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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

### University of Craiova

#### ***EVALUATION REPORT***

*APRIL 2013*

Team:

Dieter Timmermann, Chair

Mar Campins

Blazenka Divjak

Dan Derricott

Don McQuillan Team Coordinator



Performance  
in Higher Education





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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Craiova (UCV). The evaluation took place in 2013 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 Law on Education and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

### 1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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



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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. Profile of the University; National Context and Autonomy of UCV

The University of Craiova (UCV) is an accredited public institution of higher education founded in 1947. The city of Craiova, one of the largest cities in Romania, is the capital of the historical province of Oltenia and is a centre of cultural, historic and commercial importance. The university has 11 faculties, 34 departments, 37 research centres, three research institutes and four R&D units. It has 170 Bachelors specialisations, 81 full-time Masters programmes, as well as doctoral studies in 25 fields.

The faculties are: Exact Sciences; Physical Education and Sports; Electrical Engineering; Mechanical Engineering; Agriculture and Horticulture; Economics and Business Administration; Social Sciences; Theology, History and Education Sciences; Letters; Automation, Computers and Electronics; Law and Administrative Sciences.

The university has one main building, five campuses, 12 halls of residence, 300 lecture theatres and seminar rooms, 255 laboratories, one main university library and 14 individual libraries. There are 946 teaching staff and 27,989 students, 215 non-teaching staff and 796 administrative and maintenance staff.

According to the SER (page 8), UCV has been ranked among the top 10 Romanian universities in all the national and international classifications with respect to education and scientific research performance.

According to the SER the university has broad autonomy by the Law of 2011 and the University Charter agreed in 2012:

Academic autonomy;

Governance autonomy in relation to strategic management by freely elected entities;

Administrative autonomy;

Financial autonomy;

Human resources autonomy.

In practice however the freedom of the university to act is severely circumscribed by regulations laid down by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education



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(ARACIS) and the Ministry of Education (MECTS). Indeed in our meetings we found widespread discontent at the inability of UCV to act on even minor matters without the explicit consent of the Minister, especially in the area of finance. The team heard of continual changes in rules and protocols ordered from on high, and depending solely on the particular minister in office. With the recent 20% cut in the budget, and the new requirement to return unspent moneys from the previous year, the situation of UCV is difficult.

EUA supports strong autonomy for higher education institutions, which today find themselves in a rapidly changing environment and facing challenges that are by now well known: increased competition for scarce resources, massification of education, economic globalisation with the resulting demands from government and society for more and better trained graduates, especially in the sciences, the need to establish improved research capabilities for assisting/underpinning national competitiveness. In Romania there is the additional challenge of demographic trends that indicate a decrease in the number of students over the coming years. Autonomy is a necessary prerequisite for speedily responding to these challenges. On the other hand it is well recognised that autonomy is bound up with accountability to society, and that accountability brings with it the responsibility to drive the required change and improvement. Thus HEIs must use their autonomy and independence for positive strategic development and involvement with society according to its expectations and needs.

In its Graz Declaration, EUA states that “higher education remains first and foremost a public responsibility so as to maintain core academic and civic values, stimulate overall excellence and enable universities to play their role as essential partners in advancing social, economic and cultural development. Governments must therefore empower institutions and strengthen their essential autonomy by providing stable legal and funding environments. Universities accept accountability and will assume the responsibility of implementing reform in close cooperation with students and stakeholders, improving institutional quality and strategic management capacity.”

These remarks are of particular relevance to the University of Craiova which bears a great responsibility acting as a driver for the cultural, social and economic development of its region. However UCV’s ability to respond in a speedy and appropriate fashion to a rapidly changing academic and political environment is thwarted by unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

Well qualified professional academics should be trusted to do the job their training and experience have prepared them for; they should be allowed to react speedily to the challenges facing the modern university. The bureaucratic burden placed on UCV and similar highly regarded universities in Romania constitutes a serious barrier in this regard.



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### 1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was led by a group made up of ten senior staff members and three representatives of students, approved by the Senate. To assist in the preparation of the Self Evaluation Report (SER), seven focus groups were established that included students and staff, both academic and administrative. Input was requested from all sections of the university community, and information on drafts of the documents was widely disseminated. The SER was written with reference to the questions in the checklist provided by the IEP 'Guidelines for Institutions', and with 34 appendices it ran to over 500 pages. This unfortunately resulted in a SER written in a dense style with little or no narrative, and many cryptic references to the appendices. Instead of being reflective, analytic and self-explanatory it was formal and missed the opportunity to highlight strong points and processes. The team would have found it helpful to see summary descriptions of the university's governance and administrative structures; the roles and functions of the rector, senate and administrative board; the university's policies on research, teaching and learning, internationalisation, quality assurance, regional partners.

