AGORA UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Agora University of Oradea (UAO). The evaluation took place in 2014 in the framework of the project "Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities", which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

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

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

1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management.

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

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

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

1.2. Profile of Agora University of Oradea (UAO)

Agora University of Oradea (UAO), functions in a higher education system that includes 112 public (state) and private higher education institutions, divided equally between each category. It has its origins in the Agora Foundation, established in 2000 with the aim of developing a private university to serve the regional needs of northwest Romania. Since that time, the institution has progressed through the necessary phases required by law for obtaining university status. UAO was accredited first as a higher education institution in 2010 and then as a university in 2012 by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation team noted that, as a newly accredited institution, the university is to be monitored both by ARACIS and the Ministry of Education, Scientific Research, Youth and Sports until 2015.

The university's premises for supporting teaching and research are located in buildings situated in Oradea, Piata Tineretului, no. 8, Bihor county, and include facilities for lectures and seminars, and IT and library provision. For didactic purposes the academic provision of the university is structured into one faculty, law and economics, and one department, social sciences. The most recent data made available to the IEP team showed a total of 745 students registered on UAO study programmes, of which 675 were following Bachelor programmes and 70 were pursuing Masters studies.

As a private higher education institution, UAO is independent and largely autonomous according to Romanian higher education law. 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.

At national level, the evaluation team noted that Romania has joined the Bologna declaration in 1999. In 2004, legislation was passed in support of implementation of the Bologna Process, with national measures being adopted. Individual universities were required to take steps towards implementing the principles and objectives of the Bologna Process. Since 2005, higher education study programmes are required to be organised on the basis of three cycles (Bachelor; Master; and PhD/Doctorate) and aligned to the European Qualifications

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 23-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the university was sent to the evaluation team, describing the university's norms, values, and management processes and arrangements, and the SWOT analysis undertaken in preparation for the SER. The SER was accompanied by appendices, which included some institutional data; an organisation chart; information on committees; the University's Operational Plan (2013/14); and information on study programmes, partnerships, quality mechanisms, and research activities. The self-evaluation report of Agora University of Oradea, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in January 2014.

The team learned that the SER had been developed by a team appointed by the university's rector to complete the self-evaluation process. Preparations had been led by the evaluation coordinator and dean of the university, Associate Professor Gabriela Bologa. The evaluation team included representatives from academic and administrative departments, and a student representative. The SER was the product of a series of regular meetings and supporting activities, such as workshops, and included input and data collected from various sources across the university. The self-evaluation documentation was made available on the university's web pages. From meetings with staff and students it became apparent to the evaluation team that there was a reasonable awareness of the broad nature and purposes of the team's visits to the university, and the evaluation team members were warmly and openly received at all levels of the academic community.

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 useful information and data, it was somewhat descriptive. For example, it did not provide sufficiently clear pointers to areas where the university wishes to improve, nor did it provide sufficient insight into matters such as the university's governance and decision-making processes, its research or international strategies, and other strategic matters. Some important detail and information required by the team on key areas of the university's structures and operation remained absent from the SER, or was hidden or unclear. Furthermore, despite a SWOT exercise, which itself lacks in-depth self-analysis, the SER did not provide much information on the university's intended directions for future change or on its capacity for managing change. Central to this was the absence of a recognisable strategic plan and clear priorities for the future. That said, the additional information provided to evaluation team in advance of their second visit was useful in helping to address these matters.

1.4. The evaluation team

The two visits of the evaluation team to UAO took place on 18 – 20 February, and on 19 – 21 May, respectively. For its second visit, the evaluation team requested some additional information and documentation regarding the faculty's strategic planning and key performance indicators, and an updated self-evaluation report prepared in a self-analytical style. The team also requested clarification on a number of matters, including strategic and business planning processes; academic planning processes; effectiveness of governance arrangements; matters relating to the university's quality system; progress in embedding Bologna principles; plans for research and knowledge transfer; and internationalisation plans. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were not fully reflected in the SER. The requests were intended to provide a clearer picture to the team of how the university's systems and processes worked, and how the organisation as a whole functioned. This additional information was provided several weeks in advance of the second visit and provided further insight into some of the matters in which the team was interested.

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

- Sijbolt Noorda, President emeritus, University of Amsterdam and VSNU (Association of Dutch Universities), team chair
- Vaidotas Viliūnas, Principal, Marijampole College, Lithuania
- Liliya Ivanova, student, University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria
- Jethro Newton, former Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement, University of Chester, UK, team coordinator

The team would like to express its thanks to the Rector of Agora University, Prof. Dr Dziţac Ioan, and to the University's President, Prof. Dr. Manolescu Mişu Jan, for the warm welcome provided during their two visits. Special thanks are also offered by the team to the university's IEP liaison person and chair of the self-evaluation team, Associate Professor Gabriela Bologa, for her excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process and for her kind support throughout.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Vision, mission and general context

The university's SER presents UAO as a young university centred on the social sciences, based on core values of democracy and humanism, and with a mission of promoting education and scientific research. The vision of the university is to be recognised as a prominent and prestigious institution in Romanian higher education and known for the quality of its provision. The SER stated that there was a desire to create a distinctive "Agora academic culture", guided by the UAO motto of "Access to Success".

On the basis of their deliberations, the team commends the university for its regional role and for its entrepreneurial spirit, and for building strong connections with the region and the local community. The team noted that UAO is becoming increasingly valued by external stakeholders. In the view of the team, the university's strategic objective of meeting the needs of the regional employment market, by educating employable students and through high quality teaching, represents a sound strategy and members of the team support UAO in this strategic endeavour. From the team's perspective, of particular importance for UAO's mid- and long-term strategy is the expansion of effective links with the external environment and the need to ensure the attractiveness and employability of UAO graduates.

However, the team noted the non-negligible constraints placed upon the university by its operating environment. As a small and relatively recent private university, UAO faces very real resource and funding challenges. This financial unpredictability, a challenging socio-economic environment, frequent national legal reforms, and a high level of competition in the immediate region of northwest Romania, presents the university with a formidable change management agenda for ensuring viability and sustainability going forward. Not the least of these challenges is the declining number of potential students and shrinking markets. The team noted that the period between 2008 and 2012 had seen a big decrease in student numbers coming into the private higher education sector, and an overall picture whereby the economic crisis had impacted more severely than on the state higher education sector.

