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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tîrgu Mureş

EVALUATION REPORT

April 2013

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Performance
in Higher Education





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Tîrgu Mureş. The evaluation took place between January and March 2013 (with the self-evaluation report dating from late 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 service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.



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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. UMFTM’s profile

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tîrgu Mureş (UMFTM in this report) is located in the city of Tîrgu Mureş, the seat of Mureş County in the northern-central part of Romania. Consequently, the university also plays a key role with regard to the region’s public health system. Most notably, UMFTM is the only Romanian university in the field of medical and pharmaceutical education that offers programmes in three languages, namely Romanian, Hungarian and English.

The university consists of three faculties: medicine, pharmacy and dental medicine. Doctoral studies are organised via the doctoral school, or Institution Organiser of PhD Studies (IOSUD). The institution offers educational programmes in the fields of medicine, dental medicine and pharmacy, including short cycle programmes for nurses, dental technicians and pharmaceutical assistants. Some recently introduced curricula on demand-driven subjects such as kinetherapy, nutrition and dietetics and sports complete the present programme portfolio.

According to the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and additional data provided to the team, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu Mureş had a total of 507 academic staff and 260 administrative staff in the academic year 2011/2012. A total number of 5 143 students was enrolled in the university’s programmes for undergraduate, Master, PhD and postdoctoral studies, and 1 293 students were engaged in residency studies.

A new education law came into effect in January 2011. The law introduced several important changes to the organisation of the universities, most of which will be mentioned in this report. Part of these changes was an adaptation of the university charter in 2012. The charter was fully approved by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports. Adding to these turbulent environment dynamics, a new management team was elected in 2012. As a result, many internal structural and process changes were not fully implemented by the time of the evaluation (such as the new quality assurance system).



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1.3. The evaluation team

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

- Prof. Dr Ferdinand Devínsky, former Rector, Comenius University, Slovakia – team chair
- Prof. Dr Áine Hyland, former Vice-President, University College Cork, Ireland
- Prof. Dr Spyros Amourgis, AIA, President Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece
- Ms Liliya Ivanova, Executive Committee Member of the European Student Union, Bulgaria
- Dr Oliver Vettori, Director Programme Management & Quality Management, Vienna University of Economics & Business, Austria – team coordinator

The evaluation team is most grateful for the hospitality shown by the university, as well as for the open and trusting atmosphere, which the rector, Prof. Leonard Azamfirei, and his team had created. The team was particularly impressed by the spirit of enthusiasm that was shown by the rector, his liaison persons, Prof. Angela Borda and Prof. Silvia Imre and their entire team, as well as by the overwhelmingly positive statements of the students about their university and its leading team. The evaluation team would especially like to thank Angela Borda and Silvia Imre and their team for the excellent organisation of the two site visits and for providing any additional information as quickly as possible and in a very professional manner. A special thank you is also due to Alicja Bochajczuk from the IEP secretariat for her great support and to all other people who provided assistance and without whom the team's tasks could not have been completed.

1.4. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group installed by UMFTM's Rector, as specified by the IEP guidelines for institutions. The self-evaluation group consisted of nine members:

- Prof. Angela Borda, PhD – Vice-Rector for International Relations and Quality Assurance
- Prof. Dr Silvia Imre, PhD – Quality Assurance Department/Faculty of Pharmacy
- Prof. Dr Dan Dobreanu, PhD – Vice-Rector for Education/Faculty of Medicine
- Prof. Dr Tibor Szilágyi, PhD – Vice-Rector for Research/Faculty of Medicine
- Lect. Simona Muresan, PhD – Faculty of Medicine
- Lect. Christina Bicâ, PhD – Head of Department MD1/Faculty of Dental Medicine



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- Teach. ass. Aura Rusu, PhD – Senate Member/Faculty of Pharmacy
- Ms Sus Ioana – 6th year student, Faculty of Medicine

All nine members were also present for the self-evaluation group meetings during the two site visits.

The institution submitted the self-evaluation report and about a dozen annexes in December 2012. As some of the annexes had been provided in Romanian only, the use of these documents to the team was somehow limited. However, the institution, and particularly the liaison persons were very forthcoming with any kind of information and quickly obliged to prepare any additional document that was requested between the first and the second visits (e.g. a detailed financial report, an English version of the QA manual, the operational plan of the university for 2013, the annual report 2011, a more comprehensive overview of the university's student body).

The report had been prepared by the self-evaluation group and was published on UMFTM's website and thus made available to every member of the institution. On the other hand, even though most of the university representatives the team have met during their visits were aware of the existence of the report, a considerable number had not even read it, indicating that the report had not been as widely distributed and discussed as could be wished for and mirroring the finding in the self-evaluation report that the communication structures at UMFTM need to be improved: although even more sensitive information seems to be available as part of the transparency policy of the new management team, many university members show a certain lack of interest in accessing the information on the website.

