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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

National University of Theatre and Film “I.L.Caragiale”

UNATC

EVALUATION REPORT

June 2013

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Performance
in Higher Education





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the National University of Theatre and Film “I.L.Caragiale” (UNATC) in Bucharest, Romania. 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.



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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 UNATC and the national context

The origins of the university (located in Bucharest) go back to 1834, commencing with the training of actors in the Philharmonic School. Over time, other fields of study were added and institutional changes led to the creation of the university as it exists today. In the strategic plan, it is stated that “the University must remain an indestructible unity, a national landmark of artistic higher education”. The university’s mission pays significant attention to its role as an arts institution of international standing, to its social, cultural and moral responsibility, to its task of promoting the skills and qualifications required by the specific fields of professional practice to which it is connected. Therefore, the university formulates the following as strategic objectives: the training of specialists, the passing on of cultural heritage to subsequent generations and to promote experimentation, innovation and creativity – providing a high quality of education and establishing the principle of excellence in its activities. UNATC is an accredited higher education institution and the only institution in Romania active in both the fields of theatre and film.

The university enjoys a very strong national position in its fields of expertise. For a long period, it has been the only university in Romania specialising in film and theatre. While a number of other institutions now offer university level programmes in film and/or theatre, UNATC is still widely regarded as the leading national institution in these two disciplines.

UNATC takes full advantage of the academic autonomy, according to the provisions of the Education Law No. 1/2011, which strengthens the autonomy of universities and allows the formulation of the new university charter.

The UNATC mission is defined by two fundamental axes:

- the training of young artists and professionals in the fields of theatre and film at a professional level of excellence;
- the maintenance of institutional standards for the preservation, enhancement and transmission of the specific values associated with these arts.



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Recently, UNATC elected a new managerial team that is focusing its strategy and action plans on free and responsible decisions to:

- form qualified artists and specialists in the fields of expertise;
- transmit to the next generations the cultural and artistic heritage, traditions and national specificity of these fields;
- promote novelty, experiment and creativity as goals and tools necessary to achieve evolution in the arts;
- implicate itself in society, to develop theatrical and cinema education programmes in all social and economic environments, to build a strategy of access to knowledge and abilities based on theatre and film, useful in communication and in other public life domains;
- become an interdisciplinary expertise pole;
- insure the regularisation of high achievement and high educational quality in the fields mentioned;
- assert the principle of excellence in all the university's activities.

Some of the best Romanian theatres, all the major film production companies, the national television service and most of the central commercial television stations are located in Bucharest. This city is therefore a major hub, which concentrates practically all of the national TV and cinema industries. Two major film production studios are also located in the vicinity of the city, while the city itself is the location of two professional film laboratories and 57 (out of a total of 60 nationally) film and audio-visual production companies. Bucharest also has the highest concentration of theatres (12), and independent theatre companies. All the main Romanian advertising companies are based in Bucharest.

UNATC is composed of two faculties (theatre and film), managing the educational process at the 1st and 2nd cycles (Bachelor and Master degree programmes), as full-time programmes. The activities of the 3rd cycle (doctoral degree programmes) are managed by the doctoral school, which was restructured in 2008, and includes two doctoral fields and four research groups. UNATC has two research centres (theatre and film).

The entrance exams are designed to be highly selective and involve both practical skills tests and written, theoretical tests. UNATC is trying to ensure that the number of places available on its programmes is maintained relatively low so that the competition for places guarantees that the quality of applicants recruited to each programme is high, but to also make sure that the university is able to maintain the quality of the learning experience that it seeks to offer to its students.

In October 2012, UNATC had 499 students registered in the 1st cycle (Bachelors), 202 in the 2nd cycle (Masters) and 140 in doctoral degree programmes. UNATC's specific processes and



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activities (including research and artistic creation) are carried out by 270 employees: 123 full-time academic staff and 147 non-academic, technical and administrative staff.

UNATC offers a number of student support services; it is investing in the development of modern laboratories (for film and theatre production) and teaching rooms; it provides publications and documentation resources and has recently published a new student guide. UNATC is also investing in increasing the comfort level of student accommodation and improving the sports facilities available to them. The university is actively developing its range of international exchange programmes, to both enhance and broaden the students' learning experience by providing opportunities for students to acquire international perspectives and experience.

