Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

"DUNAREA DE JOS" UNIVERSITY OF GALATI

EVALUATION REPORT

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1.   Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati. The evaluation took place in 2012-2013 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.

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. "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati's profile

"Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati (UDJG) is a well-positioned institution in its region where it holds a privileged situation for training young people for the professions needed in the region. It serves as a reference for many local enterprises, SMEs as well as some large companies and administrative services.

It is a medium-sized university by European standards, which, according to the self-evaluation report provides tuition to 14000 students. It was founded in 1948 with the main mission to train engineers. The Land Development Faculty was created first; new faculties were opened subsequently. Currently, the university has 15 faculties with programmes in most scientific fields at undergraduate, Master and doctoral levels. Until 1990, some of its engineering programmes were unique in Romania (land development, shipbuilding, food industry and fishery), and are still its strongest areas today, serving as a reference for similar faculties in the country. The main campus is located in Galati, with two additional campuses; one in in Braila and the other in the Republic of Moldova.

UDJG is a public university, with a mission of public service. It is the largest in southeast Romania and holds a position of high regional relevance with well-established links with its socioeconomic environment. This region has over 2,800,000 inhabitants and the city is a transportation hub between the Danube river and the sea. Apart from public administration, health and culture, the city and its surroundings have traditionally been home to a variety of industrial activities such as metallurgy, naval architecture, fishing or agriculture. However, industry has declined lately and is expected to decrease even further. Although there are some significant projects such as the building of an airport or a bridge over the Danube, linking main parts of the country, the economic situation is difficult. This impinges on the university, mainly through decreasing demographics, which have a limiting influence on the enrolment of students.

This university has a long tradition in the technical field (although a Department of Pedagogy has been in existence since the beginning). Recently, it has become a general institution which offers 67 Bachelor degrees (of which seven are delivered as distance education), 44 Master degrees and doctoral programmes in 13 scientific fields.

Regarding its position within the national context, a recent classification exercise determined its position as a teaching and research university, which limits the state funds it has access to. Between 2009 and 2011, the employment of academic staff was restricted because of the economic situation. The number of students has also decreased in the last years because of demographic reasons.

In the last years (2008 and 2011), the UDJG has undergone two quality evaluation exercises. These frequent evaluation exercises may have caused some evaluation fatigue which may, in turn, have led to performing a routine administrative exercise rather than a genuine evaluation when gathering and processing the data for the present self-evaluation report.

From an international perspective, UDJG is located in an area with easy access from neighbouring countries with which it has a fruitful academic exchange, such as Ukraine, Greece, Turkey, Serbia and Albania and, especially, the Republic of Moldova, where a branch of the university is located.

1.3. The evaluation process

UDJG appointed a Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) consisting of eight academics belonging to a variety of faculties and academic positions and chaired by the vice-rector of international affairs, Prof. Anca Gata. Following the IEP guidelines, the SEG members were selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience in quality evaluation, management and educational systems, and included two students from Bachelor and Master programmes. In addition to the chair, the SEG included:

- Ionuţ Valerică AGACHE – first-year student, Master studies, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration;
- Dorel AIORDĂCHIOAIE – Professor, Faculty of Automation, Computers, Electrical Engineering and Electronics (experience of group leadership, global vision of management at various levels of the education system);
- Ştefan BALTĂ – Assistant Professor, Faculty of Metallurgy, Materials Science and Environment, member of the UDJG Quality Committee (expertise in the management of quality assurance structures in higher education);
- Alexandru CĂPĂȚÎNĂ – Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (internal evaluator of study programmes);
- Alina GANEA – Associate Professor, Faculty of Letters, Vice-Dean, member of the UDJG Quality Committee (expertise in assessment of study programmes);
- Claudiu MEREUȚĂ – Associate Professor, Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, chair of the UDJG Senate Quality Committee (expertise in drawing up self-evaluation reports);
- Oana MITU – second-year student, undergraduate studies, Faculty of History,

Philosophy and Theology;

- Elena SCUTELNICU – Professor, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Vice-Dean (management at various levels of the education system, expertise in international research project assessment);
- Gabriela SCRIPNIC – Associate Professor, Faculty of Letters, Head of Department (team member in national and international research projects);
- Steluţa STAN – Associate Professor, Faculty of Letters, peer evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the UDJG, together with the first series of appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in November 2012, previous to the first site visit. The visits of the evaluation team to Galati took place from 10 to 12 December 2012, and from 1 to 4 April, 2013, respectively. Between the visits, Prof. Anca Gata arranged the meetings required for the second visit and provided the evaluation team with the requested additional documentation, most of which was translated.

During the first site visit, the evaluation team (hereinafter the team) met the rector, the self-evaluation group and a broad group of external stakeholders. The team also visited the campus and the faculties of Naval Architecture, Law, Food Science and Engineering and Economics and Business Administration, where they met deans and vice-deans, academic staff representatives and students from all academic levels. During the second visit, a series of thematic meetings on governance and strategy, research and knowledge transfer, teaching, learning, quality, internationalisation, finances and human resources and student participation and experience were held with Senate representatives, the vice-rectors with responsibilities on these matters and other representatives. During this visit, the faculties of Medicine and Letters were also visited.

