Institutional Evaluation Programme

Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities

"Tibiscus" University of Timișoara

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the "Tibiscus" University of Timișoara. The evaluation took place in 2014 in the framework of the project "Ready to innovate, ready to better address the local needs. Quality and diversity of Romanian Universities", which aims to strengthen 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). IEP evaluation teams have carried out more than 300 evaluations and follow-up evaluations of diverse higher education institutions in 45 countries worldwide.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. "Tibiscus" University of Timișoara profile

"Tibiscus" University of Timișoara (TUT) is located in the city of Timișoara, which is part of Timiș County, the largest in Romania with a population of nearly 700,000. About half of this population lives in Timișoara. This region is known for being one of the richest and most advanced areas in Romania. In the past years, Timiș County was able to attract local, national and foreign investment, namely in information technology and communications, automotive industry, machine and mechanical engineering, electronics, chemicals, textiles, leather, footwear, wood processing, food and logistics. In 2009, the world economic and financial crisis hit Romania and Timișoara, causing a downturn in various industries and business and a severe decrease in the Romanian GDP. But since the early 2013, the Romanian economy is recovering, mainly due to an increase in exports to the EU, but also to the Asian, Middle-Eastern and Russian markets.

Higher education in Timișoara has a tradition of more than 100 years. The city is home to four state universities: University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" Timișoara, Polytechnic University of Timișoara, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, and West University of Timișoara. The team was told that TUT is the only accredited private university in the city.

TUT is a very recent higher education institution that was legally established as a private university and part of the Romanian education system since 2002 only. As a consequence of the new education law, TUT was classified into the group of "teaching and learning universities" in 2011. In 2013, the university was subject to an institutional evaluation by the Romanian Agency for the Higher Education Quality Assurance (ARACIS), and received a "limited confidence" rating.[1]

In the current academic year (2013-2014) TUT comprises five faculties – Faculty of Computer Science and Applied Informatics, Faculty of Design, Faculty of Law and Public Administration, Faculty of Psychology, and Faculty of Economics – responsible for teaching seven undergraduate study programmes (six full-time and one part-time) and seven Master

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[1] http://www.aracis.ro/en/eval-results/institutional-evaluations/sapientia-foundation-sapientia-university-of-cluj-napoca/tibiscus-university-of-timisoara/

programmes (all full-time), and enrolling 1 242 students (974 in Bachelor programmes and 268 in Master programmes).

During the same academic year, the number of tenured teaching staff working at TUT was 69, and the number of non-teaching staff 32. TUT also resorts to 12 teachers invited from other educational institutions in Timișoara and one visiting professor.

Recently and in parallel with those Bologna-type study programmes, the university is offering lifelong learning courses (LLL), with 900 students enrolled in 2013-2014. TUT owns part of the buildings where the learning process takes place, and rents the remaining teaching spaces. Other services (accommodation and canteen) are provided jointly with neighbouring public universities.

In recent years, the university's profile has been adjusted to fit the changing demand for study programmes. In 2009/2010 there were 13 Bachelor and 13 Master programmes, while, currently, only seven Bachelor and seven Master programmes exist. The number of faculties diminished accordingly: eight faculties in 2009/2010, five faculties in 2013/2014 (Faculty of Music and Faculty of Physical Education were discontinued in 2010/2011 and Faculty of Journalism, Communication and Modern Languages was closed during the current academic year). This reduction was due to a five-year continuous decline of student enrolment. In the five-year period 2009/2010-2013/2014 the number of students enrolled in Bachelor programmes was cut from 2 592 to 974, while in Master programmes the number was cut from 966 students to 268, leading to a severe decrease in the university's financial income.

This decrease is linked to a general trend occurring in Romania in the reduction of the number of candidates for higher education. This is caused by several factors, namely by a demographic downturn in the last years together with a strong decrease in the number of pupils graduating from high schools, and an erosion in the teenagers' interest for higher education due to the current youth unemployment rate.

TUT is a young and small teaching university, confronted with a major crisis that is putting its existence at risk due to the dramatic decline in student numbers and the resulting financial consequences. Under a new imaginative and determined leadership TUT is trying to overcome its present difficulties not only by reducing its costs, but also by better adapting its activities and study programmes to local and regional needs, and actively looking for new student populations.

To face this challenging situation, TUT has some advantages that include a new and perceptive leadership, a qualified and committed teaching staff, a good balance between theoretical education and practical training, the flexibility to answer student needs, and the

willingness to adapt to a changing environment. Additionally, the University prides itself on its good name and good teaching reputation in the region.

