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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

Ovidius University of Constanta

EVALUATION REPORT

May 2013

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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



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

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

1.2 Ovidius University of Constanta and the national context

Ovidius University of Constanta is an accredited public institution of higher education in the city of Constanta, the third largest city in Romania. Constanta is the capital of the historical province of Dobrudja and is a centre of cultural, historic and commercial importance. Situated on the Black Sea, it is also the fourth largest port in Europe. From small beginnings in 1961 the university has developed into an institution with 18,352 students in academic year 2011-2012: 14,250 in Bachelor’s programmes, 2 844 in Master’s and 594 doctoral students. The student numbers have been in decline over recent years: in 2009-2010 the corresponding figures were 15,830, 4 243, 777, while in 2010-2011 they were 15,502, 3 204, 659. Academic staff numbers have also been in decline: from 756 in 2009-2010 to 719 in 2011-2012. In this context the SER makes two important points: in recent years the law has severely restricted both promotion and recruitment of staff in the higher education sector, and over this same period Romania’s school population has dramatically decreased and, consequently, the number of high school graduates and would-be students has diminished.

There are sixteen faculties: dentistry; economic sciences; history and political sciences; medicine; pharmacy; psychology and sciences of education; letters; physical education and sports; theology; mathematics and informatics; physics, chemistry, electronics and petroleum technology; arts; natural and agricultural sciences; law, administrative sciences and sociology; constructions; mechanical, industrial and maritime engineering.

The university has 27 buildings, some of which are rented, with a total area of 48,377 square meters. The educational facilities, including auditoriums, lecture rooms, seminar rooms, laboratories and reading rooms cover a total area of about 22,938 square meters. The self-evaluation report (SER) notes that “all classrooms are equipped with state of the art furnishings and technology, and were developed with the objective to cater for the needs of each study programme, and the number of students enrolled in it”.

As noted above, the present evaluation takes place in the context of an institutional evaluation of Romanian universities. The process aims primarily at:

- Evaluating the extent to which each university fulfils its stated institutional mission;
- Supporting universities in further improving quality provision and strategic management capacity through targeted recommendations;



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- Supporting universities in enhancing their institutional quality assurance mechanisms;
- Providing policy inputs through cluster reports and a final system review report that will support the Romanian authorities in further developing higher education policies.

1.3. The self-evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was led by a group made up of senior staff members and representatives of students, approved by the Senate. Input was requested from all sections of the university community: administrative leaders, deans and representatives of faculties, academic and research personnel, students' associations, representatives of the trade unions and employers. While the SER contained much useful information the evaluation team found that it did not present a well-rounded description of the university and how it functions. It was not sufficiently reflective and analytical, and missed the opportunity to highlight the university's strong points and processes.

The evaluation team would have found it helpful to see summary descriptions of the university's governance and administrative structures; the roles and functions of the rector, senate and administrative board; the university's policies on research, teaching and learning, internationalisation, quality assurance, regional partners. There were 31 appendices written in Romanian and no translation provided. This meant that a great deal of time was spent on the first visit eliciting basic information about the university.

1.4. The evaluation team

The self-evaluation report of Ovidius University, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in good time. The two visits of the evaluation team (hereafter the team) took place on 13-15 January 2013 and 9-12 April 2013, respectively. In between the visits the university provided the evaluation team with additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Professor Sijbolt Noorda, former President of University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, team chair
- Professor Lucka Lorber, Vice-rector, University of Maribor, Slovenia
- Professor Jacques Lanares, Vice-rector, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
- Annakaisa Tikkinen, Academic Officer of Student Union, University of Oulu, Finland
- Professor Don McQuillan, former Chief Executive Irish Universities Quality Board, Ireland, team coordinator

The team would like to warmly acknowledge the cooperation and hospitality received throughout the two visits. We thank the Rector, Professor Danut-Tiberius Epure, who signed the invitation letter, the vice-rectors and other leaders, who actively supported us, and all the



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staff and students, as well as stakeholders from outside the institution, for their helpful contribution to the discussions. We thank Alina Lascu for organising the documentation, liaising with the team and maintaining our daily schedule. We trust that our joint efforts will provide a sound springboard for OUC as it moves into the next phase of its evolution.



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2. Governance and institutional decision making

2.1 Governance, organisation

The University Charter specifies the following structures:

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

The rector appoints five vice-rectors: strategy, institutional development and quality management; education and training; scientific research, development, innovation and relationships with socio-economic environment; image, communication and social problems students; international relations and foreign students.

