Mieczyslaw W. Socha   **Warsaw, 5 March 2020**

Report of the Foreign Expert for the "1 DECEMBRIE 1918" UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA

1. Introductory remarks

UAB is a relatively young and quite small university. Its five faculties offer 59 fields of study covering all higher education cycles. The number of students is 5681, whereas that of tenured staff is 164. It plays important role in the local and regional socio-economic development. Its activity was twice evaluated by ARACIS experts in 2009 and 2015, attracting positive remarks and a high confidence rating.

My observations contained in this report are mainly based on the information and analyses that are provided in an extensive, 142-page Self- Assessment Report (SAR). Moreover, SAR comes with several hundreds of annexes which are in Romanian only. The views that were presented at my meetings with the University's stakeholders are another source of information in this respect. They include the following groups: the Rector and Vice-Rectors, student representatives, Student Union, representatives of University staff, employers and graduates, Internal Institutional Commission responsible for drafting up the Self-Assessment Report, Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance at the University level (CEAC-UAB), Faculties Quality Assurance and Assessment Commissions (CEAC-F), Quality Assurance and Assessment Commissions at the level of study programs (CEAC-PS) , Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy, Centre for Scientific Research, Centre for Technology Transfer, Centre for International Relations, The Centre for Career Information, Counselling and Guidance (CICOC), Centre for Image and Marketing.

I would like to take this opportunity and thank the President of ARACIS Prof. Iordan Petrescu, and the Rector of UAB Prof. Valer-Daniel Breaz for inviting me and being so hospitable. I would also like to extend my gratitude to those I spoke with for sharing information, experiences and views at our meetings. My particular thanks go to Professor Adela Socol UAB's Vice-Rector who remained in regular touch both before and during the site visit, and to Adina Petrescu for her very effective interpreting.

2. University Vision, Mission and the Strategy

Findings: The authors of SAR define the University's vision in the following way: *"The vision of "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia is focused on the imperatives of performance and efficiency of the activity, with emphasis on promoting QUALITY, COOPERATION and COMPETITIVENESS"* (SAR, p. 83). It is the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan that presents the Vision more specifically and in more detail. UAB wishes to become an exemplary higher education institution operating at local and regional levels by setting up poles of excellence geared towards social and economic development. UAB's ambitions are better described in the Mission. It provides information (see University Charter) that UAB offers *"education and advanced scientific research, generating and transferring knowledge to*

society" and the University is to *"contribute to local, regional and national development and to European integration"*. The relationship between education and labour market needs is strongly emphasised *("UAB assumes the mission to contribute to the formation of the highly qualified human resource necessary for the socio-economic and technological development at the quotas imposed by the labour market"*).

The Mission is reflected in five-year strategic plans and annual operational plans. The Rector also prepares his own five-year Management Programme. The faculties draw up their own annual plans. Separate development strategies concerning a. o. scientific research, quality assurance and the deepening of the internationalisation process have also been created. The strategic planning system is supported by set of individual policies in the field of education quality, scientific research, internationalisation and academic staff development. UAB's plans are monitored and corrected by the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy. The 2016-2020 Strategic Plan lists 21 objectives covering five priority areas: Education, Scientific Research, Internationalization, Active involvement in the community and Institutional management. They are aimed at the improvement of education quality, continuation of the internationalisation policy and the enhancement of organisational culture (SAR p. 85). However, SAR makes no reference to organisational culture in UAB's strategic priorities in the area of the Institutional Management. Each of the objectives has its own tasks. Just like other Romanian HEIs, UAB has developed no long-term development plan spanning for more than five years, even in relation to investments. It is a very positive thing that strategic plans are posted on UAB's website and that both internal and external stakeholders participate in their preparation.

Comments: The Mission and Vision statements quoted above put emphasis on three universal functions of the HEI, but they do not clearly determine UAB's place on the domestic and international education market nor do they identify the University's unique features. The Vision, Mission and Strategic Plans are available to all stakeholders and general public however, the actual knowledge of development priorities demonstrated at our meetings by the academic community is not sound enough. When interviewed, various groups of the academic community exposed certain inconsistencies concerning the perception of the University's future position. Therefore, the authorities of the HEI should put more effort to formulate a more attractive vision, mission and a development strategy to be disseminated among its stakeholders. This is all the more recommended that SWOT is quite emphatic about growing competition on the education market and the University's poor visibility abroad.