However, being a private university without public funding, the major overall challenges that TUT is currently facing are the difficulty in enrolling the number of students needed and the related financial constraints. This happens together with a considerable uncertainty in the regional economic, social and demographic situation, and a fiercer competition with neighbouring higher education institutions. TUT also has to deal with an uncertain and constraining legal context and with an excessively complex organisational structure.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluating committee of ten members, appointed by the rector in July 2013, chaired by Prof. Tiberiu Karnyanszky, the Dean of the Faculty of Computers and Applied Computer Science, and including representatives of all four remaining faculties, one representative of the Department of Cross-Curricular Teaching, one representative of the office of programmes, institutional projects and international relations, the chief accountant, and a representative of the students.

The Self-evaluation Report (SER) of "Tibiscus" University of Timișoara along with the appendices was provided to the evaluation team (hereinafter the team) on 29 January 2014. The format of the SER followed the guidelines provided by IEP. The abundant documentation (not always providing all the relevant information) was of good quality, although there is some inconsistency in the terminology used in the report. The SER is extensive and well-documented, including an honest description of TUT's organisation and processes, reflecting hard and serious work. However, it is more descriptive than analytic and somewhat disconnected from the context. Nevertheless, the SER provided enough elements to prepare the team and to obtain an idea of the evolution and current situation of the university.

According to the SER, the self-evaluation committee had regular meetings with key actors of the educational, research and administrative processes of the university. Between meetings, an extensive documentation work was done in order to collect data for the report. The team was told that a draft version of the report was made available on the intranet and some questions were answered online. Additionally, the draft report was also discussed within faculties before being accepted by the rector and Senate. The students also contributed to the self-evaluation process, either through meetings, or answering questions online.

The two visits of the team to TUT took place on 27 and 28 February 2014 and on 12 to 14 May 2014, respectively. In between the visits TUT provided the team with some additional documentation as requested. During the two visits, the team were made aware of a constructive approach from the university community, having the opportunity to discuss with

openness the situation of TUT with many actors and stakeholders. The team consider this attitude to be a good sign for the future of the institution, and thank the university for its positive collaboration.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Prof. Philippe Rousseau, former president, Université Charles de Gaulle – Lille III, France, Chair.
- Prof. Elena Dumova-Jovanoska, former vice-rector for education, "Ss.Cyril and Methodius" University, FYR Macedonia.
- Ms Ieva Baltina, student, University of Latvia, Latvia.
- Prof. José Cabral, Pro-Rector and Head of the Continuous Improvement Office, University of Porto, Portugal, Team Coordinator.

The team thanks the Rector of TUT, Prof. Corina Muşuroi, for the warm welcome and hospitality as well as for the useful and open discussions. The team also thank the President of the Senate, Prof. Dan Laurentiu Lacrama, for his willingness to help us to understand the complexities of TUT. Our special thanks go to Prof. Tiberiu Marius Karnyanszky, TUT's liaison person and chairman of the self-evaluation committee, who prepared and organised all meetings during the two visits, and to the entire community for their cordial reception and candid discussions throughout the evaluation process.

2.   Governance and institutional decision making

Faced with challenging circumstances, it is important for TUT to clearly see its situation and to define its way out of crisis. The university must have a clear picture of what it wants to be in the future, which strategy to adopt and the means needed for a successful journey. Therefore, a central question for the team is what the institution is really trying to be and do in terms of priorities and how clear it is about carrying out, monitoring and quality-assuring its work.

2.1   Mission

The mission of "Tibiscus" University of Timișoara is defined in Article 14 of the University Charter (issued in 2012). The Charter also outlines TUT's major objectives. Both the mission statement and the objectives express commendable and respectable values but are too general and of little relevance for the specific context of the university, and do not define the particular profile pursued by TUT. The mission may be applicable to many higher education institutions in Europe. The team *recommend that TUT adopt a more precise mission statement making TUT's profile more explicit, insisting on the local, regional and professional dimension (as, for example, stated in the last two paragraphs of section 2.3 in the SER)*. This mission statement could be used on a daily basis as a working proposition.

2.2   Vision

The university is trying to overcome a major crisis, which forces it to look beyond the external causes of its present difficulties and to reassess its identity. This may be an opportunity for a successful new development of the institution. However, the SER does not include a vision statement of what the university wants to be in five or ten years.

Recovering the financial balance and ensuring financial sustainability are at the moment a major concern for TUT's management, but TUT cannot just fight to survive. The institution needs to project itself into the future, define clearer objectives and state the vision for a more distant future. This vision should specify the intended profile of TUT, fully taking into account the situation in which it is now, and realistically defining the position it wants to occupy in the higher education system.

2.3   Strategy

In 2012, following the approval of the University Charter by the Ministry in charge of education and the election of the new TUT's management team, a strategic plan for the 2012-2016 period was produced. The strategic plan was supported by a SWOT analysis, which reflected the situation at the time. The identified main internal weaknesses were linked to financial difficulties or lack of funding resources for promoting programmes and research. A

large number of the external threats described were also related to the decrease in student numbers, linked with the national decrease in the number of potential students in higher education as well as student drop out.