A main characteristic of the evaluation of UNATC was the positive engagement of both staff and students in the evaluation process that the team experienced. This highly positive engagement with the evaluation process fostered an open and frank dialogue between the team and the institution, and helped the team to form a highly positive impression of the day-to-day life of the university.

The team was also impressed by the range and status of the international awards that have been bestowed on both students and graduates of the university in the fields of theatre and cinema.

As a consequence of its established national and international standing, the university is able to attract strong fields of applicants across its range of study programmes.

1.3 The self-evaluation process

The self-evaluation report submitted to the evaluation process was produced by a Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) set-up by the university for this specific purpose, assigned by the UNATC Senate decision no. 162 from the 12 of June 2012, following the UNATC Senate decision no. 158. The SEG was led by Prof. Doru Nitescu, vice-rector for international relations, and comprised 10 additional members; two professors, three associate professors, three lecturers, one member of administrative staff and one student.

The report provided a description of the institutional context of the university (history, geographical position, the labour market situation, the structure of the university, etc.). In a second chapter the values, mission and objectives of the institution are described. The report also contains information on governance, quality assessment practice and strategic management (including the institution's view of its capacity for change). The report also provided a set of conclusions and a SWOT analysis.



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The team's view was that the self-evaluation report provides a reasonably open and honest view of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the university and formed a useful basis for discussions between the team and the representative groups in the university that the team met in the course of the evaluation visit.

1.4 The evaluation team

The UNATC self-evaluation report, together with appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in November 2012. The two visits by the evaluation team to Bucharest took place in December 2012 and April 2013. In between the two visits UNATC prepared some additional documentation, requested by the team at the conclusion of their first visit, which was provided to the evaluation team (in March 2013), just prior to the start of their second visit.

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

- Finn Jung-Jensen (team chair), former Rector of the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
- Anthony Dean, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Winchester, United Kingdom
- Eva Fazekas, International Relations student, University of Szeged, Hungary
- Luc François (team coordinator), adviser to the Rector for Internationalisation, Ghent University, Belgium

The team would like to thank the rector, vice-rectors, deans, directors of departments, members of the self-evaluation group, students, members of the Senate, external partners, and all other staff who contributed to the evaluation process and in facilitating the well-organised programme of meetings that the team experienced at the university during each visit.



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2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Decision-making processes and university structures

The UNATC governance and management processes are formulated according to the strategic goals and objectives of the university, fully respecting the university's vision and mission, the specific nature of each faculty/doctoral school and the national and international context.

The management structures of UNATC are:

- The Senate (75% staff; 25% students)
- The Administrative Council (rector, vice-rectors, chief-administrator, deans and student representative)
- The Faculty Councils/Doctoral School Council
- The Departmental Boards

Members of these councils, as well as the department directors, are elected. The rector is elected by the whole academic community and, in turn, appoints two vice-rectors. The deans are appointed as a result of an election process, which is organised by the rector.

There are several commissions (set up for consulting, monitoring and evaluation purposes): and services. Commissions comprise: Quality Management; Education Quality Evaluation and Assurance; Ethics Commission (the membership of which is comprised of staff and students with no other management function) is appointed by the rector and works in an autonomous way.

Through discussions with staff and by reading the documentation provided, the team formed the view that there was potential for the university to rationalise the number of commissions and/or the range of tasks assigned to them in order to ensure that lines of communication and responsibilities for key aspects of the university's activities were more clearly defined. In addition, the team felt that there was also scope for ensuring that the overlapping of membership between the various bodies within the management and governance structure was minimised as much as reasonably possible to ensure that a fresh perspective on the matters of business passing through successive levels of the governance and management committee structure could be assured at each level. The team also felt that this may provide an opportunity to engage newer members of faculty and university staff in these processes. The team also felt that there was scope for the university to seek to achieve a better facilitative and effective balance between the deliberative and executive functions of the management and governance of the university.

