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*Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and
Innovation in Romanian Universities Project*

BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

EVALUATION REPORT

November 2012

Team:
Jürgen Kohler, Chair
Sokratis Katsikas
Hannele Niemi
Kotryna Peilakauskaite
Jethro Newton, Team
Coordinator

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The evaluation took place in 2012 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.

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 and international 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. Babeş-Bolyai University and the national context

With a strong and embedded tradition of multiculturalism, Babeş-Bolyai University has its origins in the Romanian University of Cluj and the Bolyai Janos Hungarian University, from which Babeş-Bolyai University (hereafter UBB) was formed following their merger in 1959. The main campus of UBB is located in Cluj-Napoca, the fourth largest city in Romania, while the overall reach of the university encompasses extension centres in 12 Transylvanian cities. These university extensions are integrated into the UBB faculty structures.

UBB functions in a higher education system that includes 112 public (state) and private higher education institutions, divided equally between each category. As a public university, and the largest higher education institution in Romania, according to Romanian higher education law UBB is, in formal terms, independent and autonomous. The university is therefore responsible for its own self-government, and for the implementation of its own strategies and development policies. However, this autonomy is exercised within the general provisions of national legislation, and with regard to any constraints or parameters imposed by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport (MECTS), the Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), or by the national accreditation body, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). In the view of the IEP team, in practice, this results in constraints on the autonomy of Babeş-Bolyai University.

Under the provisions of the new national education law, adopted for implementation as from January 2011, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been classified into three groups: advanced research universities; teaching and research universities; and teaching universities. UBB is one of twelve HEIs in the first of these categories. In addition to the classification and diversification reforms, the university is subject to a new system for ranking study programmes and academic disciplines. In terms of the public financing of universities, under the new legal dispensation state funding is in future set to reflect the institutional classification exercise and the programme ranking process with funding streams consisting of core and additional funding, as prescribed by UEFISCDI criteria, with the prospect of extra funding for research-oriented universities.



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Also at national level, the IEP team noted that Romania has been a signatory to the Bologna declaration since 1999. In 2004, legislation was passed in support of implementation of the Bologna Process, with national measures being adopted, and individual universities were required to take steps towards implementing the principles and objectives of the Bologna Process. Since 2005, higher education study programmes have been organised on the basis of three cycles (Bachelor; Master; and PhD/Doctorate) and aligned to the European Qualification Framework. The ECTS system and Diploma Supplement have also been made mandatory for institutions.

1.3. The university's self-evaluation process

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the first visit, a 28-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the university was sent to the evaluation team. The SER described the university's institutional context, vision, mission and goals, its governance, organisational structure, and quality management arrangements, as well as its strategic planning arrangements and capacity for change. The SER was accompanied by eight annexes, including the university's Strategic Plan (2008/2011) and a SWOT analysis undertaken in preparing the self-evaluation. Also included, as annexes, were organisational charts, information on institutional councils and academic organisation, and general institutional data.

The self-evaluation process was directed by a self-evaluation group appointed by the rector, and chaired by the Vice Rector Professor Ladislau Nagy, responsible for quality assurance, IT, and Hungarian line of study. Members were selected from amongst the university's vice rectors, administrative units, and student representatives, reflecting the university's view that the involvement of and input from across all parts of UBB was important to the process of preparing the institutional self-evaluation. The self-evaluation methodology involved analysis against objectives as stated in the university's Strategic Plan (2008/2011). The self-evaluation process also included regular meetings of the self-evaluation commission, information collected from various academic and administrative units of the university, and meetings with groups of students and staff. The SER was also published on the university's intranet, with an invitation to comment and provide feedback. The IEP team greatly appreciated the work done in the SER and the accompanying documentation, and found it to be of great assistance in enabling them to undertake their deliberations. In principle, notwithstanding the need for some clarification of certain issues, the SER reflected the current situation of UBB adequately; the team noted that it contained not only information but also, to some degree, self-critical analysis.



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1.4. The evaluation team

The self-evaluation report of the university along with the appendices was sent to the evaluation team in May 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to UBB took place from 24 - 26 June 2012, and 16 - 19 September 2012, respectively. For its second visit, the team requested some additional information and documentation regarding UBB's strategic and operational planning, organisational structures, committees (councils) and groups, quality policy, and research. Further clarification on a number of matters was also requested. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were either not fully reflected in the SER or which merited an update due to changes at the university or possible developments at national level. This additional information, including a draft new Strategic Plan (2012/2015) was provided well in advance of the second visit and covered the issues identified by the IEP team in a helpful manner.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Jürgen Kohler, former rector, Greifswald University, Germany, Team Chair;
- Sokratis Katsikas, former rector, University of Piraeus, Greece;
- Hannele Niemi, former vice rector, University of Helsinki, Finland;
- Kotryna Peilakauskaite, ESU Student Experts Panel, Lithuania;
- Jethro Newton, former Dean of Academic Quality and Enhancement, University of Chester, UK, Team Coordinator.

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the UBB Rector, Professor Ioan Aurel Pop, for the welcome hospitality provided during their two visits.

Special thanks are also offered by the IEP team to Professor Ladislau Nagy, vice rector (Quality assurance, IT, and Hungarian line of study) and chair of the self-evaluation group, for his excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process. Thanks are also due to Dr Monica Zaharie and Gelu Gherghin of the University's Centre for quality management, for their kind support to the team in logistics and administrative matters, and to those members of the university who provided interpretation services. Thanks are also extended to all those UBB staff and external partners whom the team met for their preparedness to discuss relevant matters in a collegial, open and constructive way.



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2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Vision, mission, and general context

The university's norms and values are illustrated in its vision and mission, as set out in the UBB Charter (2012). UBB's vision and mission reflect its aspiration to be a top university which is known for its high quality education, is prominent in scientific research, and provides services to the community. Its distinctiveness as a higher education institution is reinforced by its strong multicultural focus and its portfolio of study programmes delivered not only in Romanian but also through German and Hungarian lines of study. Its mission places emphasis on being a modern university that meets the educational and research needs of today's knowledge-based society, and contributes to local, regional, and national development. The view of the IEP team is that, in seeking to achieve its vision and mission, UBB is playing a prominent role in Romanian society, and that its position as an advanced research and teaching university is assisting the university in working towards building recognition in the wider European and international contexts. The IEP team got the impression of an ambitious, collegial university, reinforced by well-embedded multi-cultural traditions and with marked aspirations to become a leading force amongst research universities. With regard to the latter aspiration, and taking account of the need for the team to assess the university's capacity for managing change, the most striking strategic aspiration of UBB from the perspective of the IEP team, is to access the upper areas of international classifications by positioning itself in the top 500 universities in the world according to the Shanghai ranking criteria. This goal, originally set in March 2006, has been taken up by and placed firmly at the centre of the priorities of the incoming UBB rector, who took office in March 2012. This reflects the importance currently attached to such rankings amongst top universities in Romania and farther afield.

In reflecting on these matters, during their engagement with the university the IEP team learned of the not inconsiderable constraints placed upon UBB by its operating environment, arising in part from a challenging socio-economic environment, and through significant demographic changes, but also through recent legal reforms, as alluded to in section 1. Indeed, with regard to the latter, the IEP team was interested to note early on in the evaluation process that amongst the "threats" to organisational development listed in its SER, the university cites "legal instability" at national level, "excessive centralisation" at the level of the Ministry (MECTS) in matters such as admission of international students, lack of clarity in national legislation regarding the future development of teacher education, and national juridical interference in the area of university-business relationships. Through reading documentation provided by the university and from national sources, and through conducting discussions with UBB staff at all levels, the IEP team gained useful insights into the nature of such constraints and the degree to which they impact on the planning, day-to-day operation,



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and potential for future development of the university. Examples range from matters such as the general bureaucratic and legalistic shaping of university policy and planning through the requirements of MECTS - such as restrictions on budgetary matters in human resources planning - on the one hand, to limited research funding and an apparently template-driven approach by ARACIS in the area of curriculum planning and design on the other hand. The team also noted apparent discrepancies between the financial legislation governing universities, and the regulatory requirements of other national financial frameworks that are also applicable to universities. The IEP team wishes to place on record their view that national bodies for higher education should take full account of the impact that such uncertainty and instability in the external policy environment has on general institutional well-being, and on the ability of universities to plan effectively and to shape and manage change in key strategic areas of operation.

Governance, management and academic organisation

The university's academic organisation is extensive, structured as it is into twenty one faculties, at least in part without clear rationale of their composition, e.g. biology and geology form a faculty, and approximately one hundred academic departments, which together deliver over 400 undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes, according to the Bologna cycles system. UBB also delivers distance learning and adult education programmes through its Centre for lifelong and distance learning. The university has seventy three doctoral fields, organised in department-based doctoral schools, together with an Institute for Doctoral Studies which coordinates admissions to doctoral programmes on a competitive basis. The principal focal points for income-generating scientific research at the university are the university's four research institutes, which undertake multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research as well as more discipline-based research, and which are organised at faculty level or, in the case of the Institute for Bio-Nano Sciences, at university level. In addition, UBB has in place a large number of department-based research centres and research units. The most recent available data at the time of the IEP team's visit showed a total of 42430 students enrolled across all three cycles (2011/2012), with some two-thirds of these being female. Around three quarters (31971) were registered on undergraduate programmes, with 8606 enrolled at masters level, and the remaining 1853 pursuing doctoral studies. The team noted, however, that reflecting national demographic trends, the overall total of enrolments showed a sharp decline from the previous academic years, where the overall numbers stood at 49046 and 50516, respectively. In March 2012 the university had over 1400 teaching staff, employed on a full- or part-time basis, with a student/staff ratio of around 25:1.