The SER, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in good time. The visits of the evaluation team took place from 26 to 28 November 2012 and from 19 to 22 March 2013, respectively. In between the visits the university provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Professor Dieter Timmermann, former Rector of Bielefeld University, Germany, team chair
- Professor Mar Campins, former Vice-Rector, University of Barcelona, Spain
- Professor Blazenka Divjak, Vice-Rector, University of Zagreb, Croatia
- Dan Derricott, Student Engagement Officer, University of Lincoln, United Kingdom
- Professor Don McQuillan, former Chief Executive Irish Universities Quality Board, Ireland, team coordinator

The team would like to warmly acknowledge the cooperation and hospitality received throughout the two visits. We thank the Rector, Professor Dan Claudiu Danisor, who signed the invitation letter, the Vice-Rectors and other leaders who actively supported us, and all the staff and students, as well as stakeholders from outside the institution, for their helpful contribution to the discussions. We thank Titela Vîlceanu for organising the documentation,



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liaising with the team and maintaining our daily schedule. We trust that our joint efforts will provide a sound springboard for UCV as it moves into the next phase of its evolution.



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## 2. Governance and institutional decision making

### 2.1 Governance, organisation

The Charter specifies the following structures:

- (1) **University Senate.** The University Senate is made up of 75% tenured and research staff and 25% student representatives, all elected by direct and secret vote of their constituencies. Each faculty has elected representatives on the Senate, the number being about 1/13 of the number of tenured staff in the faculty. The Senate elects a president by secret ballot. The president chairs meetings of the Senate and represents the Senate in its relations with the rector.
- (2) **Rector.** The rector is elected by secret vote of all established teaching and research staff of the university and the student representatives in the Senate and Faculty Councils. The appointment is confirmed by the Minister of Education. The rector appoints five vice-rectors.
- (3) **Administrative Board.** The Administrative Board is constituted by the rector, the vice-rectors, the faculty deans, the general administrative manager, a student, and a non-voting union representative.

We note that faculty deans are not elected by the faculty but rather by an application procedure that, while preserving some faculty input, leaves the rector with great influence in the final appointment. Thus the rector is very much in charge of the Administrative Board.

It seems appropriate to comment here about the dual role of the deans. On the one hand, they represent the faculty in its relations with the university and must push for approval of the faculty's decisions at university level. On the other hand, as members of the Administrative Board, they must act as officers of the university. There is a potential here for a difficult conflict of interest.

The Administrative Board is essentially the executive branch of UCV's governance structures with the Rector as Chief Executive Officer, while the Senate is the legislative branch. The team feels that this is a strong structure with the capacity to work well in the best interests of the university. However it is not without the potential for instability and future conflict since smooth interaction between the two branches will very much depend on good will between the main actors, especially the rector and the president of the senate. The university should be aware of this.

The rector is not a member of the Senate. It seems to the team that this must hamper the effective introduction to the Senate of actions proposed by the Administrative Board. We



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believe that the rector's non-voting membership of the Senate would facilitate the orderly governance of the university.

**The team recommends that the rector should be a non-voting member of the Senate.**

The exclusion of administrative staff from membership of the Senate is a cause for concern. In our opinion they are crucial to the successful daily operation of the university as well as to the effective implementation of future strategies. They would make a valuable contribution to debate in the Senate.

**The team recommends that administrative staff should be represented in the Senate.**

The team regrets the exclusion of representatives of civil society from the Senate and urges the appropriate authorities to reconsider their exclusion. The inclusion of members of civil society in the highest governing body of universities is not unusual in many countries, and has clear advantages both for society and the university: the autonomy granted to the university is balanced by public and transparent accountability to the society that maintains it; the university has a direct line to social and economic developments in the region; the university has immediate access to regional advice when preparing its strategic plan.

The responsibilities of the Senate cover all activities of the university, both academic and non-academic. It is the body that makes the final decisions on all university matters. It follows that, of necessity, much of the Senate's time is taken up debating issues, important of course, but far removed from the core academic work of the university. The team is sympathetic to this reality but is concerned that the Senate at times may lose its focus on academic issues.

**The team recommends that debating core academic issues should be central to the work of the Senate.**

A comment on the inordinate amount of reporting, both internal and external, that is required in the university is urgent. In our meetings during the two visits we heard many complaints about this. The university is powerless to reduce external reporting but this is not the case when it comes to internal reporting. There is a simple way to reduce it. There are far too many committees at work in UCV, with the resulting time-consuming meetings, reporting to other committees, and delay in getting action. Of course many of these committees are central to the effective operation of the university, and certainly at times new ones will have to be established to drive new modernising initiatives. Indeed our report contains some recommendations in this direction.

