AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ
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FSE-POSDRU/2/1.2/S/1
Nr. 5647
Data: 30.05.2011

ARTIFEX UNIVERSITY BUCHAREST
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT
2011

Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the ARTIFEX University, Bucharest as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 11 May and Friday 13 May 2011. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of ARTIFEX University focusing on the main points of continuous improvement of quality and future development aspects with outlining the main dimensions of present and future challenges of the university. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of the institution. During my stay in Bucharest with the help of the colleagues of ARTIFEX I had the possibility to insight the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and collect every useful and important information about the university. My report is roughly following the structure of the self evaluation report of the institution.

Background

The Bucharest ARTIFEX University continues the tradition which started in 1919 when the Central School for Co-operative Studies has been established and later it became the Academy for High Co-operatives Studies and continued to operate in various forms in the next decades. In 1992 the ARTIFEX University has been set up as a higher education and research institution with a private, non-profit character, and the university started to establish the present educational programs and specializations. The Bucharest ARTIFEX University – as an institution of high education, legal person of private law and public utility, integrant part of the national system of education. The university has the next authorized and accredited faculties and specialties:

- Finances and Accounting Faculty – with accredited specialties of Finances and Banks and Accounting and Management Information Systems;
- Management-Marketing Faculty – with accredited specialties of Management, Marketing and Economics of Commerce, Tourism and Services.

It is very important to point out that the university has traditionally strong connections with different types of co-operative organizations and also helps the students with offering them jobs in the frame of cottage, consumers' or credit co-operative organizations; as well as small and medium companies and other economic organizations.

As a relatively young university with strong traditions, the main aims and priorities of the university from the beginning have been the next:

- Permanently increasing the quality of activities in order to operate ARTIFEX as a well operating institution at national and international level and integrate it in the European Higher Education System;
- Permanently increasing the efficiency and competitiveness of the didactic field;
- Developing scientific research;
- Developing, perfecting and diversifying the study programs with satisfying the demands of the labor market parallel with satisfying the demands of the students;
- Permanent and dynamic development and continuous modernization of educational programs, professional framework, and infrastructure.

As a founding member of the European Co-operative University, the Bucharest ARTIFEX" University is attending a series of researching programs, investigations and debates as well as exchanges of students and didactic staff with similar institutions in European and non-European countries. It is important to point out that ARTIFEX University as a private institution has to cope with the challenges of a competitive higher education market, national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields and it has to offer attractive study programs which are really based on the demands of the students. We could say that the students are the key elements of these processes: besides the donations, sponsorships, grants and

other researching resources they are the ones who 'produce' the own resources and make the system sustainable with their fees.

It seems that the 'answers' of ARTIFEX for these permanently appearing challenges are basically successful. The long traditions and experiences, the prestige and competences of ARTIFEX University show the importance of the institution in the internal and international environment.

Management, organizational structures, Quality Assurance Management

According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of ARTIFEX University have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures and other organizational units of the university have a transparent, logical structure and it is suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution rely on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of the different types of programs, teaching staff and other personnel of the university. The operative management is provided by the Rector, Pro-rector, Scientific Secretary of the Senate, the Administrative General Director and the Chief-Secretary, who are coordinating the different activities of the institution.

Assuring quality in education and research is an essential component of the university management, as a permanent process and monitoring of all the didactic, education, scientific research and other activities of the university, in accordance with the legal provisions. The university has also adopted the Strategy of Development (2008-2012) as well as the Program of steps for increasing the quality of the training-educational and research processes, as a result of the recommendations issued by the ARACIS institutional evaluation performed in 2009. The IT processes also seem to be an integral part of the strategies.

According to the self evaluation documentation of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of ARTIFEX University is on a good level. The teaching staff in ARTIFEX University seems to have proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which certainly results a good level of performance in

education processes. For the university year 2010-2011, the ARTIFEX University disposes of a professorial body for education and research formed by 77 didactic staff, out of which 59 having the basic norm with the institution (76.63%). Out the total of 59 didactic personnel 5 are professors, 16 are readers, 14 are lecturers, 24 are assistant lecturers. It is important to point out that many staff members are candidates for a PhD degree.