We note that deans of faculties are not elected by the faculty but rather by an application procedure that, while preserving some faculty input, leaves the rector with great influence in the appointment. The Minister for Education must confirm the appointment.

The Administrative Board is essentially the executive branch of OUC's governance structures with the rector as Chief Executive Officer, while the Senate is the legislative branch. The team feels that this is a strong structure with the capacity to work well in the best interests of the university. However, it is not without the potential for instability and future conflict since smooth interaction between the two branches will very much depend on good will between the main actors, especially the rector and the president of the senate. The university should be aware of this. There is a reasonable balance and agreement between the faculties (through the Administrative Council) and the Senate, and in our discussions it was clear that there is good cooperation between the deans and the rector. Students take an active part in the governance of OUC at all levels. They are a relevant part of the decision-making process and their opinions are taken into account. The team was impressed by the dedication and professionalism of the central office staff. Management is efficient, finances are healthy despite the present difficult economic situation, and the university has ambitious goals.



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Although the rector has a standing invitation to attend meetings of the Senate he is not a member of that body. It seems to the team that this must hamper the effective introduction to the Senate of actions proposed by the Administrative Board. We believe that the rector's non-voting membership of the Senate would facilitate the orderly governance of the university.

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

The exclusion of representatives of civil society from the senate is regrettable and the team urges the appropriate authorities to reconsider this issue. The inclusion of members of civil society in the highest governing body of universities is not unusual in many countries, and has clear advantages both for society and the university: the autonomy granted to the university is balanced by public and transparent accountability to the society that maintains it; the university has a direct line to social and economic developments in the region; the university has immediate access to regional advice when preparing its strategic plan. In our discussions with university leaders it was suggested that that OUC might establish a consultative board involving external stakeholders. While this would be a good first step it would not give civil society the strong voice it deserves in university policy making.

The team recommends that external stakeholders should be represented in the senate.

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

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

There are sixteen faculties in the university. The team feels that OUC should look to reduce this number, which is quite large by modern standards, by combining some into larger faculties. This would strengthen the university's academic profile and facilitate interdisciplinary work. This kind of action may not be popular, especially among deans.

The team recommends that OUC should consider reducing the number of faculties by combining some into larger faculties.

Many functions of the university are decentralised at the level of individuals, departments and faculties. Research and quality assurance are cases in point. For example the SER states (page 16) that teaching staff, researchers, doctorate candidates, post-doctoral fellows are free to organise their work and select those research methods that are best suited to the nature of their activity. This makes it difficult to establish university-wide coherent research



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strategies, to establish research priorities and distribute scarce financial resources, to organise effective interdisciplinary cooperation. We shall come back to this, especially in the sections on research and quality assurance.

Autonomy

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

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

These remarks are of particular relevance to Ovidius University, which bears a great responsibility acting as a driver for the cultural, social and economic development of its region. However the university’s ability to respond in a speedy and appropriate fashion to the manifold challenges facing universities today, and listed above, is thwarted by unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

In principle OUC has broad autonomy by the Law of 2011: academic autonomy, governance autonomy in relation to strategic management by freely elected entities; administrative autonomy; financial autonomy; human resources autonomy.

In practice however the freedom of the university to act is severely circumscribed by regulations laid down by the Ministry of Education (MECTS). Indeed in our meetings we found widespread discontent at the inability of OUC to act on even minor matters without the explicit consent of the minister. The team heard of continual changes in rules and protocols



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ordered from on high, and depending solely on the particular minister in office. In this context the SER, in its SWOT analysis on page 30, refers to “legislative instability that creates confusion and generates contradiction, in the acquisition of goods and services”.

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

2.2 Mission, vision, strategy

On page 12 the SER describes OUC’s priorities, assumed characteristics and mission. The priorities are: education; research; management, administration and infrastructure. The assumed characteristics are:

- An education and research university
- An entrepreneurial university
- An internationally visible university
- A university oriented towards the formation of fundamental human values in students: morality, ethics; respect for human and spiritual values, for work well done, and for the environment.

The mission of the university is to meet the needs of modern society, by offering undergraduate and post-graduate study programmes, adapted to the Romanian, European and global labour markets, to generate research and innovation, to attract the best specialists and high potential youth to scientific research.

