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

BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

EVALUATION REPORT

December 2012

Team:

Finn Junge-Jensen, chair

Dieter Timmermann

Tatjana Volkova

Mikko Leino

Dionyssis Kladis, team coordinator





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the *Bucharest University of Economic Studies* (BUES). The evaluation visits took place from 11 to 13 June 2012 and from 21 to 24 October 2012 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching - Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

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

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

1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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



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

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

1.2 The BUES and the national context

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies was founded by Royal Decree on 6 April 1913, under the name the Academy of High Commercial and Industrial Studies, its current name dating since 1967. The BUES comprises eleven faculties which cover a wide range of study fields in the areas of economics and business administration, as follows: a) accounting and management information system, b) administration and public management, c) agrifood and environment economics, d) business administration in foreign languages, e) commerce, f) economics, g) economics cybernetics, statistics and informatics, h) finance, insurance, banking and stock exchange, i) international business and economics, j) management, k) marketing. The above faculties comprise, according to the Romanian Law for higher education, departments, research centres, doctoral schools and postgraduate schools.

In the academic year 2012-2013, the total number of students in the BUES was 22,031 (14,002 at Bachelor level and 8029 at Master level) while the number of academic staff was 775, resulting in an average “student/teacher ratio” of 28.4. All study programmes offered by the BUES (16 bachelor programmes for full-time students, 9 bachelor programmes for distance learners and 95 Master programmes) are accredited in accordance to the Romanian legislation by the national quality assurance authority (ARACIS). Apart from the accreditation procedures, the study programmes of the BUES were evaluated in 2011 and ranked according to Romanian legislation. The following fields were included in category A (best performing programmes): administrative sciences, economics, business administration, finance, economic cybernetics, statistics and informatics, accounting, international business and economics, management and marketing, while law was included in category D. Furthermore, following the national classification procedure for Romanian universities, the BUES was included in the category described as “universities of advanced research and education”.

The performance of the BUES in the national accreditation, classification and ranking exercises reflects a highly positioned university in Romanian higher education. In parallel, it justifies the ambitions of the university as they are reflected in its vision “to hold a leading position in the field of economic and administrative sciences in the classification of universities from Central and Eastern European countries and to achieve high



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competitiveness in the European and international area for all the undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes it provides" (SER, p. 4).

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the self-evaluation group consisting of 13 members and chaired by Prof. Ion Stancu, Vice-rector for scientific research, development and innovation. The self-evaluation group prepared the self-evaluation report (SER) and sent it electronically to the evaluation team along with the related appendices on 14 May 2012. In addition, a whole series (119 items) of additional documents, mostly in Romanian, were uploaded by the university on the electronic platform of the project.

The evaluation team appreciated the work done in the SER, which covered almost all issues and was supplemented with an impressive amount of informative appendixes and annexes. In this regard, we considered the SER a comprehensive, informative, frank and critical analysis which reflected the strong commitment of the people of the BUES towards improvement, presenting at the same time the vision and the expectations of the BUES for the future.

The two site visits

The two site visits of the evaluation team to the BUES took place from 11 to 13 June 2012 and from 21 to 24 October 2012. During the two visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of the BUES with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders, namely:

- With the leadership of the BUES
- With the leadership, with members of the academic staff and with students from 6 (out of the 11) faculties of the BUES
- With members of the academic senate and the administrative council
- With the deans of all faculties
- With key administration staff
- With student representatives
- With a representative group of international students
- With outside partners.

There were also intense and in-depth discussions with the Rector, Professor Pavel Năstase, and with the self-evaluation group. Therefore, the evaluation team had the opportunity to meet the broad spectrum of actors at the BUES. All meetings and discussions were efficiently organised by Professor Roxana Sarbu who acted as the liaison person between the university and the evaluation team. The logistics of the two site visits were carried out by Mrs. Florina Ionita on behalf of UEFISCDI.



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The evaluation team wants to express its gratitude to the people of the BUES for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues during our meetings. Finally, the evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Professor Pavel Năstase, and his team for the organisation before and during our two visits and for their warm hospitality.

In between the two visits the university provided the evaluation team with requested additional documentation.

The evaluation report

The present evaluation report is harmonised with the aims of the IEP as outlined above. In this respect, it focuses on the current strengths and weaknesses of the BUES regarding its capacity for change in view of the surrounding opportunities and threats and expresses a number of recommendations that may be taken into account for the future development of the university.

The evaluation report takes into account all the data provided to the evaluation team by the SER and corresponding additional information. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the overall analysis, the comments and the recommendations are based on two intense but rather short visits; one two-day preliminary visits and one three-day main visits. The evaluation team also collected a significant amount of information on the Romanian higher education system, especially in regards to the recent reform, but it is not possible for the analysis to go into such details. The comments and recommendations, therefore, will be confined mostly to major issues of concern within the BUES. The recommendations, together with the corresponding reasoning and analysis, appear underlined in the text of the evaluation report, while a summary of recommendations is presented in the last section of the report. Finally, it should be noted that throughout the body of the evaluation report, many ideas of the evaluation team appear, which we do not consider as real recommendations but as reflections which the BUES may consider.

