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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS BUCHAREST

EVALUATION REPORT

March 2013

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Performance
in Higher Education



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Table of contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Governance and institutional decision-making	7
3.	Teaching and learning	13
4.	Research	17
5.	Service to society	21
6.	Quality culture	24
7.	Internationalisation	29
8.	Conclusions and recommendations	32
	Envoi	35



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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the National University of the Arts, Bucharest. The evaluation took place during 2012 and 2013 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching — Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

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

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

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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



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The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. Profile of the National University of the Arts Bucharest (NUAB)

With a strong and embedded tradition in artistic education, the National University of the Arts, Bucharest (NUAB) is the largest higher education institution in the field of arts in Romania. NUAB was founded in 1864 under the name of the School of Fine Arts on the model of the French Academy of Fine Arts. In 1998 the institution changed its status from that of the “Art Academy” and was accredited as a university. In 2001 the current designation of “National University of the Arts, Bucharest” was adopted. With project plans in place to further develop and transform its physical space in the vicinity of its main building, the university currently occupies five buildings in Bucharest city centre. NUAB’s Rectorate, general administration, and its three faculties are located in three of these sites, while the remaining locations consist of the university’s gallery (UNAgaleria) and its student dormitory.

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

Under the provisions of the new National Education Law, adopted for implementation as from January 2011, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been classified into three groups: advanced research universities; teaching and research universities; and teaching universities. NUAB is one of twenty nine HEIs in the second of these categories. In addition to the classification and diversification reforms, the university is subject to a new system for ranking study programmes and academic disciplines. In terms of the public financing of



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universities, under the new legal dispensation state funding is in future set to reflect the institutional classification exercise and the programme ranking process with funding streams consisting of core and additional funding, as prescribed in the financing methodology issued by CNFIS (National Council for Higher Education Financing), with the prospect of extra funding for research-oriented universities.

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

1.3. The evaluation process

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the first visit, a 27-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the university was sent to the evaluation team. The SER described the university's norms, values, and management arrangements. The SER was accompanied by appendices which included institutional data, an organisation chart, and information on the university's *Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)*, prepared by the rector following his appointment in March 2012, and on NUAB's research activities and study programmes.

The IEP team learned that the self-evaluation process was directed by a team appointed by the university's rector, and led by the vice-rector, as Chair of the Self-Evaluation Group (SEG). The SER was informed by the work of several groups formed to cover specific topics, and appendices were developed from contributions from across the university. The information was gathered by the SEG for the purpose of drafting the SER. Each department undertook a SWOT analysis but given that the main purpose of the IEP method is that of institutional evaluation, the IEP team was disappointed to learn that the SER did not contain a composite institutional-level SWOT analysis. Both the SER and the nature and purposes of the IEP evaluation process had been discussed in various quarters, and the team was informed that it provided welcome organisational learning opportunities for those involved. From meetings with staff and students it became apparent to the team that there was a reasonable awareness of the broad nature and purposes of the IEP team's visit to the university.

In its review of the SER, the team formed the view that, while it provided a helpful basis for the team to undertake their evaluation activities, and contained much useful information and



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data, it was somewhat descriptive and lacked self-critical and self-analytical sharpness. The SER did not provide sufficient pointers to areas where the university wishes to improve, or on the university's capacity for managing change. That said, from meetings held with various groups, including senior managers, the IEP team was able to take advantage of a productive discourse between the team and NUAB, and of the additional documentation and information provided to the team in advance of the second visit.

The SER of the university, along with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in October 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to NUAB took place from 3 to 5 December 2012 and from 5 to 8 February 2013. For its second visit, the team requested some additional information and documentation regarding NUAB's strategic and operational planning; department SWOT analyses; quality assurance and evaluation; learning and teaching; research; and other matters, including the operation and functioning of committees and councils. Further clarification and updates on a number of matters was also requested. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were either not fully reflected in the SER or which merited an update due to changes at the university or possible developments at national level. This additional information, including the rector's *Operational Plan (2013)*, was provided well in advance of the second visit and covered the issues identified by the IEP team in a helpful manner.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Tatjana Volkova, former Rector, BA School of Business and Finance, Latvia (Chair);
- Paula Crabtree, Rector, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway;
- Mateusz Celmer, ESU Student Experts Pool, Poland;
- Jethro Newton, Emeritus Professor, University of Chester, UK (Team Coordinator).

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the NUAB Rector, Professor Cătălin Bălescu, for the welcome and warm hospitality provided during their two visits.

Special thanks are also offered by the IEP team to Professor Eugen Gustea, Vice-Rector and Chair of the Self-Evaluation Group, for his excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process. The team wishes to thank Aurora Bartha who provided interpretation services. Thanks are also extended to all those NUAB staff and external partners whom the team met, for their preparedness to discuss relevant matters in a collegial, open and constructive way.



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2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Vision, Mission and General Context

The NUAB mission identifies education, theoretical and practical knowledge, scientific research, and creativity and artistic research in the field of visual arts, as informing the principal objectives of the university. From the documentation made available to them, the IEP team noted that the university mission is not accompanied by a vision. The feeling of the team is that, as the largest higher education institution in the field of arts in Romania, NUAB has shown itself over time to have a strong and embedded tradition in artistic education. On the basis of their deliberations, the team is confident that NUAB will continue to play a leading role in Romanian society and the university is to be congratulated for the strength of its commitment in this regard.

However, the team also learned of the various constraints placed upon the university by its operating environment, including financial unpredictability, a challenging socio-economic environment, and national legal reforms. With regard to these matters, the team noted from the NUAB self-evaluation and from other documentation that the university perceived the principal constraints and threats as including: an annual decrease in funding since 2008; restrictions on staff appointment competitions since 2009; a classification process that restricts art universities to category B; external regulatory constraints and delays on spending; bureaucratic legislation on management procedures; the lack of recognition of artistic research as “scientific” research; and low salaries for staff. Through conducting discussions with NUAB staff at all levels, the IEP team obtained insights into the ways in which such constraints impact on the planning, day-to-day operation, and potential for future development of the university. The team wish to record their view that national bodies for higher education should take full account of the impact that such uncertainty and instability in the external policy environment has on general institutional well-being, and on the ability of universities to plan effectively and to shape and manage change in key strategic areas of operation. In summary, the IEP team notes that this operational context will present NUAB with significant change management challenges and difficult choices as it plans for the future under its new governance arrangements. In addressing future challenges, the IEP team identifies six strategic priority areas for the university:

- Governance, decision-making and planning
- Learning and teaching
- Research
- Service to society
- Quality culture
- Internationalisation



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Governance, Management and Academic Organisation

The present governance, organisational management, and strategic planning arrangements are helpfully set out in the SER and various other documents provided to the IEP team. The team has also been able to explore these arrangements in a series of productive meetings with university managers, staff and students, and external stakeholders.

The university's academic organisation is structured into three faculties: fine arts; art history and theory; decorative arts and design. Together, the faculties contain twelve academic departments which deliver a wide range of specialist and vocationally-oriented study programmes, at Bachelor and Masters levels, structured according to the Bologna cycles system. Of these, thirteen are accredited at Bachelors level and thirteen at Masters level, with one doctoral programme also having accredited status. NUAB has also recently commenced delivery of programmes for lifelong learning (see Section 5). The university's doctoral school is structured according to two research focal points — for vocational and for scientific research — and coordinates admissions to doctoral programmes on a competitive basis. The principal focal points for income-generating research at NUAB are the university's six research centres. Two research centres — Laboratory for the Analysis and Production of Artistic Image, and Centre for Research in the Conservation and Restoration of Art Work — have been accredited by the National Council for Scientific Research (CNCS) since 2004 and 2006, and have certificates of recognition. These centres undertake multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research projects as well as more discipline-based research, and are organised at faculty and department level. The most recent data made available to the IEP team showed a total of 1 721 students enrolled across all three cycles, of which almost a third are at Masters level, and 127 at doctoral level, the largest proportion of which are part-time. The team noted, however, that reflecting national demographic trends, the overall total of enrolments at undergraduate level showed a decline of around ten per cent since 2005/2006. The data showed that the university had 132 full-time teaching staff, and 103 employed on a part-time basis.