**The team recommends that the university should reduce the number of committees.**

The university is busy setting up new structures and organising new departments to carry through the initiatives envisioned in the Law and the Charter. It is important to bear in mind that very similar work has been successfully carried out in many universities in many countries. Good practice has been established in, for example, internationalisation, quality assurance, and so on. UCV should benchmark against good practice elsewhere and avoid reinventing the wheel.



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**The team recommends that UCV should benchmark against accepted good practice in key areas of its activities.**

Many functions of the university are decentralised at the level of departments and faculties. Research and quality assurance are cases in point. For example the SER states (page 14) that research topics, internal research planning, decisions related to collaboration and partnerships are decentralised at the level of the entities in question. This produces a “fortress faculty” mentality that makes it difficult to establish university-wide coherent strategies or organise effective interdisciplinary cooperation. The institution’s centre of gravity must move closer to the centre of the university.

## **2.2 Mission, Vision, Strategy**

The SER describes the mission of the university on pages 6-7, as set out in the University Charter (based on the Law of Education 1/2011). In summary: The mission of UCV is the advancement and transfer of knowledge, high level initial and continuing education for specialists, initial and continuing education for teaching staff, contribution to the advancement of fundamental and applied science, the personal growth of students, promotion of the free exchange of ideas, promotion of European ideas in science, culture and education. It goes on to refer to objectives designed to carry through the mission.

While these statements are important they could fit any university in Romania if the word “Craiova” is replaced by another regional name. There is nothing here that is specific to Craiova.

**The team recommends that the university should develop vision and mission statements that are specific to UCV.**

Furthermore the university has a document entitled “Strategic Plan”, but it is really just a list of ambitious aspirations without time lines, priorities, funding details, designated actors, success indicators. The same comment applies to the “Operational Plan”. Nevertheless these are valuable documents pointing the way to the creation of a real, down-to-earth strategic plan. The SER also contains a SWOT analysis that could be helpful here.

The university should look again in a critical and analytic way at where it wants to go in the coming years, how it envisions its future in the regional, national and international contexts. How does an underfunded university fulfill its crucial teaching, research and development role in the local region? How best to work with the local community and the regional government? How does it prioritise and focus on a small number of sustainable (possibly expensive) research areas?

Strategic planning has been described as “the continuous and collective exercise of foresight in the integrated process of taking informed decisions affecting the future”. It is essential that



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the university understands what is involved in the preparation of a strategic plan. It is not a wish list, a collection of desirable outcomes with no indication as to how these outcomes can be achieved, nor is it a compilation of departmental or faculty plans. On the contrary, the process of developing an effective strategic plan is complex and intensive. We suggest that three basic questions be kept in mind: Where is the university positioned now? Where does the university want to go? How does the university get there?

The university has all the information needed to answer the first question. We suggest that UCV should re-examine, in the light of the IEP evaluation experience, the vision, aims and objectives, strengths and weaknesses of the university, as well as the opportunities and threats it confronts. However it is important to emphasise that planning is a continuous process. Thus the plan itself and the SWOT on which it is based must be updated on an ongoing basis. This requires solid data to support conclusions and to position the university to meet new developments.

**The team recommends that UCV should establish a capability for the collection of data needed to update the Strategic Plan on an ongoing basis.**

The second question addresses the vision and mission of the university, and the detailed objectives to be achieved, say over the next four years. We note again that the vision and mission statements in the SER are rather bland and could apply to many other institutions. We urge the university to give its close attention to formulating statements that more clearly reflect UCV's aspirations at department, faculty, university, national and international level.

The third question requires a detailed presentation of the steps to be taken in achieving the objectives. Good organisation and agreed procedures are essential. The objectives should be prioritised, and each objective should be stated in a clear and unambiguous way. An action plan for the successful achievement of each objective should be established, responsibility for completion assigned, and allocation of required resources agreed. Each objective should have a time frame for completion and precise indicators of success should be set down beforehand.

**The team recommends that the Administrative Council, chaired by the rector, and functioning as a Standing Steering Committee, should prepare a detailed strategic plan and monitor its implementation.**

A sense of ownership of the strategic plan throughout the university is essential to the success of the process. This could be achieved using a fairly common methodology, one already used in UCV. In the first instance each of the faculties might prepare an agreed plan based on contributions from the individual departments. These plans could then be confronted with the university's vision and aims, and harmonised by the University Steering Committee, to produce an overarching strategic plan for the whole university. The plan should be discussed widely, and then finalised and approved by the Senate.