The SEG reported that it worked in collaboration with different management and academic departments and the Quality Assurance Committee, as needed, to write the SER, which was subsequently discussed with central and faculty level management, administrative and representative bodies. Reportedly, it was also discussed with selected members of the academic community. The group also acknowledged time constraints in gathering information, as well as some difficulties in accessing the latest versions of some of the documents they needed such as those related to institutional action plans or self-evaluation reports. Another element, also possibly related to time constraints, was that members of the broader academic community outside the SEG appeared to have limited information on the present evaluation process during the first visit, but this changed during the second one.

The evaluation team members agreed that the SER lacked some self-reflection and a deep critical stance. The fact that the university had undergone three evaluations in the last three years and may be suffering from evaluation fatigue may partly account for this fact.

The evaluation team (hereafter the team) consisted of:

- Sokratis Katsikas, Professor, University of Piraeus, and former Rector, University of the Aegean, Greece, Chair
- Lennart Olausson, Professor and former Vice-Chancellor, University of Malmö, Sweden
- Krista Varantola, Chancellor and former Rector, University of Tampere, Finland
- Asnate Kazoka, student, Riga Technical University, Latvia
- Carmen Vizcarro, Associate Professor, Universidad Autonoma of Madrid, Spain, Team Coordinator

The team wishes to thank the rector, Prof. Dr. Iulian Gabriel Bîrsan for his interest and open-mindedness during our meetings and all the members of the self-evaluation team, and in particular, its chair, Prof. Anca Gata, for their collaboration and helpfulness during the whole evaluation process.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1. Mission and vision

The Charter of the university describes its mission as generating and transferring knowledge to society, granting all university community members the necessary conditions for exploiting their personal abilities and commitment to the dissemination of cultural values with special regard to the region where the university is located.

According to the university charter, the SER cites the university's main objectives as the continuous improvement of quality in teaching, research and service to the local and national socio-economic environment.

Regarding the vision, the Strategic Plan 2012-2014 states that, as a public institution, "UDJG supports and promotes the development of specific professional values in the local, regional, national and international communities" (p.2) and relates these values to the production of scientific research, sharing knowledge through education and professional training and the exploitation of knowledge through technological innovation.

The first meeting with the rector made it very clear that one immediate goal was to upgrade the university from its present classification position, as a teaching and research university to an advanced research university. However, the team considers whether this can be seen as a goal or a strategy to reach other important goals, such as having access to better public funding, remains an open question.

2.2. Governance and institutional decision-making

UDJG has a level of institutional autonomy limited by strict legal regulations and the frequent changes the university has undergone lately. Academics seem to accept this fact, and could even have grown resigned to it, but this might also create an attitude less oriented to changing some aspects that could be changed, even in such a strongly regulated environment. However, in spite of strict regulations, the university leadership has found a good balance and there is clearly ground for action, change and improvement.

The system is quite centralised: administrative, financial, investment and human resources decisions are taken at the central level. However, decision and executive powers are separated. The university has two governing bodies, the Senate, the university's discussion and decision-making structure (comprising 60 members, including 20 students) and the Academic Council, the executive management body.

The university organisation is based on the 15 faculties, which enjoy a very large degree of autonomy in a variety of matters, within the limits set by the university; each faculty develops its own strategic and research plans, taking into account the university's direction, as well as its educational offer. They are structured into one or more departments (a total of 36) and also include the research centres (24). At faculty level, the faculty council is the decision-making body and includes deans, heads of departments and representatives of department staff and students.

Recently, seven doctoral schools have merged into two, one for technical studies and the other for social sciences. The two schools have a single director, appointed by a national committee, and whose status is equivalent to that of a dean; she is also a member of the Academic Council. These schools are governed by the Council for Doctoral University Studies, whose members are elected by scientific coordinators.

Students are very well represented in all governing structures: 25% of Senate and faculty councils, and one in the Administrative Council.

The multi-tiered, very elaborate governance structures are quite time and labour-intensive for academic staff. However, the Senate and the Administrative Council seem to have found a favourable working relationship; the evaluation team encourages the university to continue developing this good relationship between its governing bodies.

Related to this governance structure, the decision-making system also is unnecessarily complicated, although it is transparent. The university collects a great deal of information regarding its functioning, which, however, is not fully used for decision-making; to improve the decision-making process, the team recommends that the university develops "business intelligence" so that its decisions are evidence-based.

Fortunately, to support these developments the institution counts on a dynamic and capable leadership, which is very suitable and recognised by the academic community.

As stated above, one of the aims of the new rector is to include the university among the top ranks of Romanian universities. As means to reach this goal, a more efficient coordination of the current resources, the collaboration among the various faculties and an emphasis on multidisciplinary approaches are required in order to achieve stronger units with improved performance. This is a reasonable course of action especially in times of severe economic restrictions, but success depends on the extent to which this goal is shared by the academic community. The future months will be crucial in showing whether this desirable goal is shared and thus is a viable approach for transformation.