Overall, the report tended to be more descriptive than analytical; it contained a number of repetitions, whilst omitting important issues such as the university's financial status and operations. It is important to acknowledge, however, that this was the first evaluation of this kind for the university. In addition, the evaluation took place in a phase of turbulent changes (such as the implementation of the new law of education) and internal transition: the contract between the senate and the new rector had been signed just eight months before the first site visit (9 May 2012). Thus, the team wishes to stress that the self-evaluation group has managed to compile an informative written report, and the SWOT section showed that the group is aware of many of the university's current challenges. Consequently, the team **recommends making sustainable use of the self-evaluation group's comprehensive knowledge of their own institution by integrating the self-evaluation group into the already emerging formal quality assurance structures** and by taking the SWOT analysis as a basis for defining the strategic priorities for the next years (see section below).

During the two visits (20-22 January 2013; 12-15 March 2013), the team met almost a hundred members of the university, including all senior managers, representatives from the



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Senate as well as teachers and students from all three faculties (medicine, pharmacy, dentistry). Overall, the university representatives were very open during the discussions and interested in suggestions and recommendations. Not surprisingly, the different actor groups also had different views on the university's burning issues. What was surprising for the team, however, was the fact that some of the representatives were not able to identify such burning issues or name aspects they might want to change. This can also be seen as a further indicator of the lack of interest in/awareness of strategically important information that were publicly available (such as the self-evaluation report or the strategic plan).



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2. Governance and institutional decision making

2.1 Vision, mission and strategic planning

The IEP methodology uses the university's vision and mission as starting points in reviewing what the university is trying to do. UMFTM has described elements of its vision and mission in the self-evaluation report (SER) and provided multiple related documents, most notably a strategic plan for 2012 to 2016, that is directly derived from the "election programme" of the rector, and an operational plan for 2013 that outlines the duties of the management team during the entire year. The SER states the vision of the university as aiming "to build a university for the future". The mission statement claims that "the university aims to be a distinguished national leader in medical and pharmaceutical education and an outstanding research institute". The team acknowledges that the institution's newfound autonomy has its own burden and that the leadership is in general very enthusiastic about approaching the related challenges. As a result, however, the current strategy plan contains too many objectives for a relatively short period of time and is in definite need of a further prioritisation of the institutional goals. An institution's striving for excellence needs a clear focus on the most promising or structurally important strategic areas in order to avoid that the vision becomes mere rhetoric.

The team thus believes that a clearly stated common purpose and vision could assist the university in reaching a new stage of improvement. Relatedly, a more comprehensive mission statement (maybe as an addendum to the university charter) would help to keep the university on the right track in the turbulent days of changes. The evaluation team recommends that both the vision and the mission should be based on the change-friendly idea of "building a university of the future" that is already functioning as a motto for the university community. **The three faculties are prompted to prepare their own mission documents** as a means of enhancing their respective strengths and achieving their individual goals, but also need to be aware of the necessity that these missions should not only consistent with the general mission of the university, but actively support it. This seems particularly relevant in a situation where the current Education Law allows a breakdown of the budget even to the level of departments. To prevent any tensions, UMFTM will need clear rules for such allocation activities. The preparation of such rules is presently not mentioned in the strategic plan.

The translation of the vision and mission statements into practical working programmes is usually articulated in a strategic development plan. As has already been mentioned above, the current strategic plan is practically identical with the management plan as presented by rector Azamfirei during his campaign for the position. Although the fact that he was elected speaks of the plan's general acceptance by the members of the university, the issues that are



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covered in the document seem far too numerous to be tackled in a four-year period. With 68 goals and 30 sub-goals, there is a definite risk that the university management is trying to approach too many problems at once and is therefore likely to miss some of them. The team gained the clear impression, that the institution's leading team is aware of this fact, but nevertheless advises to carefully choose the most "burning issues" and formulate clear plans for how they could be solved. **Linking the SWOT-analysis from the self-evaluation more clearly to the strategic plan could be a good starting point.** In any case, the definition and prioritisation of clear and attainable goals needs to be based on a university-wide dialogue that involves all relevant stakeholder groups. **The new strategic document should also include a detailed and realistic financial plan (which is currently only included in the annual operational plan) and form the basis for more specific strategies in the areas of teaching and learning, research or internationalisation** (cf. the recommendations in the respective sections of this report). Every strategic project should be accompanied by a precise calculation of the financial and human resources that are required in order to complete the project.

One category of projects, which the evaluation team strongly advises to include in the plan and prioritise very highly, are some **institution-wide endeavours**, that will also fulfil the purpose of strengthening the overall institutional identity and emphasise a sense of belonging. There are several options for such projects, e.g. the comprehensive curriculum reform that was frequently mentioned during the evaluation (cf. section 3 on teaching and learning) or the **design and implementation of a support system for encouraging undergraduate students to participate in the faculties' research activities** (cf. section 4 on research).