1.4 The evaluation team

The evaluation team consisted of the following members:

- Finn Junge-Jensen, former President, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, as team chair
- Dieter Timmermann, former Rector, Bielefeld University, Germany
- Tatjana Volkova, former Rector, School of Business and Finance, Latvia
- Mikko Leino, MSc student, Turku School of Economics, Finland



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- Dionyssi Kladis, professor emeritus, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as team coordinator



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2. Governance and institutional decision making

2.1 Philosophy of the BUES: Norms and values/Vision — mission — strategic goals

From the key documents provided by the BUES to the evaluation team, i.e. from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), p. 4 and the Development Strategy 2011-2020 (DS 2011-2020), chapter two, the university's version is as follows: "BUES aims to hold a leading position in the field of economic and administrative sciences in the classification of universities from Central and Eastern European countries and to achieve high competitiveness in the European and international area for all the undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes it provides. This vision is based on promoting an authentic quality culture, on creating, disseminating and capitalising on top knowledge, the proactive involvement of all the members of the academic community, and on encouraging functional entrepreneurial partnerships which bring national and international benefits."

The above two key documents also outline the mission of the BUES (SER, p.4 and DS 2011-2020, chapter three) and its strategic goals (SER, pp.5 & 6 and DS 2011-2020, chapter seven). For reasons of simplicity, the evaluation does not consider necessary to quote them in the present report. However, it makes sense to quote the so-called "assumed characteristics" of the BUES (SER, p.6 and DS 2011-2020, chapter six), which in fact reflect the intended profile of the BUES as:

- A university of advanced research and education
- An entrepreneurial university
- A university with a high degree of motivation and performance
- A sound work environment that generates high performance in education and research
- A university with international visibility
- A university respecting fundamental human values: morality, ethics, human beings, honest, well-done work, the environment

It is these assumed characteristics of the BUES that the evaluation team is taking into consideration in its analysis and in its comments and proposals throughout the present report.

The evaluation team considers the triptych "vision - mission - strategic goals", as it is outlined in the basic documents of the BUES, as a very good starting platform. The implementation of this platform requires a concrete action plan, and the evaluation team understands that key performance indicators set by the leadership of the BUES for the time period 2012-2016 should contribute to implement the action plan. In this regard, the evaluation team would like to make two comments, which should also be considered as recommendations to the BUES. We believe that **stronger alignment is needed between mission, strategic goals and key**



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performance indicators. We believe that, for example setting a minimum of 50% for performance indicators like the “degree of satisfaction of the students concerning the study programmes” and the “graduation rate” is rather low compared to the vision, the mission and the strategic goals of the BUES. This brings us also to the conclusion that **a better balance may be needed between ambition and reality.** Furthermore, the evaluation team would like to stress also the need for **prioritisation regarding strategic goals and action plan/performance indicators** as it seems that they all form a neutral or horizontal list of goals and indicators. This may be acceptable in theory, but in practice priorities must be set in order to ensure that significant goals are not confused with less important ones.

Given the above “strategic platform” of the BUES, the evaluation team would like to raise the question regarding the instruments that oversee the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the performance indicators. We could not find a concrete instrument of this type. Of course, there is one senate commission for strategies and development, but it is not clear whether it has this task too. Perhaps, **this task should be assigned to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should also have the task to assess the validity of the strategic goals and the respective performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.**

From the various and in-depth discussions with the rector and other key actors of the BUES, the evaluation team had the opportunity to realise that the issue of competitiveness is one of the major concerns in the BUES. From the DS 2011-2020 (chapter four) we can see what the BUES considers or aims to have as its competitive advantage: “The BUES will have as competitive advantage the realisation of master and doctoral programmes, postdoctoral and research programmes, characterised by a high quality level, recognised on the global labour market, competitive on national and international plan.” However, from the various discussions the evaluation team understood that the major concern of the BUES regarding competitiveness is focused within Romania. In the field of economics and business administration they consider the faculties of economics in the various comprehensive Romanian universities as the main competitors, but the BUES feels it has the upper hand in this competition as they are the only specialised university in economics and they also are the first choice for students in this field.

Nevertheless, the evaluation team would like to recall one of the threats listed in the SWOT analysis of the BUES, stating that “the national and international academic market is getting to be highly competitive, especially for the economic sciences universities”. At institutional level, the BUES considers the University of Bucharest and the Polytechnic of Bucharest as its main competitors in Romania; however this competition is rather soft as the three institutions have different profiles.



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On the other hand, the evaluation team realised that the issue of competitiveness with similar institutions in the wider region of Central-Eastern Europe is high on the agenda of the BUES. However, we have a feeling that the BUES has not yet established a benchmarking mechanism in order to manage and handle this type of competitiveness.

In conclusion, **the evaluation team believes that the competitiveness issue should be strongly related to the vision and strategic goals of the BUES. In that sense, the evaluation team recommends that the BUES should focus on the international competitive situation, of course starting from the closer geographic region of Central-Eastern Europe, thus creating the appropriate benchmarking mechanisms to achieve that aim.**

2.2 Governance and institutional decision-making

The general view of the evaluation team is that the BUES has a complicated organisational structure regarding its main functions; governance/decision-making, administration, academic organisation. In this respect, the evaluation team shares the view of the BUES, as illustrated in one of the weaknesses listed in its SWOT analysis, asserting that “the institution has an intricate organisational structure, inadequate to its dynamic innovative mission” (SER, p. 26).

The leadership system of the BUES is rector-centred. The rector appoints six vice-rectors and deans of the 11 faculties of the BUES. He/she presides the Administrative Council, consisting also of the vice-rectors, the deans, the administrative general director of the university and one student representative. According to the higher education law, the administrative council ensures the operational management of the universities and applies the strategic decisions of the academic senate, which is considered the highest decision-making body at university level.