That strategic plan defines a large number of relevant specific objectives for all areas of activity of the university (university management, teaching process, scientific research, human resources, financial management, international relations, students' relations, image and communication, and relationship with the community) together with the description of the respective supportive actions.

Considering the difficult transformations recently made by the leadership of the university (e.g. the recent closure of three faculties) the university has undoubtedly the capacity to change. The team strongly believes in TUT's potential for development and improvement. Some of the changes already made go in the right direction. But in order to overcome the crisis, the university should concentrate its efforts on a more limited number of realistic and concrete objectives and a well-structured strategy to attain them. Actually, the list of "development goals" of the strategic plan 2012-2016 seems to be too extensive and frequently vague.

Indeed the strategic plan looks more like an operational plan than the definition of a real strategy. During the visits, the team became aware that the rector and the leadership have a clearer and more focused strategic concept, putting a strong emphasis on the close link with the economic environment and on vocational training. But it still remains unclear if this emphasis is a temporary remedy to the strains of the financial situation or the long-term identification of TUT's "niche" of potential excellence.

The team *recommend that TUT define a clear, realistic, well-focused strategy, leading to explicitly stating the TUT profile in the vision and sharing these statements within the academic community*.

2.4   Governance and decision making

The university has put in place all governing structures and management positions required by law (Senate, Administrative Board, Faculty Council, Department Council, and rector, vice-rector, general administrative manager, dean and vice dean).

The Senate controls the executive management of the university and currently includes five committees: the Committee for Scientific Research and Evaluation of Teaching Staff, the Committee for the University's Image and International Relations, the Committee for Education and Students' Issues, the Committee for Administration, Human and Financial Resources, and the Committee for Evaluation and Quality Assurance.

The Administrative Board includes the rector, vice-rectors, deans, vice-deans, general administrative manager, a representative of students, and three founding members of the university. The president of the Administrative Board is the rector. Among it duties, the Administrative Board has to execute the resolutions of the Senate and the annual budget.

The rector was elected through a universal, direct and secret voting process involving tenured teaching staff and student representatives of the Senate and the faculty councils. The rector appointed the vice-rector for academic development who coordinates the Scientific Council, and the vice-rector for educational and student issues who coordinates the activity of the Centre of Counselling and Career Guidance for Students. An important informal governing body is the Academic College, where the rector and deans get together and prepare decisions. Both the academic and the administrative lines report directly to the rector.

The current five faculties plus the Department of Cross-Curricular Teaching organise and manage the study programmes. Each faculty has a corresponding department and a research centre "which do not have legal personality and are established by the decision of the University Senate and operate through the teaching staff of the university" (SER, p. 7). The faculties are managed by a dean (selected through public competition organised by the rector and validated by the Senate). In turn, when appropriate, the dean appoints the vice-deans.

Each faculty has a council elected by teaching staff and students' representatives. Each department has a head of department and a council, both elected by the tenured teachers and researchers from the department. The heads of departments take care of the teaching process (including teachers' evaluation) while deans have broader functions (research, mobility, some financial responsibilities); being the extension of the executive line they are responsible for the application of the procedures and the law.

A competent rector, with a clear vision of the situation, has taken up the challenge of shaping TUT's future, and the university is managed by a motivated leadership team. The evaluation team could observe a very positive attitude of the academic community towards the university. Being a very small university, whose members live in very close proximity and have strong connections, many aspects of the governance are handled informally. However, as a consequence of this propinquity, making decisions in a structured, coherent and independent way is more difficult. Overall, there is good control of the potentially conflicting relations between the Senate and management, and, in spite of difficulties, finances are under control.

However, the team got the impression that the Senate, which includes many young and inexperienced members, lacks effectiveness on strategic issues and budgetary matters, and tends to focus more on matters that concern the management of the institution than on effectively monitoring its activities. The team *recommend that the Senate fulfil its strategic*

and monitoring role fully, in order to avoid doubling the volume of administrative tasks and interfering unduly in the management of the institution.

The team was told that according to the law, experienced people are prevented from being elected to the Senate if they already occupy other relevant management positions (for instance, the dean). This explains why the Senate includes several young members with little management experience. In fact, there is a shortage of senior teaching staff to fill all management positions.

The team thinks that the decision-making process and structure are too complex, too heavy, and sometimes redundant. Looking at the number of teaching staff needed to fill all the positions of this management structure and considering the current number of teaching staff at TUT (69 tenured teachers), and the number of teaching staff by faculty (between six and 16), it is inevitable that, in several cases, the same person holds various positions in the decision-making structure at different levels of the hierarchy. Is it really necessary for one faculty, say, with 11 teachers and 140 students, to have a dean, a vice-dean, a faculty council, a department, a head of department and a department council?