2.2 Decision-making processes and university structures

Institutional autonomy has its own burden, challenging the university's new leadership to strike a balance between the new opportunities and risks, whilst acknowledging the institutional traditions and values that have been institutionalised over the last decades. Overall, UMFTM's management team seems well qualified and capable of achieving this balance. The administrative board, which is responsible for steering the institution in every important field, seems to be functioning very well under the strong leadership provided by the rector. The board includes the rector (as chair), the vice-rectors, the deans, the director of the Council of Doctoral University Studies (whose function is equivalent to that of a vice-rector), the general director (who oversees most administrative units) and two student representatives, who share a seat on the board (they can rotate during the meetings and they are both considered board members but they have only one vote in the decision making process). Every important decision is discussed in the board and — if there is dissent — taken to a vote. Yet even though everyone seems to be very generous with sharing information and



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opinions, the evaluation team nevertheless believes that the administrative board should communicate more frequently about finances and financial issues.

All in all, Rector Azamfirei apparently managed to establish a new spirit in the daily life of the university and, together with his team, has created a positive atmosphere. Practically all university members the team met during the evaluation mentioned that transparency, openness and a new style of communication were evident under the new administration (since May 2012) and seemed positively motivated to put this spirit to work.

The evaluation team was shown that the role of the students is very much consistent with the principles of the Bologna Process and that students and staff act as full partners in all fields relevant to the students' education. The evaluation team noted with pleasure that the students in particular were almost unanimously very positive about their role in the decision-making processes and governance of the university – though some students complained about a lack of information, particularly with regard to student evaluations and quality assurance (cf. section 6 on quality culture). The team encourages the institution to continue this promising partnership and to further ensure a strong level of student participation in the decision-making bodies, yet also to make the students even more active partners when it comes to curriculum development and quality enhancement.

Overall, the team found the organisational climate to be very cooperative and was told that the relationship between the senate and the administrative board is very constructive, with the president of the senate being a regular guest at the administrative board meetings and vice versa. Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between the formal and the informal decision-making processes that has some less constructive potential. On the one hand, the rector is legally responsible for all financial and management decisions and the university charter gives him the power to shape the university strategy. On the other hand, the senate is the highest decision-making body and can veto the rector and the administrative board in practically every decision. Under certain circumstances this could lead to tensions and possibly even blockages between the highest governing body and the highest representative of the university. **In this regard, UMFTM could also benefit from a further careful clarification of the management structures and roles, i.e. who is responsible for implementing a certain strategic goal or project.**

Last but not least, the role of external governmental bodies has to be taken into account as well in the institutional decision-making process. In the case of UMFTM, governmental control seems to be a serious constraint when it comes to university expenditures and human resources. Considering that even relatively minor investments have to be approved by the Ministry, the team noticed that there is a disparity between the university's autonomy to earn funds on the one hand, and to decide what the best way is for spending these funds on the other hand. There is a real danger that the university will not retain sufficient autonomy



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with a subsequent risk to its academic freedom. This does not entail the fact that the university should not be held accountable towards the authorities managing public funds and towards society at large for its decisions and actions, which can be regarded as the “price” for institutional autonomy.

2.3 Management of financial resources and human resources

The self-evaluation report presented only very limited data on the financial situation of the university. Upon request, the team was provided with some additional data, most notably the overall budget and expenditures plans for 2012 and 2013. As has already been stated above, the current strategic plan is not linked to any financial plan at all. The operational plan contains cost calculations for some of the activities and projects on a limited basis. The main cause of concern for the team, however, is that the state’s contribution in 2012 was only 26.4% of the overall budget, and most of this money (88.3%) was used for salaries. For the year 2013 the projected situation looks even more problematic, with 98.4% of the state support (basic funding) being needed for salaries.

Even though the university currently seems in a situation of relative financial stability (with staff salaries slightly above average), which is a sound basis for future improvements and structural developments, the evaluation team **recommends that UMFTM investigates a diversification of income sources**. This is particularly important because the other major part of the budget stems from tuition fees but the regional demographic trends will probably lead to a decline in student numbers, resulting not only in a decrease of tuition fees but also with regard to the student-number-bound part of the state funding. Currently, none of the evaluative or strategic documents of the institution seem to address this problem. Thus, the team recommends that **UMFTM prepare itself by developing a comprehensive plan for securing its budget in the upcoming years**. Possible ways are an increase of income from research contracts with external partners, from internal project grants or from sponsoring and funding campaigns by ways of an alumni club (cf. section 5 on service to society). In any case, it would be helpful to calculate future expenditures by forming a stronger link between the strategic and financial plans.

With regard to its human resource management, the university has already taken some impressive actions, such as the introduction of an annual staff appraisal and a performance-based reward system (cf. section 4 on research). Many important administrative functions are fulfilled by faculty members on top of their regular duties. It can therefore be deduced, that the current administrative staff is either quantitatively or qualitatively not able to meet all the challenges the university is currently facing. **The university could benefit from investing in the professionalisation of their administrative staff, particularly the senior members**. This



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would also help the vice-rectors who — at least according to the operational plan — are conducting a great deal of routine activities themselves.