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This is a complex and difficult task involving as it does repeated top-down and bottom-up debate within the university. Inevitably there will be competing agendas, and tension between the various elements of the university. No university finds it easy to arrive at the type of institution-wide consensus that is required if such a process is to have an effective and fruitful outcome. University leaders will play a vital role in bringing doubters along and in creating the conviction that the task is worth the effort.



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### 3. Teaching and learning

UCV is to be congratulated on the introduction of the formal structures advocated by the Bologna Process. ECTS has been introduced, and all degrees offered by the university have been adapted to the Bachelor-Master-PhD model. The team had excellent meetings with a wide cross-section of students all of whom expressed satisfaction with their courses and teachers. All were glad they had chosen UCV for their university studies.

Nevertheless the team is concerned that while the Bologna degree structures have been introduced, the core Bologna philosophy on student-centred teaching and learning has yet to be fully implemented. Three comments here: first, it is now usual to see course content set out in terms of learning outcomes, the knowledge and skills a student will have acquired by the end of the course; second, key competences should be systematically fostered and emphasized in curricula; third, information to students should contain an explanation of the overall aims and purpose of the courses on offer, benchmarks for student learning and achievements each year, clear guidelines on written and project work, principles on marking and feedback to students. Many universities now include a set of student rights and responsibilities in their handbooks, and examples of these are easily found on the Internet.

**The team recommends that information to students should include:**

- **A statement of learning outcomes rather than course inputs**
- **A statement on the core competences to be fostered in each course**
- **An explanation of the overall aims and purpose of each course, benchmarks for student learning and achievements, clear guidelines on written and project work, principles on assessment and feedback to students.**

**The team also recommends that the university provide training in the implementation of learning outcomes.**

It may not be necessary, but useful just the same, to point out that moving to a student-centred teaching and learning structure often requires a difficult mindset adjustment: formal lectures balanced and augmented by supervised and well-organised, small self-study and group-study assignments, by tutorials, workshops and an increase in project work. The team is aware that several faculties have already totally or partially adopted this approach.

Teaching and learning at UCV, and student care, should form a key element of the strategic plan. The plan should be clear on the goals to be achieved and the action plans necessary to realise the goals. This work should proceed in tandem with the speedy development of an overall quality assurance process, with the active cooperation of the students.



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At the moment faculties can opt to use their own student questionnaires for the assessment of courses and teaching. In the interests of harmonising quality assurance procedures it is important that the questionnaires should be standardised across the university, with feedback to students that is timely, and agreed transparent follow-up procedures. Of course faculties should be free to add some questions specific to their own areas of expertise. From our meetings with students and teachers it is clear there is an awareness in UCV that this process should be formative and directed at improving the quality of teaching and learning, and must never become a blame game. This can lead to a continuing dialogue between teachers and students, an important element in developing a climate where real improvement can take place and a culture of quality can be developed. Many universities have also found it helpful to use tracing studies to elicit the views of recent graduates.

**The team recommends that the university should organise at once a systematic questionnaire procedure for the evaluation by students of teaching and courses that is standardised across the university. Feedback to students on the outcomes of these evaluations should be timely, and follow-up procedures agreed.**

Staff development and training is also central to the points considered here. We stress that it is of the utmost importance that training in teaching and modern presentation should be available to the teaching staff and that mechanisms for sharing good practice in teaching should be in place. This is particularly true of teachers who are in the early stages of their careers. The new emphasis on learning will highlight the necessity to provide guidance to staff members in new methodologies, in modern methods of communication, and in mutually beneficial interaction with students. International student and staff exchange programmes will be helpful here and provide useful benchmarking against good practice in other countries. This will require a structured approach and good organisation.

**The team recommends that the university should establish a Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) with responsibility for staff development and training, including new and experimental ways of teaching and learning.**

Even with the great progress achieved by the university there are serious university issues that need urgent attention: in trying to keep up with market trends UCV is offering too many degree programmes; sustainability of programmes is made problematic by the vagaries of student choices; there is tension between teaching to the local needs for technical training on the one hand, and general scientific teaching and research on the other; UCV has highly qualified staff in areas of low student demand, and other areas struggling with the need to hire new staff due to large student demand. A good first step in tackling these difficulties is to reduce the number of degree programmes. Many Bachelor programmes are too specialised and lack interdisciplinary components. In addition UCV should consider harmonising



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programme structures across the university. This has been done to good effect elsewhere.