Though noting the constraints and uncertainties referred to above, NUAB has managerial, administrative, and financial autonomy to conduct its own affairs. This autonomy is exercised under the provision of the University Charter, amended by the NUAB Senate in June, 2011. Nevertheless, as the IEP team was able to observe, financial autonomy is itself constrained by the economic conditions of the region and the country. The principal sources of income for the university are the block grant it receives from the state according to criteria primarily based on student numbers. The institutional contract is for core funding, for student scholarships, for the institutional development fund, as well as for the funding of investment objectives. There is a complementary contract for capital repairs, maintenance, and for



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accommodation and meals subsidies. This income is supplemented by income from student tuition fees, and funding received through grants and research and project-related sources, both national and private (as partner or coordinator), and through involvement in EU projects. The team learned that since the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS) suspended competitive research and development funding in 2009, artistic research such as that undertaken at specialist arts universities like NUAB, has been excluded from the evaluation criteria for funding projects at national level. The university's financial environment, and the scope for generating extra income, is therefore challenging and restrictive.

The present rector took office in March 2012, and is therefore in the early stages of his mandate. Following his appointment, the rector has taken steps at all levels of the university to discuss the implementation of the programme he proposes to take forward during his four-year term of office. This programme includes promoting the NUAB "brand" at national and international levels, supporting the educational development of NUAB, and expanding and improving the buildings and facilities of the university. The re-constituted senior management team includes two vice-rectors, approved by Senate on the recommendation of the rector, and holding responsibilities, respectively, for education and for research. Deans of faculty are appointed by the rector on the recommendation of the Faculty Councils. For the purposes of governance, management, and decision-making, there are two main bodies at the top of the organisation; these are the Senate and the Council of Administration. Led by the rector, the University's Council of Administration includes the vice-rectors, the general administrative director, the deans of faculty, and the representative of the students.

Regarding the nature and functioning of the university's organisational structures and pattern of governance, the IEP team recognised the pivotal importance of the NUAB Senate. Its terms of reference are extensive and include approval of the institutional strategic and operational plan; oversight of academic elections and appointments; approval of academic specialisations and the curricula; and approval of institutional data and information submitted to the Ministry. The IEP team noted that the composition of the Senate means that there is a membership of 40, including student members, all of whom are participants in and contributors to the committee's decision-making processes. The composition and size are intended to ensure a broad input of opinion and ownership throughout NUAB. Students are permitted to elect a quarter of Senate members. From the team's perspective, of particular importance for governance and management purposes is that under the new dispensation following the national legal reforms of 2011, the university's statutes require that the rector no longer chairs the Senate. Moreover, together with the faculty deans, he is no longer eligible for membership of Senate, though he may attend by invitation.



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In reflecting on these arrangements, during meetings and through reading institutional documentation, the IEP team formed the view that, while on one level they point to a deliberative role for the Senate and a management executive role for the rector and Council of Administration, the reality was more complex. For example, given that the rector is required to gain Senate approval for matters of strategy and policy, and also ratification of decisions and proposals made by the Board of Administration, it was evident to the IEP team that in practice the Senate also acted as a policy forum or legislature. In this way Senate influences management practices even though it is not designed as a management body.

While these leadership and governance arrangements, including the position of rector and the composition and responsibilities of the Senate, are still relatively new it is too soon for the IEP team to fully judge their impact. However, on the evidence available to date it is not unreasonable to conclude that these changes have been received well within the wider academic community of NUAB.

The IEP team further learned that the work of Senate is supported by an Ethics Board, which deals with disciplinary matters, a Quality Commission, which oversees quality evaluation, and a Scientific Research Council, which holds responsibility for matters relating to institutional scientific research strategy and development. Other deliberative and decision-making bodies considered by the IEP team include the faculty and department councils. The former, chaired by the dean, includes representatives from each department in the faculty, and also student members. Faculty councils are responsible for faculty development and strategy, curriculum and quality matters, research, and appointments to teaching positions. They also have a responsibility for allocation of budgets and resources to departments. Department councils include the head of department and, typically, representatives from two or three study programmes (reflecting the department's specialisations), and the department secretary. The councils assist the heads of the department in matters relating to the direction and management of department academic and academic-related affairs.

From the point of view of future policy formation, the effectiveness and quality of decision-making, and the capacity to influence and manage change, the IEP team took particular interest in all of the governance and management arrangements described in the foregoing discussion, especially those at the top of the organisation. The IEP team took the view that the future efficiency and effectiveness of the university's governance is heavily dependent on the extent to which Senate and the Rectorate, which includes faculty deans, are able to cooperate going forward. At the centre of the IEP team's deliberations on these important matters is the recognition, which pervaded all of the team's discussions and thinking, that if NUAB is to make significant progress in building its future it faces difficult challenges and choices going forward. As is discussed later in this section of the team's report, this brings into sharp focus the importance of effective strategic management and strategic planning



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processes to the success of the university, and, even more crucially, the possibility that hard choices may need to be made regarding resource-related matters. It also highlights the desirability, discussed below, of identifying a clear vision supported by robust strategic plans and priorities.

Strategic planning and organisational development

In light of these important considerations, the IEP team paid particularly close attention to arrangements for strategic and operational planning and, alongside this, the university's capacity for managing change and for monitoring progress towards the future. The team formed the view that while there is much to commend with regard to these important matters, there is scope for enhancement. (This view is reflected in the team's recommendations).

In considering the content of institutional and local level strategic and operational plans, and the supporting planning processes, and through discussions with senior managers and other members of staff, the IEP team was able to put together a holistic view of these matters. Documentation provided to the team in preparation for their visits included the *Rector's Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)*, the *Rector's Operational Plan (2013)*, the template for operational planning that faculties are required to use, and an example of a Faculty Operational Plan for the calendar year 2013. In their deliberations on this documentation the IEP team came to the view that while institutional strategic and operational plans contained highly important aims and tasks, along with some cost estimations and planning milestones, there were notable omissions which, in other documentation seen by the team and in discussions with senior managers, are clearly of strategic importance to the university going forward. These include, for example, priority areas such as research, quality, and the enhancement of learning and teaching. Moreover, there is a tendency to focus attention primarily on current initiatives rather than on plans for developing activities in new areas. It occurred to the team that the planning process at the top of the organisation may be hampered by the lack of a clear and unequivocal NUAB Vision Statement. Moreover, in taking account of other policy documents that might assist strategic development and planning going forward, the team observed that while there are local level (faculty) strategies for research, and while there is work in progress on an overarching institutional research strategy, there are no strategies for other key areas of the operation of the university, such as internationalisation, external public relations, or learning and teaching.

In turning their attention to faculty operational planning, from the evidence available it would seem that while documentation focused on key areas of faculty and institutional priority, it is also necessary to include key performance indicators in the planning process. In addition, at present, it is difficult to ascertain how progress against targets and tasks can be effectively



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assessed without a transparent mechanism for progress monitoring. Indeed, the team formed the view that there may be advantages to be gained by adopting a “SMART” approach to strategic and operational planning, at all levels, whereby objectives are set which are “specific”, “measurable”, “achievable”, “realistic”, and “timely”. This would need to be guided by a clear set of institutional priorities and key performance indicators. While some of this is reflected in planning documents considered by the IEP team, none contained all of these vital ingredients, such as performance indicators with measurable values attached to them, or clearly identified responsibilities for carrying out agreed actions. In reflecting on this, the university should assure itself that it is satisfied that there is sufficiently robust and effective oversight of operational plans, and that Senate and the rector can be assured of strong alignment between local level plans and the overall University Strategic Plan.