The university reported that the law specifies the governance structure. However, even if this is the case, the team considers that there are certainly ways to make it less complicated and time consuming. The team *recommend that the university simplify and streamline its organisational structure and procedures, avoiding duplicative structures and processes.*

For the moment, the relation between the top (university) level and the faculty level is good, largely due to close connections between people. Despite the existing good personal relations between leaders at different levels of the structure, there is nonetheless an uncertain long-term balance between the university level and its constituent units, with the risk, for instance, that faculties follow their own ways and damage both the institution as a whole and their long-term interests. The team *recommend that the university define more clearly the balance of responsibilities between the university level and the faculty level, avoiding the risk of an excessive dispersion between faculties.*

There is also a great disparity in size and consequently an excessive number of faculties. Some are so small that they should not be more than a department. The team suggest that TUT discuss, and eventually decide, the reduction of the number of faculties, with a few departments per faculty (e. g.: computer science and applied informatics + design; law + economics + psychology). Accordingly, the team *recommend that TUT reconsider its faculty structure bearing in mind the marked disparity in their size.*

The rector directly supervises all administrative services of the university. Theoretically, the administrative and financial activity as well as the management and maintenance of the

university property are the responsibilities of the general administrative manager (he should supervise the financial-accounting service, the IT department, the technical service of supply and acquisitions and the social services). Currently, however, the position of general administrative manager is vacant, meaning that all its responsibilities were transferred to the rector (and to the Administrative Board). Therefore, the administrative tasks of the rector are even heavier than expected. On top of that, the team observed that many other services, covering different aspects of the administrative and technical task of the institution, remain outside the remit of the general manager office and operate in a somewhat disconnected way. This probably weakens the global efficiency of the services. There should be a single person at the helm of the whole support and administrative structure, reporting to the rector, and head of all the non-teaching staff. The team *recommend that TUT try to make its administrative apparatus less fragmented, more coherent, and institutionally coordinated*.

In spite of the volume of information made available in the SER and its appendixes, the team consider that TUT's performance data are somewhat dispersed, not easily accessible and too dependent on ARACIS requirements. Consequently, the team *encourage TUT to pursue the development of an integrated information system in order to dispose of a good "institutional dash board" ("tableau de bord") that would contribute to the effective steering of the institution.* This *"tableau de bord"* would summarise the most important performance indicators, goals and results of all areas of the university (education, research and service to society). This tool could be very useful not only for decision-making but also for accountability and marketing purposes.

The team received a great deal of evidence that students have a good relationship with TUT's staff and a very positive attitude towards the institution. But their participation in university life should go beyond studying. However, student organisations at TUT are incipient or inexistent, thus hampering the development of extracurricular activities. The team *recommend that TUT help students to create independent and effective structures of discussion and reflection, and encourage them to fully assume their responsibility and actively participate in the governance of the university*. This would be beneficial for both the students' education and the institution.

Although there are multiple relationships with the local and regional society, and the strategic importance of these is recognised, TUT lacks a formally organised participation of stakeholders in its governance. The team think that the university could take better advantage of external stakeholders if these external relationships were coordinated and systematised through a structure at the central level, able to develop a forum to discuss, for instance, the strategic plan, the annual report of the rector, and other relevant documents. Consequently, the team *recommend that TUT formalise the participation of external stakeholders (including former students) in its strategic development*.

3. Teaching and learning

According to the SER, "Tibiscus" University of Timișoara "has established itself as an institution which is focused on education, meeting the demand for university-level training and for continuous improvement of local and regional community members" (SER, p. 12).

Currently, TUT offer 14 Bologna-type study programmes (seven Bachelor and seven Master) through its five faculties. These are the ones that survived the five-year decline in the number of applications affecting both Bachelor and Master programmes (between 2009-2010 and 2013-2014, the number was reduced by 65%, from 1 368 to 464). The SER explains this fact on the basis of the decline in the number of high school graduates, the high level of unemployment of university graduates, and the economic crisis. But it is likely that all these factors do not fully explain the erosion of TUT's attractiveness to students.

TUT has recognised study-programmes, accredited by ARACIS, and updated on an annual basis through discussions with representatives of employers. The team commend the collaboration with potential employers, informal as it may be, and encourage the university to enlarge and reinforce the dialogue with its economic environment.

All the formal requirements of the Bologna action lines are implemented (programmes' structure, ECTS system, etc.). The university is now taking steps in applying the Bologna principles, namely shifting to a student-centred education and promoting student and staff mobility (40 students and 15 teaching staff went abroad in 2012-2013). But the pedagogic implications of the student-centred learning approach have not been implemented to the full extent. Somehow, the university has implemented the letter rather than the spirit of the Bologna reform. The team *recommend that TUT put more emphasis on the full implementation of all pedagogic aspects of the student-centred learning approach, and organise adequate training and support of the teaching staff for that purpose*.