For an external observer, three factors determining UAB's position on the education market are important. The first is strong links with the region, where more than 70% of students come from, confirmed explicitly in statements from external stakeholders, especially employers. Second, there are limited possibilities of recruiting top faculty and, consequently, conducting advanced scientific research that is internationally recognized (confirmed by publications in the best international journals). Therefore, it is worth considering the proposal to change the UAB profile towards the regional applied sciences University offering high-quality education and research focused on the needs of the socio-economic environment.

The medium-term strategic objectives and their tasks also need some improvement because they are far too vague. Here are some examples: *O.1.6 Logistical and financial support of the specialized practice, O.2.2. Training and development of human resources involved in scientific research, O.4.4. Collaboration with universities in Romania and abroad, increased significance of university seminars/laboratories*. Neither KPIs nor people responsible for their

implementation have been identified. It is not known which funds have been allocated to which tasks. Some of the above elements are to be found in annual operational plans listing such items as: tasks (85), instruments/resources, accountable persons, time limits and forms of implementation including implementation indicators. However, few indicators have been quantified. Moreover, there is a dominant tendency to use absolute rather than relative values, for example numbers of admissions (not their percentage growth), numbers of study programmes, number of research projects or publications. And even here there is no allocation of funds to individual objectives or tasks. This vagueness is also evident in strategic plans prepared by individual units.

Analysis of strategic plan implementation is limited to annual plans whose results are published. It became clear at the meeting with stakeholders that there was no assessment procedure for five-year plan implementation, although according to SAR (p. 96) the Senate performs - if necessary - periodical analyses of strategic plans. Strategic planning would be much more effective if the University had multi-variant development plans spanning over periods in excess of five years. At this stage it is difficult to see, also from the financial perspective, to what extent the University's long-term aspirations are feasible. As SWOT warns against some risks, it is indispensable to determine their probability of occurrence. The documents attached offer some evidence of the application of risk-based management, however, that evidence is not mentioned in SAR.

As to the implementation of the strategy, it is noteworthy that apart from being stopped, the dropping number of students evident before 2014 has grown by 28%. This is all the more important as the majority of UAB's income is linked to the number of students. The problem is that the University it has not been active enough to secure different sources of income, including research projects (just over 2%) and paid post-diploma programmes. In the academic year 2018/2019 just one post-graduate programme was offered. The University's passiveness in relation to creating an attractive education offer for its students is quite evident. The number of fields of study remains quite stable and their profile - traditional (linking to one scientific discipline), almost no interdisciplinary programmes are offered which would involve the potential of several faculties and use the effect of university synergy. The authors of SWOT also point out the inefficiency of the mechanism of changes to the education offer structure.

Suggestions for improvement:
- Define your Vision and Mission more specifically to offer a clearer determination of UAB's ambitions and aspirations concerning its future position on the regional, national and international education market.
- Formulate UAB's objectives in a measurable way in your five-year plans, assign KPIs to them as well as indicate person/units responsible for their implementation. Identify your planned funds.
- Improve the mechanisms of informing stakeholders about your strategic priorities.
- Introduce regular analyses of five-year plan implementation based on KPIs.
- Develop long-term planning spanning over a period exceeding 5 years, create a number of development scenarios and incorporate scenario risk assessment.