International visibility and collaboration

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of ARTIFEX these connections seem to be in order as national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning at ARTIFEX. As a founding member of the European Co-operative University, the Bucharest ARTIFEX University is attending a series of researching programs, investigations and debates as well as exchanges of students and didactic staff with similar institutions in European and non-European countries. Co-operative studies which appear in many fields in ARTIFEX seem to be very unique in many aspects. ARTIFEX University pays attention for collaboration focusing on countries where these fields also appear in educational programs and research activities.

Material resources

The Bucharest ARTIFEX University is located in its own building in Bucharest, and owned strong material base for human resources training: classes and seminars halls, laboratories, sport hall and field, library, offices, storehouses, utilitarian rooms, hostel, canteen, cultural and scientific centre, medical center. There are 4 laboratories holding 95 computers, with a network required by the educational process. The library of the ARTIFEX University is operating within the headquarters of the university. Besides the rooms and endowments required by management and educational processes, the ARTIFEX University also disposes a sport hall of a surface of 130 sqm, endowed with fitness apparatus, rib stalls, fix bar with mirror, mattresses, ping-pong table and a sport terrain of 1000 sqm surface. The sport hall is provided with locker rooms and the necessary utilitarian rooms. The students' hostel counts for over 6,684 sqm surface, having 8

levels and an accommodation capacity of approximately 400 students. All the University students take the advantage of the accommodation in the hostel, where they are provided with proper conditions, among which Internet access, TV cable and reading rooms.

The institution also has a publishing house which is a relevant advantage for ARTIFEX University ensuring good possibilities and provides good conditions for students and for staff members, too. During the period 1996-2011, under the care of the ARTIFEX Publishing House a number of 112 titles of university textbooks, seminary books and case studies have been published, all of them being provided with ISBN code and issued in an appropriate number of copies printed.

Beside the above mentioned material resources there is also a unique initiative of the university which can be found in the basement of the main building: there is 'mini-museum', an interesting fashion exhibition there. Although this exhibition is not connected to the profile of the university but it is an interesting experience where visitors could see clothes from different ages.

The equipments and installations in connection with the educational process seem to be an important priority and supply the demands of students well. The investment and development is permanent, the present processes despite of the permanently changing financial conditions seem to be promising. These investments and developments are financed through the institution's own sources. On the whole the university meets the demands of European standards but it is important to continue the work to invest permanently to maintain its present favorable infrastructure. I think that these elements are in a good level, and meet the demands of the students.

Educational programs

There are no un-authorized or non-accredited educational programs or specialties in the frame of the ARTIFEX University. Starting with the university year 2005-2006, ARTIFEX University has implemented the Bologna Process principles, although the third level, PhD studies are 'missing' right now from the educational programs.

I consider as a remarkable issue the implementation of the two levels of the Bologna Process with undergraduate and Master's Study programs at ARTIFEX University which allows the institute to connect to the European Higher Education Area. In Hungary there is also a possibility for a two-year long advanced vocational program (at ISCED level 5B) which is available on an optional basis prior to first cycle (Undergraduate/License University Studies) programs leading to advanced vocational qualifications. Such programs can count towards any ISCED 5A programs up to a maximum of 60 credit points. As I have experienced (if my information are correct) these types of vocational programs are not existed at ARTIFEX University (and probably missing from the Romanian higher education). Maybe in the future that would be a kind of diversification to organize such programs like sports communicator, education assistant, advertising manager, etc. which already exist in the Hungarian system. I think there is also a possibility to organize professional higher education training programs at ARTIFEX University in the future (at ISCED level 5A) which can follow any Bachelor's or Master's degree and they involve specialization in a field of study and with a certificate at the end, but do not lead to another degree.

Financial activity

As a nonprofit institution, the university is self financing, establishing funds for activity from the annual school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships, interests, and from the works of the research contracts, scientific contracts, etc. According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university the financial activities – incomes and expenses of ARTIFEX are well-balanced. It is important to point out that without state support ARTIFEX has to cover its expenses with its own incomes which means that the most significant part is coming from student fees, and from some other outside resources, extra budget incomes. The present number of the students and the present amount of fees paid by them seems to be enough to sustain the university processes in a good level.