TUT has good flexibility in the organisation of teaching by adapting teaching hours to deal with different populations, taking into account their needs and constraints: full-time young students, part-time older students, employed students, etc. Nevertheless, the team was made aware of problems arising from this flexibility, as for instance the poor attendance in classes of a significant number of students. The team *recommend that flexibility does not lead to easy acceptance of low attendance at lectures.* Students must not think that one of the advantages of TUT is that attendance of lectures is not mandatory.

One of TUT strengths is a very committed teaching staff. Additionally, a number of TUT's teachers are high-profile professionals with rich practical experience, many keeping their jobs outside the university. Another TUT strength frequently recognised by students and employers during the team's visits, is the applied-oriented approach to teaching and learning

and the emphasis on practical training embedded in study programmes. Students stated that teaching is attuned towards solving real world problems and not focused on theoretical issues. Students emphasised that, especially due to the high percentage of adults, teaching is frequently supported by real-life projects inspired by their working experience. Some students also stated that they have chosen "Tibiscus" because the academic work is done in small groups, benefiting from an easy and open relationship with teachers.

TUT is intensifying the dialogue with high schools and employers, as well as improving its corporate identity by enhancing its accessibility and visibility on the Internet (namely through the creation of a portal for high schools, universities and employers). Moreover, the university is reducing barriers to student enrolments by rescheduling the payment of tuition fees, exempting students from penalties if they failed to pay, and giving loans.

In short, TUT is responding to the crisis by trying to become a vocational higher education institution with strong links to the local and regional economy, and recognised by employers as being able to produce and train competent professionals. TUT is also focusing on niche study areas and enrolling more part-time and vocational (adult) students. TUT is working hard to face the challenge, but this should not be regarded as a temporary remedy to the crisis. Instead, close relationships with the economic environment should be considered as a long-term strategy, provided that it does not only follow but also anticipates future developments.

In spite of TUT's potential, interdisciplinary courses and programmes have not been developed through interfaculty cooperation. The team *recommend that the university (at central level) encourage the development of interdisciplinary courses and study programmes, responding to society's needs*. This would be facilitated by the restructuring of faculties.

Although TUT´s teaching premises are relatively old and space does not abound, teaching conditions seem to be satisfactory. In general, classrooms are reasonably equipped (including with Wi-Fi access, video projectors and computers). The library is not a modern structure and does not provide Internet access to scientific databases. Although students (and teachers) can use the "Eugen Todoran" Central University Library in Timişoara thanks to a cooperation protocol; furthermore, it should be ensured that the opening hours of the library are well-adjusted to the needs of the academic community and in particular to that of the students.

The university portal (accessible through password) is used to "post public information for students, such as lectures, topics, bibliographies, schedules, planning, materials for semester exams or graduation" (SER p. 29). The use of e-learning platforms seems to be at an early stage, seldom being mentioned by teachers and students. Teachers and students from computer sciences (and related majors) also benefit from an IT package that supports technical education by providing access to software for learning, teaching, and research

purposes. This programme may be used in university laboratories or at home. The team also had the opportunity to visit a number of teaching laboratories and the "Radio Campus" room.

In general, TUT's students seem satisfied with the facilities offered by the university. No problems with dormitory or meals were reported to the team. Students can make use of the medical care facilities belonging to neighbouring public universities, and ask for support and guidance from the "Centre of Counselling and Career Guidance for Students" (organised by the Faculty of Psychology). However, during the interviews students did not seem particularly aware of the activities of this centre. The university has an agreement with a bank for financing the tuition fees of students with economic difficulties. The Department of Cross-Curriculum Teaching is responsible for publishing quarterly the Tibiscus Magazine, which includes contributions from current and former students, social events, etc. Students also contribute to the "Radio Campus" programmes.

4.   Research

According to the specific objectives of the 2012-2016 strategy, TUT should achieve recognition in research and development, gain more research contracts and increase the share of involvement of Master students in research. However, TUT states that "the university is not highlighted as a centre for research and education, but research has the necessary dimensions as to maintain the quality of teaching". The SER explains that the main objective of the university is to train "specialists for the geographical area in which they work", and that theoretical and applied research only aims at supporting "the socio-economic environment" and "certify and guarantee the quality of study programs" (SER, p. 26).