The academic structure related to both education and research, based on faculties and departments, is not optimised for efficiency and does not enhance collaboration. However, the leadership is aware of this and trying to make it more efficient. There are already some examples of better coordination efforts, such as the merger of the different doctoral schools. However, as previously mentioned, this efficiency goal will need to be shared substantially by the academic community. The university should seriously consider simplifying the academic structure, for example, by merging small faculties or sharing educational programmes or parts of them, which may overlap.

2.3. Strategic development

The Senate recently voted the Strategic Plan 2012-2016, after three months of discussions. The development process was apparently a top-down approach but the Strategic Plan has been broadly accepted by the academic community. Its main objectives are the enhancement of the educational and scientific mission of the university through several measures to support an adequate institutional climate; investment in needed infrastructures; building a strong partnership with students and society; modernisation of academic and administrative structures; and internationalisation. However, the plan does not set priorities. The links between the plan and the financial reality of the university are not evident and it lacks implementation plans; this might be due to the fact that it is very recent, but the university carries out yearly operational plans.

In line with the main Strategic Plan, specific strategic developments for research and internationalisation have been achieved which will be dealt with in more detail in the appropriate sections of this report.

Strategic development is the responsibility of the vice-rector for strategy and finance; a department of international affairs and communications has recently been created to provide further support toward achieving the strategic goals.

2.4. Financial management

UDJG has faced serious financial constraints in the last years, with cuts of up to 40% in state funding. This is at least partly mitigated by income diversification: income has varied over the years, but approximately 60% is state-funded and 40% comes from the university own resources (showing a positive trend for the university's own resources).

The share of state-funded income in the university's budget is based on a contract signed with the Ministry and comprises: basic funding, which amounts to 70% (i.e., financing of education taking into account factors such as the number of students, the cycle, field of study or language in which they are taught and including food and accommodation); additional funding amounts to 30%, is related to level of excellence of institutions and includes complementary funding for any other investment. The total amount of these state funds

depends on decisions of the National Parliament and the government and is largely unknown in advance, with frequent cuts in the last five years.

The university's own resources come from various sources, mainly from tuition fees paid by students (part-time, those not founded by the state, foreign students), research and partnerships with public and private institutions. Interestingly, the old technical faculties, whose study programs are better positioned in the national ranking, are able to secure more funds based on research and contracts, while the new faculties have more students and therefore get more money from tuition fees.

This total budget is distributed as follows: 25% goes to the university to cover expenses for administrative staff, running costs, financial help to faculties facing deficit and other minor expenses; the remaining 75% goes to faculties, depending on the position of their educational programmes in the national ranking, the field of studies and their number of grants, and covers academic staff, research and infrastructure investments.

Fortunately, the university enjoys a financial management that is the responsibility of a finance and strategy vice-rector. The approach is open, transparent and forward looking. The university is also supported by a database system, which helps in control and planning.

The accountability system is based on the faculties, which receive funds according to various criteria, such as the number of fee paying students, the number of research grants, and the position of the study programmes offered by each faculty in the national ranking system. Very importantly, the university belongs to the teaching and research group of Romanian universities and this has had to this day a significant impact on financial conditions. Apart from austerity measures following the economic recession, in the last two years funds have decreased at institutional level because of fewer students entering the university, which is partly due to declining demographics. The faculties seem to be balanced from the point of view of their input to the university, with Social Sciences and Humanities receiving part of their income from student fees whilst the older and more traditional faculties derive a larger part of their income mainly from research.

According to the information collected during the interviews with the senior leadership of the university, trying to increase funding was reported as being currently one of the main issues for UDJG. Apart from possible sources mentioned in the SER, such as European projects, sponsorships and services to the community, the team believes there is a potential to explore other sources of external funding. Examples are a more comprehensive part-time and lifelong learning offer (both fee-paying) or trying to attract fee-paying students from neighbouring countries, especially from the Near East and, as already acknowledged in the SER, a closer collaboration with partners from the local society or a more thorough exploitation of existing patents.

2.5. *Human resource management*

UDJG employs 1262 people, 673 of whom are teaching staff. Recruitment and career promotion have been constrained by the economic situation between 2008 and 2011; the constraints have been somewhat relaxed lately, provided that funds are available. However, past constraints gave way to an imbalance in the numbers of junior and senior staff positions, to the advantage of the latter; it can be expected that these difficulties will increase in the near future because of an ageing academic staff body and current difficulties for replacement. This situation is even more worrying since young prospective staff, well prepared and with a PhD (e.g., in the Faculty of Food Sciences), has left the region because of the economic situation.

The selection and promotion processes are public, according to the law, and clear, with a manual for candidate selection procedures. A doctorate is a prerequisite for all academic staff and the institution claims it provides development opportunities for its entire staff. However, the Strategic Plan does not include a section on human resources development, although they have been reported to take place after the SER was written.

Academic staff is evaluated each year via self, peer and student assessment for teaching and in a more simplified form for research. These evaluations are in theory the basis for rewards, but evaluation data are not fully used to support good practices or improve decision-making. As will be discussed in the section on quality, the system seems to be burdensome for academics and of a punitive, rather than supportive nature.

Administrative staff is evaluated by the heads of departments on a yearly basis. The team recommends that the ratio of administrative to academic staff, as well as the administrative staff competences are improved, so that they can carry out some of the non-academic tasks (e.g. data collection and forwarding for the quality assurance process) presently performed by academic staff who seem to be overloaded.