Notwithstanding the constraints, uncertainties, and instability occasioned by the national legal context within which the university operates, UBB has managerial, administrative, and financial autonomy to conduct its own affairs. This autonomy, as with the academic



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autonomy that UBB enjoys in matters such as its teaching profile, is exercised under the provision of the UBB Charter (2012). Nevertheless, as the IEP team noted, financial autonomy is itself constrained by the economic conditions of the region and the country. The principal sources of income for the university are the block grant it receives from the state according to criteria primarily based on student numbers, income from student tuition fees, and funding received through research and consultancy income, the last of these generated for the most part through successful project bids and EU structural funds. The team learned that since the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS) suspended competitive research and development funding in 2009, opportunities to compete for funding at national level have been severely restricted. The university's financial environment, and the scope for generating extra income, is therefore both challenging and restrictive.

Following his appointment, the rector has taken steps at all levels of the university to discuss and to commence implementation of the programme he proposes to take forward during his period of office. This programme includes promoting the university at national and international levels, re-evaluating the educational role of UBB, and continuing to encourage scientific research. The IEP team heard that his management programme is premised on the principles of collective leadership. The newly constituted senior management team includes ten vice rectors, approved by Senate on the recommendation of the rector. The team were advised that this unusually large number reflects the cultural traditions of UBB in respect of Romanian, Hungarian and German lines of study. The responsibilities of the vice rectors encompass matters such as academic affairs, research, business engagement, international relations, and finance. Together with the general administrative director, the deans of faculty, and the students' prefect, these post-holders, led by the rector, comprise the university's board of administration. Deans of faculty are appointed by the rector on the recommendation of the Faculty Councils.

In seeking to understand the nature and functioning of the university's organisational structures and pattern of governance, the IEP team also noted the pivotal importance of the UBB Senate. Under the new dispensation following the national legal reforms UBB opted for provisions in its statutes to the effect that the rector no longer chairs the Senate and, together with the deans of faculty and heads of department, is no longer eligible for membership of Senate. The IEP team noted that the Senate operates with the assistance of a system of sub-committees, with responsibilities for matters such as strategy, curriculum and quality, research and competitiveness, budgetary and financial matters, human resources, and student affairs. The team observed that the membership of these committees was restricted to members of Senate, while there are also consultative members who, in view of their personal standing in research or business, were chosen to be external members of the Great Senate. However, membership rules did not allow for representation from administrators with high-level expertise in key areas, such as quality assurance. Moreover, the IEP team took particular note of the size of the Senate, which they were informed stood



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at 139, all of whom are participants in and contributors to the committee's decision-making processes. The size is intended to ensure broad intake of opinion and ownership throughout UBB, and in order to do so participation of various groups is successfully ensured, e.g. students can elect a quarter of Senate members.

The IEP team formed the view that, while on one level these arrangements signify a distinction between a deliberative role for the Senate, and a management executive role for the rector and board of administration, it was evident from discussions and from institutional documentation, that the reality was more complex. Indeed, given that the rector is required to gain Senate approval for matters of strategy and policy, and also ratification of decisions and proposals made by the Board of Administration, it was apparent to the IEP team that in practice the Senate acted as a policy forum or legislature, which in effect influences management practices even though the Senate is not designed to be a management body..

Other deliberative and decision-making bodies considered by the IEP team include the faculty and department councils. The former, chaired by the dean, and meeting on a monthly basis, includes vice deans, heads of department, heads of study lines, and student members. Staff members are elected by staff of the faculty. Faculty councils are responsible for faculty development and strategy, curriculum and quality matters, research, and appointments to teaching positions. They also have a responsibility for allocation of budgets and resources to departments. Department councils typically contain between three and seven members, drawn from representatives of the department's specialisations. The councils assist the head of the department in matters relating to the direction and management of department academic and academic-related affairs.

From the point of view of policy formation, the effectiveness and quality of decision-making, and capacity to direct and manage change, the IEP team took particular interest in these governance arrangements, especially those at the top of the organisation. The IEP team took the view that it was too early to take an external judgement on how such arrangements were working. However, members of the team noted the frank acknowledgement, set out in the university's SER, that the future efficiency and effectiveness of the university's governance is heavily dependent on the extent to which Senate and the rectorship, which includes faculty deans, are able to cooperate going forward. Moreover, the university's self-evaluation also pointed to the implications of new legislation in terms of heavier bureaucracy and the need for further clarification in seemingly complex structures and decision-making processes. A tangible recognition of these challenges is the establishment by the rector of a Commission for Restructuring, formed to assess possibilities for reducing the number and complexity of organisational units. Although little progress had been made by this body at the time of their visits, this initiative is welcomed by the IEP team. The team had formed a view of a seemingly complex and top heavy organisational structure with an unusually large number of faculties, departments, and cross-university coordinating departments, some of which leads to an



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overlap and duplication of provisions as well as conveying the appearance of a generally inefficient, burdensome, and cost-intensive set of organisational and governance arrangements. Again, these matters are acknowledged in the UBB SER where it is stated that re-organisation of centres, institutes and administrative offices is underway to better reflect needs and to achieve efficiency gains. The IEP team fully endorses this intention.

The IEP team was able to explore further with the rector the acknowledgement of the need to simplify the university's structures, including a reduction in the number of faculties and academic departments. The team recognised that, while it is legally feasible, this process would entail achieving the political support of key players within the university, not least the senate and faculty deans. Even so, in the opinion of the IEP team this process of review should also include reflection on the possible streamlining of the roles of vice rectors. Underpinning all these considerations are questions on whether governance arrangements and organisational structures are fit for purpose, from the point of view of organisational cohesion and effective decision-making processes. At the centre of the IEP team's deliberations on these important matters is the recognition, which pervaded all of the team's discussions and thinking, that if the university is to make significant progress towards achieving its goals, not least its "Top 500" aspiration if that goal were to be taken as unquestionable, it faces difficult decisions going forward. As is discussed later in this section of the team's report, this brings into sharp focus the importance of its strategic planning processes to the success of the university, and, even more crucially, the requirement for hard choices to be made regarding resource-related matters. In taking into account all of these matters, the IEP team would encourage the university to be proactive in reviewing its present organisational arrangements, and fully endorses the rector's evolving plans for simplifying the organisational structure through reducing the number and configuration of the current faculties, departments and administrative units.

Strategic planning and organisational development

The IEP team was able to explore the university's planning and organisational agenda in some detail through considering the content of and supporting processes for institutional strategic planning, including local level planning. The SER provided the team with brief insights into this. From discussions with university managers and other staff groups, and through considering additional documentation made available to them, the team was able to form a more holistic picture of these important matters. At the time of the team's visits to UBB, the rector's new *Strategic Plan (2012/2015)* was being progressed through the approval processes laid down by Senate. The team understood that the version made available to them in draft form was unlikely to undergo major change. The team was informed that this new *Plan*, which reflected the manifesto upon which the rector had been elected, had been through an extended period of consultation with senior managers and faculties. In its essentials, the new *Plan* shared much in common with that which it replaced (*Strategic Plan*,



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2008/2011), which was also made available to the IEP team. The new version contained ten strategic aims, in four areas of strategic importance for the future direction of UBB: namely, education; research; service to the community; and management and support services. It also contained an extensive list of (some quantifiable) indicators. In line with established procedure, the team was informed that following final approval, while considering harmonisation with the rector's strategic plan Senate would develop its own annual *Operational Plan*, with faculties also drawing up annual operational plans in accordance with guidelines provided centrally. Those plans are then disseminated to all departments and units within each faculty. The UBB Centre for university development informs these processes by providing data and advice to senior managers, as appropriate. The IEP team learned that the Senate monitors the progress of the *UBB Strategic Plan* through monitoring the annual *Senate Operational Plan*, while faculty councils receive reports on progress of the *faculty Operational Plan*, at their January meetings in order to assess what has or has not been achieved.

Though noting the common threads between the *Strategic Plan (2012/2015)* and its predecessor, the IEP team took particular interest in some key differences between these documents. Prominent amongst these are the intention to "reorganise research units...in order to increase efficiency", and a commitment to the "adoption of a funding strategy based on differentiated allocation of resources". Matters relating to research and to resource allocation are discussed elsewhere in this report; the former in section 4 ("Research"), the resource allocation later in this present section under "Finance and resources". For present purposes, the team wishes to highlight these aspects of forward planning given their critical significance, especially, for realising the strategic aim that "UBB should enter the top 500 universities in the world", but also that for "maintaining UBB on a top position at national level". Moreover, as has been noted earlier in this section (p. 10), these are matters requiring difficult choices. Be that as it may, the overall message that the IEP team wishes to convey here is that if such ambitious aims are to be met there is a need for the university to ensure that the quality and operationalisation of its strategic and operational planning, at all levels, are of the highest order.