According to the received information, it is important to maintain the present average number of students in the future to make the system sustainable. To maintain this situation is an important challenge, as the number of students becomes lower and lower because of the demographical loop (just like everywhere in the Central Eastern European countries), and the negative effects of

the financial crisis which could reach (or it is possible that it has already reached) higher education, even the private education institutions, too. If this scenario is going to happen in the near future, the decreasing number of students and decreasing incomes result that ARTIFEX would be forced to find other outside resources, extra budget incomes, or has to find new ways, education programs, which could maintain the present situation in a long term as a strategic orientation.

It is important to point out that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. One of the most important part of this 'attraction' are the different policies in connection with tuition fees: educational programs offered by the ARTIFEX, the studies are free of charge for all the students of the year I; and for students coming from the Placement Centers the studies are free of charge all over the school duration of the bachelor university courses. Additionally, all the students who recorded by the end of each year of studies a mean over 9.50, take the advantage of free of charge studies during the following year. There is also a financial assistance for students as granting of scholarships and other forms of financial support as well as other social assistance to the students attending the day studies. Additionally, ARTIFEX fees seem to be lower than the average level of fees of the competitors.

Students, public information

It is favorable process that growing number of students participates in master programs of the university. In the university year 2009-2010, and 2010-2011, more than 50% of the graduates have been admitted to master studies programs.

Besides the earlier mentioned 'attractions' ARTIFEX University is offering jobs to a series of its graduates in the frame of the cottage co-operative system, according to the conventions concluded with the National Association of the Cottage Co-operation, the Territorial Associations of the Cottage Co-operation and the Co-operative Societies, in the frame of the private system through employers. According to the data and the meetings with the students as a part of the evaluation process large share of the University graduates manage to find their place in the labor market.

There is a Centre for Counseling and Career Guiding within ARTIFEX University. This is offering to the students, master students, didactic staff and non-didactic personnel a room for formatting, communicating and informing on the new educational technologies, a place for culture, opening, meeting and professional integration.

The University is also offers wide range of social, cultural and sportive services for students. The University hostel can accommodate more than 400 students. As a result of re-organization there are four students per a room with improving the access to the utilities (sanitary group in each room, joint offices on each floor, access to Internet, multi-media endowments, reading hall within the hostel, etc.).

The public information can be found on the ARTIFEX University site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language. Although an English language homepage already exists, it would be important to actualize it permanently and widening the reachable quantity of information.

During my visit I had the possibility to meet with some students of ARTIFEX University and I found them very open minded, energetic and intelligent. They seem to be very loyal to their university and pay a lot of attention to their studies. I have also experienced that the students I met speak very good English.

Research activities of ARTIFEX University

ARTIFEX University plays an important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In ARTIFEX University, just like everywhere in the recently joined European countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities. In consideration of the institution

prestige, ARTIFEX University organizes conferences which are very important for the national and international visibility of the institution and beside the 'outsider' lecturers and participants it gives possibility for the students and teachers from ARTIFEX to present the results of their research activities. Starting with the university year 2009-2010, the University is publishing its own review of economic studies and researches, ARTECO.

Although there are several international connections of the University (United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Venezuela, Lithuania, Ireland, etc.) which are operating quite well, and the enter to the ERASMUS is proceeding right now, it is recommended to enter into more bilateral contracts with European and also with non-European universities and increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities.

Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. On the whole ARTIFEX University develops its activity within a competition market including service offers for education, research and consulting and meets the individual's educational and professional training specific standards, as well as the community social and economic development standards and European standards of education and scientific research. I recommend the level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- I suggest developing more international links and collaborations to support international research activities and encourage students and staff members taking part in exchange and mobility programs if the ARTIFEX is going to be entitled to take part in ERASMUS.
- ARTIFEX University should continue to invest in the infrastructure and facilities when own resources, and any other funds allow.
- ARTIFEX should organize PhD programs in the near future connecting to the educational programs.

- The maintenance of the present favourable situation and competitiveness is an important challenge and appears the key element of the sustainable future of ARTIFEX.

Finally I would like to thank to the Rector of ARTIFEX and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Bucharest. At least but not last special thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

Pécs, 05-18-2011

Dr. Iván Zádori PhD
Assistant Professor
University of Pécs
Faculty of Adult Education and
Human Resources Development