In 2012, a new strategic plan was adopted by the university. This was developed from the proposed plan that was put forward by the current rector as part of the election process. In



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the view of the evaluation team, this plan offers a sound basis for necessary changes and developments that the university will need to engage with over the coming years.

Through its discussions with both staff and student representatives during the two visits, the team formed the view that the ambitions of the university would be well served by establishing a strategic innovation fund, in order to ensure that there was sufficient institutional capacity available to realise the full range of aims set out within the strategic plan, particularly in relation to curriculum development and pedagogic development, research, internationalisation and to improve current university systems and processes.

Over the course of its two visits to the university, the team came to the view that in order to ensure that the strategic plan does not simply remain a set of worthy principles and laudable aspirations, the rector should establish a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that will enable the Senate to formulate clear and quantifiable objectives to underpin the various elements of the strategic plan and which will assist the university in measuring its progress against these objectives.

The team wishes to give the following recommendations to the university:

- To establish a strategic innovation fund for supporting new ideas in educational development, research proposals and university systems and processes. This fund must provide some seed funding to young faculty members in order to develop creative and new ideas, which cannot be funded immediately by more regular money flows.
- To achieve a facilitative and effective balance between the deliberative and executive functions of the management and governance of the university. This would lead to a more efficient policy in the institution.
- To rationalise the number of commissions (and the tasks assigned to them) and the overlapping of membership between the various bodies within the management and governance structure ensuring, where possible, that young faculty members are appropriately represented.

2.2 Management of human resources and financial resources

The specific processes and activities at UNATC are carried out by 270 employees. This is comprised of 123 full-time academic staff and 147 non-academic, technical and administrative staff. Staff are broadly balanced in terms of gender and age. UNATC annually estimates the current and future needs of human resources. The recruitment and the promotion of teaching staff is done within the framework of the national legislation, according to the internal regulations and procedures for teaching staff appointment.



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In relation to what it learned regarding the university's approach to the recruitment and promotion of staff, the team had the view that the university should develop and establish a staff development policy that would cover the staff development needs of academic, technical and administrative staff. Such a policy should both support the implementation of the strategic plan as well as provide a clear framework aimed at assisting university staff in engaging in staff development activities and in planning their career progression.

Despite the heavy reduction of the academic staff due to austerity measures applied by the local government starting with 2008, UNATC managed to assure a balance between the quality of the academic processes and the financial efficiency. Out of the total number of 212 teaching positions at university level in 2012-2013, 89 are vacant; about 32% of them are covered by cooperating academic staff – specialists from outside the university, significantly contributing to the quality of the teaching process by their experience and specific competences.

Study at UNATC is government-funded. A certain number of places are available for students who are willing and able to pay for their studies. UNATC wants to limit these places in relation to the institutional capacity and the quality of education. Additional funding can be drawn through two companies (one for film, one for theatre) and through two NGOs.

The team offers the following recommendation to the university:

- To establish a staff development policy to cover the staff development needs of academic, technical and administrative staff, this should include a system of career progression planning.



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3. Teaching and learning

The theatre faculty and the film faculty are managing the educational process at the 1st and 2nd cycles, as full-time programmes. The activities of the 3rd cycle are managed by the doctoral school, its council, and the doctoral school director.

UNATC places a particular emphasis on its approach to teaching and learning processes within the student experience and it describes itself as “*a student-centered university*”.¹ This is reflected in the very positive relationship that appears to operate between the student body and academic, technical and administrative staff. However, the evaluation team noted that in the self-evaluation report provided by the university, the approach to teaching and learning was occasionally described as following an “*apprentice-master*” model.² During the two on-site visits, the team discovered that the approach to teaching and learning did not seek to replicate a master-pupil relationship but actively promoted a facilitative balance, between staff and students, in maintaining an effective learning environment.. The team encourages the university to further secure this approach by articulating in more nuanced terms its own definition of student-centred learning.

The university offers a comprehensive range of curricula, across its two specialist areas of study (theatre and film). However, through its discussions with a group of employers, graduates and current students, the team formed the view that there was scope for the institution to pay greater attention to trends and developments in the related fields of professional practice and respond positively to both opportunities and changing practices in these areas. In addition to the formal content of curricula, the team became aware that the learning environment fostered by the university also provides a range of excellent opportunities for students to enhance and augment their formal educational experience (for example through engagement and participation with the Film Menu Magazine, Cine Club, etc.).