From the team's perspective, having scrutinised closely existing planning documents, and having had the opportunity to discuss these matters in various meetings with UBB staff, there is scope for the university, through its Senate, its rectorship, and its faculties, to make improvements. For example, in considering both the content and execution of planning documents made available to the IEP team, members of the team did not gain confidence that there is sufficient and clear transparency or accountability in the periodic or annual monitoring of performance against targets and commitments, many of which seemed to the team not to be measurable or quantifiable, or were more aspirational than realistic. In the view of the team, the extent and number of planning targets on occasions militated against effective prioritisation. Therefore, while the IEP team was advised by some managers with



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planning responsibilities that they as managers were in a position to know where objectives had been met, or otherwise, nevertheless, it is the considered judgement of the team that improvements can be introduced. Here, the team would point to the advantages of adopting a "SMART" approach to strategic and operational planning, whereby objectives are set which are "specific", "measurable", "achievable", "realistic", and "timely". While aspects of this are reflected in planning documents considered by the IEP team, none of the plans contained all of these necessary ingredients. For example, where performance indicators were being used, they did not have quantified or measurable values attached to them. Also, where responsibilities were being identified in plans, this was often done by referring to a plurality of individuals rather than to one responsible post-holder, or by reference to a committee rather than a responsible post-holder. Moreover, objectives were occasionally being set which appeared to be so general as to be not achievable within the identified timescale. For the IEP team, a further consideration related to whether the university was satisfied that there is sufficiently robust and effective oversight of operational plans, and whether Senate and the rector could be assured of alignment between local level plans and the overall university Plan. Therefore, from their deliberations on arrangements and practices in the area of strategic and operational planning, at all levels, the IEP team strongly recommends that immediate measures are taken to secure effective alignment with the *Strategic Plan (2012/2015)*, and that this should include: focused priorities; realistic timescales; monitoring of performance against plans and targets; and clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

Finance and resourcing

The IEP team noted that, under the overall authority of the university Senate, there is strong central oversight of budgetary and financial matters, albeit with some decentralisation to faculties through annual budget allocations to that level, and to research centres which generate project income. Use is made of a "cost centre" approach, with the university able to exercise its own autonomy in establishing such cost units. The rectorate and the university are served at senior management team level by the vice rector for finance and administration, who works closely with the general administrative director and the staff of that Division for the purposes of managing financial accounting and other resource-related matters. While it is the rector who is UBB's legal representative in financial matters, the IEP team noted that in terms of governance it is the Senate which is empowered to take the main decisions regarding financial strategy, the university's annual budget, and the allocation of resources. In practice, the decision-making process takes place in the context of proposals emanating from the rector and Board of Administration, on matters such as the distribution to faculties of core state funding based on student numbers. The rector and vice rector are held responsible for managing the implementation of Senate's decisions, and for monitoring the activities of faculties and cost centres. However, the team noted that the overall decision-making scenario is more elaborate than this, since it is the budget committee, a sub-committee of Senate, which, acting on Senate's behalf, approves the financial policies of UBB



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and the budget, and also exercises some oversight of its execution. This committee also presents periodic reports to Senate on various financial matters, including new development opportunities.

The IEP team also took the opportunity to consider the processes whereby budgets were allocated to faculties and other organisational units. As noted earlier in this section (p. 8), the main sources of UBB income are the core funding the university receives (based on student numbers), tuition fee income, and contract-based research grants obtained on a competitive basis from public bodies, the EU or other external sources. In terms of distribution of core state funding, the team noted that, in accordance with the process noted whereby Senate is advised by the rector through the Board of Administration, this takes place according to a methodology and parameters established by the National Council for Higher Education Funding (CNFIS). Here, 80% is allocated for personnel and staffing, and 20% for other expenses, such as materials and maintenance costs. For the purpose of distributing non-state revenues, the IEP team learned that of fee income, 23% was top-sliced for general university costs, while 77% was allocated to faculties; while research income is top-sliced at the level of 23% and retained by the university for overhead costs with the remainder being allocated to the director of the relevant research centre. The team learned that, at the beginning of the financial year each faculty or research centre is allocated a budget, with the dean or director, as appropriate, being charged with the responsibility for implementation and monitoring at local level.

The financial challenges and constraints which face the university, and which reflect the situation across Romanian higher education, and also the conditions prevailing in the wider society, were portrayed earlier in this section. To counter these difficulties, the IEP team noted that the university's strategic aim is to increase funding through diversification of income sources, through the efficient use of resources, by seeking measures to improve the financial sustainability of academic and administrative units, and through donations and sponsorships. These activities present significant challenges but team members were encouraged to note that these matters are given prominence in faculty operational plans. The IEP team also explored the remit and activities of the university's fundraising office, but it appeared to the team that though the office announced and advised on external calls and project opportunities it did not routinely provide support or training for the purpose of capacity building in this area.

At the time of the IEP team's visit, the funding had yet to be influenced by the new law. The team was interested to hear that under the new higher education law, student-driven core state funding is intended to be allocated to departments, in contrast to present arrangements whereby under the prevailing financial law which, the team understood, determines that such funding is directed to faculties, under the legal authority of the rector. The team also noted that under these proposed new funding arrangements, advanced research and teaching



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universities such as UBB stand to gain financially. Although no concrete outcomes or action is apparent to date, the public financing of universities is intended to take account of the results of the national classification exercise, and the different ranking processes, including at study programme level. It is also planned that there should be additional research-related funding emanating from national level which, if this comes to fruition, would also be to the benefit of UBB. From the IEP team's perspective, it remains to be seen how these plans, as and when they are implemented, prove to be beneficial to the university and what degree of change UBB is able to effect.



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3. Teaching and learning

The university's SER indicates that policy in the area of education, and teaching and learning, is centred on ensuring that studies and pedagogy are focused not only on enhancing the student experience but also on meeting national needs. In support of this, the UBB *Strategic Plan 2012/2015* identifies three strategic aims: "education adapted to the knowledge society"; "development of UBB as a regional and national hub of lifelong learning and adult education"; and consolidation of the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-confessional character of the university. These strategic aims, particularly the distinctive multi-cultural nature of educational provision, are heavily reflected in the governance structure at senior management level, and at the level of faculty and department. Alongside the senior management portfolios covering Romanian education, each of two vice rectors has responsibilities which include, respectively: the German line of study and cooperation with the German cultural environment, joint degrees and publishing houses; and the Hungarian line of study and curriculum, extensions, quality assurance and IT. Appointments to academic leadership positions of dean, vice dean, and department head also reflect the prioritisation of multi-culturalism in academic affairs. Faculty and department councils also reflect the multi-cultural structure and ethos of UBB. All lines of study are represented on faculty and department councils, the former also holding wider responsibility for academic development across all areas of specialisation and study programmes. Oversight of all curriculum matters is the responsibility of the Senate committee for curriculum, quality and unconventional education. This committee periodically reviews the curriculum and study programmes at bachelor, masters, and doctoral levels in line with external quality and accreditation requirements. It also establishes the regulations governing curriculum design and development, for full-time, part-time, distance learning, and continuing education programmes.

The university's continuing commitment to making available lines of study in Romanian, German and Hungarian, and the delivery of programmes in five languages, including English and French, is a marked strength of UBB. The IEP team noted the pride of UBB staff in this distinctiveness, and also the confirmation from students of the quality of programmes delivered under the German and Hungarian lines of study. This characteristic feature also extends to the area of teacher training, where provision is made for study in Romanian, German, and Hungarian, and for Roma people. The university maintains this commitment despite the acknowledged financial challenges of securing the long term sustainability of a multi-cultural academic portfolio where student numbers are frequently low. Indeed, the university has plans to introduce new study programmes in its non-Romanian lines of study.

In reflecting more broadly across the UBB portfolio of study programmes, the team noted that provision is extensive and diverse. Nevertheless, the team was interested to note the



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university's plans for addressing the overall decline in student numbers which has been underway in recent years. The IEP team learned that UBB has aspirations for a shift of emphasis towards growing more masters provision, and to greater prioritisation of lifelong learning and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. In all of these areas it is apparent that there are fewer restrictions at national level. In view of the significant potential for meeting training and updating needs of local and regional business, commerce, and professions, and changing labour market needs more generally, the IEP team strongly endorses these plans. From the team's perspective, in view of the availability of expertise in the UBB Centre for lifelong and distance learning, there is an added advantage of making such new provision available on a distance or blended learning basis.

The IEP team also considered a range of matters relating to programme design and the setting of educational objectives, and the extent to which this indicated a commonly understood and consistently applied approach to the "profile" of the UBB student and graduate. New programmes are proposed and designed in the first instance at department level, with approval to proceed being granted by the faculty council. A self-evaluation is completed to illustrate preparedness for delivering the programme. Members of the faculty's Quality Assurance and Evaluation Committee participate in accreditation preparations, and preparation of required documentation. Curriculum development is informed by guidance from the UBB Centre for quality management, and the committee for curriculum and quality. The IEP team noted that the latter, in addition to making available strict curriculum guidance and templates from ARACIS, undertakes an internal evaluation prior to submission of curriculum documentation to ARACIS for external accreditation purposes. ARACIS holds a national register of permitted programmes, most of which UBB is accredited to deliver. (This is a further reason for the shift in emphasis, noted earlier, towards new areas for curriculum development).