In view of these circumstances, the team formed the view that this will present UAO with great challenges as it plans for the future and as it seeks to find ways in which to operate effectively in a turbulent external environment. Indeed, the team learned that UAO's president wishes to improve the university's position in national rankings and to secure a position by 2020 in the second category of higher education institutions, that for "education and research". Clearly this will require much progress to be made in image building and reputation, in which quality will need to play a central role.

In addressing such challenges as those identified in the preceding paragraphs, the team identifies six strategic priority areas for the university:

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

In relation to these matters, the team makes a number of recommendations in this report which team members hope will support the university in taking forward its vision and mission.

Governance and management

The ownership, governance, management, and planning arrangements are described in the SER and in various other documents provided to the team. The team wished to explore how these organisational arrangements functioned, where oversight is exercised, and how decisions are made on matters such as finance, resources, research, academic affairs, and other important issues. The team was also interested in the university's own assessment of the effectiveness of these arrangements and processes. However, while they are described in the institutional self-evaluation, apart from a number of references to legal constraints on structures that the team was told are imposed on the university at national level, there is no assessment of effectiveness in the SER.

Even so, the team was able to explore the use made of these institutional arrangements in a series of productive meetings with the UAO owner, and with university managers, staff, students and external stakeholders. The team noted that UAO has a significant degree of academic autonomy that is guaranteed by the University Charter and by the prevailing legal norms that relate to a private university. Against this background, in an effort to understand the fitness for purpose of institutional structures for implementing and managing change, the team considered the operation and remit of committees and commissions, the role of the rector, and the part played by the president.

The team noted that the rector, who is in his second term of office, has been appointed to this senior executive position until 2016. His responsibilities are teaching and research, and do not include financial affairs or academic planning. The team learned that since his initial appointment, student and staff numbers have increased markedly. The team was told that under the previous legal dispensation a rector would have been responsible for taking all management and planning decisions. Today, the rector is not a full member of the highest governance body, the Administrative Council, where decisions are made regarding finance, resources, and administrative matters. However, the team noted that the rector indicated

that he was able to work effectively within these prevailing structures. Other senior positions noted by the team included the post of dean, who is responsible for the operation of the Faculty of Law and Economics, the Director of Social Sciences, who is responsible for the efficient functioning of the Department of Social Sciences, and the general administrative director, who holds responsibility for logistics and for the physical assets and facilities of the university. The university's operations are also supported by a number of directors, with responsibilities in areas such as quality assurance, international relations, human resources, marketing, and counselling and guidance. Some directors report to the rector, some are line-managed by the president. The team learned that these post-holders meet on an occasional basis for the purpose of sharing information.

As noted, the principal decisions of the university are taken through the Administrative Council, chaired by the president. Here, financial, resourcing, and administrative matters are discussed. Its work is complemented and supported by the work of the Strategy and Reform Commission which is also chaired by the president and which takes responsibility for strategic planning and forward thinking on future directions for the university. In turn, team observed that the UAO Senate exercises oversight of the academic bodies lower down in the organisation (the Faculty Council and Department Council) and is also supported by a number of sub-commissions, for audit, quality, international relations, and student affairs. The Senate is composed of three professors and one student, the latter reflecting the legal stipulation of 25% student membership of academic governance bodies. The team learned that the Faculty Council is chaired by the dean. The team noted the influence of the law on determining the structures and composition of committees and councils. For example, the dean is not permitted to be a member of the Senate. The Faculty Council exercises oversight of requirements that should be fulfilled to meet ARACIS expectations. The Department Council, consists of three members, but has no student representation. It is able to raise matters for discussion at the Faculty Council and Senate, in areas such as teaching and learning, study programme planning, research, and student affairs. The Faculty and Department Councils together initiate proposals for new study programmes for discussion and approval by Senate.

From the foregoing, the team formed the view that governance and management structures, and the governance culture of the university, reflect a mixture of both the historical evolution of Agora as a private university in which the owner continues to play an active role, and of the governance requirements placed upon the university at national level through the 2011 national HE law. The team's findings confirmed them in the judgement that, as an organisation, UAO is characterised by a strong central core centred around the president as founder of the university, and that the position of the rector is essentially one of managing academic affairs and taking a leadership role in research matters.

The team members reflected carefully on the dynamics of the relationship and interface between the various governance bodies and management structures. This included

consideration of the working relationships between the Administrative Council, the Senate, the Rectorate, and the president. Also of interest to the team was the nature of the links between the "academic" and "administrative" sides of the organisation, and the extent of academic debate and engagement with strategic priorities at the level of faculty, department, and study programme councils. In the team's view, the future functioning and quality of all of these arrangements and relationships and the openness of communication will have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the university's future decision-making and its capacity for managing change going forward. In the team's view the university's change management capability, and its willingness to make appropriate decisions aligned to UAO's strategic aspirations in areas such as research, internationalisation, and portfolio development are central to the university's future success and sustainability. These are matters that the team believes the university should keep under close review on a regular basis as it faces the future. Indeed, given the size of the university, the team observes that the rather complicated governance structure required by law is not efficient for small institutions such as UAO and that any opportunity to make appropriate adjustments should be taken by the university. That said, as the university continues to develop its management structures and practices, in the view of the team this should not deflect from UAO's main priorities of teaching and research.

Academic organisation

The team noted that the university's academic organisation is relatively uncomplicated. The Faculty of Law and Economics contains one academic department, the Department of Social Sciences. The faculty and department deliver four undergraduate study programmes in the fields of accountancy, law, management, and administrative science (police studies). The first three of these programmes are accredited for three years, while the last one is authorised until 2014. The university also delivers two Master's programmes, accredited for up to five years, in the fields of human resources management and criminal and penal law. In addition, there are five accredited postgraduate programmes for delivery on a short continuing education basis in the areas of law, human resources, and accountancy. The team noted that the recruitment target for the postgraduate courses is 50. For other study programmes, the student numbers at the time of the team's visits were 675 and 70 for undergraduate and Masters study programmes, respectively. The team learned that UAO has around 1% of all higher education students in Romania.