Through its meetings with both employers and graduate students, the team learned that the professional fields (theatre and film) were developing rapidly and dynamically in Romania and that, as a consequence, graduates seeking to enter these professional fields of practice were increasingly needed to be equipped with entrepreneurial skills. The team formed the impression that there was scope to embed such skills within the curricula so that students graduating at both Bachelor and Masters levels were better prepared to meet the current and emergent demands of these specialised fields of professional practice.

The team also learned that, in national terms, employment opportunities with the professional theatre and film industries were limited and that some graduates had found it

¹ Page 16 of the Institutional Development Strategic Plan

² Page 7 of the SER



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hard to secure employment that was directly related to their specialised area of study. Both the graduates and representative group of employers whom the team met during the course of the two visits felt that there was potential to give a greater emphasis (within the curricula) to the transferable skills that were embedded within the specialist areas of study that the students were undertaking – in order to broaden out the employment opportunities for graduates.

Through its meetings with staff and student representatives and visiting the library and IT resources available to support student learning, the team formed the view that both library and IT resources were in urgent need of improvement in order to meet the learning needs of students at all levels of study. The team also learned that (in the case of IT) the operation of the university could be significantly enhanced through investment in IT equipment and specialised software packages to support administrative processes.

A strategic goal is to implement a competency-aimed quality-assurance system, taking into consideration the specificities of the educational process in the creative arts domain. Each course is annually evaluated and re-structured, if necessary at the department and faculty level, via a set of evaluation procedures. The departments and Faculty Council take these evaluations into consideration and then proceed to implement changes in the educational programmes, according to the ARACIS national accreditation norms.

The team offers the following recommendations to the university:

- To analyse and re-define what the university means by “student-centred learning” to capture more fully the productive and positive dialogue that it promotes between staff and students. The team discovered that the approach to teaching and learning did not seek to replicate a master-pupil relationship but actively promoted a facilitative balance, between staff and students, in maintaining an effective learning environment.
- To maintain a live internal dialogue, and with representatives of the related fields of professional practice, so as to ensure that the university is always fully aware of any new developments that may need to be reflected in the established curricula or lead to the establishment of new academic provision (for example, games design).
- To embed entrepreneurial skills in the curricula at undergraduate level across all study programmes and to establish internships at Masters level.
- To emphasise within the curricula the transferability of the skills inherent in student learning in specialist areas of study, in order to broaden out graduate employability. This should be linked to a regular programme of visiting professionals who are able to provide insight into a wider range of career options;



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- To prioritise the development of library and IT resources to support student learning needs at all levels of study and (in the case of IT) to also facilitate the enhancement of administrative processes.



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4. Research and knowledge exchange

4.1 Doctoral education

Advanced research activity is developed within the UNATC doctoral school programmes, organised in the two domains specific to the university:

- Scientific – with a focus on interdisciplinary theatre-film studies
- Research in the arts domain – with a focus on the analysis of the pedagogical process within artistic education

4.2 Research activities and research infrastructure

The research activity in UNATC is managed through the Research, Innovation and Lifelong Learning Centre, which falls under the purview of one of the vice-rectors. The centre coordinates the activities of three different bodies:

- Theatre Studies and Creativity Research Centre;
- Film Studies and Creativity Research Centre;
- The Department of Lifelong Learning and Career Counselling.

The actual activity has two main foci:

- Research in the arts domain – focused on the creative process and sharing of knowledge and skills;
- Scientific research – focused on theatre and film studies and cultural management.

It was not clear to the team, from the documentation provided or through discussions with staff groups, the extent to which staff time is allocated to research activity and is formally supported across the institution. The team formed the impression that there was considerable variation across departments and faculties in the way that this currently operated. The team encourages the university to consider clarifying its expectations regarding individual staff research activity as an explicit part of role descriptions for all members of faculty.