These statements are important and set down honourable markers and a vision for Ovidius University. What is missing is any reference to the region and the responsibility OUC has to act as a driver for its cultural, social and economic development. Before the university can become a top national or international university it must first establish itself as a first-class regional university.

The team recommends that the university should develop vision and mission statements that are specific to OUC and include its regional role.

The next step is to produce a comprehensive strategic plan for the university. In this context the rector has produced a six-page document entitled “Managerial Plan, General Framework”, which outlines his ideas on quality management, financial management, management of the material base, and academic marketing for the university. In addition,



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and in response to a request from the team, the university produced a one-page document listing ten strategic priorities for the university in the areas of research, teaching and learning, quality assurance, etc. The SER contains a SWOT analysis under the headings education, research, and management, administration and infrastructure. These are all valuable documents pointing the way to the creation of an overarching strategic plan for the university that will spell out details on achievable goals, time lines, funding details, designated actors and success indicators.

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

Strategic planning has been described as “the continuous and collective exercise of foresight in the integrated process of taking informed decisions affecting the future”. It is essential that the university understand what is involved in the preparation of a strategic plan. It is not a wish list, a collection of desirable outcomes with no indication as to how these outcomes can be achieved, nor is it a compilation of departmental or faculty plans. On the contrary, the process of developing an effective strategic plan is complex and intensive. We suggest that three basic questions be kept in mind:

1. Where is the university positioned now?
2. Where does the university want to go?
3. How does the university get there?

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

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

The second question addresses the vision and mission of the university, and the detailed objectives to be achieved, say over the next four years. We note again that the vision and mission statements in the SER, while generically excellent, do not focus enough on the region and could apply to many other institutions. We urge the university to give its close attention to formulating statements that more clearly reflect OUC’s aspirations at regional as well as national and international level.



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

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

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

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



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3. Teaching and learning

As a teaching university OUC is performing well. It is to be congratulated on the introduction of the formal structures advocated by the Bologna Process. ECTS has been introduced, and all degrees offered by the university have been adapted to the Bachelor-Master-PhD model. The team had excellent meetings with a wide cross-section of students all of whom expressed satisfaction with their courses and teachers. All were glad they had chosen OUC for their university studies. There is good communication and interaction between teachers and students. The university promotes an open door policy so teachers are available to students for consultation. The university is active in recruiting new students of good quality in a variety of ways, including open door days and the organisation of fairs.

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

The student-centred approach is greatly facilitated by the modularisation of courses. The team is aware that some faculties have already begun this process, but were told there is resistance to change in some parts of the university. We urge the university to proceed at top speed with the introduction of this important initiative in all faculties. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of modularisation in the evolution of the modern university and the effective implementation of Bologna.

The process of examining closely the desired outcomes of programmes and courses, followed by a breakdown into coherent modules, is a fruitful exercise in itself and by its nature contributes to a review of curricula. What was said above for courses in general holds true for modules. The content of each module should be set in terms of learning outcomes. Key competences should be systematically fostered and emphasised. Information to students should contain an explanation of the overall aims and purpose of each module, with prerequisite courses clearly indicated, benchmarks for student learning and achievements, clear guidelines on written and project work, principles on marking and feedback to students.

Modularisation will influence many of the developments already planned by the university. It will simplify the structuring and organisation of interdisciplinary studies both for students and



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the university, and indeed may point the way to new combinations of subjects for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work. At undergraduate level it opens up the possibility of a more effective use of resources by identifying or indeed creating courses, which could be regarded as core courses for all or many students in different faculties.

Modularisation will contribute to transparency in the university's dealings with students, and indeed with society as a whole, and in particular with the industrial and business community. Visiting students from abroad will be enabled to easily construct a study programme, while the implementation of ECTS will be simplified.

The team recommends that all courses in the university should be modularised. For each module, student handbooks should contain precise descriptions of

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

The team recommends that the university should make use of the modular course structure to create interdisciplinary study programmes and joint degrees between and within faculties.

The university is developing good relations with local business enterprises, and the local community in general. This has led to mutually beneficial cooperation and collaboration on a variety of regional initiatives. In this context the university's developing internship programme is of great value to OUC students. It not only provides them with experience and knowledge of the realities of work in the "real" world, but often leads to a permanent post after graduation. In this context it was suggested during discussions with staff and external stakeholders that student practical projects and internships should come earlier in the curriculum, and that the internship programme should be greatly expanded.