In their enquiries regarding staff numbers, deployment, and appointment procedures, the team learned that the number and allocation of teaching staff positions is governed by law, and that appointments and promotions are conducted by open competition on a national basis. Appointments can be proposed by the department and by the Faculty Council, but are approved by the Administrative Council and by Senate.

The team was informed that 39 staff are engaged in teaching, of whom 29 are employed on a full-time basis, and of these five are full professors, 10 are associate professors, 10 are lecturers, and four are assistants or preparatory persons. A further 10 staff are employed on an hourly-paid basis across all of these categories. Included amongst the staffing complement are some staff who are also employed at other higher education institutions. The staffing numbers also include some who are qualified to supervise doctoral work, some who have held senior management or research positions at other universities, and two members of staff who hold Jean Monnet Chairs.

Strategic planning and organisational development

As noted previously in this section (p. 10), in the view of the team, organisational leadership and governance matters will have a significant bearing on the effectiveness of the university's planning and change management capability as it faces the future. But, of particular importance from the team's perspective, is the extent to which the university can clearly identify the main strategic priorities for the next five years and how these will be taken forward. Therefore, the team paid close attention to arrangements for strategic and operational planning, and to the university's arrangements for managing this and for monitoring progress. The documentation made available for the team's first visit was disappointing in that the *University Strategic Plan* was no more than an outline of routine operational deadlines for the academic year 2013/2014. The team recognised that the document took account of academic and curriculum development plans, of research development, infrastructure, and internationalisation, but neither the SER nor the *University Strategic Plan* provided a clear view of the planning processes or who is involved. Nor could the team identify any risk analysis or clearly stated constraints and limitations faced by the university, aside from legal constraints at national level. The team noted that some descriptions were provided where key decisions are made, and the rector indicated that he was able to contribute to Senate and Administrative Council strategic thinking. However, having concluded the first visit, the team remained uncertain about the university's ability to codify its strategic plans and priorities in the form of an effective strategic planning document that is owned across the institution.

This concern featured strongly in the team's request for additional documentation in advance of their second visit. Here, the team wished to see clearer evidence of strategic planning to cover the five-year period 2014 to 2019, supported by strategic priorities, key performance indicators, and measurable and realistic objectives. The team was therefore particularly interested to receive such additional information, and to examine both the documentation and the degree of understanding, involvement and ownership of the updated information amongst staff. The team was encouraged to learn of the discussions that had taken place at department meetings and at the various councils regarding strategic objectives and supporting activities. This reinforced earlier information received during the first visit

regarding processes whereby each department is given annual targets to be monitored through the Senate. Even so, at each stage of the evaluation, including the assessment of the processes that had led to the completion of the updated information, it was evident to the team that while numerous activities were being identified and listed by the university and its various groups, there was no coherent picture. Even the staff groups with whom the team met indicated that they had difficulty in making links between the many activities being identified, and in identifying a clear set of objectives and priorities that could be realistically achieved and conveniently measured.

In reflecting on these matters, in the view of the IEP team, both the *University Strategic Plan (2013/2014)* provided for the team's first visit, and the *UAO Strategic Plan 2014/2019* made available for the team's second visit, are deficient. While providing helpful information, neither document contains key performance indicators nor SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely); nor do they provide sufficient quantitative indicators against which progress can be measured on a yearly basis. From the team's perspective, this falls short of what should be expected of a "fit for purpose" strategic plan for a modern entrepreneurial higher education institution. Furthermore, neither the planning document nor the revised SER provide clear information on the institutional data that could be used for planning purposes. Moreover, the updated planning document is somewhat repetitive year on year, and fails to highlight a clear road map for planning purposes.

Further to these findings, the IEP team also observed that no formal risk analysis was provided in any of the planning or self-evaluation documentation. Moreover, the team noted a degree of sensitivity on these matters in discussions with senior managers, and this suggested to the team that there might be insufficient openness and transparency in such matters in the wider university community. In the view of the team, the absence of a risk analysis which is known and available to the university community is unusual for a management school. From the team's perspective, as a private university, UAO's approach to strategy development and reputation management should integrate risk management as an important element. The university may wish to reflect on whether it is making sufficient use of the expertise available to it in undertaking its planning and risk analysis activities and whether it needs to develop experience and encourage skills in these areas. In the view of the team these could be regarded as important ingredients of the university's future well-being and sustainability.

In reflecting on the foregoing findings and deliberations, the team makes two recommendations. First, it **recommends** that the university build on its work to date on strategic planning and develop a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and related targets and objectives against which progress can be measured and monitored in a transparent manner, on a yearly basis, using appropriate data. This should be supported by a published annual report that highlights the major achievements for each phase of the planning period.

Secondly, the team also **recommends** that the university should develop an open method for identifying and agreeing on a risk management and reputation management plan that makes use of information and views obtained from all internal and external stakeholders.

Finance and resourcing

The team's enquiries in the areas of governance and planning led them to consider arrangements for finance and resourcing, financial planning and budget formation processes. As noted earlier in this section (p. 7), given the size, relatively short history, and private status of the university, UAO is confronted with notable resource and funding challenges.

The team noted that a significant proportion of revenue is based on student tuition fees. This is supplemented by modest amounts from donations and sponsorships, and some rental income. In addition, as is described below, the university attracts some funding from externally funded projects.

With regards to expenditure, the principal costs relate to wages and salaries, with some expenditure being allocated to scientific research, maintenance costs, and student scholarships.

The team learned that there are several types of scholarship. Those that are awarded on the basis of social needs result in a 50% monthly reduction in tuition fees for those students who benefit from a scholarship. Those students who are awarded a scholarship based on high academic achievement are able to obtain a full reduction in fees. This includes the scheme whereby 20 scholarships are made available each year for every specialism. However, the team was told by students that for the present academic year, not all of the available scholarships for high academic achievement were allocated. In reflecting on these matters, the team believes that the university should ensure that procedures and criteria for the allocation of such funds are effectively publicised and that there is representation from the student body in monitoring the outcomes of the allocation process.