From their deliberations on the university's capacity for managing change, and arrangements and practices in the area of strategic and operational planning, the IEP team strongly recommends that the university should reflect on whether it has a sufficiently clear vision of NUAB's long-term goals and priorities, and whether institutional planning and implementation might be strengthened by the identification of a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to be used at all levels. Also, in reflecting on the above matters, the IEP team proposes that the university's current *Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)* should be further elaborated and broadened, and team members also consider that it would be strengthened by the development of a suite of brief underpinning strategies for research, learning and teaching, quality, internationalisation, and service to society.

Finance and resourcing

The IEP team noted that, under the joint overall authority of the University Senate and the Rectorate, which operate through the Council of Administration, there is strong central oversight of budgetary, financial, and resource matters. There is a measure of decentralisation to faculties through annual budget allocations to that level, though these are largely based on historical allocations. Further, research centres which generate project income are also able to access the funds allocated for that purpose. The Rectorate and the University Senate are supported by the General Administrative Director for the purposes of managing financial accounting and administration and other resource-related matters. Though it is the Rector who is NUAB's legal representative in financial matters, as noted earlier, in terms of governance it is the Senate which is empowered to take the main decisions regarding financial strategy, the university's annual budget, and the allocation of resources. In practice, the decision-making process takes place in the context of proposals emanating from the rector and Council of Administration, on matters such as the distribution to faculties of core state funding based on student numbers. The rector is held responsible for



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managing the implementation of Senate's decisions, and for monitoring the activities of faculties and cost centres.

The budget building process, along with the allocations to faculties and departments, is heavily influenced by external factors, most notably the timing of the confirmation of the state budget and the allocation of state funds through the Ministry, a process which is normally completed in April. The financial year runs from January to December. The university's process commences in late November and early December with the drafting of a preliminary budget for consideration and approval internally by Senate and externally by the Ministry. Until April of each year the university operates with the provisional budget as approved conditionally in December.

The internal budgeting process takes account of all internal needs, current and projected, for central services and for academic units. Should the university's expenditure profile in the first quarter exceed the final state allocation as confirmed in April, this overspend is deducted from the second quarter allocation to the university. It was evident to the IEP team that this overall process formed part of the general uncertainty which characterises the context in which NUAB has to undertake its financial and wider strategic planning. In the view of the team this challenge should not be underestimated. Even so, from the team's perspective, if the university is to meet future challenges by bringing about change, particularly in a situation where the state-funded unit of resource continues to decline, and where opportunities for generating research income become more competitive, it will inevitably be faced with difficult choices in terms of resource planning and budgeting. With this in mind, and informed by the discussion of strategic planning earlier, the IEP team considers that institutional decision-making on future change can be assisted by using the annual budgeting and resource allocation processes to steer change in relation to agreed goals strategic and key performance indicators in order to fulfil the NUAB Mission.



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3. Teaching and learning

In focusing on matters relating to learning and teaching, the IEP team noted that the university's SER places emphasis on the centrality of artistic creativity in the educational process and the practices and activities that support this. The SER also highlights the vocational nature of the educational offer, and the intention to blend traditional approaches with more modern interactive methods. The team noted that the educational model aspired to by NUAB values individual creativity and tuition programmes that are based on active learning and critical thinking. However, even though such higher order values are given prominence in the SER, the team noted that where educational matters were included in the *Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)* and supporting faculty operational plans, the focus was more on ongoing developments relating to the NUAB curriculum rather than on meeting clearly stated strategic aims for learning and teaching. Indeed, the team learned that while actions were in place to develop an institutional research strategy, it did not appear that a similar strategy was to be developed for learning and teaching. In view of the centrality of taught provision in the university's main activity, this appeared to the IEP team to be something of an anomaly.

The team took the opportunity to consider how learning and teaching is reflected in the governance and management structure at senior management level, and in the committee structures at institutional level and at the level of faculty and department. At the top of the organisation, responsibility for educational matters lies with the vice-rector (education). Appointments to academic leadership positions of dean, vice-dean, department head, and study programme coordinator, and the respective responsibilities allocated to post-holders, similarly reflect the priority given by the university to the curriculum and related academic affairs. The work and deliberations of faculty and department councils also reflect the values and ethos of NUAB in the field of art education. All programmes are represented on faculty and department councils, the former also holding wider responsibility for academic development across all areas of specialisation and study programmes. Oversight of all teaching activities and curriculum matters is the responsibility of the Senate. This committee approves all academic specialisations and curricula, in conformity with national regulations, standards, and guidelines. It also approves personnel for all study programmes and departments. The IEP team was informed that, from the university's perspective, these arrangements worked well.

The team also considered the current situation at the university with regard to the current portfolio, and plans for future curriculum portfolio development. From meetings with teaching staff and department heads, the team noted that while importance is attached to research, a particularly high priority is attached to teaching responsibilities. From the team's



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INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme



European University Association

perspective, this seems to be reflected in the good reputation that NUAB staff are seeking to achieve internationally as artists and teachers. It is also reflected in departments' educational objectives, which emphasise a commitment to producing well-trained, well-educated artists. In addition to an emerging interest in delivering study programmes for lifelong learning (discussed more fully in section 5), team members noted that NUAB is exploring opportunities for the development of dual awards and joint study programmes with other European universities. Attention is also being paid to the opportunities for interdisciplinary programmes and the resourcing efficiencies that this may offer. However, while senior managers expressed a desire to extend the range and diversity of specialist modules offered, they emphasised the costs that this would involve in terms of additional teachers and professors. The appointment of a new rector has been viewed by the NUAB academic community as an opportunity to explore these and other developments.

In taking their enquiries further, the team was interested in assessing the progress made by the university in addressing requirements in the area of learning and teaching and curriculum design and development arising from the Bologna Process. It was evident to the team that this has constituted an important reference point for curriculum matters for some years. Since 2005, under the regulatory guidance of Ministry of Education, Research Youth and Sport (MERYS), NUAB has taken various steps to accommodate Bologna structures, including the three cycles and other curriculum structures. Prior to that, in 1998, the ECTS system was adopted and, subsequently, use has been made of the Diploma Supplement. However, in the view of the IEP team there remains scope for further work in several areas. These include: student-centred learning; initiatives to further strengthen the attractiveness of NUAB graduates to prospective employers; and the sharing of good practice in learning and teaching. The team's findings for each of these are summarised below.

From meetings with staff and from examining documentation made available to them, the team noted the continuing importance attached by NUAB to "Bologna", including the need to keep pace with curriculum modernisation developments in the wider context of European higher education and the desirability of ensuring a student-centred approach to learning and teaching. Efforts to meet the "curriculum fit" requirements of the Romanian National Qualifications Framework, at both Bachelor and Masters levels, were also noted by the team. However, on closer examination, it was evident to the IEP team that such matters, and the aspiration to reflect Bologna principles and modern pedagogy, remain "work in progress".

This finding was derived from the discussions with teachers and from views expressed by students. The latter indicated a preference for more self-directed study time. In the view of the IEP team such an emphasis would help to achieve a better balance between "teacher-centred" and "student-centred" approaches. Such issues were particularly apparent to team members from their investigations of programme design and the use made of educational



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INNOVATION FUNDING



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European University Association

objectives in curriculum development. The IEP team acknowledge the regulatory and accreditation requirements placed upon Romanian universities by ARACIS in respect of curriculum design and the use made of course descriptions. However, the team formed the clear view that while use is being made in course description documents of an approach which includes course objectives, student competences, and information on assessment, this falls short of a fully student-centred approach. From the team's experience, current best practice in Europe suggests that course descriptions (known elsewhere as "programme specifications") are most beneficial to students when they include intended learning outcomes, and when learning outcomes and assessment strategies are clearly aligned. This is especially so for assessing progress of students where their ability level is lower than average. Therefore, the IEP team recommends that the university's focus on student-centred learning should be reinforced by making use of an explicit learning outcomes approach to curriculum design, development, and review, and that such an approach is aligned to student assessment methods.