3. **University Governance**

Findings: UAB's organisational structure is in line with solutions characteristic of typical European universities. The University has 5 faculties and 11 departments, 4 doctoral schools, several functional centres and a dozen or so university-wide structures to support the work of

the faculties (functional centres, university administration units). The management system combines elements of academic and corporate governance. The first of the two types is mainly represented by collegial bodies (Senate, Board of Directors, Board for Doctoral Studies, Faculty Council; Councils of the Departments, Councils for Doctoral Schools). It is also characteristic of the University that there are a number of academic advisory commissions dealing with various aspects of academic life (education quality, research, internationalisation, etc.). There are as many as 13 research centres and over 60 quality assurance committees. Parallel to that, there is also line management with its individual managerial positions such as the Rector, Vice-Rectors, Director of the Board for Doctoral Studies, Deans, Vice-Deans, Directors of Departments and Directors of Doctoral Studies. Interim evaluations of UAB's governance system to which ISO 9000 provides a framework are performed by internal auditors. It is a very commendable thing that representatives of internal stakeholders (also students) and external stakeholders (employers, graduates) are guaranteed participation in the work of UAB's collegial bodies. The existence of the Honorary Senate which includes 20 external stakeholders (but without foreign ones) advising on strategic issues should be noted with great appreciation.

Academic integrity is ensured by a solid formal basis. The University relies on "The University Code of Ethics and Professional Deontology" as well as "The Guide to Ethics and Academic Integrity in UAB". The Council of University Ethics and Management (CEMU) and the University Ethics and Deontology Committee which present annual reports are also in operation. However, it is clear from the report that such phenomena as corruption, mobbing, sexual harassment, discrimination, plagiarism, cheating, etc., are extremely rare or absent at all. According to SAR, "*during the period analysed, 2015-2019, no situations were identified that would impose sanctions for the members of the academic community*". This seems quite unlikely which is further confirmed by the opinions of some stakeholders presented at our meetings. The above committees are quite passive, that is they wait for someone to report a case of unethical conduct rather than investigate that kind of conduct on their own initiative. This may mean that the formal system of academic integrity fails to identify such cases. The Academic Integrity System would be more complete if student interests were represented by an independent ombudsman.

Comments: The University's organisational structure is changing and being gradually adapted to UAB's strategic objectives and to reflect external changes which is evidenced by the establishment of the research centres and the Centre for Technology Transfer. My discussion with stakeholders allows me to draw the conclusion that the current governance system is deemed effective and that no significant changes are to be expected. Also, stakeholders believe that due to rigorous and meticulous state regulations regarding the internal structure of the universities, they have little room for manoeuvre in changing the management system.

However, a closer look at UAB's organisational structures reveals that they are somewhat stick-in-the-mud and that the same tasks are duplicated. It is not always clearly defined how they relate to each other. For example: the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy vs. Internal Audit Office vs. Quality Assurance Committees or research centres vs. faculties and departments.   An analysis of the composition of collegial bodies indicates that some members appear in many roles. Eg. Vice-rectors are members of the university advisory committees. This can lead to conflicts of interest and the subordination of collegiate bodies to the university managers. There are not many examples illustrating horizontal cooperation between UAB's faculties and departments (this weakness is mentioned in SWOT). The existence of many research centres is not quite conducive for promoting interdisciplinary research. The existence of many internal regulations and formal procedures is one of the

consequences of UAB's extensive organisational structure. The mechanism of allocating funds to strategic objectives and individual units is rather vague. For example, UAB's faculties and the Student Union have no budgets of their own.

The inclusion of a number of stakeholders in the governance process facilitates participatory governing model but it can also reduce management effectiveness as the interests of various groups of the academic community are divergent and a compromise has to be worked out in a long period of negotiations. Although in practice numerous groups of University employees are involved in the work of various commissions (in one case - Decision No. 1715/23603/11.10.2019 - a commission was composed of as many as 43 persons), it does not guarantee a better understanding of UAB's strategies, policies and procedures. It is surprising that the effectiveness of stakeholders' work in collegial bodies has not been analysed so far. SAR only mentions that the involvement of the alumni organisation is weaker. The system is probably overly regulated and not quite comprehensible for all those concerned, the number of internal controls is too high and the reporting that accompanies them - too frequent.

The existence of a large number of managerial positions may be quite a burden to those occupying them and it may reduce their time that should be spent on teaching and research. These weaknesses were already pointed out in the EUA experts' 2015 report. It has to be emphasised that those in managerial positions and those participating in the work of collegial bodies, including UAB's commissions, are not offered much training which is why their work may be little effective, at least at the beginning of their term of office. The process of preparation for those roles should be more professional which is particularly true for students. Consequently, stakeholders are sometimes unaware of how the University works and which tasks are performed by its units.