3.   Teaching and learning

As stated in its mission, the university is committed to providing the best education for under- and postgraduate students and continuous education to people from the surrounding areas, as well as supporting all university members to exploit their personal abilities.

In the academic year 2012/2013, DJUG has 15 faculties, with over 14,000 students registered. As previously mentioned, 67 programmes (Bachelor, Master, doctoral) are on offer at the university. The underlying philosophy, according to the SER, is to flexibly adapt to societal demands. However, the SER also reports a mismatch between the study programmes selected by students and the needs of the local labour market. Nevertheless, no systematic study on these demands has been carried out.

Each faculty is able to decide upon its educational offer. Although some programmes have reduced enrolments, they are still part of the educational offer, whilst being monitored. However, not all can cover expenses and, in these cases, the university helps with own resources. Thus this broad educational offer could mean multiplying the offer rather than adjusting to it in a rapid and flexible way, as intended. An optimisation of the resources through mergers or partnerships would be advisable in hard economic circumstances and especially in view of foreseeable staffing difficulties in the near future, a possibility acknowledged in the SER as a route to follow. Merging programmes would avoid the danger of duplicating courses and, at the same time, allow broader programmes within which students could make their own choices during their studies. Such a route would also facilitate the optimisation of the governance structure, as the number of programmes offered is directly related to the size of the faculties.

This possibility is all the more interesting given the fact that the study programmes offered at UDJG show a variety of positions in the national ranking, with the more technical and traditional ranked among the top, and the newer programmes ranked lower. However, as already mentioned, there seems to be a balance between the prestige of some faculties, which also have substantial revenue through research and contracts, and the income raised through tuition fees by others that enjoy a higher number of students.

The team noted from various interviews conducted during the two visits, that most faculties are aware of their role in qualifying their students for local employment as well as at for the European or international level. The team considers this to be an excellent starting point for implementing new teaching approaches, which can provide education that promotes graduate employability.

Good communication and relationships between academic staff and students is a dominant feature of UDJG and the team felt from the various interviews held with students that they are generally quite satisfied. The meeting with external stakeholders also showed they are happy with the graduates they employ.

The main Bologna reform features are in place, at least formally: the three-cycle Bologna structure (3+2+3), ECTS and the basic documentation for students and teachers. However, in the team's view, these developments, like in many other European universities, have not delved deeply into the Bologna philosophy of developing student-centred learning. Although there are efforts to approach teaching in a variety of ways, their relationship to learning outcomes is not straightforward and the more traditional ways largely prevail. Thus in real practice, the Bologna Process has not been fully developed, even in the best faculties and students can hardly identify some features or changes related to it. Students, especially those who have compared their experience through mobility schemes in universities abroad, mentioned that they would like to have more practical, hands-on work. Students also reported their workload was rather heavy and, according to this, it should be considered, disproportionate to ECTS, which suggests that work estimates should be reviewed; most students qualify their studies as being "hard", in many cases with work hours high above what would be desirable, especially around examination times. This shows that the current student assessment scheme is still based on workload to be invested for passing exams, although teachers report continuous assessment schemes are in place.

The team noticed that some student support services have been developed or reorganised recently, as described in the SER, targeted to students with difficulties, in particular. However, more attention to the planning and organisation of educational programmes and some specific analyses of some of these difficulties (such as dropout rate or employability studies) could provide a more solid base for this support and would also probably reduce the remedial needs of students experiencing difficulties.

Some approaches need to be revised in order to achieve a student-centred approach such as less ex-cathedra teaching (which is still quite common) in favour of a more practical, hands-on approach; an appropriate student workload evenly distributed along the academic semesters and accurately reflecting the ECTS concept; a better conceived continuous assessment scheme and a more flexible curriculum including electives to allow for a more individualised curriculum. Similarly, a less coercive control of class attendance would be desirable: the team understood that 75% attendance in order to have the right to take examinations is a widespread requirement. Learning outcomes should lead the process and, in order to really influence what students learn, should be specifically assessed; in the same line, a diversity of teaching methodologies should be strategically and specifically geared to reach the development of required competences.

Based on the information gathered during the interviews with the external stakeholders, the team concluded that there is a well-functioning relationship between the UDJG and the local enterprises, which makes it possible for students to have access to internships, many of them in major international firms. The students repeatedly reported they appreciate the opportunities for more practical activities and actually demand more.

There is in place a complete scheme for the evaluation of teaching. However, the team found out that the level of implementation varies: it is fully developed in some faculties but not so much in others. Moreover, the information collected does not seem to feed back into the system in any significant way for transforming teaching; in fact, it was identified as an occurring practice that bad performance is followed by more teaching and less time given to research.

Student admission procedures are decided annually by the university based on proposals from the faculties. Since 2012, candidates for Bachelor programmes are selected on the basis of an entrance examination, which is common to some disciplinary branches (e.g., engineering). This seems to have reduced the dropout rates. However, students may have to restart the whole process again if they decide to shift to other educational programmes. The maximum number of students enrolled each year is decided by ARACIS, the national quality assurance agency, according to the institutional capability of each university to organise study programmes. For Master and doctoral programmes, students are selected via interviews.