The IEP team noted a range of initiatives to improve the employability and continued academic achievement of NUAB graduates. The team heard descriptions of positive experiences from students who had benefited from internships. It was noted that there is no central office in the university to provide support and guidance and students therefore rely on their faculty and department to assist them in securing a placement with a local or regional employer. External stakeholders whom the IEP met commented on the need for improved NUAB structures to promote and enhance support for internships, in preference to current arrangements which depend on individual links. Currently, not all students are able to benefit from such a placement. The IEP team therefore recommend that NUAB should work towards ensuring that all Bachelor students have an opportunity to undertake an internship placement and that appropriate support arrangements are made available by the university.

A further dimension explored by the IEP team in the area of employability and the attractiveness of NUAB graduates is skills that are valued by employers. Meetings with students from various study programmes and with external stakeholders were particularly helpful to the team. A number of positive features emerged but, nevertheless, the overall picture of the student and employer experience was a mixed one. For example, some students indicated that business and entrepreneurial skills for artists formed part of their study programme, while others confirmed that they were encouraged to express themselves through technology skills. Impressions drawn from other students whom the IEP team met indicated the contrasting experiences of those for whom work on marketing, public relations and communication skills work was compulsory, and those for whom they were optional. Similarly, while studies on cultural management were reported to be compulsory, experience of entrepreneurship skills was optional.



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European University Association

From this the IEP team concur with the view expressed to them by external stakeholders that all NUAB students need to know how to use the knowledge they acquire at the university, and to combine this with a good ability to demonstrate capability in “soft skills” in areas such as communication and management. The IEP team therefore advises that consideration is given to how best meet the needs of employers for students who possess strong employability skills, in areas such as communication, presentation, creative thinking, problem solving, and other “soft skill” areas.

Having noted the absence of university-level learning and a teaching strategy the IEP team was interested in assessing the university’s ability to provide an appropriate central steer for the enhancement of learning and teaching through the identification, dissemination and sharing of good practice in matters of generic interest across all subject specialisations and all departments. From discussions with staff it appeared to the team that arrangements and opportunities in this area were rather limited. Though there are occasional opportunities provided by the Romanian Ministry to discuss learning and teaching developments with other institutions, and while EU projects from time to time provide contact with other European universities, the IEP team learned that centrally-provided activities for improving learning and teaching practice have not been prioritised. In relation to this, the team was made fully aware of the regular meetings, both formal and informal, that take place at department and faculty level, and in which all staff may participate. However, these are essentially focused on subject specialisms and do not usually address generic pedagogic matters or more general issues of academic practice. Moreover, while Senate exercises oversight of such matters, and while department-based activities demonstrate the value that is attached to good quality learning and teaching, this orientation is not supported by central initiatives to enhance teaching practice and student learning. Indeed, the IEP team found little evidence of structures and mechanisms to support the transferability of good practice, or to bring about change and transformation of learning and teaching approaches and academic practice. Professional development of individual faculty members for the purpose of enhancing the quality of learning and teaching therefore depends almost entirely on department-based initiatives. As is discussed in Section 4, this absence of a context for professors and teachers to discuss, share, and critically reflect on learning and teaching, is also to be found in the area of research. Therefore, as NUAB seeks to secure its reputation for high quality learning and teaching the IEP team proposes that arrangements are made for the establishment of a regular cross-University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Forum, with representation from all departments (including students), whose purpose will be to act as a focal point for the sharing and dissemination of good practice in areas such as curriculum design, learning and teaching, and assessment.

During both of their visits, the IEP team met with a range of students from various disciplines and from different levels of study. Students spoke well of the quality of their learning



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INNOVATION FUNDING



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European University Association

experience and the accessibility, support, and enthusiasm of teaching staff and professors. Students value the informal links with teaching staff but also expressed the view that they would appreciate more opportunities for formal processes for contact and help from faculty members. The IEP team also took the opportunity to explore student views and experiences of the various services and facilities provided by NUAB to its students. In general, students were positive about their learning environment, but would appreciate improvements in some buildings and learning spaces, and also upgrades in technology and software to support learning. Further, the team noted that while support and advice on careers and employment matters was available at department level and was coordinated by professors, there was no central department for such purposes. The team also considered arrangements for provision of scholarships and grants of various kinds. The team noted that provision was made for around 150 students classified as disadvantaged. The team also learned that around 900 students were eligible for Romanian scholarships, some of whom study at Masters level, while 40 doctoral students are also in receipt of scholarships. The team wholeheartedly endorses the view held by staff and students, recorded in recent proceedings of the NUAB Senate, that the level and number of such scholarships are rather too low. In reflecting on all of these matters, the IEP team is pleased to record the marked pride displayed by NUAB students and staff in their university. For the majority of students who the team met, NUAB was the first choice higher education institution.



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4. Research

The IEP team noted from the NUAB mission the importance attached to research. In support of this the team learned of the range of research activities, including externally-funded research project work, undertaken by the academic staff of the university. However, the university drew the team's attention to the constraints faced by NUAB through restrictions placed upon specialist art institutions in competitions for research funding. The team was advised by the university that, since 2011, under new national regulations artistic creation was not recognised as scientific research for funding purposes. This related in part to a requirement for internationally recognised publications. The university informed the team that some artistic outputs were less easily quantified and did not necessarily lead to publications. However, the team learned that through completing habilitation requirements, NUAB staff were able to meet national professorial criteria.

Senior management responsibility for research is held by the pro-rector (research), and the team learned that an appointment had recently been made to the position of director of research, under the supervision of the pro-rector. The IEP team noted the infrastructure in place at the university to support its work in the areas of scientific and artistic research, including the research department. That department, headed by the director, is responsible for the management of scientific research at NUAB, provides institutional oversight of research projects and the activities of departments and centres, and also gives information, support and guidance on research calls and grant applications. The management of research also includes the work and deliberations of the Scientific Research Council which in turn is responsible for the development and review of university research strategy and advises the Senate on research matters. The IEP team formed the view that these structural and management arrangements were appropriate and have the potential to serve the university in going forward.

The team noted that the doctoral school also forms an important part of the university's research infrastructure. This department undertakes the organisation and administration to support doctoral activity, maintains records of PhD students and research topics, and provides the main point of contact with external bodies, including the Ministry. At the time of the IEP team's visits there were around 120 doctoral students, registered across all specialisations. The team noted that NUAB is currently allocated 20 funded places, with the remaining students being fee-paying. Students are also able to apply for other ad hoc grants from additional sources during their studies.



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European University Association

The team learned that, following presentation to an internal commission, including external representation, awards are confirmed by the Ministry, with diplomas being awarded from the same source. The team paid close attention to supervision arrangements and to the research environment, each of which has an important bearing on the quality of the doctoral student experience. The students with whom the team met confirmed that their experience of facilities, space, and library support was positive, and team members also found that relations and synergies between research centres, departments, and the doctoral school worked to the benefit of doctoral students. Students also reported good experiences of links to activities associated with research projects. From meetings with students and with relevant staff, the IEP team formed the view that supervision arrangements appear to work well. Supervisors are drawn from across the university. This may put pressure on the university since only 14 members of staff currently meet the necessary criteria as habilitated professors. Registered doctoral students are permitted to teach up to four hours per week as associate teachers, though no training is provided for this specific purpose in matters such as assessment practice. Students indicated that weekly supervision is available, and that arrangements for monitoring progress work satisfactorily, with good collaboration between departments.

Central to the team's deliberations in the area of research were matters relating to strategy and issues around sustainability and development into the future. The SER indicated that research has been of strategic importance to NUAB since 2004 when its first strategy had been adopted. The team noted from the documentation made available that current objectives focus on artistic creativity, interdisciplinary research, partnerships, stimulating research centres, and accessing funding nationally and internationally. The team also learned that each faculty and department has its own strategy but that the current institutional research strategy was due to be reviewed. The director of research indicated that this review would be important in enabling central monitoring and oversight of the research activity and project work of department and research centres, and of performance and outputs in these areas.