There is no evidence proving that comprehensive and regular analyses of UAB's organisational structures and of the governance system are performed. Therefore, no wonder that some UAB representatives are of the opinion that the governance system is overly regulated, not too clear and even bureaucratic. "Poor managerial and organizational culture in certain structures and groups" is one of the weaknesses revealed in the SWOT analysis. In conclusion, the governance system may be seen as one with little flexibility so necessary for modern education and innovative research.

It is also debatable whether or not as many as four doctoral schools with their 165 students (and 4 school heads) are needed in a situation where the number of potential thesis supervisors is only 14. The schools could be combined to form only one, which - apart from economic benefits - would facilitate the effect of synergy stemming from interaction between PhD students representing various disciplines. The creation of a platform on which the concepts of PhD theses as well as interim research results could be presented would facilitate the improvement of the methodological quality of PhD theses undergoing the scientific criticism of various specialists.

Modern management is based on integrated systems collecting, processing and analysing information. SAR mentions that the computer programme (University Management System) is not yet fully operational which is confirmed in the SWOT analysis saying that UAB's management software is poorly integrated. Moreover, the management system is mostly oriented towards teaching and learning processes and staff policies. SAR makes practically no reference to the credibility of information collected during stakeholder surveys and to its usefulness for the process of decision making.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Develop a procedure for periodical analyses of the functioning of UAB's organisational structure and its governance system and eliminate the phenomenon of overlapping of tasks between various committees and organizational units.
- Consider involving foreign partners in your governance processes, at least in an advisory capacity, for example in strategic, research and development and internationalisation matters.
- Consider simplifying the organizational structures of UAB and reducing the number of collegial bodies.
- Eliminate the phenomenon of multiple membership of university managers (and the accompanying conflict of interests) in academic committees.
- Analyse the quality and reliability of information underlying the decisions you make.

4. **Quality Assurance Policy and Quality Culture**

Findings: UAB's ambitions relating to quality assurance are defined in several documents, including the Declaration for Quality of the Rector and the University Senate, Internal Quality Assurance Policy and the Quality Code. The internal quality assurance policy aims "*to continuously improve the quality of the teaching, research and managerial process at all relevant levels and functions*". Quality culture matters are not directly based on the education-related priorities of the five-year strategic plan, whereas the issues of quality enhancement appear in annual executive plans. In relation to research, UAB strives for research quality improvement and the identification of poles of excellence.

The quality management system is based on ISO 9000. The absence of a reference to EGS'15 is quite striking. 4 system procedures and 114 operational procedures covering the key areas of UAB's operation have been formally identified. However, even quality assurance committees members were not able to identify system procedures. The institutional structure of IQA is extended and includes, among other things, the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEAC-UAB), and its equivalents at faculty (CEAC-F), and field of study levels (CEAC-PS). Each department has a person responsible for the implementation of quality policy. It gives a total of 66 commissions dealing with quality assurance. Apart from that, the University also operates the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy offering substantive support to those commissions. Its activities are aimed at the development of quality culture and the permanent improvement of quality standards at institutional level. Moreover, UAB operates internal audit policies with relevant structure. Its tasks are largely identical to those of the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy, as among other things they cover such areas as teaching and learning methodology, examination, research and student services.

The above centres publish annual activity reports. The interviews I held with representatives of the quality assurance bodies reveal that some tasks are duplicated and the circulation of information between them is not very clear.

Comments: It is a highly commendable thing that the internal quality assurance system is integrated as it covers not only teaching and learning but also scientific research and university governance. The University's efforts to build an extensive regulatory structure and those of a supporting nature evident at different levels of UAB's activity deserve special mention. Internal Quality Assurance System (IQA)'s strong point is the full representation of stakeholders, including students, graduates and employers. Information obtained during the meetings shows that they actively participate in the work of these committees. This provides a

basis for a better understanding of strategic objectives linked to this area and facilitates the development of quality culture. IQA-related activities are monitored, and its short-term outcomes are presented in annual reports prepared by the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy, and in the Rector's annual reports. Regulations covering IQA and the above reports are posted on the University's website and at the above Centre which is not a common practice.