**The team recommends that the university should:**

- **rationalise the number of bachelor programmes;**
- **harmonise programme structures.**

Over the years the university has developed excellent relations with local business enterprises, and the local community in general. This has led to mutually beneficial cooperation and collaboration on a variety of important regional initiatives. In this context the development of a strong internship programme has been of great value to UCV students. It not only provides them with experience and knowledge of the realities of work in the “real” world, but often leads to a permanent post after graduation. We commend the university on this important programme and urge UCV to develop it further.

**The team recommends that the university, building on its already well developed industry-university cooperation programme, should seek and offer more internship opportunities.**



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## 4. Research

The appendix on research gives very complete statistical information on the level of research activity in the university in the period 2007-2011. For instance in the years 2007-2011 there were 703 papers published in ISI journals and 2 650 in national journals. In the same period there were 31 patents and intellectual property products. In our visits to faculties the team found that several have a good research reputation as well islands of strong interdisciplinary activity. The university has 37 research centres and three research institutes.

There are three doctoral schools with 26 domains and 80 PhD supervisors: exact sciences, engineering, social sciences and humanities. In the period 2007-2011, 682 PhD theses were completed, and ten PhD theses were defended in joint programmes with universities in Europe (eight in France and one each in Belgium and Spain).

In 2011, 51 contracts were won in national competitions with a value of 6,265,00 lei, 23 in international competitions (FP 6, FP 7) with a value of 2,176,000 lei. The sums involved are modest but represent a foothold in what is a very competitive market.

The university collaborates on joint projects with many national companies, e.g. Oltchim SA, Transelectrica, SA Complexul Energetic Turceni SA, ALRO Slatina, ICEMENERG Bucharest, etc, and international companies, e.g. Pirelli Tyres Romania, Group Renault Romania, SARL France Prestations, CIPRA-AISBL Brussel, Alnarp Suedia, Cummins Generators Technologies Romania, Ford Romania, etc.

The Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer (CITT) and CTT INCESA represent the interface with the business environment. A new INCESA project, with a value of 45,000,000 lei, will provide research infrastructure for applied science.

The university is to be commended on this important work.

Seven priority research domains have been established in UCV. This takes into consideration the priority domains included in the National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation II, and the Community Programme (PC7) of the European Union:

1. Nanosciences, nanotechnologies, new materials and new technologies for production;
2. Information and communication technology;
3. Energy;



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4. Environment;
5. Transport;
6. Food, agriculture and biotechnologies;
7. Social, economic and humanities sciences.

Appendix 23 spells out the Research Mission of UCV, the main objectives and the specific actions to be taken. The problem again is that no priorities are set, no objectives with time-lines, actors, etc. There is also another problem, potentially more difficult to overcome, one that we have already mentioned. It is emphasised in the SER on page 14:

“Decentralisation is endemic to the organization of research activities. The research topics are decentralized at the level of departments and faculties; participation in research competitions and the policy of scientific publications is decentralized at the level of faculties and even at the individual level. The internal research planning, the decisions related to collaboration and partnership are decentralised at the level of the entity in question”.

This type of fragmentation of the university’s research effort must be corrected with the centre exercising more authority and taking more responsibility. Another weakness that negatively impacts on research and the development of interdisciplinary activity, also noted in the SER, is the breakdown of communication between the various experts.

**The team recommends that the university:**

- **Put in place an action plan for research as part of its overall strategic plan;**
- **Maintain channels for regular communication between researchers from different departments and research centres.**

The team feels that research performance and organisation must be improved if research in UCV is to achieve the status that is needed to compete in the present research climate, and to underpin the quality and competitiveness of doctoral studies, particularly in the international arena. Research is essential for building the reputation of UCV. Membership of the European Union is presenting new and possibly lucrative research funding opportunities, but success will depend on meeting high performance standards.

The appendix contains a diagram of the management of research in the university. No detail is provided about what exactly will be done by this organisation to drive the research effort of the university. The team feels that it should be used support the university to initiate steps to improve the research profile of UCV, and to drive research activity and applications for foreign grants.



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**The team recommends that the university should:**

- **Re-examine research norms and values to bring them into line with European good practice, as outlined by ESF and NSF;**
- **Use commonly accepted international research and development performance indicators;**
- **Benchmark against selected leading universities to develop good practice;**
- **Establish a research support office. This office could create a research database and support staff in compiling first class research proposals;**
- **Provide adequate seed and reward money from the university budget to start and support promising research initiatives and outstanding achievements;**
- **Join on a wider basis with other university research initiatives for larger EU grants.**

Balancing a staff member's time between research and teaching is a perennial problem in all research universities. It appears to the team that there may be a certain amount of over-teaching in the university, partially due, as noted earlier, to the large number of study programmes, with resulting duplication of courses. In this context we note that the teaching load of junior staff is quite high, limiting their research time. Given that promotion depends heavily on research performance the team urges the university to consider ways of alleviating this situation.