The team was also interested to learn that the university has been able to continue to benefit from external funding awarded under the European Social Fund. The team noted that several projects have already been completed under the POSDRU scheme (Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development) with several more now underway on project funding awarded in April of this year. As is described elsewhere in this report (e.g. p. 14) these projects are enabling UAO to develop infrastructure and to support the enhancement of both staff development and student employability. The team was told that the university is optimistic regarding prospects for obtaining further funding under this scheme in future years. In the view of the team, generating income from such sources and from new ones is an essential requirement for the university in the coming years.

As has been noted earlier, the key financial decisions are taken by the Administrative Council under the guidance of the president. This body approves the annual budget and any adjustments. The legal aspects of financial matters are checked by the director of finance and the finance and accounting department. This department also monitors the implementation of EU-funded projects. From the team's perspective, the prevailing arrangements for finance, resourcing, budget formation, and budget allocation, are understood and work to the satisfaction of the university. Even so, the university may wish in this context to take note of the team's advice (p. 12) regarding the need for appropriate risk assessments to be taken, and for transparency in all such planning matters. Added to this, is the recommendation, highlighted in the preceding paragraph, regarding the identification of additional income streams.

3. Learning and teaching

The IEP team noted that the main purpose of the education offer of the university is to address the needs of the regional economy and labour market in areas such as law, management and business. In the longer term, UAO, as a private university, is trying to enhance its reputation for enabling its graduates to enter the European labour market. The team learned that since its establishment the university has sought to tailor and adjust its study programmes and curriculum to employers' needs, taking account, as necessary, of national developments and priorities. Even so, the team observed that placing students in employment after graduation is an ongoing challenge as the opportunities that are available attract high levels of competition.

From discussions with staff regarding curriculum design and approval the team formed the view that the curriculum is tailored to reflect the above priorities. The team was informed that, as far as possible, the teaching process focuses on applied knowledge and practical learning, but that an appropriate balance is sought between the theoretical and applied aspects of learning. Nevertheless, the team was told that some 75% of the curriculum is determined at national level by ARACIS and that this restricts the time available for practical work. Within these parameters the team noted that each syllabus is drawn up by teachers for approval by the Faculty Council. In turn, the Senate seeks consistency of curriculum proposals with UAO's mission and with university and ARACIS regulations. The team also learned that where a study programme is under provisional authorisation, UAO graduates are awarded their Bachelor degree by an accredited university under cooperation agreements approved by the Ministry and by ARACIS.

In pursuing their enquiries regarding the work-related and employability-related dimension of learning and teaching at UAO, the team took a close interest in the use made of internships. It noted that student placements are a compulsory feature of all study programmes, and that Bachelor programmes are integrated with undergraduate and graduate internships. As an illustration of the emphasis being placed on employability, and the student-oriented focus in this area, the team learned that some 50% of students are employed in the field in which they graduated. The team noted that much of this effort on the part of the university has been made possible through the successful application for external funding under the EU-funded PODRU scheme, as described in the previous section (p. 13). Since 2010, several projects have been completed and this has enabled the university to place some 500 students in part-time internships during that period. The team also noted that since April, the university has commenced work on additional projects, funded under the same scheme, whereby 480 student internships are being targeted in banks, the police, private enterprises, the Municipality, and other employment situations. From this, UAO has set a target of 30% of

students to be hired on a more permanent basis by the organisations in which they complete their internships.

The team was impressed by the level of activity in the area of internships and work-related experience from which UAO students are able to benefit, and with the university's determination to make such opportunities available. However, the team formed the view that a note of caution should be included in their observations in this area. For example, as the volume of activity grows and the number of external employer partners increases, the university will wish to ensure that quality monitoring mechanisms are in place that can guarantee that the quality of the student experience is at an appropriate level and that supervision arrangements are robust. During discussions with students, the team heard that the extent and quality of supervision arrangements were variable, with some students pointing to the absence of any meaningful supervision in the workplace and the absence of any student feedback opportunities. From the team's perspective, if any supervision arrangements are dysfunctional, or if staff are overstretched, then companies will be unable to support learning and this will undermine the value of such an important aspect of the university's provision for its students. In the view of the IEP team this is a matter that the university should keep under regular review.

The team considered a number of aspects of student support services and student facilities. The team noted that the university campus consists of five buildings, with eight seminar rooms, five lecture spaces, and three laboratories. In 2002, the university's Senate established the Agora University Sports Club (UASC). Students informed the team that social and cultural activities were organised occasionally, some by the Agora Students' Association (ASA). The university also has its own video conferencing and printing facilities, and computing facilities are updated as appropriate. The team noted the university's view that library facilities are generally fit for purpose, and observed that facilities and library stock were being extended and enhanced as student numbers grow, with funds being allocated to support this modernisation. Students who met the team indicated that areas that they would wish to see improved included sports facilities and library facilities. However, students informed the team that, in broad terms, they were satisfied with learning resources, including accessibility, and that teaching materials, the use made of smart boards and classroom projectors, assisted their learning in positive ways. Even so, students drew the team's attention to the absence of any on-site facility to obtain refreshments or small items of food. Students spoke positively about career guidance and advice, and drew the team's attention to the important work of the Centre for Information on Careers and Counselling.