Practical projects serve different purposes at different stages of study. Therefore the team recommends that the university should increase the number of practical projects and internships and schedule some of them earlier in the curriculum.

In the interests of harmonising quality assurance procedures it is important that the student questionnaires on teaching and courses should be standardised across the university, with feedback to students that is timely, and agreed transparent follow-up procedures. Of course faculties should be free to add some questions specific to their own areas of expertise. From our meetings with students and teachers it is clear that there is an awareness in OUC that this process should be formative and directed at improving the quality of teaching and learning.



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The team recommends that the university should update the standardised teacher evaluation questionnaire to collect relevant information on course content, workload, and the methods of teaching from the student perspective. Feedback to students on the outcomes of these evaluations should be timely, and follow-up procedures agreed.

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

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

The SER notes that the university senate has opened a Centre of Excellence for Students and each faculty will appoint one or two of its former graduates as founding members of a University Alumni Association. This is an excellent development. Alumni associations maintain and fortify contact with graduates and strengthen the good will in the community toward the university. This process of maintaining effective close contact with graduates embeds the university further in the community, and in turn will be helpful to new graduates in finding employment. This should go hand in hand with a systematic process for tracking OUC's graduates and creating a database on what they do, where they go, their opinion on teaching and courses. This will provide valuable information for curricular reform and care of undergraduates.



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4. Research

In the years 2010-2012 the number of papers published in international journals (excluding conference proceedings) by OUC researchers came to a total of 212. Four faculties accounted for 171 of these: mathematics and informatics; medicine; physics and chemistry; natural and agricultural sciences. This is to be expected since many of the other faculties, by the nature of the discipline involved, will tend to publish in national journals. However the SER notes that “because of the new criteria for career advancement, our academic staff is less interested in participating in national conferences and contributing to national academic journals”.

Revenue from research fell from a high of 1,254,000 lei in 2009 to 736,000 in 2012. Most of this money was earned on Romanian-funded projects. While these sums are modest they also reflect the tough competition for research support.

The SER lists seven strategic objectives in research on page 18. They include: establishing indicators of performance congruent with international standards; opening new directions with a local and national specificity; expanding international cooperation; achieving national and international recognition; developing national and international partnerships; professionalising research management. In addition, several immediate goals were mentioned in our discussions: developing the research base by starting new research projects, creating centres of excellence and interdisciplinary teams, upgrading research facilities, stimulating publishing and the use of research in practice. In addition each faculty has set down a list of its own research goals.

Obviously research must have a central place in the university’s strategic plan. As we noted in our discussion of strategic planning this involves much soul-searching. The first step is to agree on the key overall research objectives of the university. For a university like OUC with a mixture of regional, national and international ambitions, but very limited resources, this poses a fundamental question. We have remarked previously that the first step in achieving its long-term ambitions is for OUC to become a strong regional university, and then to build on this. Thus the university has to decide on the nature of the research it will carry out, at least in the medium term. Is it to be fundamental research or oriented towards applications.

The team recommends that OUC define the nature of research in the university (application oriented or fundamental) and create an overarching strategy to build the research base of the university

It seems clear that research performance and organisation must be improved if research in OUC is to achieve the status that is needed to compete in the present research climate, and to underpin the quality and competitiveness of doctoral studies, particularly in the international arena. Research is essential for building the reputation of OUC. Membership of the European Union is presenting new and possibly lucrative research funding opportunities,



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but success will depend on meeting high performance standards. The newly established Department for Research and Projects Management is in the process of deciding its strategic position within the research landscape of the university. The team feels this department can become an important player in the university's drive to improve research performance and organisation, that it should have a central role in supporting the university to improve its research profile.