The first issue that the evaluation team would like to point out is the large number of members of the Senate. It comprises 97 members, including representatives of all faculties and following the analogy provided by the law 75% academic staff and 25% students. As we were informed in our meeting with the president and representatives of the Senate, it usually convenes for 15 meetings during the academic year. However, its operation is supported by eight (8) specialised commissions which prepare the proposals for the various issues to be introduced to the Senate.

A second issue, in the view of the evaluation team, is that the rector, the vice-rectors and the deans are not members of the Senate. This means that there is a complete distinction regarding membership between the two major bodies of the university (the Senate and the Administrative Council). However, it seems that the governance system of the BUES has reached an equilibrium state, without any serious internal conflicts. It is important to notice



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here that according to the higher education law, the president of the Academic Senate is not considered a management position (like the rector, vice-rectors and deans), although the Senate is considered a management body (like the Administrative Council and the faculty councils). In this respect, it could be said that the law prevents conflicts and tensions arising within the university.

The evaluation team stressed both issues during its discussions with key actors and bodies in the BUES. No major problems were reported in our meetings. However, the efficiency of the Senate due to its size remains a question for the evaluation team. In this respect, **the evaluation team believes that the BUES might reconsider the membership of the senate regarding the number of its members and not of course its composition.** Regarding this, the evaluation team would like to mention with satisfaction the high importance that the higher education law attributes to the students' involvement and participation in the governance structures both at institutional and faculty level, apart from the case of the Administrative Council with only one student representative participating.

Autonomy and constraints

As it has already been mentioned, one of the aims of the current higher education reform in Romania is to increase university autonomy. In this respect, the universities are allowed to define their vision, mission and strategy; they are also allowed to define their internal structural organisation, their quality assurance mechanisms and to a certain extent, their financial and human resources management; finally they are responsible for curricula design and their implementation.

The evaluation team understands that there is a high degree of autonomy for Romanian universities, the main restrictions applying to issues regarding accountability and public responsibility of the universities. An example of such a restriction is the maximum number of students that a study programme is allowed to enrol, which is defined in the context of the accreditation procedure by ARACIS. However, the universities can decide themselves the number of fee-paying students in every programme having only to respect the predefined maximum total number of students. In this way, the universities can manage/control their income.

The evaluation team observed the problems that the BUES encounters because of autonomy restrictions (financial and human resources restrictions). Some of them are linked to the general economic crisis. An example of this is the fact that no new positions for academic staff are provided to the universities, as the team was informed in their meetings. This has an impact on the student/staff ratio and on the quality of teaching, but it also has an impact on the possibilities of promoting academic staff since promotion is done through pleas for new positions. Another example, that is not linked to the economic crisis and was referred to the



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team in a meeting with external partners, is the fact that experienced people from the business and management sector cannot be invited to give lectures in the context of the study programmes if they do not hold a PhD. And this again has an impact on the need to transfer their real-life experience to the students. Furthermore, the team heard during their meetings references to serious constraints related to the free use of the universities' research money. **For the evaluation team such constraints have a negative impact on the overall performance of a university. In the abovementioned examples, the removal of the restrictions could, on the one hand, offer a serious incentive to the academic staff and, on the other hand, improve efficiency of financial management. All in all, it would increase the ability of the university to develop the necessary strategic changes.**

Financial management

The evaluation team noted that the main problem regarding financial management in the BUES is the centralisation of resources. However, during our second visit we were informed with satisfaction by the rector that a new decision was taken recently which decentralises part of the resources to the faculties. However, **the evaluation team would like to stress the need for balance between centralised and decentralised resources. Part of the resources should be managed centrally and be a policy instrument for the institutional leadership to set priorities and implement the strategic goals of the university. In this respect, the evaluation team also stresses the need for stronger links to be established between strategic goals and allocation of resources within the university.**

Academic structure/academic organisation

The academic structure/organisation of the BUES is also too complicated. There are 11 faculties with 20 departments, 24 research centres and 12 doctoral schools. It is interesting to note that the 12 doctoral schools are affiliated to the faculties but are coordinated by the Council of Doctoral Studies.

The academic structure of Romanian universities is provided by the law. However, the number of academic entities (faculties, departments, research centres and doctoral schools) and their scientific content is decided by the BUES itself. The evaluation team considers this structure strongly fragmented, even more so as the BUES is a specialised institution and not multidisciplinary or comprehensive. How is interdisciplinarity supported by this fragmented structure? How is it possible to ensure critical mass? In our discussions, we heard many explanations for this reality. We heard, for example, that the fragmentation can be explained partly by the large number of students and partly by the history of the BUES. Further on, we heard that the doctoral schools have to be linked with the faculties because they are part of the channel that connects research with education. This channel starts from the Master's level which is under the responsibility of the faculties. At the same time, there is a need for



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coordination and horizontal supervision of the operation of the doctoral schools at institutional level and this is ensured by the Council of Doctoral Studies.

The evaluation team understands that there may be many reasons and arguments for this academic organisation. But, on the other hand, it has to stress two important issues; interdisciplinarity and critical masses. We can see with satisfaction that the first issue has already been raised by the university itself in one of the weaknesses listed in the SWOT analysis presented in the SER (p. 25): "Rigid structure of the study programmes and inadequate interdisciplinary coordination between Faculties that entail few alternatives for students in the choice of optional courses." In this reference, interdisciplinarity is connected with study programmes and learning opportunities for students. Similarly, the issue of critical mass of academic staff for both education and research reasons becomes important especially in times of economic recession. In this regard, **the evaluation team believes that the BUES might reconsider its academic organisation with the aim to ensure interdisciplinarity and critical mass in both education and research.**



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3. Teaching and learning

3.1 Teaching and learning

In its visits to six (out of the eleven) faculties of the BUES and during its discussions with the deans and vice-deans, with members of the academic staff and students, the evaluation team appreciated the dedicated and focused efforts from all actors to redesign both Bachelor and Master curricula and to improve teaching and learning in general.