The current strategy, which contains short-, medium- and long-term plans, runs until 2013 and, accordingly, the IEP encourages the university to make early progress in developing its new strategy. From the team's perspective, this is especially important in view of the sustainability challenges in this area. Indeed, the SWOT analysis undertaken in preparation for the IEP evaluation points directly to the threat posed by the exclusion of specialist institutions such as NUAB from national research competitions. Moreover, added to this, the university's external operating environment for research is likely to become even more challenging in the near future as opportunities for funding on the wider European stage become fewer and more competitive. With these considerations in mind the IEP team was particularly interested in examining closely some of the planning documentation made available to them by the university. The team noted from faculty operational planning documentation, and the



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European University Association

supporting template, that no mention is made of research or knowledge transfer. Similarly, neither the *Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)* nor the Rector's *Operational Plan (2013)* give any prominence to research matters. From this the team concluded that, in view of the strategic importance attached elsewhere to this area, these are matters upon which the university and its top structure will no doubt wish to reflect, and that a set of goals and key performance indicators for research, to be used in all planning documents and processes may be useful to the university.

In exploring research activity at faculty and department level, the team took the opportunity to explore the student experience of the extent to which staff research informs teaching and impacts upon the student experience. While staff stressed the importance of transferring research to courses and teaching, and that this is required practice, the team nevertheless found that student awareness of staff research outputs, including publications, was variable. Much of the team's attention on research activity was focused on two other matters: the type of research undertaken at NUAB, and how this was viewed internally and externally; and the significance to the university's research profile in its six research centres. The university's SER states that research at NUAB is organised on two levels: "core research" and "applied research", the latter including innovation and applied technology. The SER also indicates that research is carried out in research centres and project work is carried out through the doctoral studies department, and through individual research and artistic practice of staff as professional artists. The university also organises a research conference each semester, and also events that are more internationally focused and which include prominent international figures.

The IEP was informed that the question of "what is research" in the context of art education is a matter that is under discussion not only in the wider context of European art schools but also, currently, at NUAB. This matter was of particular interest to members of the IEP team. The team was informed by senior managers that, for the most part, and with the exception of areas such as art history, the research undertaken at NUAB is viewed as aesthetic research rather than scientific research. Further, the team was informed that the prevailing official perspective of the university is that research is embedded in all the academic work that members of staff are engaged in, and that it is not feasible to draw a distinction between "practice" and "research". The view presented to the team was that, as practicing artists and art educators, staff members were, by definition, also engaged in research. However, drawing on the collective and individual experience of the IEP team, this was not a perspective with which the team members were comfortable. Two reasons are put forward for consideration by the university. Firstly, it is usual in such circumstances to refer to agreed institutional criteria and guidelines for judging whether "practice" can be viewed as "research", and for such criteria to be incorporated into annual staff appraisal and evaluation processes. Secondly, at present the university does not have a forum in place, at institutional level,



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where matters relating to research, practice, and innovation can be discussed by all researchers, and where collective and individual critical reflection on these issues can be stimulated.

In turning their attention to the university's research centres, the IEP team observed that these had become pivotal in the growth of research at NUAB and were central to how research was viewed, strategically, going forward. All project teams (which varied in size from three to 12 members) owed their existence to project funding generated externally. All NUAB departments were involved in external project work. Indeed, the team gained the impression that the main research thrust at NUAB was through the centres and that, effectively, research was heavily project-dependent. From the data presented to the team it was evident that the level of income generated by project teams in recent years, from national and European sources, though important to the university, was somewhat modest. For example, the level of funding for external awards and grants for 2011 was in the region of 120k euro. The SER acknowledged the challenges in this regard in relation to competing for funds through the EU Structural Fund or through the FP7 (Framework 7) programme and recognised that this placed constraints on the growth and sustainability of scientific research. Taking account of such considerations, the IEP team sought to understand the strategic decision-making processes underlying the continued emphasis being placed on the research centres. Here, the team learned that, while recognising the need for strategic planning, the objective of the present rector is to build as many centres as possible, albeit through exclusive dependency on externally generated funding as is presently the case. The IEP team wishes the university well in its chosen approach to research growth and sustainability, but formed the view that in an environment that is increasingly competitive there may be merit in the university undertaking a wider assessment of future strategic options, to include the possibility of identifying fewer centres in areas of greatest research strengths and according them greater priority.

The IEP team completed its enquiries on research matters by considering current and future potential developments in NUAB's "Third Mission" agenda, and knowledge transfer and business interface activities where the university might be able to demonstrate the impact and wider contribution of research and also extend income generation opportunities. During meetings, the team were advised that while some departments and individuals could show impact on society this would not necessarily generate income. Indeed, for some departments where the focus was cultural or theoretical rather than practical, it was pointed out that business interface or income generation was less likely to be possible. In other departments, the team learned of a range of examples where knowledge transfer takes place through workshops and publications and similar forms of dissemination. Examples were also provided of joint projects with prestigious international companies such as Renault. Nevertheless, in their assessment of these matters the team formed the view that relatively little income is generated from industry, the private sector, or philanthropic sources. That there are



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DEVELOPMENT AND
INNOVATION FUNDING



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European University Association

potentially untapped opportunities in this regard was recognised by several areas within NUAB, such as Ceramics, Fashion, and Design. Though acknowledging the difficult economic circumstances and industrial decline experienced in today's society, the IEP team believes that the university should find ways to encourage and build on the willingness of those departments that wish to improve in these matters.

In summary, while noting the strengths and distinctive nature of much of the research undertaken at NUAB, in its departments, faculties, and centres, it is evident from the foregoing that, while there are potential opportunities available to, it the university faces difficult challenges and perhaps some hard choices in carrying forward its research agenda, and in securing a sustainable future in this area. This is reflected in the team's recommendations, where particular attention is paid to the matter of university-level research strategy. Therefore, the IEP team advises that, as the university further develops its research strategy, it should take the opportunity to undertake a realistic assessment of its research directions, and also review how best to secure the resourcing and sustainability of those research centres and areas of research strength it wishes to support going forward. Further, the team recommends that stronger steps should be taken to strengthen the Third Mission capability of the university and its departments, and that additional actions need to be taken to create further opportunities for additional income generation from industry, alumni, and philanthropic sources.



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5. Service to society

In focusing on the university's externally-facing activities, the IEP team also considered the broader question of service to society. From examining institutional documentation, and from meetings with staff and with external stakeholders, the IEP team was able to obtain good insights into the contributions to local, regional, and national economic, social and cultural life. This was manifested in various ways, including: partnerships and consultancies; agreements with business and industry; internships; media contributions; and activities such as exhibitions and active involvement in art education networks. The team was also interested to learn of the plans being made to celebrate the institution's 150th anniversary in 2014, including a major art show, a new monograph, and activities organised through the National Museum of the Arts.

In their enquiries the team explored the organisational arrangements and measures being taken to position NUAB regionally and nationally. Here, the team noted the joint responsibilities of the rector and vice-rector (education). The former, as head of the institution, takes the lead responsibility for coordinating public relations and matters relating to the image of NUAB, and is supported in this by the vice-rector, who also takes a prominent role in promoting the university's contribution in the wider society. While the team assumed that the Senate also takes a close interest in these matters, the documentation made available did not provide clear pointers in this area. Indeed, from reading the NUAB Self Evaluation Report and other institutional papers, the team formed the impression that more work is needed to systematically extend the university's societal contribution and to project its image in a more effective, externally-facing manner. Though the stated purposes and mission of NUAB signify its vocational relevance, its prominence as a specialist art education university, and its community responsibilities in terms of responding to social demand, in the view of the IEP team more can be done strategically and operationally in the area of service to society.

The *Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)* identifies several items and areas of activity of a wider societal nature, covering matters such as national and international development, and the development of the NUAB "brand". From the IEP team's perspective some of these proposed actions held good potential. Others, it appeared, were more operational in nature and formed part of the normal calendar and cycle of institutional activities rather than being of a strategic nature. From that viewpoint they would not, of themselves, secure a more outward-looking position amongst other European art schools. The team also paid attention to faculty operational planning. While operational planning documentation seen by the IEP team included activities to promote the faculty externally, these also gave the impression of



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DEVELOPMENT AND
INNOVATION FUNDING



EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme



European University Association

being activities of an ongoing, year-on-year nature, rather than being strategic in nature. These matters took on added significance for the IEP team when considering the relative lack of appropriate infrastructure to support the university's outward-facing strategic aspirations. For example, the university's summary SWOT analysis made reference to the weakness in the lack of a Public Relations Department, dedicated to promotional activities. Indeed, the team noted the somewhat fragmented nature of organisational and administrative responsibilities in these matters, with offices for public relations, external relations, publishing, and community programmes, all seemingly holding some degree of responsibility in the general area of "service to society".