The willingness to undergo external evaluations performed for bodies other than ARACIS is a very positive thing. IEP EUA experts performed an institutional evaluation in 2014 and the ISO system has certificates issued by the Romanian Quality Assurance Society. Some units are evaluated by other national institutions, for example the National University Research Council. The University could be more active in the field of applying for international accreditations by professional associations. It is truly tremendous that the University is involved in quality assurance experience exchange with other national higher education institutions (SAR p.130)

On the other hand, however, there are certain shortcomings concerning the implementation of the quality policy. Above all, quality culture is not enough emphasised in the quality policy. The development of quality culture is not rooted deep enough in the academic community. Moreover, as the meetings proved, stakeholders have serious problems with understanding the mechanism and principles of the internal quality assurance system. SAR (p. 95) states that „*the quality assurance procedure is part of the strategic management*". However, when asked questions relating to the above, representatives of quality assurance committees and other stakeholders were unable to indicate any links. It seems that knowledge of the quality management system in line with ISO and ESG'15 principles and of how they are linked in the University's quality management system is rather fragmented. It would be advisable to present the current quality assurance system in the context of ESG'15. Poor information about the long-term objectives that UAB wishes to achieve in the field of quality assurance may be one of the reasons. IQA does not undergo holistic and periodic evaluations from the perspective of its main strategic objectives. The absence of KPIs makes any assessment of progress in the improvement and enhancement of UAB's functioning quite difficult. That is why stakeholders are unable to clearly identify IQA's weaknesses and strengths.

A relatively poor self-analysis skill evidenced in SAR may serve as confirmation. This extremely long document (as many as 142 pages) repeatedly quotes identical information and facts, is dominated by lengthy descriptions of internal regulations but lacks thorough analysis and reflection concerning the solutions presented, mechanisms and their results. It reduces its usefulness for strategic management. These weaknesses are also evident in reports issued by the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy which are overloaded with basic information about the University. The SWOT analysis that is presented in SAR contains too many (sometimes as many as 15) factors of various importance, which is why it is really difficult to see what the real strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities are. I would encourage UAB to perform such analyses for each area of its operation. It also seems that the system of collecting quality information is not linked strong enough to information concerning the implementation of strategic plans (sadly, without KPIs) and collected during follow-ups. To sum up, it has to be said that the quality loop has not been closed and the last two stages of the Deming Cycle - Check and Do - are relatively least developed.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Perform a holistic review of the solutions in this field from the perspective of progress made in relation to quality strategic objectives and quality culture development.
- Improve your feedback mechanisms, especially those applicable to feedback from students and external stakeholders.
- Make the implementation of the quality assurance system more professional by offering specialist training in quality assurance.

5. Study Programs and Student-centred learning (SCL)

Findings: The Strategy of UAB (objectives 0.1.1 - 0.1.5) announces the promotion of modern education oriented towards the needs of students and the labour market (to increase employability) and stimulating interactive teaching methods as innovative methods of learning outcomes evaluation. This is ensured by including representatives of students and all other stakeholders in the process of designing, monitoring and reviewing of study programmes. Study programme analysis using benchmarking is performed by the Quality Assurance and Assessment Commissions at the level of programmes at least once a year. The Centre for Career Information, Counselling and Guidance (CICOC) regularly performs graduate career tracking.

SAR quotes examples of teaching techniques involving students in the teaching/learning process. All students and not only their representatives may express their views on education quality and its infrastructure in end-of-term questionnaires. The level of student satisfaction with the quality of education and the conditions in which it is provided is very high – over 80%. The system of in-service teacher training and peer reviews concerning academic teachers help disseminate good teaching practice and improve education quality. The best students are able to develop their research skills in research clubs and participate in research. The provision of varied forms of support to underperforming students is a very commendable thing. Offering support to students in the form of peer tutoring by the Student Union is a very good practice. Students at risk of social exclusion, those coming from poor families, representing ethnic minorities and affected by disabilities are monitored and receive special care. Student reports focussing on teaching and learning are an important way of making student views known.