During their discussions with staff and students, and through consulting the documentation made available, the team took the opportunity to consider arrangements for assessing and testing students' academic progress and end-of-course outcomes. The SER indicated that arrangements for examinations and grading of student work are governed by the university's

Charter and academic regulations. The SER stated that students are assessed each semester by examinations and that the assessment schedule is determined by professors with student involvement, and that use is made of both written and oral tests. Schedules are approved by the Faculty Council 15 days before examinations are held. The team discussed these matters with the students whom they met. The team was told that some 90% of the examinations undertaken by these students were oral examinations. When questioned further, students also indicated that it was not normal practice for them to receive feedback on their performance in such oral examinations unless they requested it or unless they complained about a grade. Students also informed the team that they were unaware of any documented record of the oral presentations they made. In reflecting on these findings the team noted that the students with whom they met were drawn from a variety of study programmes and levels. It is possible that their views and experiences were not necessarily representative or typical of all students. Even so, the views heard by the team give cause for concern regarding how such assessment and testing is used to enable students to improve if no feedback is provided. Further, the team was also concerned that there appear to be no means whereby comparability of standards is made possible from one oral assessment to another. In the view of the team, if there is a lack of variety in assessment methods then this is not in line with good assessment practice. In the experience of the team, sound assessment practice requires variety, objectivity, comparability, and feedback that can facilitate improvement in student learning. Such precepts are incorporated in the relevant sections of Part 1 of the *European Standards and Guidelines*,[1] and the university may wish to consult these as a valuable external reference point for good assessment practice.

On the broader question of the university's overall agenda for change in learning and teaching, the team noted that the university has acknowledged the need to modernise learning and teaching methods and the curriculum. Discussions with staff and students indicated that teaching approaches are moving in the direction of a less teacher-centred approach, and that emphasis was beginning to be placed on more interactive forms of teaching. The team viewed this as an encouraging sign of efforts being made to bring about pedagogic change. Further, the team noted from the SER and supporting documentation that national and European requirements and, specifically, policies such as those linked to the Bologna Process and changes in the national law on higher education are being taken into account.

Even so, while noting these positive indicators, the team noted that the full extent of the Bologna principles has not yet been adopted, and a learning-outcomes approach to learning has not yet been fully implemented and embedded. For example, students with whom the

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[1] *The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG). http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf (last retrieved on 1 July 2014)

team met showed a low level of awareness of the issue of learning outcomes and how this might be linked to assessment and testing. Moreover, the team was not convinced that staff, generally, had an acceptable level of understanding of a learning-outcomes approach to curriculum design and delivery. The team noted that, the documentation provided in advance of both visits included claims that Bologna principles in curriculum design, in the use of a learning-outcomes approach, and in student-centred learning, were in a well-advanced stage of adoption and implementation. However, this was not confirmed by the team's reading of the documentation or in the discussions held during the two visits to the university. Indeed, although having requested further clarification on these matters, the team could find no evaluation or self-analysis of progress made, of steps still to be taken, or of plans to review the success of implementation at a future date. On the basis of these findings, the team **advises** that steps should be taken to ensure that, for each subject and each study programme, all learning outcomes should be clearly identified; aligned to assessment strategies; and appropriate in type and number. They should be assessed, and be transparent to all students.

In reflecting further on such matters, the team formed the view that there remains much scope to improve understanding of how Bologna principles generally, and student-centred learning specifically, might be developed and taken further forward. For example, some of the discussions between the members of the team and UAO staff revealed that there was a relatively low level of understanding amongst some staff of modern concepts of student-centred learning. With this in mind, it appeared to the team that the university might wish to make use, for staff development purposes, of some of the ideas, interpretations, and discussions relating to student-centred learning that can be found in the EUA publication *Trends 2010: A Decade of Change in European Higher Education*.[2]

Notwithstanding this advice, the team was encouraged to note the developments underway at UAO to introduce the Moodle e-learning platform in order to encourage innovation in the use of technology to support learning and to complement face-to-face teaching. The team noted that staff training is being planned to support staff in using the Moodle platform, and that a user manual has been developed.

As part of their discussions on the enhancement of learning and teaching, the team's enquiries pointed to the absence of structures to support the enhancement of learning and teaching and academic practice. Though the team noted that guest lectures by visiting professors are held on a monthly basis, and that occasional workshops are led by the more experienced of the university's professors to enable staff to share experiences of academic practice and the enhancement of learning and teaching, in the team's view more can be done

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[2] http://www.eua.be/publications/eua-reports-studies-and-occasional-papers.aspx; (last retrieved on 1 July 2014)

in this area. There are examples of good and innovative practice in student-centred learning (such as problem-based learning, case studies, interactive learning, soft skills and employability, and the use of Moodle for pedagogic purposes) that should be shared more systematically and this sharing should involve students. Therefore, the team **recommends** that an annual university-wide educational conference for learning and teaching should be organised for the purpose of sharing and disseminating innovative ideas on student-centred learning.

Finally, in reflecting on all of these matters, the team was pleased to note the loyalty of students to the university, and students' appreciation of the approachability of teaching staff. The team also noted that students viewed UAO as making available staff who are well-trained, specialised in their field, and who interact well with business and the external world. Students indicated that they chose UAO, as a private university, in preference to other universities, including state universities, because of such positive characteristics.

4. Research and knowledge transfer

As noted in section 2, since its foundation UAO has had a double mission focused around education and training, and applied research. In the documentation provided to the team, and through discussions involving senior managers, the university made clear its determination to extend its research profile. The team took the opportunity in both visits to pay close attention to these matters. The team was informed that, as in other areas of the university's activities, it is influenced in research aspirations by strategies and requirements at national level. In this case, the prominent bodies are the ministry in charge of higher education, the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS), and the National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education (CNCSIS). The team noted that the university's research strategy, approved by Senate, is supported and complemented by annual operational plans proposed by the Faculty Council. This strategy, together with other documentation made available for both of the team's visits, gives priority to the establishment of viable research teams and research centres, the establishment of a doctoral school, encouraging research activity amongst all academic staff, and seeking opportunities for external research partnerships and external research funding.

The team heard from the university that the emphasis placed on research has brought benefits in terms of high-level training, finance, and infrastructure. However, from the team's perspective, though scientific research activity is a high priority, the volume, outputs, and scope of such activity are still low. The team also noted that though the university has been successful in attracting external funding for various projects, including some involving international collaboration, this externally funded project income does not include funding for research *per se* but is more focused on organisational development initiatives and building infrastructure capacity. These findings and observations no doubt reflect the profile and relatively short history of UAO. The team's view was confirmed in meetings with academic staff whose primary responsibilities were in teaching and whose research outputs were low. The IEP team learned that while the proportion of time allocated to teaching and research varies between members of academic staff, with some professors being more deeply involved in research than others. The team was informed that heads of departments monitor the research outputs of each individual member of staff, with the expectation that an individual should, on average, publish three papers per year. From discussions with teaching staff it appeared to the team that this target was not met in all cases.