The IEP team was interested to note that initiatives were underway at the university to take forward developments in the area of lifelong learning. However, it was not clear to the team what role the Office for Community Programmes and Lifelong Learning had in stimulating development in this area. Nor was it apparent from the *Strategic Development Plan (2012/2016)*, the *Operational Development Plan (2012)*, or from faculty operational planning documents, whether there are any strategic objectives or targets for lifelong learning or whether developments were directly linked to or informed by wider EU developments. However, from discussions with faculty staff, the team noted the potential in this area and learned that good links were being established in some departments with external stakeholders and that study programmes were being offered on a flexible basis, including evenings and weekends. In the view of the team, this is an area of importance and of untapped opportunity that could be taken up more extensively in the University. The IEP team wishes to encourage the further development in NUAB's faculties and departments of provision for meeting lifelong learning needs of society.

The IEP team's enquiries were greatly assisted by valuable discussions with prominent external stakeholders, including NUAB alumni, drawn from business, industry, museums and galleries, media, fashion and design, and the Romanian art world generally. The team members were greatly impressed by the large number of stakeholders they were able to meet, their enthusiasm, and the constructive views they offered on the current and future position of NUAB in Romanian society. The team discussed a number of matters with external stakeholders and noted the value attached by employers to NUAB graduates and interns by employers. External stakeholders were able to confirm that the university's students often went on to occupy prominent positions in business and commerce related to the world of art and design, and were recognised as being among the best in Romania from the point of view of educational background, employability and entrepreneurial skills.

The team was able to explore the degree of involvement that external stakeholders might have in curriculum change and development. Discussions indicated that some external involvement with faculties and departments was evident in terms of input into curriculum



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DEVELOPMENT AND
INNOVATION FUNDING



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European University Association

matters, though this varied across departments. The IEP team noted some good examples provided by stakeholders of departments such as advice on new courses. Such examples of responsiveness to employer needs in terms of course portfolio development further confirmed to the team their view that additional emphasis should be placed by the university on meeting continuing education and lifelong learning needs.

In pursuing their enquiries on these matters, the team sought to explore the extent to which external stakeholders and the wider community and region were involved in the governance and planning of the university and in strategic matters generally. While relations with alumni and external stakeholders more generally appear to be extensive and fruitful, it was apparent to the team that such arrangements are currently based largely on individual professional links and that this is not reflected in the formal organisational arrangements and structures of the university. From the team's perspective, and from what they learned from meetings with externals, there would be mutual benefits for the university and its external regional and national partners if relations were to be strengthened by formally incorporating external input into the university's processes. In the view of the IEP team this is particularly so if NUAB is to continue to meet the challenges of a changing and uncertain external environment and if it is to be sufficiently responsive in meeting external stakeholder needs through adapting the university's portfolio and services going forward.

In summary, the IEP team has been impressed by the range of ways in which the university's contribution to regional and national society can be seen to have a positive impact. Even so, the team's recommendations in this area provide encouragement to the university to take further steps to maximise the opportunities available for promoting the NUAB "brand" and visibility, nationally and internationally. First, the IEP team proposes that the university should give consideration to the potential benefits of establishing an Alumni Association to support efforts in promoting the NUAB "brand". Second, the team advises the university to take advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from industry, business, commerce, and the artistic world, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the rector and to the Senate on promoting the regional, national, and international interests of NUAB, and also on strategic matters.



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6. Quality culture

The IEP team was interested to explore the progress being made in the area of quality management, quality assurance, and quality evaluation. This allowed the team to obtain further insights into organisational effectiveness and progress towards the development of a quality culture. From the documentation provided, and through discussions with staff and students, the IEP team identified four important dimensions of quality assurance and quality evaluation at NUAB. These are: policy and practice in support of quality management and quality assurance, including work in progress towards the development of a university quality model; developments to support student representation and involvement in quality processes, including student evaluation; procedures for the evaluation and appraisal of teachers; and processes to support the self-critical internal review and evaluation of study programmes and academic provision.

In the team's deliberations, consideration was given to the external parameters for quality assurance and accreditation, which are laid down by ARACIS, as the national body responsible for the national programme of institutional evaluation and programme accreditation in all Romanian higher education institutions. During their work the team was able to establish that NUAB has been working towards the implementation of structures and quality processes that enable it to meet these external requirements. The team also drew on their experience in the wider European context in the area of quality assurance practices. It was noted that, while the vice-rector (Education) held institutional management responsibility for quality matters, the university did not have a central quality department. However, the team was interested to note the important role played in the area of quality evaluation by the Quality Evaluation Commission (QEC). As a sub-committee of Senate, this body oversees internal processes for quality assurance and evaluation, as discussed below, and also performs an advisory role to Senate. In turn, deans of faculty, heads of department, and study programme coordinators are responsible for quality assurance and evaluation processes at their respective levels in the organisation. Taken together, these arrangements signified to the IEP team that the university is making progress towards the evolution of a quality assurance infrastructure that is suitable for a modern university, which has quality as one of its priorities.

As noted, amongst the areas that drew the close attention of the IEP team are the arrangements that have been put in place for teacher evaluation and peer evaluation, and also for student representation. The team members welcome such developments and were keen to examine the use made of these arrangements and their effectiveness. The team invited students to indicate whether they were sufficiently well represented, and were able to express their views on quality and other matters through involvement in committees or



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through other channels. The team noted that the informal channels open to students for raising concerns with their teachers or head of departments appeared to work satisfactorily and that staff are accessible and helpful. The team also noted the well-embedded arrangements for student representation in the university's governance structures and decision-making bodies, such as the Senate, the Quality Evaluation Commission, the Council of Administration, and Faculty Councils. Provision is made in the university's charter and rules of internal organisation for 25% representation and voting rights in these structures. Students confirmed that there are free elections, that they feel well represented, and that representatives do their best to keep them informed on issues discussed in councils. In the view of the IEP team these arrangements for student representation are extensive, and extend to both undergraduate and doctoral students. The team heard from students that they provide valuable opportunities to meet with university authorities. However, as is indicated later in this section, and as the team were advised by some students with whom they met, including student representatives, the outcomes of student expressions of concern, particularly through the use of formal feedback mechanisms for obtaining student views, are not reported back to the student body on a consistent and systematic basis.

The IEP team noted that under the peer evaluation of teaching scheme, each member of teaching staff is evaluated on an annual basis. The relevant forms are distributed at the end of the second semester and each member of staff in each department is required to evaluate all his or her colleagues. The template invites comment on the teacher's knowledge in the field, and the quality of teaching methods and assessment methods. Each faculty has a "Commission for the Evaluation of Teaching and Research Performance", of two or three persons who review the results of each department in the faculty. The results of the evaluations are considered by the head of department and by the dean for management and performance monitoring purposes, and the head of department meets privately with each member of staff to discuss that individual's results. In this process account is also taken of the outcomes of student evaluations of professors, the process for which is discussed below. The team learned that outcomes may have salary implications for a member of teaching staff. The collated results of peer evaluations are also considered at faculty and department councils, while a summary report on all such evaluations is considered by the University Senate and by the QEC. In reflecting on this peer evaluation process the IEP team noted that it was still relatively new, having been introduced two years ago. From the university's perspective the scheme worked as intended. While recognising this, the team noted that the procedure was essentially based on performance management and feel that in due course the university may wish to introduce a more developmental element. In the view of the team this could be achieved through incorporating some form of peer observation in which two colleagues evaluate each other, but on a confidential basis, and share ideas about good practice.