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3. Teaching and learning

Teaching plays a big role in the university, as can be seen from the impressive investment in the teaching infrastructure (e.g. in the case of the faculty of dentistry). Overall the students seem very satisfied with the quality of the teaching. The university has already implemented major parts of the Bologna requirements, but still seems to struggle with the teaching and learning aspects.

The UMFTM's teaching approaches appear effective, but are predominantly rooted in the traditional teacher-centered paradigm (which, as a side-effect, are also fairly resource-intensive). It is **recommended that the university pursue the transition from teaching to learning more actively**. In other words, student-centred learning and a learning-outcome approach need to be strengthened and encouraged among the teachers, especially in the first and second years of studies. Here in particular, students can feel a little lost and would benefit from forms of assessment that differ from traditional exams. There are many successful European examples to learn from — but this also means that **the staff needs to be given more opportunities to learn abroad** (see also section 7 on internationalisation).

One of the key goals of the university as mentioned in the strategic plan and various meetings during the site visits is a **comprehensive curriculum reform across all study programmes** in order to make the study experience even more practice-oriented and to redevelop a programme portfolio that is in line with the Bologna recommendations, EU norms for the regulated professions, the National Education Law as well as the current educational trends. It can be easily seen that such a reform requires a great deal of time, effort and energy and should thus be prioritised very highly among UMFTM's strategic goals for the next years.

As the university's curriculum development processes seem rather complicated and not very suitable for flexible change and since any comprehensive curriculum reform requires the balancing of a broad number of various stakeholder interests, the team **recommends establishing a professional curriculum development unit under the leadership of the vice-rector for education**. Such a unit could handle the administrative processes of reforming and maintaining the institution's curricula as well as provide advice and support in all technical, legal and potentially even didactical matters involved in curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation.

Within the context of the reform, the team advises UMFTM to **strengthen the modular structure of the curricula as suggested by the Bologna Principles as well as to formulate clear learning outcomes for each individual course in close cooperation between the teaching staff and the students**. Learning outcomes are concise statements about what students will know and be able to do, once they have completed a certain course. They are also an effective means for identifying redundancies as well as subject and skill areas that



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need to be strengthened and will help with the problem of recognising exams that were taken abroad. The evaluation indicates that such key elements of the Bologna principles are still only partly known or understood among the teaching staff. It is therefore suggested that UMFTM offer more training and assistance with regard to educational and pedagogical principles and didactic techniques that are in line with current international trends and standards. This seems even more important, as some of the students were concerned about the teaching methods, believing that the courses should be more interactive and updated so as to make them more relevant to practice. The new Simulation Centre for practical skills that is mentioned in the strategic plan and seems to be rather highly prioritised by the rector could be a valuable means to get there. It is important to note, however, that the Simulation Centre will require significant investments, not only to build it, but also for maintenance and for keeping it up-to-date. In addition, the centre will only be able to effectively fulfil its function if it is embedded in an adequate teaching and learning model and accompanied by a variety of activities that help the teachers to make good use of it as well as to reflect their own current teaching styles and adapt them.

In general, student-staff ratios are very good — with the possible exception of the ratio in the faculty of dentistry, where there are too many students (probably also in relation to the number of available patients). Nevertheless, the high teaching workload was a problem that was frequently mentioned by the teaching staff. This is a common problem with many higher education institutions. In the case of UMFTM, however, the teaching burden could be at least partly relieved by taking some organisational measures. The team thus **recommends a detailed review of the teachers' workload and the reasons for it and to develop an action plan** in order to improve the situation.

Some possible causes already surfaced during the evaluation. As was already mentioned above, the educational philosophy at UMFTM appears to be traditional and more teaching-oriented than learning-oriented. This philosophy assumes that a considerable part of student learning takes place during the contact hours — yet this does not necessarily occur, as the high workload for clinical teachers leads to situations where students are present but have neither direct contact with the teachers nor the patients. At least part of the problem might be addressed by re-organising the teaching (potentially related to the curriculum reform, see above) in a way that increases self-directed learning. In this respect, it is also **recommended that UMFTM professionalise the institutional management** in order to organise the clinical parts of the curricula more efficiently (this would benefit both students and teachers). Furthermore, by **involving external specialists in part-time teaching** the university could also achieve its goal of making the courses more practice-oriented as well as reducing the teaching load of the regular staff.

Overall, teaching cooperation needs not only to be strengthened with external partners, but also across the various faculties and disciplines. Overall, the evaluation team observed a



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limited amount of inter-faculty cooperation. Even though there are courses provided by each faculty for study programmes dominated by other faculties, the courses tend to be tailored to the needs of the “home programme” rather than to the requirements of the programme they are intended for. Therefore, the team **recommends that UMFTM develops cross-departmental initiatives and projects** that would foster constructive exchange between the various disciplines and create new innovative teaching formats as well as make the programmes more attractive for students, including international ones.

With regard to the quality of the student body, there is a need to review the admission criteria and selection process in order to identify precisely the problems and find the appropriate solutions. **There is a need for more data and information about what is working and what is not, particularly as the demographic developments of the region do not seem to be taken into account.** The evaluation team estimates that the number of applicants will decline in the coming years creating the need to diversify sources of income and to develop distance education modules, which could also attract more students from abroad.