On the other hand, the evaluation team could not find real evidence on whether the BUES applies a “student-centred learning” approach in its study programmes. In some of our meetings we were informed that the university aims at implementing this approach. However, it seems that it is difficult to change the attitudes of academic staff and to stimulate them in order to apply this new approach. We would add here that genuine implementation of student-centred learning also requires changing the students’ attitudes too. As for the academic staff, **the evaluation team believes that appropriate and effective training is required to achieve this aim.**

Nevertheless, the evaluation team is not sure to what extent the concept of student-centred learning is clearly understood and perceived in Romania and to what extent it is a constituent part of the current reform. In the earlier mentioned background paper “Overview of the higher education system in Romania”, the term “student-centred learning” is given the following content: “Students are considered partners in the higher education institutions and equal members of the academic community.” Undoubtedly, this is a significant principle for the Romanian higher education system, which is already applied accordingly in the collective governance structures and procedures, but it does not correspond to the meaning of student-centred learning. This ambiguity may also explain the difficulties in implementing student-centred learning.

In our meetings at the BUES we had the opportunity to discuss extensively issues related to teaching and learning with various actors. Our overall impression is that, in general, the students are satisfied with their studies, teachers, and university. However, we would like to emphasise one issue that was raised in all our meetings with students. It has to do with the need for practical experience and development of personal skills, including also entrepreneurial skills, and this should be considered a necessary complement to the theoretical courses, which prevail in the study programmes. The need to develop the practical competences of students is of course an issue to be considered in redesigning the curricula and the corresponding learning outcomes. Besides, it is an issue that requires the cooperation of the external partners to the university, i.e. the people of companies and business. In this regard, the evaluation team would like to suggest some practical ideas, as follows:



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- **Increasing the number of internships nationally and internationally which should be considered a constituent part of studies, providing students with more exposure to the workings of a business**
- **Involving students in real-life projects in companies**
- **Inviting experts from the world of business and companies as guest lecturers to the BUES with no obligation to hold a doctorate degree**
- **Developing innovative learning methods, like case studies, case competitions, simulation exercises, business games, etc.**
- **Developing mentoring schemes, with the involvement of students of higher levels of studies and of BUES alumni as well.**

Strengthening the links with its alumni is an important issue for the BUES, which can also be useful in order to improve the relevance of curricula to the reality of the business and corporate world. To that effect the evaluation team considers it necessary that **the BUES should establish an effective procedure for tracking its graduates.**

The link between education and research is a *conditio sine qua non* for a university that aims to be a leading university in both fields. The first link of this type can be created through the students. As mentioned earlier, the research path at the BUES starts from the level of Master's and then continues to doctoral studies. This means that **the students at Master level should have the opportunity and the possibility to get involved in research programmes.** This is something that requires competent academic staff as well as the existence of research projects.

3.2 Students

The evaluation team had many fruitful meetings with students, at both faculty and institutional level. The impression of the evaluation team is that the students are indeed satisfied with their studies, teachers, the university as a whole, and employment opportunities. They are also satisfied with the level of their involvement and participation in university governance. In parallel, they had strong views on how to improve their studies and the overall operation of their university. Our feeling is that we met really mature and committed students. **The only thing that the evaluation team would propose is that the students should be as active as possible in all functions of the university.**

3.3 Academic staff

The evaluation team had the opportunity to realise the dedication and commitment of the academic staff of the BUES. Under the current economic crisis, academic staff shortages may



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become harmful for the quality of teaching and learning, and it is only the commitment of the academic staff that prevents such a situation arising in the BUES. The continuously worsening student/staff ratio results in an increasing teaching overload, which in turn does not leave room for research and competence development despite the dedicated efforts of the academic staff.

The evaluation team would like to stress the need for the leadership of the BUES at all levels **to ensure a balance between research and teaching obligations of the academic staff, considering also the possibility for sabbaticals, and for the development of a motivation policy, which should include a merit-based promotion procedure that will not depend on existing resources, i.e. on the existence of vacant places.**

Finally, the evaluation team would like to praise the BUES for its initiative to establish procedures aiming to improve the teaching and pedagogical competences of the staff. **The evaluation team considers these procedures extremely important for the quality of teaching and would like to stress the need for their further improvement and their enrichment with new approaches related to the concept of student-centred learning. In parallel, the further improvement of these procedures should also integrate the ability of the academic staff to develop the students' practical skills, thus sharing their potential business experience with their students.**



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4. Research

The research activity in the BUES is carried out primarily in the research centres. According to the higher education law, the research centres operate in the context of the departments, and there are 24 research centres in the BUES. The evaluation team considers this number too large, especially in the case of a specialised university like the BUES, resulting in a fragmented structure and consequently a fragmented operation. In this respect, one of our major concerns from the very beginning was to understand the rationale for this large number of research centres and the added value that it produces. From our discussions at all levels we had the opportunity to realise the strong focus by the university on the need to develop research. Furthermore, we were informed that in the research centres the university wants to bring together all the major research activities, improving interdisciplinarity at the same time. However, the evaluation team believes that a fragmented structure results in isolation of research activities at the expense of interdisciplinarity. The evaluation team was informed that the Senate does not favour the idea of concentrating the research activities of the BUES in only two research centres; economics and management. Instead, it favours the current situation of a research centre for each field.