The team recommends that the Department for Research and Project Development should be upgraded to a strong unit with the remit to:

- **re-examine research norms and values to bring them into line with European good practice, as outlined by ESF and NSF**
- **introduce to OUC commonly accepted international research and development performance indicators**
- **benchmark against selected leading universities to develop good practice**
- **create a research database and support staff in compiling first class research proposals**
- **provide adequate seed and reward money from the university budget to start and support promising research initiatives and outstanding achievements**
- **join on a wider basis with other university research initiatives for larger EU grants.**
- **develop strategies to increase the number of PhDs awarded by OUC.**

The last point above is crucial. As the work to increase the quantity and quality of research output goes ahead this must be matched by an increase in the number of doctoral schools in the university and the number of doctoral candidates. In the years 2010-2012, PhD degrees were awarded in philology (26), history (22), theology (37), biology (20), mathematics (4), civil engineering (8), medicine (56), dentistry (1). At the moment there are only four doctoral schools in OUC due to inflexible national criteria e.g. a minimum of three habilitated professors in the school. We have seen that 85% of staff have a PhD, so most have earned the degree in other universities. Given also that most of the staff are graduates of OUC (a situation that is not likely to change soon), that the habilitated professors in the doctoral schools are quite senior, and that all teaching staff will be required to have a PhD by 2015, it is clear that the university's strategy for doctoral studies is critical. In the context of international competition for research funding we suggest that the university should seek to strengthen international acceptance of its PhD graduates. The following measures might assist in achieving this goal.



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The team recommends that the university should:

- **use external co-referees and evaluators**
- **publish results, especially PhD research achievements, in international refereed journals**
- **systematically stimulate and reward attendance at international conferences**
- **increase the number of joint PhDs.**



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5. Service to society

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

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

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

Employability of graduates is a central objective of OUC and the team recognises that the university already invests time and effort in helping graduates to find employment. We note, however, that many universities have set up a careers office to drive their effort in this area. The remit of this office usually includes the following: establishing contact between students and industry for the exchange of information on posts available and graduates qualified to take up the posts, helping students to prepare for interviews, inviting employers to speak to groups of senior students on employer expectations, arranging interviews, and building up a database on its activities. Organising training in entrepreneurship across the university is often the responsibility of this office. This is another effective way to embed the university in the working life of the community and maintain contact with graduates and employers. The team feels that a Careers Office, with professional leadership, is best suited to the specialised work of helping students find their way in the working world.

The team recommends that the university should establish a Careers Office.



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6. Quality culture

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

The university has several committees and individuals to drive the legal requirements for quality assurance: the OUC Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation, the Senate's Commission for Image, Communication, Strategies, Institutional Development and Quality Management, the Centre of Quality Assurance in Education, faculty commissions for quality assurance and evaluation, a Vice-rector for quality management, faculty coordinators for quality assurance and evaluation.

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

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

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

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



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- effective follow-up on recommendations for improvement
- minimal bureaucracy
- quality improvement
- involvement of students and other stakeholders.

We refer to two EUA publications: “Examining Quality Culture Part II, Processes and Tools”, and “EUA’s Quality Assurance Policy in the Context of the Bergen Communiqué”.

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

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

The team recommends that the Vice-rector for quality management, with appropriate back-up, should organise and oversee the new operational procedures for quality assurance.

Other procedures affect the quality of performance at OUC. These include the appointment of new staff, the quality and number of the entering students and the related issue of their formation and motivation during their years in the university. Student intake has declined in recent years, both in number and quality, due to declining population and competition from private universities. We have already mentioned the efforts OUC is making to attract the best local students, an effective strategy since 70% of students come from the county of Constanta. Weaker entering students are provided with bridging courses, especially in mathematics and physics. The procedures for appointing professors appear to be quite open and transparent and totally in the hands of the university. It is essential that this important element of autonomy is maintained and that procedures are scrupulously applied. However, the difficulty of attracting new staff was highlighted in several discussions. Low salaries and international competition were cited. At the moment 85% of staff have a PhD. All staff will be required to have a doctorate by 2015.



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7. Internationalisation

OUC has a flourishing programme for international students who come from neighbouring countries to study for degrees in a variety of disciplines. The team congratulates the university on this initiative and urges the further development and enhancement of the programme — so important to OUC’s international image. We offer a word of caution however: such degree programmes must be carefully planned, organised and structured; human and material resources properly allocated. The good name and international image of OUC are at stake, and experience elsewhere shows that once lost these are difficult to regain.

The team recommends that international degree programmes for foreign students should be developed and offered with great care.

The university has a vice-rector for international relations and foreign students. However, international interaction at research level through joint projects and joint degrees hardly exists. We have made recommendations in the section on research on how the department for research and project management can take steps to improve this situation.