In general, the excellent teaching infrastructure (especially the new dentistry training facilities and the soon-to-be built Simulation Centre) and the motivation of teachers and students alike provide a promising basis to build upon and to further help the university’s ambition to deliver professional education.



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4. Research

UMFTM aims to become an outstanding research institution and research is regarded as an important priority by the management team as is evidenced by the self-evaluation report as well as numerous statements by UMFTM representatives during the evaluation visits. However, there is a need to translate this priority into practice. So far, this ambition has hardly gone beyond the state of a vision for the future. The evidence available to the evaluation team indicates that research productivity and visibility is rather low, particularly by international standards. Additionally, the current share of UMFTM's overall budget allocated for research is surprisingly low (3.7% of the 2012 annual budget; 5.1% for the 2013 budget plan, not including the infrastructure investments).

Thus, the team advises the university **to develop a university-wide research policy that is aligned with the overall strategic plan and to dedicate the necessary funding to this policy.** The policy should indicate clear and sustainable priorities, define the main objectives for the next five to ten years and specify the main research areas on which the institution wants to focus. It is recommended that the policy builds on the already existing individual "research hotspots": UMFTM has some excellent academic staff who gained experience abroad, at highly respected institutions, and are publishing in top international journals. In addition, the new research policy should also explain how research is related to the educational process and vice versa, in order to ensure that research activity results in research-based education and teaching.

Last but not least, the policy could also help with respect to prioritising future investments in the university's infrastructure as well as to the pooling of current resources. In this regard, the evaluation team commends the plan to establish a new "Integrated Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Research Education Centre", and suggests that the centre should not only serve for researchers in pharmaceutical sciences but for researchers from other disciplines as well; the current parochial system that regards equipment and laboratories as the property of a faculty is definitely an obstacle to achieving high quality research. **Related to this, the research policy should also make provisions for fostering research collaborations between different departments and also across the three faculties.** In the case of the faculty of dentistry, for example, potential research opportunities are impeded because there is not enough pre-clinical staff available. By developing cooperative initiatives across the three faculties, such as joint research programmes, the university may even be able to lower the barriers for organisational change and help create a unifying sense of a common purpose and spirit on the level of the entire institution. Bearing in mind that the most successful and promising research areas nowadays are of an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary character, the fostering of joint research projects could prove to be a vital step towards achieving UMFTM's vision.



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In order to increase the publication output as soon as possible, however, it will also be necessary to start some short-term initiatives and activities. Research support activities could be extended and improved: some promising elements are already in place, such as the internal grant competition programme; this seems to work well in terms of its stimulating effects and has been well perceived. The additional introduction of a seed money grants scheme to prepare proposals for research at UMFTM could be a further step.

Within UMFTM, research is viewed as an important part of the academic identity, yet teaching classes seems to dominate the daily tasks; in order to achieve the intended change, it might be necessary to challenge the faculty's self-image of predominantly being teachers and that the high teaching workload is precluding them from committing to a research career. Teaching could be re-organised in order to reduce the individual teaching workload, which is comparably high, at least in the clinical disciplines. The teaching load of the strongest researchers could also be reduced. In order to motivate staff to invest time in their research instead of teaching or working in practices outside of the university, additional incentives will be necessary. A first step could be to **provide more opportunities for junior staff to participate in international academic discussions**, by providing and funding more opportunities to attend conferences.

The academic staff also needs support for editing papers, for language editing of English publications, for dealing with the technical aspects of applying for European level projects, etc. An important first step was taken by creating a department for European projects and research, yet the department's work needs to be further professionalised, in order to support the university's participation in European programmes such as the 7th and upcoming 8th Framework Programme. In this regard, the team **recommends that the university should take a more active role in acquiring research funds from abroad.**

The evaluation team believes that recruiting new researchers in the prioritised research areas would play a key role for achieving the intended change, although it is also acknowledged that the current promotion regulations can be a serious obstacle, as they involve complex and demanding criteria set at national level by the ministry. The team commends the steps that were already taken in the recent past in order to improve the quality of doctoral education, **and advises that UMFTM further increase the support for its young researchers and to invest in their training and supervision, particularly as the hiring of new staff has some clear (financial) limits.** With a share of only 4.5% of the entire student body, the number of UMFTM's PhD students should be increased, e.g. by offering grants and stipends. Judging from the apparent motivation and dedication of UMFTM's students, it might also be possible **to actively involve pre-PhD students in research projects.** This way, the university will not only be able to create a student research culture, but also to compensate at least partially for the lack of staff resources.