Nevertheless, the team welcomes the recent publication of two international journals, in the fields of film and theatre (*Close Up* in film and media studies and the *Romanian Performing Arts Journal*) as a major step in international branding and relationship building.



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The team also welcomes the proposal to make more explicit the areas of research focus in the doctoral school but would advise that this is done with careful consideration given to the established research strengths of staff.

Through its engagement with the university via the evaluation process, the team became aware of the wealth of research and knowledge exchange activity that the university was engaged in, on both a national and international level. However, the team came to the view that the breadth and range of the impact of this activity was not being effectively harnessed by the university for enhancing its profile in either the public domain or the international field of academic research.

Through viewing documentation and through its meetings with staff, the team learned that, due to the impending retirement of a number of senior academic staff, the university would not be in a position to provide enough appropriately qualified and experienced PhD supervisors to meet the needs of the university's likely cohort of PhD students within two years of the evaluation. The team formed the view that this was a matter that needed to be addressed urgently by the university in order to safeguard the research student experience.

Through its discussions with staff and students, the team was made aware of the various activities that were available to research students to engage with the research activities of academic staff and other PhD students through seminars and presentations. However, in general, this appeared to be confined to the immediate centre of research or discipline area that the PhD student was based in. The team felt that there was potential to further enrich the research student experience through the provision of structured opportunities for staff and students to share their research across research centres and disciplines.

The team offers the following recommendations to the university:

- To establish clear priorities for research centres, taking into full account their relationship with the wider external fields of current research;
- To develop a strategy for evaluating and reporting on the impact of the university's research and knowledge exchange activity in the public domain as well as in relation to the wider field of academic research;
- To urgently address the need to have more PhD mentors within a two-year timeframe to meet the demands of the research student body;
- To further enhance the experience of the student PhD environment through establishing structured opportunities for students to meet and share their work and ideas.



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5. Service to society

The university prides itself on the opportunities it provides for students to engage directly with and receive feedback from public audiences. This is viewed as a vital element in their academic and artistic development. UNATC wants to integrate itself in society and to develop theatre and film education programmes that can be made available to people from all social and economic backgrounds, to build a strategy of access to the specialised knowledge and abilities inherent in theatre and film practices that can be directly, or by adaptation, useful in communication and in other domains of public life.

Through the process of the evaluation, the team became aware of the extensive network of contacts and range of activities through which the university engages with external communities, organisations and individuals, although much of this information was atomised throughout the different faculties, departments and staff clusters or individual staff members. The team formed the view that there was an opportunity to capture such information so as to compile a useful data set, which, in turn, could form the basis of a more structured and strategic approach to external links and partnerships.

Similarly, the team gathered the impression that the impact of the university on academic, cultural and social life was likely to be significant. However, the university did not appear to have any systematic means of identifying or gathering evidence that it could use as a means of evidencing the impact of the university on both the cultural and economic life of the country. The team felt that it would be in the medium- to long-term interests of the university to address this matter through the commissioning of an impact study.

Small but significant steps are being achieved in creating an educational system (for secondary school level) in which art can penetrate into the curriculum, even if at first only as an optional subject. UNATC has established, as of 2012, a Masters in theatrical pedagogy in order to meet the growing demand of the education market from pre-university level.

UNATC assumes its social, cultural and moral responsibility to meet the training demands of contemporary Romanian and European society of professionalisation and training in the fields of theatre, film and media. UNATC consciously assumes the task of promoting the skills and qualifications required by the specific labour market in performing arts, cinema and media, in accordance with European and international competitive standards of academic artistic activity.

Through its meeting with a representative group of employers, which formed part of the evaluation process, the team were made aware of the willingness of potential employers (of the university's graduates) to provide valuable insight and advice to the university on a range of matters, particularly in terms of curriculum development and the specific skill sets sought by employers in the current fields of employment. Although it was clear, through discussions



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with academic staff, that such intelligence was being gathered in ad hoc and often anecdotal ways, the team was of the opinion that there was an opportunity for the university to establish a more comprehensive and formal means of gathering such intelligence that could bring together key individuals from society (including the specific field of employment for which the university was preparing students) to offer advice to the rector and his management team. This could be usefully further augmented by the establishment of an alumni society.