The university took some measures to increase scientific production. For instance, the performance evaluation criteria of teaching staff include research activity and TUT monitors the scientific output of the academic staff according to well-established procedures. Faculties were also encouraged to integrate young teachers in research teams of funded projects and to correlate Masters' dissertations with research topics in their departments. TUT is funding the research expenses of teachers who publish articles in ISI journals (or in other prestigious foreign journals) and in conference proceedings. It should be stressed that teachers must perform in research in order to compete for positions in higher education, and some of them must finish their PhDs thesis in order to meet the legal requirements and keep their positions.

At TUT, research is considered a part of teachers' work (currently, the university does not employ researchers). Since 2008/2009, each faculty runs its own research centre, which is responsible for organising its research activity. Those centres are led by a director, and include teaching staff and students belonging to the related faculty. Although not having legal personality "each centre has bank accounts in lei and foreign currency funding the activities of the projects and contracts" (SER p. 26). Basically, the centres anchor R&D projects belonging to the faculty's specialisation areas, whether they are individual initiatives, collaborations with other institutions, or funded research contracts. Yet, the SER acknowledges the "low coherence of faculty research centres" (SER p. 36).

In the teams' view, the nature and status of research centres remain unclear: are they permanent or project based? Should they belong to one faculty, should they be interdisciplinary, should they be university based? It is clear that the critical mass of each faculty alone is too small for the desired breakthrough in research. All those aspects should be clarified.

According to the SER, "the results of theoretical and applied research are noticeable in published works" (SER p. 27). But despite some positive signs in recent years, namely raising funds from research projects and research partnerships with the public and the private sector, the scientific performance of TUT is still far from international standards. For instance, during

the five-year period 2009-2013, only 53 articles were published by the 82 TUT's teaching staff (67 with PhDs) in journals indexed in the ISI Web of Knowledge and Scopus databases.

Overall, the research activity of TUT is coordinated by the Senate through the Committee for Scientific Research and Evaluation of Teaching Staff, and by the Scientific Council (which include the vice-rector and the vice-deans responsible for research). The small size of the institution and the good will among the main actors enable things to be managed in an informal way. However, the apparent lack of structural coherence may give room for potentially damaging conflicts in the governance of this part of TUT's activity (for instance between the vice-rector in charge of research, the lax organization and the uncertain purpose of the different research centres, and the Committee for Scientific Research).

Moreover, the team observed a certain lack of clarity in the formulation of the policy concerning research and an associated confusion in the organisation of this area of TUT's activity. The team had the impression that there is no systematic approach to research in the institution, no clear definition of the profile of the scientific activity (which TUT wants to promote), nor any consistent strategy in this field. Although research centres are improving research output, since research greatly depends on the individual initiative of teaching staff, major steps must be taken if research is to be given its adequate place in the overall strategy of the institution.

The team *recommend that TUT draw a well-defined and realistic strategy towards research activities, clarifying the concept of research relevant for the institution, taking into account the available financial and human resources*.

The team also *recommend that TUT move towards a more coordinated organisation of its research activities and encourage the development of interdisciplinary projects responding to local and regional needs*.

5.   Service to society

Links with the local and regional environment is recognised as being of strategic importance for TUT. The university wants to become an institution that is strongly identified with the needs of the community, linked with the local and regional economy, and focused on the qualification of professionals.

TUT's contribution to society has many aspects, from the conception of study programmes to partnerships or applied research projects with local and regional organisation. TUT is paying special attention to adult education in its various forms (postgraduate education, lifelong education, short time education, professional education etc.) and wants to play a significant role in training unemployed people for a new career, and in preparing adults for new functions and jobs. Some faculties have developed formal contacts with employers in order to adapt teaching curricula to their needs and to integrate TUT's students in their companies for practical training. Formal protocols with companies were also negotiated in order to enrol their employees in TUT's study programmes.

In 2013 the university established the Life Long Training Centre, whose mission is "to analyse the demand for labour market training, accreditation of courses and selection of candidates" (SER p. 22). So far, the university has been successful in organising training courses, as about 900 participants were enrolled until now. The activity of TUT in the field of lifelong learning and the creation of the centre are commendable.

Moreover, the university is also trying to increase the activities involving the public and private sectors through development projects, applied research and consulting. Some external partners' representatives informed the team that they were happy about the way their relationship with the university evolved. Most have the view that TUT is open to suggestions and that their opinions are listened to and taken into account.

However, considering the strategic importance of links with the economic and social environment, the way TUT is still developing those activities is too scattered and relies too much on individual initiatives. Additionally, there is no structured organisation to manage alumni relations.

The team *recommend that TUT:*

- *Coordinate and systematise external relations at central level and develop regular forum of communication with stakeholders.*
- *Systematically keep a register of all partnerships and contacts with the economic and social environment.*
- *Facilitate the creation of an active alumni association and give them a place in the activities of the university.*

6.   Quality culture

The university is aware of the relevance of quality assurance, and many good practices are in place at TUT. It is important to mention that the university as a whole and its study programmes in particular, are periodically evaluated and accredited by ARACIS. Accordingly, TUT implemented all the legal requirements for a quality assurance system focusing on the various dimensions of teaching and learning, but also addressing research, administrative processes and management activities.