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Last but not least, research ethics needs to be a pivotal part of all research policies and research activities alike. The issue of plagiarism was frequently brought up during the two site visits and was also touched upon in the 2011 annual report of the university. The team appreciates that the university has actively dealt with this issue, e.g., by ways of its ethics commission. Most notably, on 25 February 2013, the university signed a contract with the publishing company “Versita” in order to improve the quality of its publishing processes and publications. Among others, the university gains access to a specific plagiarism detection software called “CrossCheck”. The evaluation team acknowledges the actions already taken and recommends that **the university continue to take such steps for ensuring a foundation of academic integrity** for its ambition to become a research-intense university.



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5. Service to society

UMFTM appears to be a locally very well connected university that is firmly embedded in the region's community and plays a key role in the region's public health sector. The region also offers some opportunities for working with the pharmaceutical sector and the university has already made good use of it. The university's graduates seem to value their study experience at UMFTM very highly and often keep contact with the institution far beyond graduation. Yet even though UMFTM's alumni are fond of their university, they still lack the opportunity to network among themselves and with partners at the university on a systematic basis. A university-wide alumni club could improve this situation considerably. The importance of a systematic and sustainable dialogue with one's alumni should not be underestimated, as the graduates form a pivotal link between the more academically oriented culture of the university and the professional practice of the labour markets to which needs the university's programmes cater to. **With regard to these needs, it is also advised that UMFTM pays particular attention to the increased importance of soft skills/generic skills and heeds them in the curricula** (e.g. specific communication trainings targeted at different groups, presentation and CV writing skills, self-organisation and time-management, etc.).

In addition, the graduates are not the only important external stakeholder group, whose input can be beneficial to a university. Thus, the team advises UMFTM to increase the level of stakeholder involvement, both at the curricular level and attached to the different faculties as well as on the level of institutional governance. **It is recommended that UMFTM build upon the already existing relations, to strengthen the links with industry and cooperate with external research centres.** An external stakeholder's advisory board could also offer valuable advice with regard to the graduates' competence development and help systematise research relations. The team's meeting with selected stakeholders already indicated the underlying potential and showed the stakeholders' willingness to contribute to the development of the university and its regional presence.

With regard to regional needs and the changing demographics across Europe, it also seems prudent **to further develop the issue of lifelong learning within the university's overall educational and service portfolio.** Health and preventive health care are issues of continuously increasing importance within most of Europe's ageing societies and providing tailor-made educational modules could meet the interests of non-traditional students and professionals in need of actualising their knowledge.

Considering that Tirgu Mures is a relatively small city with three separate universities, it might be beneficial for the city, the region and particularly for the individual universities to pursue the idea of creating a Metropolitan University Network or even a joint university of Tirgu Mures. The resulting synergy effects could not only be of advantage with regard to the



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resource situation, but would also offer additional strategic options for institutional and regional development. However, it is necessary to point out that such projects of joining efforts and structures require cautious and prudent planning and preparation, not only of the economic and legal aspects, but also with respect to different organisational cultures and stakeholder interests. Of particular importance is the strong support that should be secured from the academics of each higher education institution involved as well as clear political support from the Ministry of Education and the Romanian Government.



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6. Quality culture

Developing a culture of quality that informs and supports the core processes of a higher education institution is a difficult and demanding task because it not only requires the implementation of formal and analytical processes but also has to engage the institution's community as a whole and appeal to the values that inspire this community for further improvements. In the context of the Romanian higher education system, external influences play a very important role. The National Education Law sets the framework for the current quality assurance system in the Romanian higher education sector which is strongly based on external programme evaluations and accreditations by ARACIS (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) as well as additional external evaluations (such as this one). Although such external quality assurance (QA) processes can be important drivers for the development of quality cultures, there is also the risk that they lead to a degree of evaluation fatigue and cause the universities to focus on responding external demands instead of strengthening their internal capacity for reflective change.

In the case of UMFTM, the spirit of the QA officers and the QA department is clearly one of improving the institution and striving for excellence. The QA core team seems very dedicated and invests a great deal of time and effort to developing the internal QA system. The current version of the QA manual demonstrates the ambition to create an overarching system that encompasses all core processes. The team also commends the decision to establish a vice-rector for quality assurance and international affairs, who is responsible for the QA department.

On the other hand, the SWOT analysis that is included in the self-evaluation report identifies as an internal weakness the insufficient understanding of the QA system by academics and students. This can at least partly be ascribed to the fact, that QA is framed as something new to the university instead of a process that has always taken place but is now being redeveloped and professionalised. This can be compounded by the fact that the QA manual focuses on structures and formal aspects; thus, there is a certain risk that QA will be perceived as an additional bureaucratic burden instead of an instrument that would help the university and its members to become better in what they are already doing. As a result, most members of the university could well be tempted to regard QA as the sole responsibility of the QA department instead of acknowledging that it is everybody's role to ensure and enhance the quality of all the activities at the university. **In order to help the other university stakeholders to learn about the benefits of the QA system and how to contribute to its effectiveness, it might be advisable for the QA core team to take a closer look at how other universities across Europe have approached and solved similar problems** (such as engaging the faculty and the students in the QA processes).