As the work to increase the quantity and quality of research output goes ahead this must be matched by an increase in the number of PhD students. Care must be taken however to ensure that the accepted European principles for PhD mentorship, as outlined by EUA, are observed.

In the context of international competition for research funding we suggest that the university should seek to strengthen international acceptance of its PhD graduates. The following measures might assist in achieving this goal.



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**The team recommends that the university should:**

- **Extend the existing joint PhD programmes, supported by the EU;**
- **Use external co-referees and evaluators;**
- **Publish results, especially PhD research achievements, in international refereed journals;**
- **Systematically stimulate and reward attendance at international conferences.**



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## 5. Service to society

It is clear from our meetings with stakeholders that regional business and community leaders hold the university in high esteem. Representatives of a wide variety of business enterprises, including giant companies like Ford and Pirelli, as well as representatives of local government and the local development agency, were warm in their praise of UCV. They expressed their appreciation for the quality of the university's graduates and the developing level of productive interaction between UCV and the region. In particular the university's openness to creating tailor-made courses, and discussing suggestions on curricular design, was valuable, but it was felt that more could be achieved in this area. They were also adamant that much more could be done to generally strengthen the cooperation between the business sector and UCV. In this context the team notes that the drive for interaction with business enterprises usually comes from individual researchers or from faculties. We believe that this process would be greatly facilitated by a systematised approach at university level.

**The team recommends that the university should systematise its collaboration with external partners by:**

- **Establishing a forum for regular discussion with local employers;**
- **Closer articulation between student training and the needs of employers in the region.**

It is worth noting that the SER stresses that innovation and technology transfer is an important line of action for the university. Within UCV, The Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer (CITT) and CTT INCESA represent the interface with the business environment, providing a wide range of support services to researchers. These organisations will be integrated into an operational consortium in the foreseeable future. The team congratulates the university on these positive developments.

Employability of graduates is a central objective of UCV. To drive their effort in this area many universities have set up a careers office. The remit of this office usually includes the following: establishing contact between students and industry for the exchange of information on posts available and graduates qualified to take up the posts, helping students to prepare for interviews, inviting employers to speak to groups of senior students on employer expectations, arranging interviews, and building up a database on its activities. Organising training in entrepreneurship across the university is often the responsibility of this office. This is another effective way to embed the university in the working life of the community and



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maintain contact with graduates and employers. The team acknowledges that the university's centre for professional counselling and orientation includes some of these activities in its very wide remit. We nevertheless feel that the careers office, with professional leadership, is more suited to the specialised work of helping students find their way in the working world.

**The team recommends that the university should establish a careers office.**



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## 6. Quality culture

The quality of higher education has emerged as a key element in the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, and in driving national progress and competitiveness. Thus quality assurance is one of the main action items of the Bologna Process. In the Berlin and Bergen Communiqués the European Ministers of Higher Education committed to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level, and stressed the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. They also stressed that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

The university has a department of quality assurance that “undertakes the mission of organising and monitoring the process of periodic evaluation and quality assurance in education, as well as of professional insertion of UCV students, in accordance with the provisions of the Quality Assurance Code”. The department “aims at the promotion of a culture of quality which the academic community should adopt”. There is a comprehensive list of activities to be carried out by the department that includes implementation of the university’s strategies and policies of quality assurance and enhancement.

This is an excellent basis for the development of a modern academic quality assurance and quality enhancement system. However the team feels that the methodology, organisation and documentation adopted by UCV will not achieve the university’s goal of quality enhancement and the creation of a quality culture. The proposed organisation is too complicated and the methodology too time-consuming and formulaic, and indeed is reminiscent of accreditation processes. There is a lack of self-analysis and self-criticism, no opportunity for a department, or whatever entity is being evaluated, to present its unique features. We have noted elsewhere the importance of benchmarking against good practice in other universities, especially when undertaking a new initiative. There are some examples of very good practice around Europe and we urge UCV to do some homework in this area.

EUA proposes a coherent QA policy for Europe, based on the belief that institutional autonomy creates and requires responsibility, that universities are responsible for developing internal quality cultures and that progress at European level involving all stakeholders is a necessary next step. With the active contribution of students, universities must monitor and evaluate all their activities, including study programmes, departments, faculties, research productivity, innovativeness, competitiveness, management, funding systems and services.