Comments: Beyond any doubt, UAB's activities are in line with the idea of student-centred learning. The involvement of students in decision making focussing on study programmes and the teaching/learning process merits special mention. As external stakeholders (employers, graduates) participate in commissions dealing with study programmes, the adaptation of the educational offer to the needs of the labour market is easier. The Rector informed that annual meetings with representatives of employers are organized at the university level, at which changes in study programs and syllabuses are discussed. Other stakeholders provided examples of the active participation of employers and graduates in the work of their committees resulting in the formulation of proposals for changes in study programs. This is confirmed by graduate employability statistics and employers whose opinion on graduates' skills demonstrated on the labour market is generally very positive. UAB's wide range of assistance provided to various student groups in the process of learning is another strength of the University. However, a it should be noted high and growing drop-out rate (14% for BA, 19% for MA and 9% for doctoral students). It points towards rather poor effectiveness of the supporting system (see also SWOT analysis). UAB representatives are explaining this phenomenon of growing emigration abroad, problems with paying for study costs and insufficient preparation for studies. UAB teachers' wide participation in mobility programmes and visiting professors giving short lectures facilitates the transfer of good teaching practices.

All those steps would be more effective if the University developed a clearly defined learning and teaching framework explaining what the implementation of SCL entails at the present stage of UAB's development. During the meetings there were large discrepancies in the assessment of the implementation of strategic goal 0.1.5 regarding interactive teaching techniques. Some teachers suggested that this concept could cover 75% -80 BA classes and 100% Master's classes, while others considered about 40% of classes. SCL pace is limited both by external (state regulations) and internal circumstances. For instance it was pointed out the legal difficulties in creating interdisciplinary programs and closing existing ones. Among the latter, a relatively high number of students per one academic teacher (almost 35 (31) in 2015/2016 21 (25.4) and the number of teachers per one study programme (2.8) are quite striking. In reality, student groups at some faculties are even larger. The actual chances for choosing individualised learning pathways are limited. The percentage of optional subjects is about 20 and information obtained during my meetings makes me think that students are not willing to choose freely from courses provided outside of their home faculty. A significant part of the teaching process is still offered in the form of lectures and compulsory courses (over 20 hours per week). Although students complete questionnaires evaluating their academic teachers, students have no access to the individual results of such surveys, therefore, there is no feedback mechanism helping to improve the learning process.

Moreover, the number of full time professors employed by the University is relatively small - scarcely 20 - and has not changed for the last years. The staff policy focusses on the consolidation of its own teaching staff which does not help introduce new teaching techniques usually applied by newly employed teachers from other HEIs. The number of practitioners involved in the teaching process is small, because, due to the requirement to have a PhD degree, not everyone can teach on their own. The same can be said about the number of students studying part of their programme at other national and foreign universities. A high number of teaching hours, pressure on publishing and teaching staff participation in various collegial bodies do not help to implement innovative learning and teaching techniques.

SAR does not provide much information about learning outcomes and those demonstrated on the labour market. The review of English language syllabuses reveals many faults in their construction, including the formulation of intended learning outcomes. For example, their description is almost identical for Microeconomics and Macroeconomics and includes formulations such as: *To provide an introduction to fundamentals of micro (macro) economics; the course is intended both for graduate student who wish to develop a solid background in game theory* .... Nota bene among topics there is no mention of game theory. In the syllabus for Microeconomics, the youngest item of literature was published in 1920 and the remaining ones in the 19th century. Such carelessness is surprising, because the UAB developed a guide on, among others, formulating learning outcomes and according to many declarations, the content of syllabuses is systematically analysed. This example indicates the need to analyse the syllabuses to what extent the latest knowledge is transfer into the teaching and learning processes. It seems that student achievement assessment system is not analysed (except for end-of-term examination results). The same is true for the quality of theses and their reviews. The actual graduate employability rate by field of study remains unknown, as because my interlocutors provided divergent information. Market research would benefit from surveys administered to employers, at least to those who employ most UAB graduates.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Formulate a teaching and learning framework taking account of practices helping the implementation of the student-centred learning principle.
- Introduce regular periodical analyses of student achievements during study and at the end of it.
- Increase the diversity of academic teachers by employing a larger number of business and industry practitioners as well as visiting professors from partner HEIs.
- Launch interdisciplinary programmes provided together with partner HEIs.
- Improve the quality of English version syllabuses.