This seems even more important as the evaluation team found numerous signs of an already existing and very well functioning quality culture at UMFTM that needs to be systematised



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and put on a more stable and procedurally sustainable basis. At present, the institutional quality culture is strongly relying on informal feedback processes. Even though the apparent atmosphere of open communication is to be applauded, there is a lack of evidence regarding the consequences of such feedback: it is therefore recommended to strengthen the formal feedback channels and to complete the Plan-Do-Check-Act-cycle (PDCA-cycle) by paying more attention to follow-up activities. One QA component that seems particularly laudable in this respect is the performance-based reward system the university has started to implement. For every staff member, there is an annual evaluation/assessment along specific and pre-defined criteria. Even the individual members of the administrative staff have clear job descriptions and clear quality criteria for their work. An appeal system ensures the fairness of the overall scheme.

The students, on the other hand, though evidently very satisfied with the overall communicative atmosphere and the “open ears” of the decision-makers, currently rarely use the official evaluation forms or are — in case of several of the students the team met during their visits — not even aware of their existence. In other cases, they do not fully trust the assurance of anonymity. In addition, the results from these evaluations have been rarely used for purposes of decision-making or quality development yet. The team wishes to emphasise that QA is not simply a matter of getting and interpreting data. **There must be proper transparency and feedback to the students about course improvement and the follow-up activities.**

The evaluation team recommends that the university should invest more in its data collection (such as monitoring the regional demographic developments) and management information systems (i.e. linking different types of data and make them regularly available to all relevant actors and stakeholders). A great deal of data is already being generated by various processes and systems ; these need to be brought together and analysed. The team advises caution about the risk of creating an overabundance of reports and information that are not used or are not useful. Thus, **developing the management information system should start with identifying the needs and open questions of the decision-makers and other relevant actors and by selecting and prioritising that data that is needed to answer them.** The QA system should not become a parallel system to already existing structures, but should be integrated in the overall strategic planning process. As has already been mentioned above, feedback is a pivotal part of any functioning QA system. **In this regard it should be ensured that the outcomes of QA interventions are communicated to staff and students alike so that the feedback loops are closed and the QA system is demonstrated to be effective as well as meaningful.** This will also be an important step towards moving to a quality enhancement approach and for achieving a proper balance between internal and external quality assurance.



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7. Internationalisation

Multiculturalism and multilingualism are obviously important values at UMFTM and manifest themselves visibly in the university's three distinct educational lines: in Romanian, Hungarian and English, which attracts students from various European countries, including the UK and Sweden. The presence of an international student cohort (currently about 6% of the overall student population) contributes strongly to the international character of a university and is also a welcome source of income. Considering the university's attractive teaching infrastructure and, by international standards, relatively low tuition fees, this ratio could and should be increased during the next years. In order to achieve this, **however, UMFTM's international visibility could be considerably enhanced by reworking the university's publicly available information materials.** English language information is scarce, particularly on the university's website, and a better promotion — internally and externally — of the university's considerable achievements would not only help UMFTM's ambition to become more than a regional leader but could also provide the university members with a shared vision for the future. **In addition, the university also needs to carefully monitor the quality of its international student applicants.** The fact that all students who applied in the recent past were seemingly admitted to the university could also send the wrong signal to students interested in a high quality education.

With regard to mobility, the team found a general reluctance (or lack of resources) to send staff abroad, be it faculty members (who even partly self-finance their conference participations and as a result hardly go to international conferences) or administrative staff. As a result the mobility of students and staff remains rather low (in the year 2011/2012 only 1.7 % of the students and 1.7 % of the staff participated in an exchange programme; this means 87 out of 5 143, or 7 out of 404, respectively). **The IEP team recommends increasing this share significantly.** It is significant to note that the student organisations at UMFTM apparently manage to achieve a student exchange rate that is five times higher than the official ERASMUS rate of the university. Joining an existing network such as MedESN (Medical Erasmus Student Network) or establishing a similar exchange network could be important steps toward increasing the student mobility rate. One further way could be to eliminate possible barriers to mobility, such as limited recognition of courses from abroad, so that students do not need to take additional exams upon their return. In addition, the academic staff should be encouraged to take even longer study or research trips abroad: fruitful research cooperation or learning experiences cannot be achieved through short visits or conference trips alone, but might require at least one term at another institution.

In general, it is recommended that **UMFTM improves its international contacts and partnerships** (the apparent current number of 24 bilateral agreements could be increased) and makes better use of the existing ones — not just in terms of increasing student or staff mobility rates, but as a means of internal capacity building. Many of the challenges UMFTM is



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currently facing (e.g. in QA, in implementing the Bologna recommendations, in developing research support services), could be tackled or even overcome by taking examples from institutions from other countries, which have already solved these problems.

Overall, the team believes that many of the issues above could be solved if the university developed a **strategic plan with clear and feasible goals for handling and improving its international relations**. As a starting point, the leading team should revisit the existing 24 bilateral agreements with other universities from different perspectives (i.e. from the point of view of mobility programmes, teaching and learning activities as well as research cooperation), and thus identify potential areas for improvement.