The team wishes to give the following recommendations to the university:

- To establish a process that enables the wide range of contacts and activities through which the university engages with external organisations and individuals to be captured so as to form the basis of a more structured approach to external partnerships.
- To find a means of evidencing the impact of the university on both the cultural and economic life of the country.
- To set up an advisory board that brings together key individuals from society to offer advice to the rector and his management team.
- To support the establishment of an alumni society.



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6. Quality culture

In its documentation, UNATC states that it implemented a quality assurance system, based on national and European standards (in 2005), in line with the national quality assurance strategy as it applied to universities. The university's expressed view is that the policies and procedures for the assurance of the quality of the learning experience and the standards of its awards were designed to assimilate these requirements and promote a culture of quality across the institution. In undertaking this task, one of the main preoccupations of the university was to adapt the quality standards to its specific vocational profile. This was applied to its design of mechanisms for gathering student evaluations and for the evaluation of teaching staff.

However, throughout the evaluation process, the team did not find any clear evidence of an effective quality culture having been established in the university. While the team was able to identify some formal procedures that could support a quality culture, it remained unconvinced that the principles and processes of a robust quality culture are currently embedded within university processes.

The team, therefore, gives the following recommendations to the university:

- To devise and embed an effective quality assurance system within the university;
- To devise a process by which Senate can check the ongoing utility and effectiveness of its quality assurance systems on a regular basis;
- To develop a strategically important range of benchmarking data that enables the university to make meaningful and informative comparisons with peer institutions both nationally and internationally;
- To develop a reliable system for fully capturing graduate employment data which should include longitudinal as well as latitudinal data on an annual basis;
- To enhance the effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms by ensuring that the outcomes of the analysis and consideration of this feedback are made manifest to the student body.



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7. Internationalisation

Achieving a high level of international recognition has become a priority for Romanian universities — in the more specific case of arts universities this is linked to both the international development of artistic creation and artistic practices, as well as the cultural role that they play in their society. From this point of view, UNATC has excellent prerequisites, both institutional and at the level of most disciplines, to obtain an academic status equivalent to the achievements of its students in artistic competitions, both student competitions and open competitions.

The team has noted the wide range of individual, international academic relationships held among the staff cohort. But at the same time, the team noted a lack of a real internationalisation policy. At present, the internationalisation agenda is more or less limited to being realised through the individual and personal contacts of faculty staff rather than being strategically managed. This gives rise to an ad hoc or opportunity-driven approach to the selection of international events that are attended by representative staff. Similarly, links with peer international institutions are currently mainly driven by individual staff research interests or the presence of graduates or ex-colleagues in specific institutions. While opportunities to establish links in this way is helpful, it should form part of an overarching and strategic approach to selecting international peer partner institutions.

During its discussions with staff, the team heard about various collaborative initiatives that the university was involved in, in respect of collaborative research projects, which were supported by external (predominantly EU) funding. The team took the view that there was potential to increase this type of activity provided that it took a more strategic approach to developing joint research projects with other European and international partners in order to further enhance the international research profile of the university and secure external funding to support such activities.

The team noted the intention of the university to improve its international research standing. This included an intention to ensure that more members of academic staff are able to publish research papers, articles and monographs in English. The team very much support this intention and were pleased to receive copies of two newly established research journals (one in theatre and one in film), printed in English, on the occasion of their second visit. The team wishes to commend the university for taking this important step towards contributing more fully to international research activity.

The team offers the following recommendations to the university:

- To develop a focused strategy for internationalisation;



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- To set aside the means to enable wider participation in international conferences and to give financial support for travelling to conferences by allocating possible funds;
- To give careful strategic consideration as to which peer partners at international level with which to develop and strengthen productive links;
- To increase the possibilities of publishing research papers, articles and monographs in English;
- To develop joint research projects with other European and international partners in order to secure external funding.



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8. Conclusions

In summary, through the course of the evaluation, the team discovered a great willingness on the part of the university to engage both fully and positively with the evaluation process. This was evidenced by the attitude generally displayed by the staff cohort, to continue with the process of change within the university that it has recently commenced. This was particularly evident among the younger members of faculty, whom the team found to be highly motivated and were clearly ready to play a greater role in the change process that is being managed by the rector and his senior team.