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The university's approach to students' evaluation of teaching provided a further perspective on the use made of quality evaluation by the university. Since 2009 Senate has required that all students are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of teaching at the end of each academic year. Completed forms are received by the head of department and, where it is seen as appropriate a meeting will take place with an individual teacher, such as where student ratings and grades are lower than is acceptable. Information is also received by the dean who is responsible for drawing together a "Report concerning the students' evaluation of the teaching personnel". This, the team was advised, feeds into the annual faculty quality report. The IEP team noted that, while the feedback form template contains an open comments box, the evaluation that is requested focuses only on teaching, and not on student learning. In the view of the team this is a matter upon which the university should reflect as it reviews the template, particularly in view of the importance attached to the quality of the student learning experience. In pursuing their enquiries in this area the IEP team was interested in clarifying the use made of this procedure and the information it produces, including arrangements for providing feedback to students on the issues they raise. However, it was apparent to the team that there is a mixed picture. Some students with whom the team met indicated that they were not aware of what happens to the feedback forms while the experience of others suggested that their teachers discuss issues raised with their class. There did not appear to be a consistently applied mechanism for ensuring that students are provided with such feedback. While it is evident that there are informal ways in which problems are discussed and resolved, and while issues are discussed with students on faculty and department councils, the team was unable to establish whether any institutional body, such as Senate, or the QEC, took steps to ensure that the feedback loop is closed.

On the basis of the findings outlined here, the IEP team proposes that the template for teacher evaluation is revised and recommend that, in addition to the opportunity that students currently have to give their views on teaching matters, items are added to enable students to provide feedback on their learning experience. Further, while acknowledging the arrangements currently in place for enabling students to provide anonymous feedback, the IEP team advises the university to reflect on the use made of teacher evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university, its faculties and departments, for informing students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

In progressing enquiries on the university's quality review and evaluation processes, the team considered the valuable evaluation work undertaken by the Senate Quality Commission and also took the opportunity to consider how the emerging quality system is being used at department level for the purposes of annual review of curriculum and learning and teaching matters. The team noted with interest the reference in the "Regulations pertaining to the quality management system" to "annual monitoring and evaluation of the quality of study



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programmes". To assist their deliberations, team members examined several quality reports made available to them. The team noted that at the end of each Semester, the five-person Quality Commission establishes a special Commission to visit each faculty and department to undertake an evaluation of exhibitions, students' work, and end-of-semester results. The visiting Commission, which includes a dean, external members, students, and members of the university's leadership, completes an end-of-semester report on the activities of departments within each faculty. However, having examined a Quality Commission report prepared for Senate following such an evaluation it was evident to the IEP team that, even though the report was wide-ranging and commented on pedagogic matters and matters relating to the learning environment, it did not contain an action plan whereby issues raised could be taken forward for action and subsequent monitoring. Moreover, it was not clear whether the evaluation process itself required self-critical reflection by the departments concerned. The team experienced similar difficulties when considering department quality evaluation. In this case, even though a "SWOT" format had been adopted the annual report seemed to lack evaluation and self-criticality and was essentially descriptive. Moreover, no forward action planning was evident, no student data had been included, and no actions were identified to address issues such as teaching and learning, research, or student concerns.

In the experience of the IEP team, an effective system for annual monitoring and evaluation should be expected to be self-critical, should include action planning, and should incorporate evaluation by those nearest to the student experience, namely, study programme teams. From this, the IEP team advises that the university's capability for self-critical analysis of academic provision should be strengthened by the introduction of a procedure for the annual monitoring and evaluation of each study programme by study programme coordinators and their teams.

Central to the team's assessment of progress towards the development of a quality culture were considerations arising from the information provided by the university on the quality principles and quality criteria guiding the development and implementation of quality assurance processes, and also progress towards the development of a university quality model and quality manual. As has been noted earlier in this section, the team believes that there is progress still to be made in strengthening evaluation procedures. Indeed, the team also came to the view that there is a need for the university to reflect on whether it needs to identify a framework for academic quality assurance and enhancement to complement that being developed in the area of organisational quality management.

The team learned that the most recent major development in the area of quality is the proposed adoption of the ISO 9001: 2001 quality model to assist improvement in organisational effectiveness. The decision to seek the implementation of a quality management system in conformity with these standards, and to adapt it to the NUAB



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context, had been reached following a recommendation by a national regulatory body, the Council of Accounts. It is the considered view of the IEP team that the university should proceed cautiously in this area since the application of quality models that have their origins in the world of business, commerce or industry, may not necessarily facilitate a clear focus on learning and teaching, and the student learning experience. While such models may assist a university in improving its management and administrative processes and procedures, in the view of the IEP team they may be rather less effective in achieving the “improvement of educational processes” or fulfilling the student-centred quality criteria identified in the document made available to the team by the university, entitled “Quality Management at NUAB”. Moreover, in their discussions with staff at all levels of the university, the team members were interested to note that there is very little if any awareness at NUAB of academic quality frameworks such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, otherwise known as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Though the team notes that the ESG have been discussed by the Senate Quality Evaluation Commission, as it endeavours to work towards a quality system that is fit for academic purposes, the university may wish to reflect further on the merits of Part 1 of the ESG, and the standards and guidance contained therein on matters such as the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards, the assessment of students, the quality assurance of teaching staff, and student support.

Therefore, while noting the university’s intention to adopt and implement an approach to quality management based on the ISO 9001 model, the IEP strongly recommends that consideration is given to broadening the institutional quality strategy by developing a framework for academic quality assurance and enhancement. Finally, in concluding the team’s reflections and deliberations on these important matters, it is advisable to reflect on the need for senior managers to be able to rely on an appropriate level of support to ensure that whatever policies and procedures are adopted, they are implemented consistently and in the interests of organisational cohesion. With this in mind, the team advises that as it develops a framework for academic quality assurance and enhancement, to assist the vice-rector in this area consideration should be given by the university to making an appointment to a position of coordinator of Academic Quality Monitoring and Enhancement.



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7. Internationalisation

The IEP team noted the importance attached by NUAB to the European and wider international dimension and wishes to encourage the university to continue to progress its intentions for further internationalisation. At senior management level, oversight of internationalisation is exercised by the vice-rector (education). For administrative and operational purposes, he is supported in these matters by the Director for the Erasmus Exchange Programme and the Director for International Affairs. In the NUAB deliberative committee structure, international matters are discussed by the Senate, while executive decisions on matters relating to international cooperation are taken by the Rectorate through the Council of Administration. Proposals for new partnerships, the monitoring of agreements with existing NUAB international partners, and requests relating to university participation in international networks for education and scientific research, are included in the business of faculty councils, with matters referred to Senate or to the Council of Administration for approval, as necessary.

In their consideration of university policy and strategy in the area of internationalisation, the IEP team learned that there is no dedicated strategy document for international affairs. Further, the institutional planning documents made available to the team, such as the Rector's *Operational Plan (2013)* and faculty operational plans (2012/2013), contain limited, if any, references to strategic or planning considerations on international matters. While the Rector's *Strategic Development Plan (2012-2016)* makes reference to some proposed international developments, through Erasmus partnerships and involvement in the Balkan region TRANSFORM project, and while faculty operational plans include reference to international developments in learning and teaching, these appeared to be largely of an operational nature. The team was unable to identify any strategic objectives for the planning period 2012-2016. Therefore, it was not possible to ascertain clearly from these documents how Senate, the Rectorate, or the faculties were measuring success going forward. The absence of clearly specified attainment targets, accompanied by measureable indicators, on matters such as mobility, and international research links, which might act as reference points for future planning in this area across the university and its faculties, seemed to the IEP team to be a notable omission. In summary, at the time of the team's visit, even on the limited occasions where reference was made in planning documents to international developments, there did not appear to be a clear method by which progress could be transparently monitored and assessed as the operational plans were being taken forward to implementation.