According to documents provided, the figures on dropout rates vary among faculties and are unusually lower from 2010 to 2012 (from 23.3% to 8.6% for the whole institution), with data of some faculties meriting closer analysis (e.g., students reported a 40% drop-out rate in Medicine, maybe because many students are more mature and hold full time jobs while studying). Dropout figures are generally lower for the older, engineering faculties, which also have a lower student body.

Available figures for recent years on employment rates do exist and are acceptable, but the team thinks that the methodology used to collect them should be improved in order to fit the purpose. Students are asked about their employment only once, when they collect their graduation certificates, which does not provide a timely and full picture of how employment rates evolve. This methodology may not only bias the data collected, but also make timely availability of the data difficult as shown by the fact that data for the last year are not provided. The team recommends serious consideration should be given to carrying out data collection in a more fit-for-purpose way, which guarantees access to a less biased student sample.

The team also recommends to establish better monitoring of the use of learning resources, human as well as laboratories and other infrastructures used in learning, and their outcomes so that they are used in a way that serve efficiently the goals that are set. Along this line, it is worth mentioning that collaboration among faculties for some educational programmes is suggested in the SER, since it seems that very similar, if not identical, programmes have been offered in different faculties.

Likewise, the team believes that it would be interesting to establish mechanisms to stimulate the exchange of successful teaching practices across the university (not only at the departmental level, which is currently the case) in order to broaden the cross-fertilisation of good practices and create a more open attitude to other disciplines. Events, such as periodic

university-wide meetings could serve this purpose and could also be tied to reward mechanisms, which need not be costly.

4. Research

UDJG shows strong research activity in some specific areas as demonstrated by the available funds, the participation in national and international projects and the number of publications. Overall, figures provided in the SER and meetings show that the efforts in raising external funds for research are successful in the more technical areas, which form the traditional core of the university. However, activity is much less significant in other areas, particularly in Humanities and Social Sciences as is often the case elsewhere since funding is less available in these areas.

Thus, within UDJG there are quite broad differences among the various faculties regarding research. Whereas the older, well-established faculties seem to enjoy a higher status nationally and internationally (although less than nationally), other faculties had less opportunities to benefit from research initiatives. The leading faculties have developed cooperation schemes both with other universities, both nationally and internationally, and with local enterprises, which strengthen their position.

Research is organised in research centres, within each faculty; the centres currently total 24. However, the team understood from the SER and interviews that they have no clear structures or resources, and, according to their own members, do not disseminate information properly nor are they properly connected to international research networks. This organisation results in a level of performance that the leadership considers less effective than expected and there are plans to improve collaboration among them; some new measures, such as the mergers of doctoral schools and research centres have already been enacted.

In order to achieve its goal of becoming an advanced research and learning university, which seems to be the clearest project for the university at this point in time, research will presumably play a pivotal role. As proof of its interest in research, UDJG has developed a specific strategy in agreement with the university's 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, the 2014-2020 National Strategy and the European Horizon 2020 Research Innovation Framework Programme. This strategy aims to increase performance, develop innovation capacity and enhance national and international recognition through measures such as the consolidation of traditional research domains; the modernisation and sharing of existing research infrastructures; the development of new research directions, which will be initially funded with the university's own resources; involving young researchers, development of innovation capacity and annual evaluation of research performance with financial consequences. A reorganisation of the many research centres, with a view to increasing efficiency through collaboration is an important element of this strategy and some mergers have already occurred.

Some other measures to support and expand research are mentioned in the SER and in the research strategy. The research strategy shows that the university intends to launch and support new research areas; however, these would need to be prioritised to emphasise a

multidisciplinary approach and take on board more participation from the less active research disciplines, such as social sciences and humanities. Furthermore, the leadership team is ready to stimulate cooperation among different faculties with a view to optimising the use of human resources and expensive equipment. Multidisciplinary research, some of it including Social Sciences and Humanities, is also an appropriate strategy and may benefit from the experience of other faculties. These efforts should be encouraged by all available means.

The team believes that these measures constitute a reasonable course of action and encourages the University to continue with their implementation.

Some very positive recent developments to make more efficient use of resources deserve to be mentioned: a mixed committee for research, which includes vice-deans and the vice-rector for research, has been put in place; an office to support patent applications is to be opened shortly, and should be developed fully. A successful reorganisation of doctoral studies from an atomised faculty-based scheme into two doctoral centres has also been successfully achieved recently; these two centres are under a common umbrella of a Council for Doctoral University Studies.

The law requires that PhD thesis are examined at national level to assure their quality. The team finds this external control to be unnecessary, especially since it implies a lack of trust in the university's quality control system and is potentially demeaning to academics supervising them. Besides, the team advises to provide specific training to new academic PhD supervisors, possibly through mentoring of successful senior colleagues in order to increase its number, which is now too low.

As in other areas of functioning, the team found that the university makes a great effort of collecting information through the evaluation of research activity. The team encourages the university to continue doing so, but recommends that this information is further exploited by dissemination to the whole academic community as a means of inviting colleagues to emulate best practices.