In this respect, the strategic plan does offer a sound basis for the necessary changes and developments that the university will need to implement over the coming years, provided that an appropriate set of key performance indicators are established to underpin its progress in achieving its strategic objectives.

In addition to the topics highlighted by the strategic plan and the recommendations of the team listed on the previous pages, the team urges the management of the university to develop a more focused strategy for internationalisation and to establish a more structured approach to developing and consolidating external partnerships.

In summary, the team wishes to highlight the key recommendations in the following areas:

8.1 Governance and institutional decision-making

- To establish a strategic innovation fund for supporting new ideas in both educational development, research proposals and university systems and processes. This fund must provide some seed funding to young faculty members in order to develop creative and new ideas, which cannot be funded immediately by more regular money flows;
- To establish a staff development policy to cover the staff development needs of academic, technical and administrative staff, this should include a system of career progression planning;
- To achieve a facilitative and effective balance between the deliberative and executive functions of the management and governance of the university;
- To rationalise the number of commissions (and the tasks assigned to them) and the overlapping of membership between the various bodies within the management and governance structure ensuring, where possible, that young faculty members are appropriately represented.



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8.2 Teaching and learning

- To analyse and re-define what the university means by “student-centred learning”, to capture more fully the productive and positive dialogue that it promotes between staff and students. The team discovered that the approach to teaching and learning did not seek to replicate a master-pupil relationship but actively promoted a facilitative balance, between staff and students, in maintaining an effective learning environment;
- To maintain a live internal dialogue, and with representatives of the related fields of professional practice, to ensure that the university is always fully aware of any new developments that may need to be reflected in the established curricula or lead to the establishment of new academic provisions (for example, games design);
- To embed entrepreneurial skills in the curricula at undergraduate level across all study programmes and to establish internships at Masters level;
- To emphasise within the curricula the transferability of the skills inherent in student learning in specialist areas of study, in order to broaden out graduate employability. This should be linked to a regular programme of visiting professionals who are able to provide insight into a wider range of career options;
- To prioritise the development of library and IT resources to support student learning needs at all levels of study and (in the case of IT) to also facilitate the enhancement of administrative processes.

8.3 Research and knowledge exchange

- To establish clear priorities for centres of research, taking into full account their relationship with the wider external fields of current research;
- To develop a strategy for evaluating and reporting on the impact of the university’s research and knowledge exchange activity in the public domain as well as in relation to the wider field of academic research;
- To urgently address the need to have more PhD mentors within a two-year timeframe to meet the demands of the research student body.
- To further enhance the experience of the student PhD environment through establishing structured opportunities for students to meet and share their work and ideas.



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8.4 Services to society

- To establish a process that enables the wide range of contacts and activities through which the university engages with external organisations and individuals to be captured so as to form the basis of a more structured approach to external partnerships;;
- To find a means of evidencing the impact of the university on both the cultural and economic life of the country;
- To set up an advisory board that brings together key individuals from society to offer advice to the rector and his management team;
- To support the establishment of an alumni society.

8.5 Quality Culture

- To devise and embed an effective quality assurance system within the university;
- To devise a process by which Senate can check the ongoing utility and effectiveness of its quality assurance systems on a regular basis;
- To develop a strategically important range of benchmarking data that enables the university to make meaningful and informative comparisons with peer institutions both nationally and internationally;
- To develop a reliable system for fully capturing graduate employment data which should include longitudinal as well as latitudinal data on an annual basis;
- To enhance the effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms by ensuring that the outcomes of the analysis and consideration of this feedback is made manifest to the student body.

8.6 Internationalisation

- To develop a focused strategy for internationalisation;
- To set aside the means to enable wider participation in international conferences;
- To give careful strategic consideration as to which peer partners at international level with which to develop and strengthen productive links;
- To increase the possibilities of publishing research papers, articles and monographs in English;



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- To develop joint research projects with other European and international partners in order to secure external funding.