In exploring these matters further, through discussions with the university's staff and students, and through consideration of institutional documentation, the IEP team was keen to develop a closer understanding of student-related aspects of curriculum design and curriculum objectives. Here, it was evident to the team that the Bologna Process has constituted an important reference point for curriculum matters for some years. The SER states that restructuring of university programmes on a three-cycle basis commenced in 2005/2006, and that use is made of the ECTS and diploma supplement, and also a learning outcomes approach to curriculum design and student development. The team also noted that the Senate *Operational Plan 2012/2013* emphasises the continuing importance of "Bologna" and the need to keep pace with curriculum modernisation developments in the wider context of European higher education. However, on closer examination, it was evident to the IEP team that such updating and modernisation, particularly to reflect "Bologna principles", remained "work in progress" and that different departments and faculties were at different stages of development. For example, faculty quality assurance planning examined by the



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team identifies the updating and revision of curricula content for all “Bologna” specialisms, at bachelor and masters levels, as a major aim for 2012/2013. For the IEP team, this acknowledgement of the need for further, ongoing work on curriculum content reflected the variability in the understanding of UBB staff of matters relating to educational objectives, student skills, and the general question of the UBB “student profile”. It also indicated to the team that student-centred principles may not be being applied consistently in the university’s curriculum design and assessment processes. From discussions with students, it appeared to the IEP team that, in some areas, an emphasis on skills was relatively new or at least underdeveloped, and that even where learning outcomes were identified in course descriptor, outcomes were not always assessed. The team noted that intended competencies of graduates, an emphasis on practical skills (such as communication, research, entrepreneurship, and active citizenship in democratic societies), are all emphasised in strategic documents and in curriculum guidance. However, the IEP team formed the view that there is a need for the university to take steps to ensure that its educational principles and objectives are fully and consistently embedded and understood. Central to this is the need to secure a common understanding of the intended attributes, characteristics and profile of “the UBB graduate”. In the view of the team, the university’s existing processes for curriculum design and for the annual periodic revision and review of syllabi and curricula can be used to achieve this and to monitor progress. In reflecting on all these matters, though it is acknowledged that the university implements “Bologna” policies and practices to a large extent, it is recommended that it should sharpen its competence and learning outcomes orientation - bearing in mind the wide span of its educational objectives (maintaining and developing research and innovative capabilities, ensuring employability, fostering personal development, and educating for democratic citizenship) - and fully align student assessment methods to match the aforementioned orientation.

Other dimensions of student-centred learning were also of interest to the IEP team. The team noted that the SER placed emphasis on UBB’s commitment to the pursuit of excellence in education by providing student-centred teaching and learning programmes, and by diverse and flexible teaching and assessment methods. However, discussions with students, and also with staff, indicated a very variable situation. Students who met the IEP team indicated clearly that the level of innovation or use of new approaches was not as prevalent as the university is striving towards. Indeed, students noted that some members of staff were outdated in their approach to learning, teaching and assessment. Students also indicated disappointment that opportunities to take electives or options were limited, and that in practice too many courses were mandatory and there were limited opportunities to undertake study in a faculty other than one’s own. The team also noted that, despite the emphasis placed on multi-disciplinary programmes of study in strategic documentation, in practice this was not very visible. Discussions with staff provided a limited picture of the extent to which the adoption of new and innovative approaches, such as problem-based learning or technology-enhanced learning, was growing in prevalence amongst the teaching



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staff. Further, despite the emphasis placed on the importance of student research skills in institutional documentation the team has identified the need to address the lack of opportunity for students to focus on research skills and project work at undergraduate level (this aspect is considered further in section 4). In order to enhance the culture of learning and teaching at the university, and to strengthen innovation in pedagogy, the IEP team recommends that more extensive and consistent use is made of a full range of student-centred tools and methods.

Though the university has a strategy for research, there is no equivalent elaborate strategy for learning and teaching. It was not apparent to the IEP team that there was sufficient central drive towards the enhancement of learning and teaching, or the incentivisation and celebration of excellence in learning and teaching. From discussions with staff it appeared that arrangements in this area are somewhat *ad hoc*. Though the EU Tempus scheme has been used to engage contact with other institutions, and while staff visits to other universities are encouraged, the IEP team heard that centrally provided activities for improving learning and teaching methods have been poorly attended. Further, in the absence of a central focal point or unit for the training or development of new or inexperienced teaching staff, any support for new academics is left to the line-manager to organise. Therefore, while high value is attached to good quality learning, this is not fully reflected in support for initiatives to enhance teaching practice. Therefore, as UBB seeks to secure its reputation for high quality learning and teaching the IEP team encourages it to consider raising the profile of teaching by putting in place a scheme for the reward and recognition of excellence in teaching and academic practice.

During their enquiries on teaching and learning, the IEP team was able to gain insights into matters which are currently subject to debate both nationally and within the university regarding the training of school teachers. The team learned that this was an area of some importance and priority to UBB. In pursuing their enquiries the team sought to ascertain the university's plans for enhancing the quality of teachers in both initial teacher training and in-service provision, responsibility for which is located in UBB's faculty of educational sciences. Matters here remain uncertain pending decisions by the Ministry of Education regarding both primary and secondary schools. At present, the university's own immediate priorities are directed at resolving questions regarding the most appropriate organisational arrangements for the education and training of teachers. All faculties currently have some form of involvement with students who are wishing to become school teachers. From discussions in various meetings, the IEP team noted that the main priority for some faculties is to focus on subject specialisms, rather than the requirements and pedagogic needs of students who wish to train as teachers. In other cases, faculties have a preference for undertaking both the subject specialist and pedagogic work in the preparation and training of teachers. It was apparent to the team that the core issue is how the different faculties interact with the faculty of educational sciences, how the subject specialist and pedagogic needs of trainee



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teachers are best met, and how and by what means the necessary collaboration will be achieved. In exploring the university's societal responsibility for ensuring the education and training of high quality teachers (both in terms of discipline content and pedagogy), the IEP team formed the view that the UBB Senate should ensure that mechanisms are put in place to secure effective interaction and collaboration and a shared sense of responsibility between faculties and the faculty of educational sciences.

During their visits, the IEP team explored experiences, particularly those of students, of the various services and facilities provided by UBB to its students. These include scholarships and grants of various kinds, along with exchange programmes (see section 7). The team met with a range of students from various disciplines and from different levels of study. Students spoke well of learning resources, access to library and IT facilities, and the UBB online platform. The IEP team was reassured that these provided good support for learners. Those students whom the IEP team met also spoke well of the study skills support provided at faculty level. Students also indicated good awareness of centrally provided pastoral and health-related services available to those students who wished to use them. The team noted, however, that the UBB student satisfaction survey showed lowest satisfaction for the careers service, though the very low response rate of 3% might make this finding an unreliable one. The IEP noted that effective oversight of student support services is exercised by the Senate commission for student affairs, which is advised by the director of social services, and that arrangements for students to contribute to the monitoring and review of student services are good. The team was pleased to hear of the marked pride that students of UBB have in their university, and noted that for the majority it was the first choice higher education institution.



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4. Research and knowledge transfer

In the documentation prepared for the IEP team, and in discussions with UBB leadership and other staff, including researchers, the university made clear its strategic objective to grow and extend its research profile on both the national and international levels. The SER describes scientific research as “a fundamental component of the university’s activity” and, as noted earlier in this report, given the goal that UBB is set on a “Top 500” position in world rankings, the IEP team formed the view that this is likely to present by far the biggest challenge for the university, going forward.

At senior management level, leadership of research is under the direction of the vice rector for scientific research and publications. The high profile of research is also reflected in the UBB deliberative structures in the form of the Senate committee for scientific research and competitiveness. This committee coordinates scientific research activity in support of the university’s national and international aspirations, through promoting innovation and competitiveness, but does not include the research vice rector amongst its members on the rationale that it is a Senate committee while the vice rector is seen as a member of the executive. The committee takes the lead in the development of university research policy and strategy. Coinciding with the IEP team’s visits, in addition to “in principle” approval of the new *UBB Strategic Plan*, Senate approval was also granted, in July 2012, for a new *Scientific Research Strategy (2012/2016)*. Together, these strategic documents commit the university to developing UBB’s research infrastructure; attracting new sources of funding for research; and the adoption of a funding strategy based on differentiated allocation of resources. These resource-related matters, and the hard choices and decisions which, in the view of the IEP team, they will require the university to make in the near future, are discussed more fully at the end of this section.