To summarise, in the team's view the functioning and potential of the university in this area are good and the growth possibilities are properly conceived. One possibility, which could yield interesting results and deserves further exploration, is to broaden the concept of technology transfer so that it includes the concept of knowledge transfer. This could also encourage the humanities and social sciences to join in this effort. This initiative could also strengthen the relationships with society.

5. Service to society

As already mentioned, and was clear according to the broad attendance at the external stakeholders meeting, the university is aware of its role regarding the local society and, at the same time, the local society feels well connected to its university. This provides for dynamic and rich interaction with external stakeholders.

Academic staff as well as students and stakeholders appear to be aware of the role the university plays in educating the future local workforce, but also of the need to broaden the perspective to Europe and the whole world, in face of the current economic situation that the country and the region are facing.

However, external stakeholders hinted during the interviews that the links with society could be strengthened in the case of some faculties, a fact acknowledged in the SER. For instance, the local community is not represented in any decision-making body, even if it is informally consulted. As a matter of fact, these ties have been developed in varying degrees by the different faculties. This dialogue should be enhanced by all possible means as the SER itself suggests. One strategy could be to have a closer look at regional societal needs as a way, for instance, of developing a more adapted offer at every academic level, including lifelong learning. As a principle, the team recommends that UDJG does as much as possible to show to the local society the benefits that the university can bring to them. This could also be improved, as already said, by broadening the concept of transfer to include not only technical, but also knowledge transfer, which may have a strong effect and, in fact, in many ways change the local society. In this way, the university would also show, not only its capacity to flexibly adapt to societal needs, but also to actually help change the local society and increase its innovation potential. Furthermore, all these measures may help improve the relationship and collaboration with stakeholders, and their potential to raise university income should also be explored. Along this line, initiatives such as the new spin-off Association for Continuous Education and Technology Transfer, not yet approved, should be supported and expanded.

Alumni organisations could also help strengthen ties with society and bridge the gap between the expectations of citizens, admittedly more oriented towards immediate, concrete problems, and the academic community, more oriented towards general principles and generalisations.

To summarise, the team encourages the university to pursue all avenues in order to strengthen close collaboration with society and, in particular with the City Council.

6.   Quality culture

Created in 2007, quality assurance structures are quite recent at UDJG, even if quality is one of the main aims of the university, as stated in its mission. Quality is the responsibility of the university Senate through the Quality Council and Quality Committees at the faculty and departmental level. As previously mentioned, the university, in compliance with the law, counts on well-established and formally documented, very elaborated and demanding quality control processes and procedures, including a quality manual. Evaluations for the university or the quality agency are very frequent.

In fact, the team would like to point out that the unnecessarily complicated and partly imposed by the law quality assurance structure may lead to lack of ownership of quality assurance efforts, which may at times be perceived as something that is imposed on the university rather than useful to it. Overall, the team found that quality control procedures seem to be geared more towards control and are of a more punitive rather than supportive nature; in other words, they identify bad practices rather than the good ones and there are no documented efforts to disseminate good practices within the university. Thus, in spite of significant evaluation efforts, the consequences are unclear and could, in fact, be counterproductive (for instance, giving more teaching to those academics who fare less well in this activity). Generally speaking, there is a lack of recognition of good performance, particularly in teaching, and the collected information is not fed back into the system in a systematic way in order to improve it.

Overall, reasonable teaching quality evaluation schemes are in place although, in the team's view, they seem unevenly developed in the different faculties. In addition, as already mentioned, it is not clear to the team how these evaluations inform decisions, except when the results are very negative, in which case sanctions may be imposed. However, teachers with bad teaching results are not advised on how to improve their results and, furthermore, a possible consequence of bad results in teaching is an increase in the teaching load, which would give professors less time to do research. Furthermore, there exist a Department of Teachers' Training at university level supposed to provide the educational development teachers need to achieve better performance, but it is not regularly recommended as a means of development and does not seem to be broadly known or used. This unit is directly dependent of a specific academic department (Pedagogy) and is not conceived or staffed in a multidisciplinary way. It provides academic staff with general, prescriptive documents and templates supposed to facilitate quality teaching but the use of these documents is not followed or supported in any way.

Students are not informed of any consequence following their evaluations – a fact that may be related to the very low level of participation in electronic evaluation forms (only about 15% of students fill them in). The SER reported concerns about the infrequent answering of electronic questionnaires by students, which could be explained by several factors. In the first place, the fear of being identified, a possibility that would require some further analysis; on the other hand, as already mentioned, students do not have clear feedback on the use the university makes of their input, which could demotivate them. On the positive side, communication between teachers and students is very straightforward and students speak to them directly whenever they have any difficulties, whether these are individual or affecting a group of students.

Interestingly, the Strategic Plan does not include any mention of quality assurance, even when it states that the attainment of good quality in all university activities is among the main aims. On the other hand, there is no link between strategic planning and the results of the quality assurance evaluation. Overall, as is also the case in other areas, the team understands that the university is making an effort to collect the data, but does not use the data to inform decision-making. Importantly, this is a fact acknowledged in the SER. Following this fact, the team advises the UDJG to feed the evaluation data of all areas back into the system in order to improve it. Creating a quality culture would also entail transforming the system from a control to a supportive system which could help this academic community to achieve improved quality levels in all domains of activity. To this end, it would also be beneficial to shift away from, or at least complement ISO schemes with the *European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance*, that are more appropriate for educational higher education institutions.

