiu. The evaluation took place in December 2012 and February 2013 in the framework of the project "Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching" Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities", which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

Such 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 Education Act* and the various related normative documents. Whilst institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is being assessed by an independent team, under the authority of Institutional Evaluation Programme.

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Evaluators

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

- Professor Carles Solà, former Rector, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain, Team chair
- Professor Jean-Pierre Gesson, former President, University of Poitiers, France
- Professor Karol Izydor Wysokinski, former Vice-Rector for Research and International Collaboration, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej (UMCS) Lublin, Poland
- Ms Camilla Georgsson, student, Linköping University, Sweden (for first visit)
- Ms Liliya Ivanova, student, University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria (for second visit)
- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, Team coordinator.

The team would like to thank the Rector, Professor Ioan Bondrea, and our institutional liaison, the Vice-Rector for Organisational and Financial Strategy, Professor Livia Ilie, for their considerable support in this IEP visit to Lucian Bloga University. The team is very grateful to the staff and students of the university who have spent time meeting us and helped us to understand how the university operates. The team was very impressed with their enthusiasm and willingness to share their views and opinions.

Self-evaluation Process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a team comprising the following:

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- Professor Livia Ilie, Vice-Rector, Organisational and Financial Strategy
- Professor Claudiu Kifor, Vice-Rector for Research and Doctoral Studies
- Associate Professor Marian Tiplic, Academic Vice-Rector
- Associate Professor Ramona Todericiu, Deputy Administrative Director
- Dr Daniela Preda, Director of International Relations Office
- Professor Liviu Rosca, Dean, Faculty of Engineering
- Associate Professor Silva Marginean, Faculty of Economic Sciences
- Associate Professor Eva-Nicoleta Burdusel, Faculty of Letters and Arts
- Assistant Professor Lucian Lobont, Quality Assurance Department
- Associate Professor Horatiu Rusu, Research Department
- Diana Lupu, Student, Faculty of Engineering
- Marius Smarandoiu, Student, Faculty of Medicine

The self-evaluation report of the Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in November 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu took place from 9 to 11 December 2012 and from 3 to 6 February 2013, respectively. In between the visits to Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

Reporting

Governance and Institutional Decision-making

more on Governance and Institutional Decision-making at LBU

It was clear to the team that the university had approached this international evaluation process with serious intent. The university saw the benefits of such a self-evaluation process in the context of the need to respond to the on-going economic difficulties in Europe and the reform of the higher education system in Romania.

Teaching and Learning

more on Teaching and Learning at LBU

The components of the three-tier Bologna system are present in the academic structure at LBUS. As the SER notes, however, the academic autonomy of the university is constrained by the number of places allowed by ARACIS on Bachelor and Masters programmes and the nationally prescribed elements of the curriculum. The team were advised that, in respect of Bachelor programmes, the university only had academic discretion over 20% of the curriculum and that all study programmes had to be firstly authorised and then accredited by ARACIS and comply with nationally determined academic standards and criteria. LBUS is reviewing its Masters programmes as not all of them offer the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies.

Research

more on Research at LBU

LBUS embeds research and knowledge transfer into many aspects of its mission and strategic goals. The team was fully supportive of this approach but found it difficult to clearly define the overall direction of research in the university, some of the ways in which it was organised and ways in which research output was funded and

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evaluated. In addition to these issues some of the metrics relating to the supervision of research students were not altogether transparent.

Service to Society

more on Service to Society at LBU

The team were able to discuss the university's relationship with the city and the wider region with the Mayor of Sibiu and a group of employers and alumni. There is, understandably, an emphasis in the university's SER on being an active member of the local community and also reference to positive partnerships with City Hall and major companies operating in the Sibiu region. The involvement of the university in organising the arrangements for Sibiu's period as European City of Culture in 2007 still provides a point of reference in the university for such partnership. Yet, it seemed to the team from its meetings that there could be a greater and improved dynamic between the university and the city. There was clearly a shared desire to see a comprehensive university with a student population at its current level but there appeared to be no shared projects ? outside the cultural field ? between City Hall and the university. It was suggested, for example, that there might be opportunities for involving the faculty of engineering in projects. More generally, there was a desire from employers, endorsed by the team, to see an increase in practical training for students at the university.

Quality culture

more on Quality culture at LBU

The team noted that, in recent years, there had been an active debate in the university concerning the theory and practice of quality assurance and enhancement. The university had also been open to external scrutiny in this area. The rector and his management team were clearly keen to provide fresh impetus to this debate and to improve staff engagement in quality processes and the wider culture relating to quality enhancement. The SER and, in particular, the appendix on quality functional units, set out the university's processes for assuring and enhancing the quality of its academic provision. As part of the evaluation of quality culture across the university the team met with staff and students in a number of faculties. It emerged strongly from these meetings that the information and data required to scrutinise performance on programmes were either not available or only obtainable with some significant difficulty. For example, both staff and students confirmed to the team that the student feedback mechanisms faced a range of problems including poor student response rates, a lack of feedback to students, results of student feedback not being provided to professors, and some professors not responding to the feedback. There was the view at both faculty and central levels of the university that the existing quality processes and mechanisms were not working as effectively as they could.

Internationalisation

more on Internationalization at LBU

As part of its strategic development LBUS has prioritised links with other universities in the European Union and also more widely in other regions of the world. The scope of these links is considerable and the SER notes that in the last four years LBUS had signed 44 cooperation agreements with a long list of countries. Overall LBUS has more than 90 such agreements.

Recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

- To fulfil its desire to be a comprehensive university LBUS needs to consider carefully how it can reflect opinions from across the spectrum.
- In the future development of the university there should also be allowance for the traditions flowing from the humanities and the wider cultural significance of the work of the university. This might help in securing the identity of the university.
- Improvement strategies should not only be focused on those programmes in category C but should also look to sustain A-graded programmes, seek to improve programmes from B to A and finally look at the potential for improving D/E programmes where there was strong evidence of student demand.
- To support the involvement of students in the affairs of the university, there is a case for including a student on the Strategic Working Group.
- The university needs to gain a greater understanding of how it will balance some competing dynamics ? central authority in driving forward change together with greater autonomy for the faculties; wider involvement in decision-making via the Senate while the Executive arm needs to be increasingly flexible and fleet footed in responding to the many challenges facing the university.
- The university should give further thought to its investment in development as this has seen a considerable reduction in the last four years.

Teaching and learning

- It is important for good practice in teaching and learning to be shared by the community and as much support as possible provided for teaching staff. * It is clear that there is the potential for sharing good practice across faculties. This might be helped by the introduction of staff development plans at both faculty and institutional levels. A particular focus might be the development of a deeper understanding of some aspects of the Bologna Process such as the embedding of student-centred learning in the curriculum and the clear

articulation of learning outcomes.

- An institutional learning and teaching strategy should be developed that responds to some of the problems observed and could include ways, for example, of promoting technology-aided learning; tackling student concerns over large class sizes and the length of the teaching day; bias in marking; the approach to tackling plagiarism; out-dated library stock.
- The university should consider ways in which the curriculum could be developed to improve graduate transferrable skills, including team working, language skills and information literacy and also provide a focus for improving both opportunities for, and the experience of, internships.

Research

- The university should make clear the distinction between genuine research centres and those which are, in fact, research groups.
- It is imperative to create an appropriate administrative mechanism to support research.
- Efforts should be made to develop a university wide community of doctoral students to facilitate the sharing of experience.
- The university should continue to explore ways in which research activity can be incentivised.
- There should be a greater emphasis on the teaching of research methodology as part of doctoral studies and this should be linked to the particular subject discipline.

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- The university should pay particular attention to the weaknesses identified in the report on research provided to the team.
- There is considerable scope for the sharing of good practice in research identified in some faculties and this would support the development of a wider research culture across the university.

Service to Society

- There should be a greater and improved dynamic between the university and the city.
- There should be an increase in practical training for students at the university and, jointly, the university and local companies should support the development of further opportunities in respect of student internships in the local economy.
- The university should work with employers and the Mayor of Sibiu to improve the effectiveness of the Advisory Board.

Quality Culture

- There needs to be an improved system of quality monitoring to tackle some problems identified by students e.g. the subjective assessment (favouritism) of students by some professors; a concern that questionnaires were not kept confidential and that honest comments might result in victimisation.
- The role of the Quality Assurance Department should be enhanced and, perhaps, linked directly to the Rectorate team.

The university needs to ensure that its quality assurance processes are able to identify problems and resolve the issues with greater rigour. The university would benefit from consulting the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area.

Internationalisation

- The university should formulate a clear international strategy and, in the medium- to long-term, should consider providing more focused links both in terms of countries and subject disciplines.
- The university should ensure that there are rigorous systems in place for recording ECTS when students return from their Erasmus programmes.
- The university should take advantage of the opportunities for developing more programmes in English, perhaps initially with an offer of 60 ECTS to facilitate student exchange.
- The English language version of the university's website should be kept up-to-date and also offer more specific guidance on the content of academic programmes.
- The university should work with the Mayor's Office to consider ways in which international students might be involved with cultural events in the City.

Conclusion

Lucian Bloga University, Sibiu is establishing a clear sense of its future direction in a period of significant and continuing change in the national higher education landscape. It has a realistic sense of what can be achieved in the short- to medium-term and is determined to build its development from a sound financial base.

The team was impressed with the ambition shown by the new rector and his senior management team to harness improvement to change and it appeared that this was being embraced by the wider university community. It was acknowledged that there were significant barriers to change, many encountered in the external HE environment in Romania. The team was struck by the almost unanimous view in the university that the vagaries of changing national laws did little to support considered academic and financial planning or the enhancement of a quality

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culture. In particular, this had a damaging impact on staff morale; the barriers to recruitment of academic and administrative staff were challenging both core systems for quality management and improvements in learning and teaching across all disciplines. Notwithstanding these external constraints, there is still much scope for the university to change and improve and this was perhaps evidenced most clearly in the views of some of the younger teaching staff. Here the team saw the potential for innovation in the curriculum, especially in respect of employability; the delivery of studentcentred learning; and an understanding that academic staff had to be at the forefront of improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and research. This provided for greater optimism about the future. This was also recognised by many of the students who the team met during the evaluation.

Students were supportive of the broad ambitions of the university and many felt that the comprehensive nature of the academic portfolio was a key attraction to them in selecting the university. There was a clear indication from students that they felt more involved and had a greater voice following the election of the new rector. The team also found evidence that the student council was developing into a valuable forum for the student voice.

The university had set about a thorough review of all its activities and had already identified many strengths and weaknesses. The honesty with which it was pursuing this ambitious review was critical to its future success, not least in respect of the research agenda. The team was convinced, however, that the Rector's programme for change was taking the university in the right direction and that, with the support of the wider community, the university's future was sustainable and open to significant improvement in the key areas of teaching, learning and research.