In elaborating on a range of topics the *Research Strategy* places demands on the entire UBB academic community, its faculties, research centres, and institutes. It encourages the development of fundamental research, applied research and knowledge transfer, and innovation. It emphasises the intention to promote multi- and inter-disciplinary research (partly within the context of research institutes), the need for increased competitiveness, and the desirability of increasing outputs of research, particularly through publications. Bearing in mind the nature and extent of the university’s research ambitions, the IEP team sought to gain an understanding of the research profile of the university’s various faculties and departments in terms of fundamental research, applied research, or multi-disciplinary activity. As the team found, and as acknowledged at rectorship level, the type, level, and scope of research activity varies quite markedly between UBB’s academic units. In broad terms: while on the one hand there are well embedded strengths in science-related areas, on the other hand, in humanities, social science, and business, there is no such tradition. Indeed



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the team noted that, put simply, those faculties able to attract larger student numbers, and hence higher levels of funding for teaching, are precisely those areas which in relative terms have lower levels of research activity and research outputs. (The full implications of this in terms of change management are discussed later in this section). As was confirmed to the IEP team by the university's senior managers, if the university wishes to make progress in meeting its research aspirations, it will need to grow capacity and capability in existing fields while also identifying and encouraging new ones, including multi-disciplinary, but also consider discontinuing some. Simultaneously, UBB will need to extend its ability to support applied research. However, the team noted that one of the main inhibiting factors which the university has faced in recent times has been the dependency on national policies regarding staffing matters and, alongside this, severe budgetary constraints. As the university's SER acknowledges, the human resource dimension is a decisive factor in increasing the quality of research activity at UBB and in bringing about change in research activity more generally. Personnel hired into research positions are, for the most part, appointed through external project funding. Similarly, the involvement of internal research specialists is also dependent on external collaborative projects, or EU mobility funding. The team also noted severe restrictions on possibilities for internally funded sabbatical leave.

In exploring research at faculty and department level, the IEP team also took the opportunity to consider the extent to which staff research informs teaching and impacts upon the student experience. The team noted that students, particularly in their final year of undergraduate study, were able to benefit from involvement in research through internal and externally-sponsored grants awarded on a competitive basis, and also through undertaking short-term project work, sometimes linked to staff research. However, though discussions with students and staff indicated that the picture varied between faculties, the IEP team was informed that research informs the educational process for the most part at masters and doctoral degree levels. This does not reflect the requirement stated in the university's research strategy that all study programmes offered by UBB should include activities that prepare students for scientific research. While the team heard of a number of examples of the involvement of undergraduate and masters students in research, including the study of research methods, the lack of a systematic and consistently implemented research orientation in undergraduate and masters level programmes is a matter upon which the University should reflect. The IEP team recommends that steps are taken to strengthen the integration of staff research into teaching in first and second cycle programmes of study, and to make this more consistent across all faculties. Such measures could and should encompass students' early involvement in ongoing research activities, wherever possible and meaningful; however, the development of a "research mind" could also be supported by specific teaching and learning devices such as problem-based learning, project work, and internships with a specific focus on conceptual and developmental activities.



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The IEP team also directed some of their enquiries towards the activities and operation of UBB's Institute for doctoral studies and doctoral schools, and also the quality of support provided to doctoral and post-doctoral students. As noted in section 2, the Institute for doctoral studies exercises oversight of doctoral recruitment. Admissions, however, are undertaken by the doctoral schools themselves. The team noted that the administrative support provided by the Institute is generally welcomed by staff and research students, with the latter confirming to the IEP team the value they attach to the assistance provided in guiding them through processes and procedures. The team was also made aware of impending changes under the new higher education law intended to clarify the functioning and organisation of doctoral education, with the focus being on research doctorate and professional doctorate qualifications. As these changes await implementation, the IEP team is not in a position to comment on any possible impact on the university.

All doctoral students are integrated into one or other of the university's faculties or research institutes and are linked closely with ongoing project work. The team learned that, for the most part, the university's 1853 doctoral students are drawn heavily from the Cluj region; a modest number are recruited internationally, with the figure for the latter standing at 162 for 2011/2012. Selection at doctoral level is highly competitive, and involves an initial announcement followed by examination and interview. Candidates are able to apply for a modest scholarship, though students reported long delays in receiving payment from the EU, despite good efforts on the part of the university. Admissions arrangements for post-doctoral positions are similar, though these opportunities arise from different sources, including project-driven or grant-led appointments, leading, the IEP team learned, to differences in salary levels. Those doctoral students who teach are provided with support from mentors, but the experience of this arrangement amongst students whom the team met was rather variable. The team noted that some training for students who teach is available, as is the opportunity to follow credit-based modules that offer preparation for the teaching of adults. However, even though some post-doctoral students have teaching loads of 12 hours per week, and all students who teach may be involved in assessment tasks, the team noted that there is no national or institutional scheme that is designed specifically for preparing for teaching and assessing at university level. The members of the IEP team also considered the experience of supervision and guidance of doctoral students, and arrangements for monitoring their progress. Here, although some students reported positive experiences, with good support for thesis work, helpful advice with choice of options, and regular supervision and progress monitoring, most did not. This pointed to inconsistency of practice and variability in the quality of the postgraduate student experience. Accordingly, the IEP team proposes that a review is undertaken of the support provided to doctoral students with a view to delivering a consistent and high quality experience for all such students, thereby removing the current variability in this area between doctoral schools in the university's faculties and departments.



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To date, the main thrust of the university's progress and success in research and development has been centred on its research institutes and research centres, whose income-generating profile was described in section 2 (p. 13). The IEP team noted that these institutes and centres have integral links with the university's faculties, sometimes acting as the research arm of a faculty, and often involving doctoral student research undertaken on the basis of collaboration between faculties and centres. Similarly, staff of centres and institutes may be involved in faculty-based undergraduate or masters level teaching. Here, the IEP team noted that if the university is to prioritise and grow its cross- and inter-disciplinary research, then the links between research entities are of potential importance. While this does not preclude faculties from continuing to pursue basic research, it does provide an opportunity for additional cross-university links to be developed. The team also observed that faculties and research centres and institutes share facilities and equipment. Here, the IEP team took note of further challenges facing the university. It was evident to the team that the university depends in no small part on external funding, particularly EU structural or project funding, to enable it to purchase and maintain equipment, and to sustain its research infrastructure. To date, it appears to have lacked a sustainable rolling maintenance programme. Moreover, UBB is not well placed to offer seed money to incentivise and encourage new or growing fields of research, whether pure or applied. As the IEP team noted, the research units, centres and institutes, which are the principal focal point for generating research income, are expected to be self-financing. The team learned that the university has, on occasions, funded new research units, but this appeared not to be typical or large-scale.

The IEP team also focused some attention on matters relating to the approval of potentially new institutes and centres, and the viability and sustainability of existing ones. The team clarified the nomenclature and status of each of these entities. They learned that a research unit is usually an informally organised entity within a department, organised on the basis of a small group of researchers and research facilities; a research centre is larger and is normally certified either by the university or by a national authority; while an institute is the largest unit of research and is self-supporting. The team's attention was also drawn to the reference in the university's SER to a statement to the effect that it is the university's policy to leave research centres (and presumably institutes and units) to plan their own research activities. Reflecting on all of these matters, it was apparent to the IEP team that a major number of these entities had grown over the years without there being an overarching institutional policy or set of procedures, implemented according to transparent criteria, for the approval of such research bodies. Through discussion with staff involved in these structures and activities, it was evident to the IEP team that while the issue of working towards the development of criteria for the establishment or approval of research centres and institutes has been subject to recent discussion at the university, to date this has not produced tangible conclusions. However, given the current and potential future importance of these entities for the UBB research agenda, and while noting that there is a national forum of university representatives where the matter of criteria is discussed, the IEP team regard this as a matter



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requiring action on the part of the university. Therefore, with clarification of this matter not only being an issue of good governance and management and, subsequently, of adequate funding policies but also a requirement for clear external and internal communication of proven research excellence, the IEP team wishes to encourage the development of clear and transparent criteria and approval procedures for institutes and “centres of research excellence” and take the view that early progress can be made in this area.

In reflecting across the range of existing and potential research-related activity at UBB, the IEP team considered the extent to which the university is maximising opportunities to apply research in business, industrial and commercial contexts. The growing importance to the university of this “Third Mission”, business engagement work was recognised in discussions with senior managers, including the vice rector with responsibility for university-business interface. Moreover, the university’s *Strategic Plan 2012/2015* also makes mention of encouragement for technology transfer through partnerships with business, consultancy with the business sector, and the use by local and regional society of the university’s research outputs. Nevertheless, the IEP team gained the firm impression that more emphasis needed to be placed by UBB on applied research and business engagement. Indeed, while applied research is mentioned in the new *Research Strategy 2012/2016*, this notion merited a higher profile there and no pointers are provided in the strategy that might guide or incentivise faculties in that area. Further, from reading the faculty operational plans made available to them, it was apparent to the IEP team that while collaboration with other higher education institutions in the Cluj area and possibly beyond is prioritised, those plans would benefit from more emphasis on objectives and targets specifically aimed at applied research and knowledge transfer, and business engagement links more generally. Though not contributing as directly to the university’s “Top 500” ambitions as, for example, internationally refereed publications or citations, applied research does nevertheless complement the requirement for increased outputs from research.