The team believes that these measures would contribute to shift from isolated and at times meaningless quality evaluation activities toward embedding a quality culture. Along this line, the team notes that the vice-rector for quality assurance and the Quality Committee have a great work ahead to change the system into a real quality culture.

Capacity for change

The team understood that the rector and his team have a clear vision of the need to be ranked highly among Romanian universities, which also conditions the university's funding from the state. This concrete goal, if shared and supported widely at the institutional level, could be an extremely powerful lever of change, if the university's leadership manages to achieve a higher level of integration and collaboration among the different faculties and institutional bodies. However, this will require much effort and the active involvement and participation of all faculties and a substantial number of academics.

The team found that clearly such a capacity for change exists, and the leadership is able and well positioned to show the way. In fact, most of the main lines of development are included

in the newly approved Strategic Plan, even though it is not yet translated into implementation plans.

It should be noted that actual change depends largely on external financial and legal constraints, in addition to requiring considerable internal efforts and the widespread willingness to change across the whole institution. Along this line, the readiness to share resources and collaborate among the different faculties and departments seems crucial. With regards to external factors, the team believes that positive changing would require financial support and less overregulation.

7. Internationalisation

Although at this point in time, UDJG does not seem to benefit from a large amount of exchanges be it of students or teachers, both outgoing and incoming, it has established agreements with universities all over Europe and, according to the SER, is the second university in the country regarding the number of students it receives from the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia and Albania. Again, the older faculties of this university seem to perform better in this area, sending their academic staff as visiting scholars to foreign universities as well as receiving scholars from outside.

In the team's view, the university has correctly understood the need and benefits of internationalisation. A specific strategy exists, and it identifies the immediate lines of development, which are to develop study programmes in foreign languages and increase mobility for students as well as teaching staff; however, the team finds some of these aims to be too ambitious at this point in time. While these objectives are to be encouraged, some intermediate, more modest measures, better adapted to the current situation, may be pursued. Along this line, offering some subjects in foreign languages, even if entire study programmes are not available yet, is a positive step in achieving at least "internationalisation at home", especially for students.

The university has also succeeded in the implementation of the first stage of internationalisation in order to facilitate mobility both for students and teachers. Language policy has been correctly identified as a means to prepare and facilitate exchanges. Given the serious financial difficulties that many students experience when moving to foreign countries, especially western European countries, the team suggests that "internationalisation at home" would be an appropriate strategy; its main aim would be to provide some courses in English (not necessarily whole programmes at this first stage) in their own home university, an initiative which has already started, and the team encourages to continue. Besides, the team recommends other improvements such as developing support structures for foreign students or restructuring courses in order to facilitate the establishment of mobility windows.

The university is encouraged to correctly identify the next steps which could include contacts with the Far and Near East, the latter a promising ground for fee-paying students. Finally, the outcomes of this strategy should be monitored in a continuous way.

Conclusion

UDJG is a university in transition, with limitations because of the current economic situation, and strong regulations limiting its autonomy. Frequent changes in the national legislation make the situation more complex. Fortunately, a new, capable, ambitious and dynamic leadership has assumed office recently and is well positioned to introduce significant and needed changes, since its vision and strategy are largely shared by the majority of the academic community. This of course is a very positive ground for change.

The capacity for change exists and actual change is still in progress in many areas and should be encouraged. Actual change will depend largely on external constraints, but will also require considerable efforts and the willingness of the whole academic community to build on this change and assure a sustainable level of collaboration across the institution. In turn, this will require a considerable effort of the leadership to inspire and involve the whole university community to actively participate in this joint effort from which they all have much to gain.

The team would like to emphasise that the university has generally correctly identified the main challenges it faces and is moving in the right direction regarding most of them. However, there is significant room for improvement in several areas. They have been mentioned throughout this report and are summarised below.

Summary of recommendations:

1. Governance structures are quite complicated, and time- and labour-intensive for academic staff and would benefit from simplification. However, the Senate and the Administrative Council seem to have found a favourable working relationship; the team encourages the university to continue developing this good relationship between its governing bodies.

2. The decision-making system also seems quite complicated, but is transparent. The university collects a great deal of information regarding its functioning, which, however, is not fully used for decision-making; to improve the decision-making process, the team recommends that the university develops "business intelligence" so that its decisions are evidence-based.

3. The academic structures of faculties, departments and even those supporting research activities are not optimised for efficiency but the leadership is trying to make them more efficient. The team endorses these efforts as a sound basis for development in a difficult economic situation. The university should seriously

consider simplifying the academic structure, for example, by merging small faculties or sharing educational programmes or parts of them, which may overlap.

4. A Strategic Plan has been recently approved which shows most lines of development, with needed operational plans announced. Regarding financial management, and in order to expand own financing, the team recommends that new income sources are explored and existing ones are further exploited.

5. The team recommends that the ratio of administrative to academic staff, as well as the administrative staff competences are improved, so that they can carry out some of the non-academic tasks (e.g. data collection and forwarding for the quality assurance process) presently performed by academic staff who seem to be overloaded.