While making the foregoing comments, the team also noted that over the period of the past five years, research performance was on an upward curve, albeit a gradual one. For example, the team observed that *ISI Web of Science* listings had improved, that external partnerships had grown, and that activities such as international conferences, edited proceedings, and in-house journals, had been developed. The team noted that staff publications tend to be focused on the university's five in-house peer reviewed journals, whose editorial teams

include prominent external academics, some from outside of Romania. Nevertheless, the team recognised that it is unusual for a small university to have several journals listed in the *ISI Web of Science*. The team was also interested to learn of the activities of the university's four research centres and the research teams that are linked to them. These centres consist of the Agora Research and Development Company, a private limited company with its own independent legal status; the Italian-Romanian Research Centre; the Centre for Research in European Studies; and the Regional Centre for Preventing and Combating Trans-border Crime. These research groups are encouraged to seek external funding. Linked research projects, in which interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research are encouraged, are required to reflect UAO's mission and priorities. The team heard that research teams are active in academic departments through seminars organised for dissemination purposes.

The team noted the central role played by the rector in terms of leadership of research and in capacity building. The team learned that, in addition to his established track record in Business Informatics, as illustrated by a successful international journal and the organisation of a high profile international conference, the rector has initiated academic and research links in both India and China. The team observed that the rector is also taking the leading role in plans for the establishment of an Agora Doctoral School and a number of doctoral programmes. Here, the team noted the university's enthusiasm to make progress with its aspiration to establish a doctoral school, and viewed this as a key element of UAO's research agenda. The team learned that the rector's goal is to create the necessary conditions for doctoral programmes in law, management, and informatics by around 2016. This goal also aligns with the president's aspiration to improve the university's position by 2020. However, the team noted that the timescale for establishing doctoral schools remain uncertain. Even so, the team was told that the university has recently been approved for the supervision of doctoral students and already has a number of staff qualified to supervise at this level. The university plans to supplement this by growing supervision links with international partners.

In reflecting on all of the foregoing matters, the team endorses the university's cautious approach to growing research and to pursuing initiatives and priorities where it has the capacity and opportunities to do so. But, in the view of the team, in the interests of efficient use of resources, the university should, as far as possible, develop its research activity and doctoral studies in fields and subject areas where there is existing provision in study programmes at Bachelor and Master's levels. In looking to the future, UAO will no doubt wish to continue to make realistic assessments of what can be achieved in the medium term for growing research and in applying this in the context of business and the professions, so as to identify priorities that are achievable.

However, with regard to this, from their deliberations the team concluded that the potential opportunities for knowledge transfer and applied research links with regional businesses, to support innovation, have not yet been fully recognised or exploited by the university. The

team note that if the goal of the university is to play a key role in the region and to stimulate regional development, then knowledge transfer and consultancy have an important role to play in choosing research projects. This also has the added potential of generating income for the university. The team noted that the university has commenced its thinking in this area, and were informed of various ideas that are being discussed, such as seeking contracts with regional enterprises to solve specific problems, stimulating entrepreneurial start-up and spin-off companies, and using existing internship arrangements to involve students in knowledge transfer initiatives. With regard to student participation in applied research, the team believes that the university should ensure that a more consistent approach to broadening such opportunities could be adopted. In reflecting on these various matters, this all requires clear planning and firm targets. Accordingly, the team **advises** that in prioritising its aspirations in research for the next three years, the university should include firm plans for income-generating applied research opportunities for knowledge transfer, consultancy, and business solution agreements with regional businesses.

5. Service to society

In their enquiries on engagement with the wider society the team noted that the university has made good progress in establishing connections with the region and local community. The level of interest amongst the business and commercial community and among public organisations continues to grow. From the point of view of corporate identity, this augurs well for the future of the UAO "brand". In this respect, the university's general strategy is well aligned to regional development in the fields in which it specialises. This will serve UAO well going forward in its efforts to prepare specialists with the necessary attributes required by the labour market, and in ensuring the innovative spirit that will enable it to contribute to research and development in the region. The team noted the potential constraints faced by the university, such as the challenging economic situation in the region, and the need to overcome accreditation timescale constraints in developing new provision. In addition, there seem to be limited "in company" training opportunities, given the tendency of larger companies to send employees abroad for training or to provide their own "in-house" training programmes. However, the team also observed the willingness of UAO to adapt its educational provision to meet the education and training needs of employers and other stakeholders.

To assist them in their deliberations on service to society, the team held fruitful discussions with external stakeholders. Some stakeholders were themselves UAO graduates, and were able to confirm to the team that they received good preparation for their current careers, including work-based learning opportunities. External stakeholders also testified to the quality of the teaching and indicated that UAO teachers, some of whom are also from the business world, have high expectations of students. The external representatives also spoke positively of the various links and partnerships that have been established between the university and their organisations.

The team provided stakeholders with an opportunity to indicate any areas where they felt that improvements could be made. Here, though acknowledging the lengthy timescales that are involved in external programme accreditation processes, external stakeholders indicated that there was scope for the further diversification of study programmes to meet market needs. Further, they expressed the view that they needed students with the ability to apply knowledge; therefore, any efforts on the part of the university to enhance practical skills and competences and to intensify work-based and work-related learning would be welcome.

While noting all of the optimistic signs outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the team formed the view that there remains scope for the university to strengthen its efforts in the area of service to society, not least in engaging with and involving external stakeholders even more directly in university matters. This could include strengthening external involvement in governance and organisational development arrangements, and in matters relating to the

development of the course portfolio, and in identifying what is distinctive about the profile and attributes of the UAO student and graduate.