Meetings with staff and students, and documentation provided to the IEP team, presented valuable opportunities for team members to assess the range of international and wider



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European activities engaged in by various individuals and groups in the university. These activities extended to both learning and teaching and research. The team noted the importance of these activities to the wider NUAB academic community, and the potential of aspirations for future development. The university has established institutional-level links and agreements with a range of international organisations, all of which require approval at Rectorate level. It was evident to the members of the team that such international links bring benefits to the wider university. Links established at department or faculty level, or at the level of individual faculty members — such as projects, professional networks (e.g. European League of Art Institutes), exchanges, guest speakers, participation in exhibitions, and partnerships of various kinds — add considerable value in terms of pedagogy, or the research experience gained. These benefits also extended to students, either directly or indirectly, in terms of an enhanced academic experience or, for some, opportunities to study abroad or alongside the small number of incoming students from other countries. However, while noting the potential benefits of increasing such international links and partnerships, and the advantages in terms of projecting the NUAB “brand” onto the European stage, in reflecting on these matters the team urges the university to exercise some caution in this area, not least in relation to the number of partnerships and the need for selection and approval procedures and criteria that are transparent and risk-based. Experience elsewhere in higher education indicates that costs and resource demands need to be weighed against potential or actual benefits. Moreover, in the view of the team, going forward, the university may wish to reflect on the possible advantages of having fewer, more strategic but stronger partnerships in some types of international operation.

The team was provided with recent data on Erasmus-related student mobility at Bachelor level and also incoming Masters level students. As is recognised by the university, the numbers are relatively low. For example, the most recent data show that the incoming number of Erasmus programme students for 2012/2013 is 15 (drawn from nine countries), while the outgoing number is 33 (going to 11 countries). The university’s determination to improve this situation was made evident to the IEP team in various ways, and new agreements have recently been signed. Students confirmed to the team that they were aware of such opportunities, that internal promotion and advertising was good, and that the application process was not difficult. However, it was also apparent to the team that despite grant support (albeit at a low level), for many students the cost of study at a foreign university was likely to be prohibitive. While the team heard of some targets for increasing student mobility by 2% or 3%, team members were unable to find any such measurable targets in institutional or faculty planning documents. Further, while the team noted that the university’s distinctive profile in arts education makes it potentially attractive to incoming students there remain challenges to be resolved in offering study programmes in foreign languages, such as English or French. Though the team was impressed by the enthusiasm of those staff who were keen to deliver such programmes, for example on an interdisciplinary



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basis at Masters level, in the view of the team this was a further area where specific targets and plans needed to be identified by the university's senior management. The team also explored staff mobility, both outgoing and incoming. Here, awareness amongst staff was markedly less apparent to the team than awareness amongst students, and the team was advised that no incoming teachers were currently engaged in Erasmus programmes for staff. Even so, the team noted that the university wished to address this situation. Staff were able to point to the use made of guest lecturers, and to the opportunities for staff involved in project work or Erasmus schemes to take advantage of international visits.

The team welcomed the openness that characterised the university's approach to discussions of some of the challenges and constraints, which NUAB faced in taking forward its internationalisation aspirations. These include the financial costs to NUAB students and academics of extended periods of study or research abroad; the increasingly competitive nature of European funding for projects and grants; and the difficulties of attracting and remunerating international professors and teachers of suitable academic standing. The IEP team wishes the university well in its ongoing determination to project NUAB's distinctive profile on the international stage, and to draw attention to what it has to offer the international community in terms of incoming and outgoing students and academics. In endorsing the university's aspiration to strengthen its international profile by developing study programmes in English, by increasing mobility opportunities through Erasmus programmes, and by exploring further opportunities for joint academic activities with international partners, the IEP team recommends that such efforts should be supported by an international strategy that can act as a "road map" for future development, with appropriate milestones and measurable targets.



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Conclusions and recommendations

The recommendations of the IEP team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the university's future success and strategic development and the aspiration of NUAB to continue to play a leading role in artistic education in Romanian society.

Governance and management

- From their deliberations on the university's capacity for managing change, and arrangements and practices in the area of strategic and operational planning, the IEP team strongly recommends that the university should reflect on whether it has a sufficiently clear vision of NUAB's long-term goals and priorities, and whether institutional planning and implementation might be strengthened by the identification of a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to be used at all levels;
- Further, in reflecting on the above matters, the IEP team proposes that the university's current *Strategic Plan* should be further elaborated and broadened and team members consider that it would be strengthened by the development of a suite of brief underpinning strategies for research, learning and teaching, quality, internationalisation, and service to society;
- The IEP team considers that institutional decision-making on future change can be assisted by using the annual budgeting and resource allocation processes to steer change in relation to agreed strategic priorities.

Learning and teaching

- The IEP team recommends that the university's focus on student-centred learning should be reinforced by making use of an explicit learning outcomes approach to curriculum design, development, and review, and that such an approach is aligned to student assessment methods;
- The IEP team proposes that NUAB should work towards ensuring that all Bachelor students have an opportunity to undertake an internship placement and that appropriate support arrangements are made available by the university;
- The IEP team advises that consideration is given to how best to meet the needs of employers for students who possess strong employability skills, in areas such as communication, presentation, creative thinking, problem solving, and other "soft skill" areas;



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- The IEP team proposes that arrangements are made for the establishment of a regular cross-University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Forum, with representation from all departments (including students), whose purpose will be to act as a focal point for the sharing and dissemination of good practice in areas such as curriculum design, learning and teaching, and assessment.

Research

- The IEP team advises that as the university further develops its research strategy it should take the opportunity to undertake a realistic assessment of its research directions, and also review how best to secure the resourcing and sustainability of those research centres and areas of research strength it wishes to support going forward;
- The IEP team recommends that stronger steps should be taken to strengthen the Third Mission capability of the University and its departments, and also that additional actions need to be taken to create further opportunities for additional income generation from industry, alumni, and philanthropic sources.

Service to society

- The IEP team wishes to encourage the further development in NUAB's faculties and departments of provision for meeting lifelong learning needs of society;
- The IEP team proposes that the university should give consideration to the potential benefits of establishing an Alumni Association to support efforts in promoting the NUAB "brand";
- The IEP team advises the university to take advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from industry, business, commerce, and the artistic world, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the rector and to the Senate on promoting the regional, national, and international interests of NUAB, and also on strategic matters.

Quality culture

- The IEP team proposes that the template for teacher evaluation is revised and recommend that, in addition to the opportunity that students currently have to give their views on teaching matters, items are added to enable students to provide feedback on their learning experience;



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- While acknowledging the arrangements currently in place for students to provide anonymous feedback, the IEP team advises the university to reflect on the use made of teacher evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university and its faculties, for informing students of actions taken to “close the loop” in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide;
- The IEP team advises that the university’s capability for self-critical analysis of academic provision should be strengthened by the introduction of a procedure for the annual monitoring and evaluation of each study programme by study programme coordinators and their teams;
- While noting the university’s intention to adopt and implement an approach to quality management based on the ISO 9001 model, the IEP strongly recommends that consideration is given to broadening the institutional quality strategy by developing a framework for academic quality assurance and enhancement;
- The team advises that as it develops a framework for academic quality assurance and enhancement, to assist the vice-rector in this area, consideration should be given by the university to making an appointment to a position of Coordinator of Academic Quality Monitoring and Enhancement.

Internationalisation

- In endorsing the university’s aspiration to strengthen its international profile through developing study programmes in English, by increasing mobility opportunities through Erasmus programmes, and by exploring further opportunities for joint academic activities with international partners, the IEP team wish to recommend that such efforts should be supported by an international strategy that can act as a “road map” for future development, with appropriate milestones and measurable targets.



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Envoi

The IEP team has enjoyed learning about the unique characteristics and distinctive role of NUAB. Team members will look with special interest at the university's future development and wish the institution success in its forthcoming 150 years anniversary celebrations. It has been a pleasure to discuss with staff, students, and stakeholders the challenges faced by NUAB, and efforts to address constraints and to explore future opportunities. The team believes the university has the potential to be successful in its next stage of development. Special thanks are due to the Rector, Professor Bălescu, for inviting the IEP team, and to the Vice-Rector, Associate Professor Gustea, for ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process.