The education process (including study programmes, teaching, and students' activity) is monitored and controlled by the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEACUT). This Commission (which is headed by a member of the Administrative Board and includes representatives of the teaching staff, administrative staff, students and an external member) set up quality assessment procedures and regulations, which are approved by the Senate. The CEACUT has its subordinated counterparts in each faculty, the Quality Commissions.

The internal evaluation and monitoring of study programmes are conducted by CEACUT, based on an assessment process, which includes procedures for approval, monitoring and periodical evaluation. Basically, CEACUT verify if the teaching process is conducted according to ARACIS' requirements and regulations. This task includes the control of course descriptions, workload of teaching staff and their qualifications. Another important task of CEACUT is to collect and analyse the reports of faculties and the results of the questionnaires. Based upon this, CEACUT produces global reports containing recommendations for improvement.

Faculties are responsible for organising and reviewing (annually) their programmes and for preparing the documentation needed for external evaluations and accreditations. Students also participate in the evaluation of study programmes by answering questionnaires to assess their satisfaction of the university's educational offer, and to evaluate the pedagogic performance of teaching staff. Students were also involved in preparing part of the report for ARACIS.

The procedure for the quality assessment of teaching staff encompasses: (i) the evaluation conducted by the head of the respective faculty (based on predefined criteria), (ii) the assessment made by students (at the end of each semester) through a questionnaire, (iii) the self-evaluation of teaching activities (based on the same questionnaire) and, finally, (iv) the peer evaluation (through a peer evaluation questionnaire). As a result of these four reviews "the head of department prepares the final evaluation sheet" (SER p. 32).

Moreover, the Office of Internal Audit conducts three audits each year (each department must be audited every three years). Audit activities focus on the administrative aspects of

many activities: students, financial accounting, human resources, decision-making system, etc. Audit results are analysed both by the Administrative Board and the Senate.

The implementation of monitoring and follow-up mechanisms is an important step towards the establishment of a quality culture. In this regard, TUT's strategic plan is deployed into annual operational plans for teaching and research. Every January, annual reports are produced on each operational plan. The analysis of the results and the definition of corrective or improving actions (made by the management bodies of the university) close the loop.

The team acknowledge the seriousness and commitment of the CEACUT, as well as the establishment of an internal audit system. But, although most procedures are imposed by legal regulations, in general, the team consider that TUT's system is mostly build according to the requirement of an accreditation scheme. The result is a somewhat heavy, bureaucratic and not necessarily improvement-oriented quality system. Quality assurance should be more focused on how to make things better and less concerned with suspicion and penalties. Additionally, there is a lack of a clear definition of the desirable quality for the relevant areas throughout the institution, with corresponding key indicators that would enable precise measurements.

The team *recommend that the university put more emphasis on improvement activities through evaluation and try to minimise the bureaucratic burden of current quality assurance procedures, making them easier and less time consuming*.

The team is aware that a great deal of data is collected at TUT, and that the new IT system will improve the management of academic information. But it seems that there is room for further development in this area.

The team *recommend that TUT pursue the development of a user-friendly database gathering up-to-date data and key performance indicators linked to TUT's understanding of what is good and what ought to be improved, through which progress could be easily monitored*.

Students told the team that the university's management has a welcoming attitude towards improvement, teachers care about students' needs, and it is easy to voice one's opinion and to change things in TUT. Nevertheless, quality culture at TUT could be enhanced if students were more intensively involved in quality procedures.

In this respect, the team *encourage TUT to set up mechanisms ensuring that feedback is provided to those who make suggestions, fill out questionnaires or produce evaluations (particularly students, who should see the result of their engagement)*.

Finally, the team *recommend that TUT benchmark against good QA practices in similar European higher education institutions to see what is good and what is less good, and benefit from contacting external experts in the field*.

7.   Internationalisation

TUT wants to become more international and is aware of the benefit of giving an international dimension to its activities. On the one hand, TUT is encouraging the mobility of teachers and students through Erasmus-type programmes, and through the establishment of partnerships with foreign universities and institutions. On the other hand, the university is making efforts to internationalise its research activities increasing the number of scientific publications in international journals and in conference proceedings, and fostering the academic staff's participation in international scientific and educational activities.

Beyond other functions, the office of programmes, institutional projects and international relations is responsible for coordinating Erasmus activities in the university "through the institutional coordinator and the coordinators of each Faculty" (SER p. 8). Since 2007 (when TUT first received the Erasmus Charter) outgoing student mobility increased markedly: six students in 2007-2008, 28 students in 2012-2013, and more were expected in 2013-2014, according to the funds received. This happened despite the economic difficulties faced by mobile students going abroad. Incoming students mobility had not yet been successful due to "difficulties with the required teaching language" (SER p. 28).