6. The educational programme offer is very broad and resource-intensive. The team recommends that the number of programmes be reduced, by merging those that overlap or are similar; this would provide internal flexibility within the programmes and expand the number of electives.

7. A very positive, straightforward relationship exists between students and teachers. The team recommends that some approaches be revised in order to achieve a truly student-centred approach, such as less ex-cathedra teaching and a more practical, hands-on approach. Further, students' workload should be more objectively estimated and more evenly distributed along the academic semesters, accurately reflecting the ECTS concept; a better conceived continuous assessment scheme could help along this line. A less coercive control of class attendance would be desirable and learning outcomes should really lead the process and be specifically assessed; along the same lines, a diversity of teaching methodologies should be strategically used to reach desired learning outcomes. A more flexible curriculum including electives is also recommended.

8. The team recommends that teaching evaluation data be used to improve the system and studies on student dropout rates and employment patterns be systematically carried out.

9. The team also recommends to establish better monitoring of the use of learning resources, human as well as laboratories and other infrastructures used in learning, and their outcomes so that they are used in a way that serve efficiently the goals that are set.

10. The team believes that it would be interesting to establish mechanisms to stimulate the exchange of successful teaching practices across the university (not only at the departmental level, which is currently the case) in order to broaden the cross-

fertilisation of good practices and create a more open attitude to other disciplines. Events such as periodic university-wide meetings could serve this purpose and could also be tied to reward mechanisms, which need not be costly.

11. The organisation and potential of the university in research are good and the growth possibilities are properly perceived. Research is very much the focus of this university and the specific strategy shows that it intends to support traditional fields of inquiry as well as launch new research areas. The leadership team is ready to stimulate cooperation among different faculties with a view to optimising the use of resources (shared use of expensive equipment as well as human resources). As part of this strategy, multidisciplinary research is encouraged, some of it including the Social Sciences and the Humanities, as a means to stimulate the less active areas, which could thus benefit from the richer experience of other schools in this area. The team encourages the University to continue with fully implementing these plans.

12. Very positive recent developments to achieve a more efficient use of resources can be identified, such as a mixed committee for research including vice-deans and the vice-rector for research, a successful reorganisation of doctoral studies into two doctoral schools and the recent creation of an office to support patent applications. The team recommends that efforts towards more efficient use of resources should continue.

13. As in other areas of functioning, the team found that the university makes a great effort of collecting information through the evaluation of research activity. The team encourages the university to continue doing so, but further recommends that this information is fully exploited by dissemination to the whole academic community as a means of inviting colleagues to emulate best practices.

14. The team believes that broadening the concept of technology transfer and innovation by also including knowledge transfer is an idea worth exploring and could open ways for the Humanities and Social Sciences to join in this effort. This initiative could also strengthen the relationships with the society by not only addressing local needs but also shaping them.

15. The links with society are quite strong but could still be strengthened in the case of some faculties. As much as possible must be done to show the benefits that the university can bring to the surrounding society and pursue all avenues in order to strengthen collaboration with society and, particularly with the City Council. One strategy could be to have a closer look at regional societal needs as a way, for instance, of developing a more adjusted offer at every academic level, including lifelong learning. This could also be improved, as already mentioned, by broadening the concept of transfer to include not only technical, but also knowledge transfer as a

means of changing the environment itself. The team encourages the university to pursue all avenues in order to strengthen close collaboration with society and, in particular, with the City Council.

16. The Strategic Plan does not include any mention of quality assurance, even although the attainment of good quality in all activities is the mission of the university. The efforts of the university to collect as much information as possible on its functioning at every level is clear; however, there is no apparent effort to link strategic planning to results of quality evaluation and no process exists for transforming these data into knowledge to inform decision-making. The team recommends that evaluation data in all areas are fed back into the system in order to improve it. This would also entail transforming the quality assurance approach from a control to a supportive system, which could help the academic community achieve improved quality levels and have a true quality culture. It would also be beneficial to shift away from, or at least complement ISO schemes with the *European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance.*

17. Clearly the capacity for change exists, and the leadership is able and well positioned to show the way. Most of the main lines of development are included in the newly approved Strategic Plan, which, however, needs to be translated into concrete implementation plans. Actual change depends largely on external, financial and legal constraints and will also require considerable internal efforts and the widespread willingness to change in the whole institution.

18. The university has correctly identified the need and benefits of internationalisation and has succeeded in the implementation of its first stage. A specific strategy exists, which identifies the immediate lines of development in order to facilitate mobility both for students and teachers. Language policy has been correctly identified as a means to prepare and facilitate exchanges. Given the financial difficulties that many students report when moving to western European countries, the team recommends "internationalisation at home" as an appropriate strategy; its main aim would be to provide some courses in English (not, necessarily whole programmes) in their own home university, an initiative which is already underway. Other suggested measures would be developing support structures for foreign students or restructuring courses in order to facilitate the establishment of mobility windows. The team also encourages the university to advance in the correct identification of the next steps, which could include contacts with the far and Near East, the latter a promising ground for fee-paying students.

19. In all areas, any efforts for improvement need to be assessed against established plans in systematic ways so that feedback can keep informing future decisions and serve quality assurance.