The team noted that there is an external member of the Committee for Strategy Reform, that there are over 50 partnership agreements in place with public and private organisations, and that steps have been taken for university departments to meet more regularly with people from the business world. The team also learned that use is made of an electronic database for tracking student employment destinations. But the team noted that there is no regular survey of employers and business people, and that more use could be made of data on regional labour market trends. Further, in the view of the team, there is potential for making greater use of alumni in working with students and by exploring future income generation or sponsorship opportunities.

In reflecting on all of these matters, the team's findings point to a university whose responsiveness on a regional level is good, and where there is a strong emphasis on internships and work-based learning, on student employability, and on lifelong learning. However, in the view of the IEP team, if the university is to be successful in these areas over the longer term, then the visibility of Agora must be strengthened even further. In working towards achieving this, communication with the regional business sector needs to be improved and must become more open. With this in mind, the team **advises** the university to take advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from industry, business, and commerce, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the founder-owner and to the UAO management on opportunities for promoting the regional interests of the university and on related strategic matters. Further, the team believes that the university's senior figures, such as the president, rector and dean, should themselves seek opportunities to be represented on the governance bodies and organisational structures of public and private organisations across the northwest region.

6. Quality culture

The team noted that, to date, much of the university's efforts in quality assurance have been devoted to meeting external licensing and accreditation requirements. The SER stated that quality assurance arrangements are in accordance with national law and in particular the regulatory expectations of ARACIS. It also stated that quality policy and practices are compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). In exploring these matters, the team was particularly interested in understanding how the organisational approach to quality functioned, the extent to which it provided a coherent system with appropriate mechanisms for internal evaluation and review, and what the university's future intentions were in respect of quality management policy and methodology. The university's documentation listed a number of objectives deriving from UAO policy on academic quality. The team noted from the SER that, in accordance with the *UAO Strategic Plan*, the university wished to implement quality standards for both teaching and research, and for administrative activities and that training is provided for all staff. The team observed that emphasis is being placed on the quality assurance of study programmes and on various forms of evaluation, but that the quality assurance of research is less well-developed and is as yet insufficiently integrated with research activities.

In furthering their enquiries, the team considered the structures and governance arrangements that have been put in place to support quality assurance and quality management. The team noted that oversight and control of most quality matters is exercised jointly by a commission of Senate, the Internal Audit of Quality in Education and Research Commission (IAQERC), and the Quality Assurance Department (QAD). The former plays an important role in decision-making on quality policy and objectives and ensures compliance with rules of procedure and with ARACIS standards. In turn, the QAD, through its director, develops operational procedures based on the recommendations of the Senate Commission, paying particular attention to evaluation of the teaching process and student satisfaction with teaching. The team noted that both the Faculty Council and Department Council discuss quality issues, such as those relating to teaching, learning resources, and research, but that there are no study programme councils.

These arrangements appear to the team to have served the university well as it has set out in the early stages of its quality journey and as it has sought to make progress in the direction of a quality culture. However, in the view of the team, there remains quite some progress to be made by the university. UAO's arrangements for quality assurance currently include emphasis on the *European Standards and Guidelines*, Bologna principles, and ISO 9001 on the one hand, and arrangements for student representation and various types of evaluation on the other hand.

The impression gained by the team is that, to date, while use is made of quality evaluation and quality audit, the overall approach is somewhat fragmented. From the team's perspective, the various mechanisms and methodologies do not appear to constitute a coherent system. Further work and reflection is needed on each of the components of the emerging quality assurance arrangements.

Several examples are put forward here to illustrate the team's perspective and findings. First, it was not clear to the team how the ISO 9001 model was to be used going forward, or whether staff understood the university's intentions with regard to this model. In the documentation made available on quality in preparation for the team's second visit there was no reference made to this model. Second, although a helpful mapping and "gap analysis" of Part 1 of the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) was presented to the team in preparation for their second visit, the staff groups whom the team met showed little awareness of the ESG or its systematic use and implementation by the university in planning its approach to quality assurance and quality management in areas such as assessment, internal review, or the use of learning outcomes. Therefore, in the view of the team, there is more work to be done in mapping the university's quality processes against the ESG. Third, while there are reasonable opportunities for student representation (both formal and informal), there is limited formal feedback to students on issues they raise in the various evaluations they complete. As the university develops its procedures it should build a quality system that involves and fully engages students in all quality review and evaluation projects and initiatives, and also in curriculum review and development. (Student evaluation is discussed in more detail below.)

Reflecting the foregoing assessment, two recommendations are put forward. Noting the need for a quality assurance model that is appropriate for academic purposes, the team **advises** the university to further undertake work in its mapping exercise against the *European Standards and Guidelines*, particularly to address "gaps" in areas such as internal monitoring and review, and assessment of learning outcomes. This should be accompanied by the development of a university quality assurance manual, and a programme of university-wide briefing and training to obtain full awareness of the QA manual and ESG across the university, and should also take account of the diversity of the student profile. Further, the team also **recommends** that consideration should be given to amending the end of semester student evaluation form so that students are invited to comment not only on teaching, but more directly on their learning experience and on whether they have achieved the intended programme learning outcomes.

The team took the opportunity to consider a number of student-related quality issues, including student attendance, and student "drop-out" and withdrawal. Regarding "drop-out", students indicated that the principal reason for student withdrawal was related to inability to meet the costs of tuition fees which, the team was informed, are high relative to Romanian

living standards. While the team was told by university managers that the scale of this problem is lower at Agora than at other universities, particularly some state universities, in the view of the team members this is an issue that the university should continue to keep under review by using its quality monitoring procedures. Further, though levels vary between study programmes, the team heard from students that student attendance can reach levels as low as 25% to 50%. Though the team recognised that many students have paid work commitments in addition to study commitments, and while students can access teaching materials through the use of the Moodle platform, this again is a matter that the university should review on a regular and proactive basis through using its quality monitoring procedures and its mechanisms for ensuring effective student engagement.