In putting forward these observations, the IEP team takes note of the discussions held with key players amongst the university’s research community, and recognise the very real constraints presented by challenging socio-economic conditions in the region, and a profile of industry and business that does not easily lend itself to opportunities for applied research and consultancy. The team heard of a number of practical difficulties in securing partners able or willing to pay for university expertise, including those companies where research and development are provided on an in-house basis. The team was also advised of legalistic difficulties in areas such as patenting and product placement. While noting these constraining factors, the IEP team was encouraged by a number of aspects of discussions held with university staff with an interest in progressing developments in business engagement and using research capability to support this. The team noted that the notion of a Cluj Universities Consortium, which had been on the university’s agenda some ten years previously, was again actively engaging the attention and involvement of UBB. Programmes such as the “Through



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Research for Health” initiative, an interdisciplinary programme drawing on various forms of regional research expertise, exemplified for the IEP team the potential for cooperation in applied research. The IEP team also learned of other “regional cluster” opportunities being pursued in the north-west of Romania, providing the team with further evidence of opportunities being pursued by UBB for diversifying income. The team was also advised that the university had now assumed responsibility for supporting payment for patent registrations. While, to date, UBB has no “spin-off” companies, the latter development is a helpful one in that regard.

Taking account of all of the issues outlined and analysed in this section, it is evident to the IEP team that, in view of the university’s ambitious goals for research, it faces challenging times and difficult choices. As has been noted earlier in this report, these strategic choices relate not only to resourcing considerations, but also to matters of governance, organisational structures, and planning processes. Regarding the resourcing dimension, it is the considered view of the IEP Team that attaining such goals as the “Top 500” aspiration is unlikely to be realised by retaining the *status quo*. For the IEP team, there are several aspects to this. First, while the university will wish to continue to strengthen “strong” research areas, reliance on project funding carries with it the risk of increased competition for such funding and diminishing funding opportunities, particularly through EU sources. There are also the sustainability challenges relating to research infrastructure, equipment, and facilities. Secondly, there is every possibility that if UBB wishes to identify new fields of research, albeit informed by careful decision-making and business planning, it will inevitably be faced with decisions regarding the discontinuation of some activities which it cannot sustain. This is likely to involve the movement of resources away from some areas which are presently research-intensive. Thirdly, arguably, not all departments or faculties can realistically become research-intensive, and decisions might have to be made that define some as “teaching-led” rather than “research-intensive”. Fourthly, it seems inevitable that additional non-state funding and research income is, in the first instance, most likely to come from growing applied research, and initiatives such as product development. Here, while the importance of basic research and research for publication is acknowledged to be a priority, other “new” research, such as knowledge transfer activity and multi-disciplinary work, will probably need to be incentivised. Finally, underpinning all of these considerations is the question of how far the university wishes to go beyond its present situation, and the *status quo*. This is a matter of the university’s capacity for change. Here, from the IEP team’s perspective, mechanisms need to be put in place for identifying strategic research strengths that are to be maintained and those that are to be created anew, and, for ensuring the appropriate allocation and re-allocation of resources. These mechanisms need to be activated through decision-making processes and governance arrangements which permit difficult strategic choices to be made. A key aspect of this will be the strength of the working relationship between the Senate and the rector. With these considerations in mind, the IEP team welcomes the intention as set out in the *UBB Strategic Plan (2012/2015)*, for a move towards a differential allocation of



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resources to support research, and urges the university to make early progress with this approach.



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5. Service to society

Through exploring matters relating to the university's research and other externally-facing activities, the IEP team's focus was drawn to the broader question of the positioning of UBB in terms of community engagement and service to society. The team noted the role played by the vice rector for communication with the business environment, and also the remit of the Senate sub-committee for relations with society, which is responsible for developing the participation of UBB in the life of the community and for proposing economic, social and cultural partnerships. The responsibilities of this committee extend to approval of the composition, membership, and regulation of the Great Senate, discussed below. From the IEP team's perspective, the main drivers in this area stem from the vision, mission and values of UBB, which place emphasis on services for the community, as does the rector's *Strategic Plan (2012/2015)* which, as with the previous Plan that it succeeds, sets out strategic objectives that guide the direction and operations of the university in the area of community engagement and service to society. Here, UBB's service to society in a multi-ethnic environment, as described in section 3 (p. 14), is a special feature.

The new *Strategic Plan (2012/2015)* sets out three strategic objectives for, respectively: engagement with the business environment; the university's cultural and educational role; and increasing involvement in the community. Given UBB's already strong traditions in such areas, the team believes that the university is well placed to realise such aims and ambitions as are set out in the *Plan*. Nevertheless, as earlier discussions around strategic planning have implied, for this to be realised the university must take care to identify robust and transparent means whereby progress against the *Plan*, and also community and societal impact, can be measured. The team acknowledge that this is not an easy task in this area, but current efforts for the tracking of graduates represents an excellent example of what can be done in terms of assessing impact.

In considering the planning documentation made available to them, such as the *Senate Operational Plan*, and examples of faculty *Operational Plans*, the IEP team noted that while some plans paid close attention to objectives and targets aimed specifically at community engagement and service to society through partnerships, cultural activities, and so on, some were less forthcoming in this respect. The team formed the view that greater consistency in this is desirable. Nevertheless, from the full range of documentation and from meetings with various groups and individuals, the team saw clear evidence of extensive contributions to local, regional, and national economic, social and cultural life. This was manifested in partnerships; consultative roles; delivery of services; company scholarships; agreements with companies, businesses, and NGOs; internship arrangements; and many academic-related activities. In addition, the IEP team noted that UBB staff make important voluntary contributions to community development work through involvement in non-profit



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organisations. In particular, UBB renders service to its environment by maintaining and fostering multiculturalism, which has been a hallmark of the region for centuries.

The IEP team's enquiries and deliberations in this area were assisted by institutional documentation, meetings with UBB staff and alumni, and also valuable discussions with external stakeholders drawn from business, industry, the professions, and the high school sector. The team explored a number of matters with external stakeholders and were impressed to hear the value attached to UBB graduates and interns by employers who were able to confirm, either through direct experience or by reputation, that the university's students often went on to occupy senior management positions in business and commerce, and were recognised as being among the best in Romania from the point of view of educational background and employability and entrepreneurial skills. The team also took the opportunity to explore relating to the UBB course portfolio and any involvement they might have in curriculum change and development with external stakeholders' matters. Discussions confirmed that some external involvement with some faculties and departments was evident in terms of input into curriculum matters, though this was by no means consistent in all academic areas. It appeared to the IEP team that the best examples involved those departments where an employer forum had been established, where input into and advice on new course development was actively sought, and where formal employer feedback was obtained. In the best of these cases, the team heard of prompt responses to employer needs in terms of course portfolio development through the provision of customised, technology-related programmes of study. The team acknowledge the constraints faced in some areas, including legal constraints which have restricted the ability of departments to contract with private providers for project work. Nevertheless, the team were interested to hear the view expressed by some external stakeholders that the university could do more to provide flexible, tailor-made, advanced training courses for business, industry and the professions as part of a more responsive approach to continuing professional development (CPD) and even work-based learning packages. This further confirmed the thrust of the discussion in section 3, whereby additional emphasis needs to be placed by the university on continuing education and lifelong learning.

In reflecting on and assessing the foregoing issues, the team were able to explore the extent to which external stakeholders and the wider community and region were involved in the governance and planning of the university, and in strategic matters generally. The team was interested to learn that external input was routinely sought into SWOT analyses undertaken for strategic planning purposes. Further, at the time of the team's visit, it was apparent that the Great Senate would continue to exist as a consultative body to the university's Senate, providing external input into discussions regarding the strategic direction of the university. The team noted that the contribution of this body, in terms of the business, cultural, political and religious expertise and added value it brings to the university's deliberative processes, is widely appreciated by members of the university community. The team also learned that



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consideration was being given to the inclusion of members of the Great Senate on each of the sub-committees of the newly constituted Senate structure. From the team's perspective, this may go some way towards enabling the university to bring much needed additional external input into the university. However, in the team's judgement, there is also a need for more proactive approaches to be adopted in these matters at the level of individual faculties and departments. In view of the changing and uncertain external environment, not least from an economic and demographic point of view, by becoming more consistently proactive the university and its faculties may find that they can become more responsive and agile in meeting changing needs and in adapting the portfolio and services of the university as traditional markets decline or become more competitive.



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6. Quality culture

Developments in quality management, and quality assurance and evaluation, provided the IEP with further insights into organisational development and organisational effectiveness. Progress being made towards the development of a culture of quality was also of interest to the team. In their deliberations, based on documentation provided, and discussions with staff and students, the IEP team identified three important dimensions of quality assurance and quality evaluation at UBB: policy and procedure for the planning and administration of quality, which draws on business and industry approaches and models; developments to support student representation and involvement in quality processes, including student evaluation; and arrangements relating more broadly to academic quality assurance, such as the Centre for Quality Management (CQM), and processes to support the internal review and accreditation of programmes, and the evaluation and appraisal of teachers.