6. Research orientation

Findings: Both the University's Strategy and a separate document - the Scientific Research Strategy 2014-2020 - contain tasks appertaining to this area. They are further elaborated on in annual operational plans. They are aimed at the improvement of research quality, identification of poles of excellence in research and the development of interdisciplinary research. Therefore, to provide support to research, the University operates an extensive structure whose elements are: the Commission for Scientific Research, Technological Transfer, Projects and Resources, Centre for Scientific Research and the Centre for Technology Transfer. The Centre for Scientific Research is responsible for the implementation of research strategy. There are 13 research centres linked to scientific disciplines. Their work is coordinated by the Vice-Rector. The Centre for Technology Transfer is a liaison unit between the University, industry and business. According to SAR, the University is actively seeking new grants (out of 21 applications lodged in 2019, 17 received funding), is currently involved in three interdisciplinary projects and cooperates with foreign partners. However, there is no much information in SAR about any projects implemented together with business partners. The best BA and MA students are offered research grants and the best researchers can get a reduction in teaching loading to one lecture per week. However, it is quite striking that the level of expenditure on research is relatively low - about 2% of UAB's annual budget.

About 35 scientific conferences are organised every year and the University publishes its own scientific journals. UAB's employees publish not only in national but also international journals cited by international bibliographical databases. There is no information in SAR about the number of publications in IF journals. The number of registered patents is small – one per year according information provided during site visit.. Researchers are helped by way of providing them with information about the grants they can apply for, preparatory training before preparing scientific articles in foreign languages (proofreading service). It is a very interesting solutions that the University has 13 scientific consultants to whom one may turn for advice on research. Students from 17 research clubs participate in research and the results of their work are presented at conferences (168 in 2015-2019) and published (90 over the last 5 years) in journals and books.

Every year, research quality as well as at the above centres undergo an assessment. Its results are posted on UAB's website and in the Rector's report.

Comments: Compared with the previous evaluation findings, there has been significant progress in the organisation of research, applying for research funds and in the support system for researchers. However, there is an intriguing discrepancy between the University's growing

research expenditure, growing number of grants and the ensuing results measured with - for example - the number and quality of publications. In 2015-2019 the number of grants implemented annually went up from 11 to 17, whereas research expenditure was not reduced, its nominal values grew. Within the same period the number of published monographs went down from 90 to 36 and in foreign journals - from 12 to 7, the number of ISI indexed Journals publications shrank from 52 to 38 (over 2015-2018), ISI Proceedings from 32 down to 23, BDI from 236 to 58. SAR does not comment on that data. One of the possible explanations is that the higher number of students had caused growing demand for courses and less involvement in research. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the organisational structures that support research as some of them were established only last year. According to UAB representatives, the reduced number of publications results from a greater concern for their quality, as evidenced by the growing number of citations from 125 in 2014 to 253 in 2019, in publications listed in Web of Science. UAB stresses its role in the region but practically, there is no much research done for business and local communities.

Suggestions for improvement:
- Promote the establishment of interdisciplinary teams in your research policy.
- Tie your research programme and internationalisation policy more closely.
- Be more active in developing cooperation with local and regional businesses.
- Establish a business incubator promoting the establishment of start-ups and cooperation between students representing various fields of study.
- Provide stronger encouragement in your staff policy to publish in renowned scientific journals, especially in those appearing abroad.