The disintegration of research activities through the large number of fragmented research centres has another even more serious effect, in the view of the evaluation team; it does not allow for the research profile of the BUES to be developed. This is a very important issue especially for a university which aims to be a leading institution in education and research and which aims to excellence in research. The research profile of a university is determined on the basis of the research areas in which it aims to develop excellence. Excellence cannot be developed in a large number of research centres, it requires prioritisation. A university cannot excel in all the research areas it cultivates. It has to realise its real strengths in research and its comparative advantages and then it has to set priorities. These priorities will define its research profile, which in turn will generate the brand name of the university. And it has to be acknowledged within the university community that all educational and research activities in the university will benefit its international reputation based on its brand name and its niches of excellence. In this regard, **the evaluation team recommends that the BUES should define its strategic priorities of areas of excellence in research, reconsidering also the organisation of research within the university.**

The above recommendation does not undermine the **need for the university to provide even stronger support to all individual researchers in terms of money and time, irrespective of and in parallel to defining areas of excellence. This is something strongly recommended by the evaluation team as it is associated with the nature of the universities.** Furthermore, the above recommendation does not disregard or undermine the decision of the BUES to consolidate the research structure into the university context, including also the new structure of doctoral studies. Research has to be linked to education. And this is something



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that brings us to another related comment: it refers to the need for balance between teaching and research activities of the academic staff of the BUES. And it also refers to the need for the involvement of students in research activities at least starting at the Master's level. We have already elaborated on these two issues in the section of teaching and learning, but we consider it necessary to refer to them here in order to show that our recommendation for prioritisation of research is not irrelevant to the need to consolidate research in the university context.

To conclude this analysis on research, the evaluation team would like to emphasise three additional issues: the first issue has to do with the **need for more technical support for preparing competitive proposals for research funding**; the second issue has to do with the **need to improve entrepreneurial and innovation attitude within the university through research**; and the third issue has to do with the possibility of **considering intercultural research as one of the comparative advantages of the BUES**.



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5. Links with society

Establishing strong and close links with society is one of the major aims of any university nowadays, notably because offering services to society is considered the third mission of modern universities, combined, of course, with their accountability and public responsibility. In the case of a university like the BUES, which is specialised in economics and business administration, a significant part of this relationship is directed to the business community, companies and corporate society. This is a two-way relationship and may be either direct or indirect. The direct relationship may refer to fund-raising on the basis of services provided by the university to business and companies (including services provided through research projects). The indirect relationship refers, on the one hand, to the competence-building of graduates regarding their relevance to the needs of business and companies, and on the other hand to the employment opportunities that exist or may exist for the graduates.

The evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the links of the BUES with society, both with the leadership and other actors of the university and with its stakeholders (outside partners) who belong mainly to the business sector. From these discussions we realised that so far the links of the BUES with society are rather weak. In fact they were restricted to internships, summer schools, forums within entrepreneurial projects, partnership agreements, and exchange of visits. The weakest bonds in this link were, on the one hand, the lack of involvement of stakeholders, including employers, in curriculum development, which would improve the relevance of studies to employment, and on the other hand the lack of involvement of stakeholders in governance. The last point is already illustrated as one of the weaknesses of the BUES, as they appear in its SWOT analysis (SER, p. 26): "Insufficient involvement of the stakeholders in both the curricular design and in the university governance."

The evaluation team was informed with satisfaction about the recent establishment of an Advisory Board at the BUES consisting of stakeholders and aiming to fill the gap in the relationship of the BUES with its outside partners. The evaluation team wants to praise the initiative of the BUES to establish an Advisory Board, with members of which it had the opportunity to meet during its second visit to the BUES. From this meeting, the evaluation team is pleased to realise that the joint attitude in the BUES leadership and in the Advisory Board is quite promising for better cooperation in the days to come. From its meeting with the Advisory Board the evaluation team realised also that its members are all BUES alumni. This appears to be a reality in general for the BUES, since most of its outside partners are also its alumni. In the opinion of the evaluation team **this reality offers an excellent opportunity for the BUES to take advantage of and benefit from its alumni building closer links with them.** The evaluation team is aware that contact with alumni is the responsibility of the faculties. Hence, the last recommendation is addressed mainly to the faculties. However the



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leadership of the BUES at institutional level has to take initiatives in order to stimulate the faculties to do the same.

To conclude, the evaluation team would like to stress **the need for the BUES to build closer relationships with society (business, private, public, as well as NGOs). Many of the initiatives to be taken in this respect have already been outlined as recommendations in the sections concerning teaching and learning and research.** Undoubtedly, the establishment of the Advisory Board can prove to be a good catalyst in building closer relationships with society. Furthermore, the stakeholders stressed the need for the BUES to improve its entrepreneurial attitude. This need has also been raised by the evaluation team in the section for research. This should be considered a prerequisite for the BUES to improve its relationship with the business society. In parallel, this should be the basis for the BUES **to place stronger emphasis on its collaboration with other universities as well in similar initiatives, like entrepreneurial activities, start-ups, etc.**



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6. Quality culture

The term “quality culture” defines the overall attitude of a university which focuses on the concept of “quality” and which thus applies to issues like quality assurance, quality assessment, quality improvement, etc. In the context of the IEP’s methodology, quality assurance offers the means through which a university will be in a position to know whether it is doing well and accomplishing its chosen mission and goals. It certainly comes from the necessity of going beyond data, figures, statistics, quantitative elements and it deals with the qualitative dimension. Quality is a central element in European higher education today. Furthermore, it has also assumed a key role in the Bologna Process, while the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG), adopted by the European Ministers in Bergen in May 2005, have built a European perspective and a European context for quality assurance in higher education. It is worthwhile to note that every country participating in the Bologna Process is committed to developing its own quality assurance system in compliance with the above ESG.