There is little student and staff mobility. In its SWOT analysis the low mobility of teaching staff and the difficulty of attracting more foreign students are highlighted. Several factors can be suggested to explain the small number of students from abroad: the need for a stronger university-wide marketing strategy, the narrow range of study programmes in English, the need to approach international students individually, the impossibility of studying at different faculties at the same time, the limited number of academic staff capable of teaching in English, limitations on OUC’s enrolment capacity. In addition there is the issue of the visibility and image of OUC on the international scene.

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

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

Bearing these factors in mind, the team would like to make several recommendations in this area.



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The team recommends that OUC should

- **include in the university strategic plan an international university policy for the next five years involving all university components, based on the work already done, on effective contacts, on scientific priorities, on geographic areas, etc.**
- **include targets to be reached concerning the mobility of students, teachers and administrative staff, with a travel grant system to support this mobility**
- **provide more foreign language training for staff and students**
- **provide study programmes in foreign languages, e.g. English, French.**
- **make use of the international brand of Constanta and its historic region to attract foreign scholars and students.**

The team recommends that the university establish a central office, with appropriate back-up, which will

- **drive and coordinate the implementation of the university's international action plans in cooperation with all university components**
- **develop a systematic policy of information to the university community (on European programmes, networks, scholarships, grants, ECTS, Bologna Process, Erasmus, etc.)**
- **Collect centrally all data at all levels on international actions in order to follow their evolution, their results, and use this monitoring (this log-book) to have a clear view of OUC's presence in Europe and in the world.**



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8. Conclusion

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

Summary of recommendations

The rector should be a non-voting member of the Senate

External stakeholders should be represented in the Senate

OUC should benchmark against accepted good practice in key areas of its activities.

OUC should consider reducing the number of faculties by combining some into larger faculties.

The university should develop vision and mission statements that are specific to OUC and include its regional role.

OUC should establish a capability for the collection of data needed to update the strategic plan on an ongoing basis.

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

All courses in the university should be modularised. For each module student handbooks should contain precise descriptions of:

- **Learning outcomes rather than inputs**
- **Core competences to be fostered**
- **The overall aims and purpose of the module, benchmarks for student learning and achievements, clear guidelines on written and project work, principles on assessment and feedback to students.**



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The university should increase the number of practical projects and internships and schedule some of them earlier in the curriculum.

The university should update the standardised teacher evaluation questionnaire to collect relevant information on course content, workload, and the methods of teaching from the student perspective. Feedback to students on the outcomes of these evaluations should be timely, and follow-up procedures agreed.

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

OUC should define the nature of research in the university (application oriented or fundamental) and create an overarching strategy to build the research base of the university.

The Department for Research and Project Development should be upgraded to a strong unit with the remit to:

- **re-examine research norms and values to bring them into line with European good practice, as outlined by ESF and NSF**
- **introduce to OUC commonly accepted international research and development performance indicators**
- **benchmark against selected leading universities to develop good practice**
- **create a research database and support staff in compiling first class research proposals**
- **provide adequate seed and reward money from the University budget to start and support promising research initiatives and outstanding achievements**
- **join on a wider basis with other university research initiatives for larger EU grants.**
- **develop strategies to increase the number of PhDs awarded by OUC.**

The university should:

- **use external co-referees and evaluators**
- **publish results, especially PhD research achievements, in international refereed journals**



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- **systematically stimulate and reward attendance at international conferences**
- **increase the number of joint PhDs**

The university should systematise its collaboration with external partners by:

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

The university should establish a careers office.

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

The Vice-rector for quality management, with appropriate back-up, should organise and oversee the new operational procedures for quality assurance.

International degree programmes for foreign students should be developed and offered with great care.

OUC should:

- **include in the university strategic plan an international university policy for the next five years involving all university components, based on the work already done, on effective contacts, scientific priorities, geographic areas, etc.**
- **include targets to be reached concerning the mobility of students, teachers and administrative staff, with a travel grant system to support this mobility**
- **provide more foreign language training for staff and students**
- **provide study programmes in foreign languages, e.g. English, French**
- **make use of the international brand of Constanta and its historic region to attract foreign scholars and students.**

The university should establish a central office, with appropriate back-up, which will

- **drive and coordinate the implementation of the university's international action plans in cooperation with all university components**



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- **develop a systematic policy of information to the university community (on European programmes, networks, scholarships, grants, ECTS, Bologna Process, Erasmus, etc.)**
- **collect centrally all data at all levels on international actions in order to follow their evolution, their results, and use this monitoring (this log-book) to have a clear view of OUC's presence in Europe and in the world.**