The team examined the use made of various types of teacher and student evaluations. Under procedures approved centrally by the Senate, the performance of each teacher is evaluated periodically. This includes self-assessment by the teacher, peer evaluation, outcomes of student evaluations, and results in the ranking of all teachers by the relevant Head of Department. The process is linked to the university's promotion policy. Key managers, such as the rector, dean, director of social science, have access to the results of the evaluations, as does the director of quality assurance. The team paid close attention to one aspect of these evaluation procedures, namely, the end of semester evaluation by students of teaching and teachers. The team noted that the evaluation forms enable students to give anonymous feedback about classes, seminars, and teacher involvement, and also allow them to add comments. The team learned that forms are evaluated by managers and that results can be accessed by the president, the rector, and the dean, with a view to bringing about improvements in teaching quality. However, on the basis of their discussions with students and staff, the team formed the view that this process, which focused largely on teaching-related matters, is being used mainly for management purposes, and that while issues are fed upwards in the organisation for consideration by managers and high-level committees, there is no mechanism for formal feedback downwards to students on actions being taken. Indeed, students indicated that while some members of staff discussed issues raised by students in these surveys, most did not. Further, when asked if they were made aware of any changes being made as a result of their feedback, students with whom the team met indicated that this was a variable picture at best. Accordingly, the team **advises** the university to reflect on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university and its departments, for informing students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

7. Internationalisation

The team noted the importance attached by UAO, going forward, to the wider European and international dimension. This is reflected in the university's structures, which contain an office for international relations and an office for international programmes. The former is responsible for facilitating the growth of links and partnerships, while the latter is responsible for mobility. The team learned of various international links, partnership agreements, and networks from which the university and its staff and students are able to benefit, but observed that they are inevitably relatively modest in number. In part, this reflects a lack of resources historically; for example, for stimulating mobility. Nevertheless, the team was interested to observe that academic and research links have recently been intensified with partnerships now established in China, Russia, and India. The team noted that these new initiatives complement existing links in Europe and the USA. In addition, individual members of UAO staff have ongoing academic partnerships, including visiting professorships, in various foreign countries. The university also hopes to form partnerships that will lead to the delivery of joint degrees, though this will require ARACIS approval.

The low level of activity in international mobility (for staff and students) attracted the close attention of the team, as did the lack of courses delivered through the medium of the English language. Bearing in mind these matters, the team was encouraged to see that an Erasmus Charter agreement has now been completed for the period 2014-2020, and that plans are being put in place for prioritising student and staff mobility. The team noted that targets have already been identified by the university for the academic year 2014/2015, though the challenge of attracting incoming students is a considerable one. Even so, in the view of the team, this is a step in the right direction and will assist the university in building its reputation abroad.

The team took note of the university's stated plans to make some study programmes available through the medium of the English language at the earliest opportunity. It is intended that the university will first offer a Bachelor and then a Master in Management, with delivery being undertaken in the English language. The university is aware that if it is to realise its aspirations to establish an international reputation, and to make itself attractive to foreign students and incoming visiting professors, then these are matters that require supporting actions. For example, though the team was informed that some staff have reasonable competence in the English language, staff who met the team indicated that they needed training on foreign language skills. However, in reflecting on all of these issues, the team wishes to encourage the university to make early progress with its aspirations towards further internationalisation.

In considering on all of these matters the team recommends that as the university takes forward its plans for internationalisation it will benefit from identifying clear priorities and targets and from ensuring clear criteria for agreeing formal partnerships.

8. Conclusion

The recommendations of the team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the university's future success and strategic development and are designed to encourage UAO to continue to prioritise teaching and research. The team hopes that these recommendations will contribute to the university's efforts in delivering a quality learning experience and to the overall sustainability of UAO.

Governance and institutional decision-making

- The team recommends that the university builds on its work to date on strategic planning and develops a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and related targets and objectives against which progress can be measured and monitored in a transparent manner, on a yearly basis, using appropriate data. This should be supported by a published Annual Report, which highlights the major achievements for each phase of the planning period.

- The team also recommends that the university should develop an open method for identifying and agreeing a risk management and reputation management plan that makes use of information and views obtained from all internal and external stakeholders.

Learning and teaching

- The team advises that steps should be taken to ensure that for each subject and each study programme, all learning outcomes should be clearly identified; be aligned to assessment strategies; and be appropriate in type and number. They should be assessed, and be transparent to all students.

- The team recommends that an annual university-wide educational conference for learning and teaching should be organised for the purpose of sharing and disseminating innovative ideas on student-centred learning.

Research and knowledge transfer

- The team advises the university that in prioritising its aspirations in research for the next three years, it should include firm plans for income-generating applied research opportunities for knowledge transfer, consultancy, and business solution agreements with regional businesses.

Service to society

- The team advises the university to take advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from industry, business, and commerce, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the founder-owner and to the UAO management on opportunities for promoting the regional interests of the university, and on related strategic matters.

Quality culture

- Noting the need for a quality assurance model that is appropriate for academic purposes, the team advises that the university should undertake further work in its mapping exercise against the European Standards and Guidelines, particularly to address "gaps" in areas such as internal monitoring and review, and assessment of learning outcomes. This should be accompanied by the development of a university quality assurance manual and a programme of university-wide briefing and training to obtain full awareness of the QA manual and ESG across the university, and should also take account of the diversity of the student profile.

- The team recommends that consideration should be given to amending the end of semester student evaluation form so that students are invited to comment not only on teaching but also more directly on their learning experience and on whether they have achieved the intended programme learning outcomes.

- The team advises the university to reflect on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university and its departments, for informing students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

Internationalisation

- The team recommends that as the university takes forward its plans for internationalisation it will benefit from identifying clear priorities and targets and from ensuring clear criteria for agreeing formal partnerships.

Envoi

The team has enjoyed learning about the characteristics of Agora University and its role as an entrepreneurial provider of higher education in the fields of law, management and social science. It has been an interesting experience to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders the challenges faced by UAO and the university's efforts to address constraints and to explore future opportunities. We believe the university has the potential to take successful steps in its next stage of development.

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to UAO's President, Professor Mişu Jan Manolescu, and to the Rector, Professor Ioan Dziţac, for inviting the team and for the warm welcome provided during their two visits. Special thanks are also offered to the Dean of the University and chair of the self-evaluation team, Associate Professor Gabriela Bologa and her staff for their excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process.