7. Internationalization

Findings: UAB's international cooperation is undergoing intensive development. The issue of internationalisation is reflected in the University's five-year and annual strategic plans. The strategy and policy of internationalisation are laid down in separate documents. The Strategic Plan (objective 3.4) promises - among other things - "*development of the intercultural dimension of the University…*". Various forms of internationalisation abroad are being developed. The development of internationalisation at home is more modest. The University has concluded 235 agreements with foreign partners from all over the world, mainly from Europe. UAB is actively seeking funds for mobility programmes, such as Erasmus + or Norwegian grants. The Centre for International Relations offers substantive and logistics support. The University is an active member of the University Network of International Relations Centres where other members include similar centres from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Poland, Russia and Turkey. Foreigners wishing to study at UAB are offered a year-long Romanian language course. They have a choice of four BA programmes and two MA programmes provided in English. Foreign students are provided with an English-language guide. Training for academic staff to raise their competences in this field is a thing worth mentioning. It covered English Language for Internationalization of Higher Education Services, Intercultural Communication and the Internationalization of Curricula. Students are able to learn Chinese as they are offered support by the Chinese Embassy and the University of Brashov. To achieve the objective of improving UAB's visibility abroad, its website is also provided in English and Chinese.

Comments: UAB's active approach to the internationalisation policy has increased the University's internationalisation abroad. The number of students and academic teachers going

to study and work at foreign HEIs is growing. Only in 2019, over 60% of academic teachers and over 38% of support staff went to foreign universities as part of the Erasmus+ programme. In 2015-2019 there was a 40%-increase in the number of foreign students. However, this is less than 6% of the total student population in 2019. Therefore University plans to increase the recruitment of Asian students. A large number of foreign partners raises the question of the actual priorities of the internationalisation policy, including benefits derived from cooperation with other HEIs whose profile is similar to that of UAB.

The University successfully develops internationalisation at home. There are relatively good supply of courses provided in English and by visiting professors. There has been a radical growth in the number of foreign students within 2015-2020. It would be useful to involve representatives of foreign partner HEIs in university governance or at least in the work of academic advisory bodies. Also, more evidence is needed, that intercultural and global values are included in the curriculum.

The international promotion of the University leaves a lot to desire. UAB's English (and probably Chinese) language version of the website is quite poor when compared with that provided in Romanian. Even information about the English-language programmes are limited to technicalities (programme duration, fees, ECTS) and not to substantive issues such as intended learning outcomes, curriculum structure, tutors, etc. UAB's faculties, departments and other units do not have websites in foreign languages. Therefore, as a foreign observer, I find it difficult to pinpoint UAB's comparative advantages, research priorities and current scientific projects. Despite the above critical remarks, the University's activity in the area of internationalisation is well-developed and makes UAB stand out from the rest of Romanian HEIs.

Suggestions for improvement:
- Consider the combination of your final examination in foreign languages with obtaining professional certificates confirming language skills.
- Introduce the requirement to possess a certificate confirming at least C1 foreign language skills when recruiting new staff.
- Involve your students in courses provided in foreign languages offered online by partner HEIs.
- Considerably expand your webpages in foreign languages.

8. Final Conclusions

Making final conclusions based on limited sources of information is always risky. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that since the previous external evaluation the University has made considerable progress in the development and implementation of solutions characteristic of good European HEIs. UAB's stable and engaged leaders and its highly committed academic community are one of the sources of that success. Internationalization, cooperation with stakeholders, especially employers, transparency of all processes are examples of UAB's strengths.

There are three general issues the University management should more reflect. First, as the only HEI in Alba Iulia, UAB plays an important role in the development of the city and its region. This role should me more emphasised in the implementation of UAB's strategic objectives concerning education and research. Second, the University's management system requires further changes aimed at increased flexibility and adaptiveness to radical changes to the national

and international environment. Third, the operating internal quality assurance system should be more oriented toward quality culture development and less control oriented, and more attention should be given to reflect on the long-term effects of existing internal solutions. Fourth, the system of information and communication with internal stakeholders should be strengthened.

To sum up, I think that UAB deserves ARACIS's accreditation and a HIGH DEGREE CONFIDENCE rating.