For its part, EUA actively encourages its member universities to implement their own internal quality assurance mechanisms and to develop a quality culture shared among universities throughout Europe. As stated in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework”. It is a task therefore for every European university to develop its own structures and procedures ensuring genuine quality assurance.

Referring to the case of the BUES, the evaluation team would like first of all to praise its well organised system of internal quality assurance. This system includes three parallel structures with concrete but distinct roles: a) the Quality Council is one of the senate commissions and has an advisory role to the Senate for the strategy of the BUES in the field of quality; b) the Commission for Assessment and Quality Assurance coordinates and oversees the internal quality assurance procedures and prepares the annual report on the quality of education, which is sent to the ministry and to ARACIS; c) the Department for Quality Management is the administrative unit dealing with all quality issues (collection and analysis of data, coordination and administrative support of various evaluation exercises, etc.). The Department for Quality Management was also responsible for the administrative support of the overall self-evaluation process in the context of the current evaluation by the IEP.

The evaluation team paid specific attention to the consistency of the internal quality assurance system of the BUES to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), specifically with part 1. Of course, the IEP does not aim to judge the compliance of the internal quality assurance systems of the evaluated institutions with ESG. However, the degree of consistency



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is a criterion of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance system. In this respect, the evaluation team had the opportunity to realise that the internal quality assurance structures and procedures of the BUES follow, to a satisfactory extent, the ESG.

The evaluation team is also aware that the BUES, like all Romanian universities, has undergone in the past few years many external evaluations at various levels and for various reasons. We mention them below:

- a) Evaluation by ARACIS (2008), resulting in the recognition of the BUES as “university with a high degree of confidence”
- b) Evaluation leading to the ISO certification for the Quality Management System (2010)
- c) Classification in the category of Universities of Advanced Research and Education (2011)
- d) Accreditation of all study programmes by ARACIS (since 2007-08)
- e) Ranking of study programmes (2011): All programmes in category A except Law in category D

The evaluation team understands that the BUES, like all Romanian universities, has suffered – and still suffers – from an evaluation overload. The reasons are understandable, as they have to do with the need to prevent and improve the quality of the Romanian higher education system. However, the evaluation team also knows that evaluation overload does not necessarily lead to improvement in quality and does not necessarily help in building a quality culture. Similarly, evaluation bureaucracy or punitive evaluations do not help here. In addition, it is true that the current evaluation of the BUES by the IEP is conducted in a difficult phase for Romanian universities (e.g. financial crisis, changes in legislation).

As mentioned earlier, quality culture is not about standards, rankings, or classifications; it is about attitudes, mentalities, and values. Quality culture is not expected to be imposed or regulated or monitored in a top-down approach. Quality culture should be built in a bottom-up approach and then spread within the whole higher education community and affect all functions of the university. However, the involvement of each individual in this bottom-up procedure requires inspiration which in fact acts as stimulation. And conveying this inspiration is a very important role and task for the leadership of the university at all levels.

The evaluation team would like to give an example here, to show that quality assurance procedures do not necessarily create quality culture. The example has to do with the evaluation of courses and teaching by the students. We were informed that at the end of each semester the students fill the appropriate questionnaires for every course. This is part of the internal quality assurance procedures and is in complete consistency with the ESG. We asked students about the impact that this evaluation has on the quality of their studies. They answered that they are not aware of the impact and they added that they do not see the reason for participating in this procedure. This means that the participation of students in this procedure is considered by all (students, teachers, deans) a routine task, instead of being considered an instrument to be used by all involved in order to improve the quality of studies.



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The evaluation team praises the BUES for its internal quality assurance system and for its consistency in following the ESG. However, it believes that a great deal still has to be done for a genuine quality culture to be developed and spread within the whole university. And the leadership of the university should put in even more efforts to achieving this aim.



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7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key issue for a university that aims to play a leading role today at national, regional and international level. The evaluation team had the opportunity to realise that internationalisation is high on the strategic agenda of the BUES and that the awareness of the need for further internationalisation is strong within the university. This awareness was combined however with the acknowledgment that the current level of internationalisation at the BUES is low and needs to improve. This observation derived from our discussions with various actors within the university, including the students. This was an issue raised also by external partners, in the sense that the BUES does not promote itself abroad. For the evaluation team this is an important observation. An internationalisation strategy may be based on the relationships established by a university with international partners. This relationship may be built at the institutional level (e.g. inter-university relationships, relations with international organisations, partnership in international networks and consortia), at the level of the faculties (e.g. joint or dual study programmes and degrees), at the level of research centres (e.g. participation in international research projects and financing by international resources) or at the level of individuals (e.g. mobility exchanges of students and staff, attractiveness of international students and staff, involvement of students and staff in international events and activities).

Therefore, an important part of the internationalisation strategy of a university will be of course to develop the appropriate conditions that will help to establish and/or further improve the above relationships. However, it should also be taken into account that the above relationships will be built on and will be facilitated and further improved by the brand name that the university has internationally, by its reputation, and by the way in which it promotes its qualities internationally. And this should be considered a constituent part of an internationalisation strategy.