8. Conclusion

Over the last years, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tirgu Mures has proven that it can adapt to new challenges and has the capability for achieving constructive and effective change. The evaluation team particularly commends the positive and motivated spirit of the new leadership team and the great level of cooperation between all university members, including the students.

Nevertheless, there are some “burning issues” in the institution and the institutional environment that need to be addressed in the near future in order to pave the way for UMFTM’s “strive for excellence”. Among the most important external constraints and internal areas for development are:

- A strong governmental control of university expenditures
- The current hiring freeze and the difficulties in finding enough qualified researchers and administrators (related to the high workload of the university’s key performers)
- The need to diversify the university’s income streams
- The need for comprehensive curricular reform
- The university’s low level of research activities and a lack of interdisciplinary cooperation in research
- A rather formal and over-bureaucratic approach to quality assurance
- Relatively low rates of student and staff mobility



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

With regard to governance and institutional decision-making:

- To elaborate the vision and mission documents of the university in order to help build a “university for the future”.
- To formulate mission documents for the three faculties, which are consistent with the general mission of the university and actively support it.
- To develop a clear and concise strategic plan that focuses on the most important priorities for the next four years and is closely aligned with the overall financial plan.
- To strengthen university-wide cooperation initiatives, e.g. in the form of interdisciplinary research projects.
- To clarify the internal management structures and roles, i.e. define who is responsible for implementing a certain strategic goal or project, and to further professionalise the senior administrative staff.
- To develop a comprehensive plan for securing the university’s budget in the upcoming years, e.g. through an increase of income from research contracts with external partners, internal project grants or sponsoring and funding campaigns by ways of an alumni club.

With regard to teaching and learning:

- To continue the change from teaching-centred to learning-centred education and to assist teachers in modernising and diversifying their teaching styles and methods.
- To reform the curricula in order to make the study experience even more practice-oriented and to redevelop a program portfolio that is in line with the Bologna recommendations, EU norms for regulated professions, the national law of education as well as current educational trends.
- To establish a curriculum development unit that assists the decision-makers as well as the academic staff to redevelop curricula and keep them up to date.
- To strengthen the modular structure of the curricula as suggested by the Bologna principles and to formulate clear learning outcomes for each individual course.
- To conduct a detailed review of the teachers’ current high workload and the reasons for it and to develop an action plan in order to improve the situation, e.g. by re-organising teaching and by promoting students’ self-directed learning and/or by involving external specialists in part-time teaching.



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With regard to research:

- **To develop a university-wide research policy that is aligned with the overall strategic plan and to dedicate the necessary funding. Such a policy should indicate clear and sustainable priorities, define the main objectives for the next five to ten years and specify the main research areas on which the institution wants to focus.**
- **To foster research collaborations between different departments and also across the three faculties.**
- **To take a more active role in acquiring research funds from abroad and to further professionalise the work of the research support units.**
- **To actively involve pre-PhD students in research projects and thus create a student research culture and compensate, at least partially, for the lack of staff resources.**

With regard to service to society:

- **To establish a university-wide alumni club in order to give graduates the opportunity to network among themselves and with their partners at the university on a systematic basis.**
- **To increase the level of stakeholder involvement at the curricular level and attached to the different faculties as well as on the level of institutional governance.**
- **To further develop the issue of lifelong learning within the university's overall educational and service portfolio.**

With regard to quality culture:

- **To develop the institutional quality culture in a way that embraces and encourages all stakeholders instead of alienating them with additional formalities.**
- **To strengthen the formal feedback channels and to complete the PDCA-cycle by paying more attention to the follow up activities.**
- **To ensure proper transparency and feedback to the students about course improvement and the respective follow-up activities.**
- **To establish a professional management information system and to start by identifying the needs and open questions of the decision-makers and other relevant actors and by selecting and prioritizing that data that is needed to answer them.**
- **To ensure that the outcomes of QA interventions are communicated to staff and students alike so the feedback loop is closed and the QA system is demonstrated to be effective as well as meaningful.**

With regard to internationalisation

- **To rework the university's publicly available information materials and to increase the share of information that is accessible in English.**



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- **To increase the number of student and staff exchanges, e.g. by joining an existing network such as MedESN (Medical Erasmus Student Network), and by eliminating possible barriers to mobility, such as limited possibilities to recognise courses from abroad.**
- **To increase the number of international contacts and partnerships and makes better use of the existing ones.**
- **To develop a strategic plan for handling and improving international issues.**

Envoi

The team wishes to thank the UMF once again for an excellent and intensive evaluation experience and for the openness and hospitality shown during the two evaluation visits. It was a pleasure to be in Tirgu Mures and to work and discuss this great variety of issues with the staff, students and external stakeholders of the university.

Based on what the team has seen during the review process, it is confident that the university will be able to successfully meet its challenges, the internal ones as well as those caused by the dynamic changes in its environment. The team concludes this evaluation with a feel of optimism for the university's future and in the belief that the institution being part of the European higher education and research area is not only of benefit for the students and staff but also for the region and Romania at large.