The IEP team noted that important external parameters for quality assurance and accreditation were set by ARACIS, as the national body responsible for the national programme of institutional evaluation and programme accreditation in all Romanian higher education institutions. From their enquiries the team was able to ascertain that UBB had in place well established quality processes to meet these external requirements. In this the CQM and the Senate sub-committee for Quality Assurance and Evaluation (QAEC), respectively, play important advisory roles. The work of the CQM, established in 2006 following prior activities in the area of quality assurance which date back to 2002, signified to the IEP team that the university has in place an infrastructure that is suitable for a modern university which has quality as one of its top priorities and which has been at the forefront of quality assurance development amongst Romanian universities for some ten years. The team noted that the remit of the Centre includes distribution and analysis of quality surveys of students and other stakeholders, and the organisation of training on quality matters. The QAEC's responsibilities include matters such as quality policy, the annual quality assurance programme, and ensuring cooperation with the requirements of ARACIS. However, the team felt that UBB's CQM staff, being "quality professionals" due to their acquisition of specific competencies, could be involved more proactively even at early stages of developing or revising study programmes, thus helping academics to make use of specific aspects of "quality expectations" as early as possible, i.e. at the onset of a planning process. This approach requires, and should ensure, shifting the view on quality of study programmes from an ex-post issue of investigative checking to an ex-ante issue of adequate conceptualisation supported by "quality professionals" in collaboration with academics and students of the academic field in question. Matters relating to oversight exercised by QAEC, and by Senate, of the outcomes and institutional implications of student surveys are returned at the end of this section.



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The *Quality Policy* of the university defines quality in terms of a “fitness for purpose” approach, and sets out a number of quality objectives for consideration by faculties and administrative units. In their scrutiny of faculty annual quality assurance plans it appeared to the IEP team that faculties made appropriate use of this policy. The team noted, however, that neither the *Policy* nor the university's *Quality Manual* provide substantive linkage beyond verbal reference to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), nor the Bologna Process, both important sources for academic quality for all European universities. In view of the emphasis placed on the ESG and Bologna in the university's self-evaluation report, this was a little surprising. Indeed, the contents of the *Manual* confirmed the IEP team in their view that quality management at UBB, in terms of philosophy and procedural emphasis, owes much to a reliance on industrial and business models, terminology and approaches to quality, as exemplified in matters such as “document control”, and an emphasis on “corrective and preventive measures”. In light of some of the more negative staff views of “quality” noted in the UBB SER, and evident to the IEP team in the views expressed to them by some staff, the university may wish to reflect on whether its policies and documentation in the general area of quality assurance might benefit from being more “academic friendly” in its principles, philosophy and terminology. These matters are discussed further, below.

To facilitate and underpin the implementation of arrangements for academic quality assurance, the university established the quality assurance and evaluation councils which operate at faculty level, and which were referred to in section 3. The team noted the role played by the councils in preparing quality assurance plans, in scrutinising quality review and evaluation reports for programmes and courses, and for teacher performance, and in addressing the accreditation requirements of the national quality agency, ARACIS. They also provide a point of contact with the CQM. This oversight, together with the annual and five-yearly (external) review activity at programme level, assists the gradual development of a culture of self-evaluation at UBB, and is supporting institutional efforts towards improvement of processes and of the academic experience. Though there remains work to be done in developing the maturity of these committees, the IEP team formed the view that progress is being made in strengthening the operation of these important bodies which have potential in contributing to an environment and culture in which, as is proposed below, quality matters are subject to open and mature debate and discussion.

The IEP team noted that each member of academic staff is assessed annually by the relevant faculty or department manager. This scheme focuses on activity and achievements in the areas of teaching, research, and external work. Account is also taken of student feedback. Until a change of law in 2011, salary levels were directly related to the outcomes of these appraisals. Further, from a quality development point of view, the IEP team was interested to learn that the university also has in place procedures for the peer review of teaching performance. The peer evaluation process is undertaken in addition to, but separate from, assessments provided by students through survey feedback. The team noted that the



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purpose of the scheme is to enhance the quality of teaching. While the university acknowledged that there is further work to be done in embedding this process and in gaining wider acceptance of its benefits amongst those who may be reluctant to engage with the scheme, the IEP team would wish to encourage the university in taking this scheme, and the proposed online scheme, forward as an additional element of UBB's drive towards a quality culture and, more specifically, as a means of improving staff competencies. The team also believes that staff support for quality assurance could be enhanced by emphasizing the supportive aspect for academics, e.g. by providing training schemes for academic teaching, or by rewarding good teaching, e.g. by awarding a prize for excellence in teaching.

The team focused some of their deliberations and enquiries on provisions for student representation and involvement in quality processes, and in wider institutional governance arrangements. The documentation provided, and discussions with students and staff, proved to be helpful in this respect. The team took care to ensure that students were provided with opportunities to indicate whether they were sufficiently well represented, and were able to express their views on quality and other matters through involvement in committees or through other channels. The team learned that students were, in general, content with the informal channels open to them, and were able to raise matters of concern with their teachers or head of departments on a day-to-day basis. It appeared to the team that such arrangements worked satisfactorily and that staff were accessible and helpful. Also, the team noted the established arrangements for student representation in the governance structures and decision-making bodies, such as the university Senate, Board of Administration, and other committees and councils. There is provision in the university's charter for 25% representation and voting rights in the structure of the Senate and in faculty committees. The student prefect has full voting rights on the Board of Administration. The students' chancellor is the elected leader of the students' councillors and has voting rights in a number of committees that make decisions on important student affairs. In the view of the IEP team these arrangements for student representation are comprehensive, and extend to both undergraduate and doctoral students. The team heard from students that they provide valuable opportunities to meet with university authorities. They are also valued by students for the opportunities provided to gain skills of importance to future employment prospects. However, as is indicated below, and as the team were advised by some students with whom they met, including student representatives, the outcomes of student expressions of concern, particularly through the use of formal feedback mechanisms for obtaining student views, are not always apparent to the student body.

The IEP team's consideration of the use made of formal student feedback and evaluation by the university and its faculties and departments focused on the effectiveness of these arrangements from the student perspective. The team learned that student evaluation forms have been used for a number of years. While surveys are used to obtain feedback from employers, from doctoral and international students, and from UBB graduates, the principal



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mechanisms for gathering feedback on course-related matters and teaching quality, and general satisfaction of UBB students with their experience at the university are, respectively, the online, end of semester “student evaluation of teaching” questionnaire, and the annual online student satisfaction survey. The former survey instrument, which is confidential, invites students to comment on matters such as assessment, teaching, administration, and learning resources, for each module studied. This process is facilitated by the Centre for quality management and results are made available to the individual member of staff and to deans and heads, as appropriate, to become part of the evaluation of the individual member of staff.

In considering the student feedback aspect of this process, it was apparent to the team from meetings with students and staff that, while this was an area of potential good practice, and despite the obvious opportunities for using this as a tool for quality improvement, these arrangements are not working sufficiently well for students. Indeed, this is acknowledged in the SER where it is stated that students do not view the system as transparent or effective since they are not provided with feedback or information on follow-up or of any actions taken to improve or change courses or teaching and learning. Nor does feedback from this evaluation process seem to be considered by faculty or department boards or committees. The particularly low response rate, noted by the IEP team, is also highlighted as a weakness in the SWOT analysis contained in the university’s SER. From their enquiries it became apparent to the IEP team that these deficiencies also apply to the university-wide student satisfaction surveys. The university may wish to reflect on the experience elsewhere in higher education, where it is apparent that online requests for student feedback are as a matter of course associated by low rates of response. The IEP team were interested to note from some students that in some departments, attempts are made to overcome such difficulties with staff designing their own surveys for distribution in class and with prompt feedback on actions being taken to address issues raised by students. These local level arrangements appeared to work more effectively from the perspective of students.

In reflecting on all aspects of quality assurance, quality evaluation, and quality improvement, the IEP team took a close interest in making an assessment of the effectiveness of the quality system by examining how it is viewed by both staff and students, as users of the systems and procedures. This forms part of the team’s perspective on the stage of development at UBB in terms of progress towards building a quality culture. Here, the team were guided by the view expressed in the UBB SER and in the UBB *Quality Policy*, and fully endorsed by the IEP team, that quality is the responsibility of all members of the academic community. This is an important recognition by the university in its quality work. Even so, in its SER the university is candid in its acknowledgement that there is progress to be made in this direction when it draws attention to negative perceptions of some UBB staff, that “quality” can become associated with “burden” and “bureaucracy”. In the experience of the IEP team, these are not unfamiliar perspectives amongst university staff and it is a timely reminder that it is



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important to avoid building quality systems that are over-elaborate or unnecessarily complex. In considering the student perspective on matters relating to the integrity of quality processes, the IEP team were interested to hear from some students that in their experience some staff were reticent about receiving feedback on teaching and academic matters and on this being made public. The team formed the impression that this may be a more widespread cultural phenomenon that might be preventing a more open approach to matters including, but not restricted to, responses to student feedback. In the view of some students (including student representatives) who met with the team, and who conveyed their views in a very articulate manner, this was for them symptomatic of a need for the university to take further steps to give greater prominence to the student voice and to approach this within a culture of greater openness and less defensiveness at all levels and in all contexts on quality matters. It also points to the need for more careful oversight to be exercised by Senate and its sub-committees in drawing out matters for institutional consideration that are raised by students in feedback surveys and being seen to respond to them. Student representatives indicated to the IEP team that there is work to be done by the university in this regard. In considering matters relating to quality culture, the IEP team advises the university to reflect on the use made of course/teacher evaluation and student satisfaction surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university, its faculties and departments, for informing students of actions taken to “close the loop”, at all levels, in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

The team would also like to draw UBB’s attention to broaden quality assessment more coherently and more consistently to matters such as student support systems and to administrative processes within UBB. Moreover, as regards the evaluation of study programmes there could be some benefit in transversal analysis of recurring problems, if any, which may show up across various programmes, thus helping UBB to address generic deficiencies of a cross-sectoral nature.