In view of the above analysis, **the evaluation team considers it extremely important for the BUES to develop an internationalisation strategy that will cover all the abovementioned dimensions.** Some of the issues to be considered in the context of that strategy are outlined below:

- **High proportion of incoming and outgoing mobility students**
- **Increasing attractiveness of international students**
- **Staff mobility and high ratio of visiting professors**
- **Joint research and collaborative publications**
- **Considerably more English study programmes**
- **Establishing more joint or dual degrees**
- **Improving international partnerships.**



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Furthermore, the evaluation team would also recommend that, **in order to further improve and strengthen its international status, the BUES seeks international accreditation (both at programme level and institutional level)**. Finally, the evaluation team would recommend that **the BUES consider establishing an international advisory board, which would focus on internationalisation issues.**



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8. Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Capacity for change

Alongside quality assurance issues, the Institutional Evaluation Programme focuses on the capacity for change. The reason for this is a widespread conviction that European HEIs are exposed to increasing demands from society and the labour market and in many countries they are also exposed to growing competition from other institutions of higher education. Especially with regards to European universities, the new landscape connected to the emerging European Higher Education Area and the principles of the Bologna Process is one more reason and necessity for change.

If the universities do not seize the initiative themselves and show their capacity for improving, adapting, changing and showing adaptability to radically new conditions in an era of mass higher education, then there may be risks that even the important core academic values, which we undoubtedly all want to preserve, might be in jeopardy.

The capacity for change firstly requires the identification of all the factors requiring change, as well as of the features and the content of the change needed. Secondly, it requires each university to determine its own mission in conjunction with the changes needed and to set its priorities. Thirdly, it requires determining the strengths and weaknesses of each university with respect to its own identity and characteristics and to the existing external conditions. Finally, it requires an efficient mechanism to assess continually the course of each institution towards its objectives, towards the changes required.

But above all, the capacity for change requires inspiration. It requires inspired, motivated and determined people. It is extremely important to realise that elements of strategic planning do not themselves change universities. Changes in institutions have to be driven by people: staff and students, with an inspired leadership making sure that the actions in the action plans are underway and that the milestones are achieved.

Talking about the BUES, we can say that it is a university in the middle of change. The specific situation of Romania and of Romanian higher education, together with the current trends in the European higher education and in conjunction with the current economic crisis, form a rapidly changing and challenging landscape for the BUES, and for any Romanian university. The BUES has to adapt its strategy to this new landscape, in order to fulfil its assumed mission. The evaluation team is aware of the development strategy 2011-2020 of the university and is also aware of the analysis that the BUES has already done regarding its strengths and its weaknesses together with the opportunities and the threats deriving from the new landscape. In this respect, the evaluation team has the certainty that the BUES has the qualities, the



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potential and the means to adapt to the changing conditions and to meet the emerging challenges.

We conclude by mentioning some of the qualities that we consider indispensable in order to ensure the capacity of the BUES for change:

- A clear mission, inspired vision and ambitious but realistic objectives
- Effective strategic management
- Action plans and milestones through performance indicators
- Effective, efficient and inspiring leadership
- Quality culture
- Committed staff
- Close and strong links with society at large and an economy based on mutual trust and effective interaction

Many of these qualities characterise already, to a higher or lower degree, the BUES, as we have already outlined throughout our present report. Other qualities however have to be further improved. In this respect, **our only recommendation on this point would be that the BUES maintains and further improves these qualities in order to strengthen its capacity for change, reinforcing internal trust and ownership for the mission and strategic developments.**

8.2 Conclusions

Next year, 2013, the BUES celebrates its 100th anniversary. During this 100-year period it has undergone many changes, demonstrating its capacity to adapt to changing conditions. Today, the BUES faces the challenge of a new era in Romanian higher education, which of course should be considered in conjunction with the current developments in the European Higher Education Area and take due account of the constraints resulting from the economic crisis.

The context in which the current evaluation took place has been described earlier in this report. In this regard, our evaluation aims to find out, understand and assess the qualities of the BUES and its capacity to meet successfully the challenges of the future. These challenges should be considered as opportunities for the BUES. On the one hand, they offer a clear perspective for the future and, on the other hand, they operate as driving forces motivating and stimulating all the actors within the university.

We had the opportunity to realise these qualities. Further on, we had the opportunity to see a university with a high level of self-knowledge, as it derives from the SER and from the SWOT analysis included there, and with clear vision for the future, as it derives from its development plan, which we consider a significant starting point for the future steps of the BUES. From the evaluation team's viewpoint, the BUES has much strength to rely on in order to face its



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challenging future. And our analysis has convinced us that the BUES is heading in the right direction for its future.

It is in that context that the evaluation team tried to approach the work done by the BUES. Our recommendations are intended to be our own contribution to the process of change and to help the BUES to make the most of the opportunities open to it and to cope with the threats scattered along its route to the future. At the same time, our report aspires to function as an inspiration for the BUES as a whole, but more specifically for all those people, leadership, students and staff, who are concerned by its future. We hope that the work done by our evaluation team, including the present report, offers a real help to the BUES for its future steps. And we also hope that the 100th anniversary will be a great opportunity for the BUES to realise and demonstrate its great potential.

8.3 Summary of recommendations

In this section of the report we summarise the main recommendations, as they have appeared underlined in the respective sections of the text.