The university has already established some other types of cooperation agreements with foreign institutions and international networks. Among other things, this activity resulted in internships and training opportunities for students and staff. The attentive way the university monitors students' internships throughout their period abroad must be commended. TUT is also receiving teachers and visiting professors from abroad. Additionally, some TUT´s teachers belong to the boards of international journals, committees of international meetings and conferences, and international professional associations.

But, altogether, not only is the level of internationalisation of TUT still very limited but also a real strategy, including clear objectives and how to get there, is missing. Internationalisation is largely left to individual and fragmented initiatives, insufficiently coordinated and supported. Concerning students' incoming mobility, for instance, it should be specified which study areas to focus, the target countries, which courses should be offered in a foreign language, and what language should be adopted. The team also encourage TUT to facilitate incoming mobility of students by introducing courses in foreign languages and offering tutoring to foreign students.

The team *recommend that the university define a coherent strategy for the development of its international activity and increase the administrative support of international mobility*.

The team *recommend that TUT put more emphasis on teaching foreign languages to stimulate the mobility of students and ensure the success of the invitations that are extended to guest professors*.

8. Conclusions

TUT has experienced and is still confronted with a very serious crisis, but it has shown ability to face the situation and strong determination to overcome it. Bearing in mind the difficult decisions recently taken by the new leadership and the remarkable improvements already achieved, the team has no doubt that TUT has the capacity to find its place in the regional HE context and to create its own "niche of excellence". This will require a clear view of the goal, hard work, and strong commitment of the entire community, but TUT may find its own way to prove that "small may be beautiful".

The team is confident that TUT will face its future and wish the institution the best of luck.

For this objective to be fully achieved, in the team's view the following recommendations should be implemented.

8.1 Recommendations

8.1.1 Governance and institutional decision making

a) Adopt a more precise mission statement making TUT's profile more explicit, insisting on the local, regional and professional dimension (as stated in the last two paragraphs of section 2.3 of the SER).

b) Define a clear, realistic, well-focused strategy, leading to explicitly stating TUT's profile in the vision and sharing these statements within the academic community.

c) The Senate should fulfil its strategic and monitoring role fully, avoid doubling the volume of administrative tasks and interfering unduly in the institution's management.

d) Simplify and streamline the organisational structure and procedures, avoiding duplicative structures and processes.

e) Define more clearly the balance of responsibilities between the university level and the faculty level, avoiding the risks of an excessive dispersion across the faculties.

f) Reconsider the faculty structure bearing in mind the marked disparity in their size.

g) Try to make its administrative apparatus less fragmented, more coherent, and institutionally coordinated.

h) Pursue the development of an integrated information system in order to dispose of a good "institutional dash board" ("tableau de bord") that would contribute to the effective steering of the institution.

i) Help students to create independent and effective structures of discussion and reflection, and encourage them to fully take their responsibility and actively participate in the governance of the university.

j) Formalise the participation of external stakeholders (including former students) in its strategic development.

8.1.2 Teaching and learning

k) Put more emphasis on the full implementation of all pedagogic aspects of the student-centred learning approach, and organise adequate training and support of the teaching staff for that purpose.

l) Make sure that flexibility does not lead to easy acceptance of low attendance at lectures.

m) Encourage (at central level) the development of interdisciplinary courses and study programmes, responding to society's needs.

8.1.3 Research

n) Draw a well-defined and realistic strategy towards research activities, clarifying the concept of research relevant for the institution, taking into account the available financial and human resources.

o) Move towards a more coordinated organisation of research activities and encourage the development of interdisciplinary projects responding to local and regional needs.

8.1.4 Service to society

p) Coordinate and systematise external relations at central level and develop a regular forum of communication with stakeholders.

q) Systematically keep a register of all partnerships and contacts with the economic and social environment.

r) Facilitate the creation of an active alumni association and give them a place in the activities of the university.

8.1.5 Quality culture

s) Put more emphasis on improvement activities through evaluation and try to minimise the bureaucratic burden of current quality assurance procedures, making them easier and less time consuming.

t) Pursue the development of a user-friendly database gathering up-to-date data and key performance indicators linked to TUTs' understanding of what is good and what ought to be good, through which progress could be easily monitored.

u) Benchmark against good QA practices in similar European institutions to see what is good and what is less good, and benefit from contacting external experts in the field.

8.1.6 Internationalisation

v) Define a coherent strategy for the development of international activity and increase the administrative support of international mobility.

w) Put more emphasis on teaching foreign languages to stimulate the mobility of the students and ensure the success of the invitations that are extended to guest professors.