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7. Internationalisation

The IEP team noted the importance attached by the university, on an ongoing basis, to the international and wider European dimension. (The significance of the research dimension of internationalisation, and matters relating to international ranking, has been addressed in section 4 above). At the top of the organisation, senior management oversight is exercised by a vice rector with responsibility for public relations, communication, and international relations. For administrative purposes he is supported in his role by the Centre for International Cooperation. In the UBB deliberative committee structure, international matters are discussed at the Senate sub-committee for International Cooperation. This committee makes proposals to Senate for new partnerships, monitors agreements with existing UBB international partners, and examines the level of university participation in international networks for education and scientific research. The sub-committee also contributes to policy and strategy discussions in the area of internationalisation.

The IEP team learned that though there is no dedicated strategy document for international affairs, strategic considerations are addressed in various institutional planning documents. The team took note of various international commitments and aspirations in the Senate operational plan and in faculty operational plans. These included intentions and ongoing activity to internationalise the curriculum, plans to develop joint and dual degrees, and to extend and grow faculty and department international activities in areas such as student and staff mobility, research and scholarly links, and project funding. Even so, it was not possible to ascertain clearly from these plans how Senate or the faculties were measuring success or the attainment of general targets which, for the most part, were not accompanied by measurable indicators. The team noted with interest that the rector's recently developed *Strategic Plan (2012-2015)*, which will act as the main reference point for future planning in this area across the university and its faculties, contained a number of objectives and quantifiable indicators on matters such as mobility, and international research links. However, at the time of the team's visit no specific measurable values were attached to targets that are set out in that document by which progress could be transparently monitored and assessed as the plan was being taken forward to implementation.

From meetings with staff and students, and from documentation provided, the IEP team was able to assess and confirm the importance to the wider UBB academic community of its international and wider European activities and plans for future development. The university has long-standing institutional-level links with a range of international organisations. It was evident to the members of the team that such international links continue to bring benefits to the wider university. Further, those links established at department or faculty level or at the level of individual faculty members, through agreements, exchanges and partnerships of various kinds, add considerable value in terms of pedagogy, or the research experience



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gained. These benefits also extended to students, either directly or indirectly, in terms of an enhanced academic experience, or opportunities to study abroad or alongside incoming students from other countries. Nevertheless – and particularly in view of what appears to be some mushrooming of international agreements of cooperation - it was not clear to the IEP team how international partners were selected, and according to what criteria final decisions were made regarding the acceptance of memoranda of cooperation or memoranda of agreement. While it was noted that the university's central office plays a role in facilitating such links with faculties and departments the IEP team could not establish by what central strategic criteria final decisions were made regarding such partnerships. Moreover, in the view of the team the university may wish to reflect on the possible advantages of having fewer, more strategic but stronger partnerships of this kind.

The team was provided with recent data on Erasmus-related student mobility and also incoming doctoral students. In the former case, the team noted that the number of outgoing students (854 for 2011/2012) greatly outnumbers that for incoming students (283 for 2011/2012), and this prompted the recognition in the university's SER that more targeted activity was required. The team observed that the university's unique multicultural profile makes it attractive to those students who wish to benefit from the emphasis placed by UBB on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that are delivered in Romanian, English, German, French and Hungarian. In 2011/2012 the number of international students stood at 1212, while the number of incoming doctoral students had shown a modest increase over a two-year period from 135 to 162. Incoming students at all study levels are able to benefit from a comprehensive *Handbook for International Students*, which introduces students to life at UBB, and provides a range of valuable practical information.

The team noted and appreciated the open manner in which the university discussed some of the challenges and constraints which it was seeking to overcome in this area. This includes the expense to Romanian students and academics of extended periods of study or research abroad; the highly competitive nature of applications for projects and grants; the legal and bureaucratic restrictions on incoming students who wish to study on a part-time basis; and the challenges of attracting, incentivising and remunerating foreign professors of high academic standing. The team formed the view that the degree of frankness demonstrated by the university in discussions with the IEP team, and in institutional documentation provided to the team, should serve the university well as it redoubles its efforts in the sphere of internationalisation. The IEP wishes the university well in its continuing efforts to project its profile and strengths on the international stage, and to draw attention to what the university has to offer to incoming students and academics from the international community.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The recommendations of the IEP team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the aspiration of Babeş-Bolyai University (UBB) to be a leading university in Romania, and which is recognised in the wider European and international contexts for its education and research. The team's recommendations have been reached after full consideration of the structures and processes which underpin the operation of the university, and of its capacity for taking forward successful change.

Governance and management

- The IEP team would encourage the university to be proactive in reviewing its present organisational arrangements, and fully endorses the rector's evolving plans for simplifying the organisational structure through reducing the number and configuration of the current faculties, departments and administrative units;
- From their deliberations on arrangements and practices in the area of strategic and operational planning, at all levels, the IEP team strongly recommends that immediate measures are taken to secure effective alignment with the university's *Strategic Plan 2012/2015*, and that this should include: focused priorities; realistic timescales; monitoring of performance against plans and targets; and clear lines of responsibility and accountability;

Learning and teaching

- While the university implements "Bologna" policies and practices to a large extent, it is recommended that it should sharpen its competence and learning outcomes orientation - bearing in mind the wide span of educational objectives (maintaining and developing research and innovative capabilities, ensuring employability, fostering personal development, and educating for democratic citizenship) - and fully align student assessment methods to match the aforementioned orientation;
- In order to enhance the culture of learning and teaching at the university, and to strengthen innovation in pedagogy, the IEP team recommends that more extensive and consistent use is made of a full range of student-centred tools and methods;
- As UBB seeks to secure its reputation for high quality learning and teaching, the IEP team encourages it to consider raising the profile of teaching by putting in place a scheme for the reward and recognition of excellence in teaching and academic practice;
- In exploring the university's societal responsibility for ensuring the education and training of high quality teachers (both in terms of discipline content and pedagogy),

the IEP team formed the view that Senate should ensure that mechanisms are put in place to secure effective interaction and collaboration and a shared sense of responsibility between faculties and the faculty of educational sciences;

Research

- The IEP team recommends that steps are taken to strengthen the integration of staff research into teaching in first and second cycle programmes of study, and to make this more consistent across all faculties;
- The IEP team proposes that a review is undertaken of the support provided to doctoral students with a view to delivering a consistent and high quality experience for all such students, thereby removing the current variability between doctoral schools in the university's faculties and departments.
- The IEP team wishes to encourage the development of clear and transparent criteria and approval procedures for institutes and "centres of research excellence" and take the view that early progress can be made in this area;
- The IEP team welcomes the intention as set out in the *UBB Strategic Plan (2012/2015)* for a move towards a differential allocation of resources to support research and urges the university to make early progress with this approach;

Service to society

- While UBB's contribution to society is commendable, especially in terms of fostering multiculturalism and of contributing to economic development, the IEP team recommends that it should consider the establishment of institutionalised opportunities (i.e. more coherent and regular) for discourse with stakeholders;

Quality

- In considering matters relating to quality culture, the IEP team advises the university to reflect on the use made of course/teacher evaluation and student satisfaction surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university, its faculties and departments, for informing students of actions taken to "close the loop", at all levels, in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide;
- Although UBB needs to avoid undue bureaucracy and must not overstretch both its administrative capacity and participants' tolerance, it should nevertheless ensure that administrative processes and student support elements are checked, and that there is transversal learning across the university in order to identify and rectify problems of a generic nature which may occur similarly throughout the university;



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- The IEP team recommends that the approach to quality assurance needs to be shifted from checking to supporting, both by ensuring early involvement of “quality professionals” in programme development and, where necessary, by providing personal support to academics by helping them to get better as academic teachers;

Internationalisation

- The IEP team recommends that the university should ensure that it implements an internationalisation strategy, both in terms of research and studies, which bears in mind the strategic objective of UBB to be a strong research university, by reducing and focusing its partnerships, and by developing these more decisively towards sustainable joint structures.

Envoi

The IEP team wishes to thank the university for the excellent arrangements made in preparation for their visits, for the support provided for the work undertaken by the team, and for the hospitality and welcome extended by the university and its staff and students. The IEP team has enjoyed learning about the distinctive characteristics and contribution of Babeş-Bolyai University (UBB). It has been a great pleasure to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders, the challenges faced by the university and its determination to address and overcome them. The IEP team hopes that the university finds their comments and suggestions helpful and supportive in its planning for the future. We believe that UBB has the ambition and potential to be successful in its next stage of development and beyond, and we wish the institution well in this.