Section 2 Governance and institutional decision making

2.1 The philosophy of the BUES: Norms and values/Vision - mission - strategic goals

1. Stronger alignment is needed between mission, strategic goals and key performance indicators. A better balance may be needed between ambition and reality. Need for prioritisation regarding the strategic goals and the action plan/performance indicators.
2. The task to oversee the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the performance indicators should be assigned to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should also have the task to assess the validity of the strategic goals and the respective performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.
3. The competitiveness issue should be strongly related to the vision and the strategic goals of the BUES. In that sense, the BUES should focus on the international competitive situation, of course starting from the closer geographic region of Central-Eastern Europe, creating also the appropriate benchmarking mechanisms to that aim.

2.2 Governance and institutional decision-making



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4. The BUES might reconsider the membership of the Senate regarding the number of its members and not of course its composition.

Autonomy and constraints

5. Constraints to autonomy have a negative impact on the overall performance of a university. In this respect, the removal of existing financial restrictions as well as restrictions regarding human resources could, on the one hand, offer a serious incentive to the academic staff and, on the other hand, improve efficiency of financial management. All in all, it would enhance the ability of the university to develop the necessary strategic changes.

Financial management

6. Need for balance between centralised and decentralised resources. Part of the resources should be managed centrally and be a policy instrument for the institutional leadership to set priorities and implement the strategic goals of the university. In this respect, there is also a need for stronger links to be established between strategic goals and allocation of resources within the university.

Academic structure/academic organisation

7. The BUES might reconsider its academic organisation with the aim to ensure interdisciplinarity and critical mass in both education and research.

Section 3 Teaching and learning

3.1 Teaching and learning

8. Appropriate and effective training is required for genuine implementation of the "student-centred learning" educational approach.
9. Some ideas and recommendations in order to develop the practical competences of students:
 - Increasing the number of internships nationally and internationally which should be considered a constituent part of the studies, increasing accordingly the exposure of students to business experience
 - Involving students in real-life projects in companies
 - Inviting experts from the world of business and companies as guest lecturers in the BUES with no obligation to hold a doctorate degree



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- Developing innovative learning methods, like case studies, case competitions, simulation exercises, business games etc.
- Developing mentoring schemes, with the involvement of students of higher levels of studies and of BUES alumni as well

10. Need for strengthening the links of the BUES with its alumni (see also recommendation No. 21).

11. Need for the BUES to establish an effective procedure for tracking its graduates.

12. The students at Master level should have the opportunity and the possibility to get involved in research programmes.

3.2 Students

13. The students in the BUES should make their involvement in all functions of the university as active as possible.

3.3 Academic staff

14. Need for the leadership of the BUES at all levels to ensure a balance between research and teaching obligations of the academic staff, considering also the possibility for sabbaticals.

15. Need for the development of a motivation policy which should include a merit-based promotion procedure that will not depend on existing resources, i.e. on the existence of vacant places.

16. Need for further improvement of the procedures aiming to increase the teaching and pedagogical competences of the staff and for their enrichment with new approaches related to the concept of "student-centred learning". In parallel, the further improvement of these procedures should also integrate the ability of the academic staff to develop the students' practical skills thus sharing their potential business experience with their students.

Section 4 Research

17. The BUES should define its strategic priorities of areas of excellence in research, reconsidering also the organisation of research within the university to achieve that aim.

18. Need for the university to support even stronger all individual researchers in terms of money and time, irrespective of and in parallel to defining areas of excellence.



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EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme



European University Association

19. Need for more technical support for preparing competitive proposals for research funding.

20. Need to improve entrepreneurial and innovation attitude within the university through research.

21. Considering intercultural research one of the comparative advantages of the BUES.

Section 5 *Links with society*

22. Need for closer links to alumni taking advantage of and benefiting from their current professional positions in the world of business and economy in general (see also recommendation No. 10).

23. Need for closer relationship with the society (business, private, public, as well as NGOs).

24. Need for stronger emphasis in the collaboration of the BUES with other universities as well in entrepreneurial activities, start-ups, etc.

Section 6 *Quality culture*

25. The evaluation team praises the BUES for its internal quality assurance system and for its consistency in following the ESG. However, it believes that a great deal still has to be done for a genuine quality culture to be developed and spread within the whole university. And the leadership of the university should put even more efforts into achieving that aim.

Section 7 *Internationalisation*

26. Need for the BUES to develop a multidimensional internationalisation strategy, covering among others the following issues:

- High proportion of incoming and outgoing mobility students
- Increasing attractiveness of international students
- Staff mobility and high ratio of visiting professors
- Joint research and collaborative publications
- Considerably more English study programmes
- Establishing more joint or dual degrees
- Improving international partnerships



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27. Considering the need for seeking international accreditation (both at programme level and at institutional level).

28. Considering the need for establishment of an international advisory board which would focus on internationalisation issues.

Section 8 *Capacity for institutional change*

29. The following are qualities that the evaluation team considers indispensable in order to ensure the capacity of the BUES for change:

- A clear mission, inspired vision and ambitious but realistic objectives
- Effective strategic management
- Action plans and milestones through performance indicators
- Effective, efficient and inspiring leadership
- Quality culture
- Committed staff
- Close and strong links with society at large and economy based on mutual trust and effective interaction

Many of these qualities characterise already, to a higher or lower degree, the BUES. Other qualities however have to be further improved. In this respect, the recommendation of the evaluation team on this point would be that the BUES maintains and further improves these qualities in order to strengthen its capacity for change, reinforcing internal trust and ownership for the mission and strategic developments.