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The procedures must promote academic and organisational quality, respect institutional autonomy, develop internal quality cultures, and, what is important in the UCV context, minimise bureaucracy and cost, and avoid over-regulation.

For EUA, as for the Ministers of Education, the key elements in a QA process are:

- Effective follow-up on recommendations for improvement;
- Minimal bureaucracy;
- Quality improvement;
- Involvement of students and other stakeholders.

We refer to three publications of EUA:

‘Examining Quality Culture Part II, Processes and Tools’

‘EUA’s Quality Assurance Policy in the Context of the Bergen Communiqué’

‘EUA policy statement on Quality and Quality Assurance in the European higher Education Area’

**The team recommends that the university should establish overarching internal quality assurance procedures, and a high level University Standing Committee to ensure harmonisation across the university.**

In this connection we note again that excellent QA systems, consistent with the EUA approach, have been developed in several universities around Europe. Nevertheless, establishing such an internal system of quality assurance takes time and commitment, and there may be an initial reluctance on the part of some staff to face the challenge of change or even to accept that change is necessary. Dialogue between all members of the university community is central to creating good will, if not total and enthusiastic acceptance. It should be stressed that the goal is to create a quality culture in all activities of the university through continuous improvement, and not to apportion blame for perceived shortcomings. Again the role of the university leadership is crucial in driving the process and in facilitating the missionary work necessary to convert the doubters. To ensure coherence and harmonisation across the university, the guidelines and operational procedures for this important work should be agreed at university level and the department of quality assurance assigned the task of organising and overseeing the details of the procedures.

**The team recommends that the department of quality assurance should organise and oversee the new operational procedures for quality assurance.**

Other procedures affect the quality of performance at UCV. These include the appointment of new staff, the quality and number of the entering students and the related issue of their formation and motivation during their years in the university. We were told that many



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entering students are poorly prepared, especially in science subjects and languages. Bridging courses and special tutoring are widely used elsewhere to alleviate this problem. The procedures for appointing professors appear to be quite open and transparent and totally in the hands of the university. It is essential that this important element of autonomy is maintained and that procedures are scrupulously applied. However the difficulty of attracting new staff was highlighted in several discussions. Low salaries and international competition were cited.

This is an important quality issue for UCV, affecting as it does the future development of the university, the quality of the degrees on offer, and thus the formation of the young men and women on whom the prosperity and economic success of the region so vitally depend. It would seem that UCV will continue to depend to a great extent on its own graduates to sustain its research and teaching effort. This re-enforces the importance of first class quality processes in the university.



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## 7. Internationalisation

The university has a department of international relations, with a list of strategic objectives to be achieved over the coming years. We were pleased to see that benchmarking against good practice in other universities is included. The goals are excellent and include:

- Developing international collaboration to enhance the international visibility of UCV through a coherent institutional strategy;
- Affiliation with more international networks;
- Interconnecting institutional strategy with that of the faculties;
- Developing international mobility schemes;
- Organising programmes in international languages;
- Accessing national and international grants;
- Appreciation of examples of good practice elsewhere;
- Increasing the number of joint study programmes.

Again however there are no details on how and when these objectives are to be reached, and again the team urges the university to include specifics in the new strategic plan. Indeed this will form the main part of our recommendation on internationalisation.

Much good work has already been done. UCV has academic cooperation agreements with over forty universities in Europe, as well as institutions in China and, importantly, in Algeria. We have already mentioned ten PhDs awarded jointly with universities in France, Belgium and Spain. Overall in the period 2007-2011 there were 48 PhD candidates jointly with universities in France, Belgium and Switzerland. Academic staff attend international conferences and meetings: 324 in 2012, down from a high of 546 in 2007, and foreign experts are invited to spend time in the university: 37 in 2012, down from a high of 54 in 2010. We have already commented on international initiatives in research.

The team notes that good work is also being done in what might be called “internationalisation at home”. All students must take a two-year foreign language course (2-4 hours per week) with an emphasis on language for the field of study. There are plans to provide language courses for academic staff, especially in English, with a view to teaching more courses in English. The French department organises lectures on France open to all students. More needs to be done in this area.

In the Erasmus programme 164 students went out in the academic year 2011-2012, down from 196 in 2010-2011. The figures for incoming students were 28 and 34 respectively. The figures for outgoing staff were 78 and 68, for incoming staff figures were 19 and 12. The



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importance of the Erasmus programme to the university was emphasised in our meeting with representatives of the Department of International Relations. The department has a system in place to greet incoming students, provides advice to students on courses and accommodation, and arranges the transfer of credits. They organise a workshop where students who have been on Erasmus share experiences with others and highlight the advantages of a period abroad.

The team congratulates the university on these developments.

However, the incoming and outgoing numbers are small and more needs to be done to improve the situation. In the Bologna Process three action items have been emphasised for the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Quality assurance is the first of these and we have discussed the creation of a robust QA system in UCV earlier in this report. The second is the adoption of the Bologna degree structure. The university is to be congratulated on having this system already in place, though with the reservations already noted. The third is the mobility of students and teachers.

In this regard the European Ministers of higher education have stated that “mobility of students and academic and administrative staff is the basis for establishing a European Higher Education Area. Ministers emphasise its importance for academic and cultural as well as political, social and economic spheres, and agree to undertake the necessary steps to improve the quality and coverage of statistical data on student mobility”.

Several factors can be suggested to explain the small number of students from abroad: the need for a stronger university-wide marketing strategy, the narrow range of study programmes in English, the need to approach international students individually, the impossibility of studying at different faculties at the same time, the limited number of academic staff capable of teaching in English. In addition there is the issue of the visibility and image of UCV on the international scene.

**The team recommends that, as part of its overall strategic plan, UCV should put in place an action plan for internationalisation. The plan should include details on:**

- **Implementation of the stated objectives of the department of international relations;**
- **Provision of more study programmes in English and improved English language skills across the university;**
- **Extending the initiatives on “internationalisation at home”.**



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## 8. Conclusion

We wish to thank the university once again for its generous hospitality and for the excellent arrangements provided for the evaluation team. It was a pleasure to be in Craiova to discuss with students and staff the future directions of the university. At this time of profound and far-reaching change in higher education in Romania the university is to be congratulated for its frank and open examination of its ability to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. In all our meetings we were struck by the strong determination to see the university achieve its full potential as a driver of regional development and an institution of high national and international standing. We hope that the university finds our comments and suggestions helpful, and we wish the university well for the next stage of its development

### Summary of Recommendations

Administrative staff should be represented in the Senate.

Debating core academic issues should be central to the work of the Senate.

Reduce the number of committees.

Benchmark against accepted good practice in key areas of the university's activities.

Develop vision and mission statements that are specific to UCV.

The Administrative Council, chaired by the rector, and functioning as a Standing Steering Committee, should prepare a detailed strategic plan and monitor its implementation.

Establish a capability for the collection of data needed to update the Strategic Plan on an ongoing basis.

Information to students should include:

- A statement of learning outcomes rather than course inputs.
- A statement on the core competences to be fostered in each course.
- An explanation of the overall aims and purpose of each course, benchmarks for student learning and achievements, clear guidelines on written and project work, principles on assessment and feedback to students.

Provide training for staff in the implementation of learning outcomes.

Organise at once a systematic questionnaire procedure for the evaluation by students of



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teaching and courses that is standardised across the university. Feedback to students on the outcomes of these evaluations should be timely, and follow-up procedures agreed.

Establish a Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) with responsibility for staff development and training, including new and experimental ways of teaching and learning.

Rationalise the number of Bachelor programmes and harmonise programme structures.

Building on an already well developed industry-university cooperation programme, seek and offer more internship opportunities.

Put in place an action plan for research as part of the overall strategic plan.

Maintain channels for regular communication between researchers from different departments and research centres.

The university should:

- Re-examine research norms and values to bring them into line with European good practice, as outlined by ESF and NSF;
- Use commonly accepted international research and development performance indicators;
- Benchmark against selected leading universities to develop good practice;
- Establish a research support office. This office could create a research database and support staff in compiling first class research proposals;
- Provide adequate seed and reward money from the university budget to start and support promising research initiatives and outstanding achievements;
- Join on a wider basis with other university research initiatives for larger EU grants.

The university should:

- Extend the existing joint PhD programmes, supported by the EU;
- Use external co-referees and evaluators;
- Publish results, especially PhD research achievements, in international refereed journals;
- Systematically stimulate and reward attendance at international conference

Systematise collaboration with external partners by:

- Establishing a forum for regular discussion with local employers;
- Closer articulation between student training and the needs of employers in the region.



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Establish a careers office.

Establish overarching internal quality assurance procedures, and a high level University Standing Committee to ensure harmonisation across the university. The department of quality assurance should organise and oversee the operational procedures.

As part of the overall strategic plan, put in place an action plan for internationalisation. The plan should include details on:

- Implementation of the stated objectives of the department of international relations;
- Provision of more study programmes in English and improved English language skills across the university;
- Extending the initiatives on “internationalisation at home”.