

EXTERNAL EVALUATOR'S REPORT FOR ARACIS

“Tibiscus” University of Timisoara 2022

Introduction

I was appointed as an International Evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was consequently invited to join the evaluation team for the institutional evaluation process of “Tibiscus” University of Timisoara (TUT). The audit took place between 7-12 April 2022. The evaluation process was conducted online.

The evaluation team consisted of the following members, in addition to myself:

Prof. univ. dr. Ladislau Nagy – Mission Director

Prof. univ. dr. Alexandru-Silviu Apahidean – Coordinator of the Experts Evaluator Team

Prof. univ. dr. George Darie – Advisory Commission Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Doinita Sendre – Institutional Commission Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Daniel Botez – Programme Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Geanina Cucu-Ciuhan – Programme Expert

Ioana Popescu – Technical Secretary

Jalaboi Iustin Gheorghe – Student Evaluator (Aliantei Nationale a Organizatiilor Studentesti din Romania)

Stefan Gabriel Costea – Student Evaluator (Uniunea Nationala a Studentilor din Romania)

The evaluation process began on Thursday at 9:00 a.m. at Zoom platform with a preliminary meeting for the preparation and harmonization of the evaluation stages in the hybrid work mode at institutional level and at the level of university study programmes. Everybody of the evaluation team gave their first impressions of the university, primarily on the basis of the documentation that was received previously. Also the members of the evaluation team introduced themselves briefly. At 10:00 a.m. we had a preliminary meeting

with the management of TUT, in order to establish the details of the evaluations both at the institutional level and at the level of university study programmes.

Prof. univ. dr. Ladislau Nagy told the introductory statements of the mission and he also asked the members of the evaluation team to introduce themselves. Then Prof. univ. dr. Radu Raducan (rector) had a welcoming speech and asked his colleagues to say a few words about their activities at TUT.

In my role as an international evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of the whole university and therefore I asked for additional meetings with a few members of the staff at TUT. I talked with the representatives of the Commission of recognition and equivalence of studies (CRID); the representative of the Commission for study programs, training and evaluation of teaching staff and student activities; and the responsible person(s) for international activities and relations (also Erasmus) at TUT.

My findings are based on the "INTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT" (2021) and I have heard during the meetings and interviews. The meetings and interviews were conducted at Zoom platform. I also tried to gain information from the website of TUT, but the English availability is missing.

General Statements

TUT is a private university established by the "Augusta Foundation" Union of Timisoara and started operating in 1991. Several structural changes has happened in the maintenance background of TUT since its establishment. From the mid of the 2000's some problems occurred between the founders and the university management, but they were mostly solved at the end of the 2010's. It seems that the reorganisation of the university is underway from 2020 according to the professional and legal requirements.

Currently, TUT operates under the auspices of the "Augusta Foundation" Union in accordance with the provisions of the National Education Law no.1 / 05.01.2011, with subsequent amendments. The institution was last evaluated by ARACIS in 2015. TUT received the qualification "Limited degree of trust".

The didactic structure of TUT is relatively simple as it has four faculties at the moment (Faculty of Law and Public Administration; Faculty of Computer science and Applied Informatics; Faculty of Psychology; Faculty of Economics). The faculties are further subdivided into departments.

TUT has 4 bachelor degree programmes (Law; Informatics; Psychology; Accountancy) and 6 master degree programmes (Institutions of European law; Administration of distributed systems; Web-design; Psychotherapies and clinical psychology; Audit and evaluation of the enterprise; Accounting, taxation and patrimony management of territorial administrative units).

The university has 728 (603 BA + 125 MA) enrolled students in the academic year of 2020-2021. In this academic year the number of students increased (793 BA + 133 MA = 926). Although the quantity of the academic staff is not sufficient, the quality of human resources at TUT seems to be on a good level, but scientific potential and research should be strengthened.

According to the organisation chart of TUT has a well-designed administrative structure, which meets the institutional needs of the university in order to achieve its mission and objectives.

Comment: It was very confusing that the references to the annexes in the Internal Evaluation Report and documents' structure uploaded to google drive were totally different.

Managerial Structure

The management of TUT seems to be organised in accordance with the legal obligations and with the provisions of the university's charter.

The management is assured by the following decision-making and administrative bodies: the Senate and the Board of Directors (university level), the Council of the Faculties and the Councils of Department (departmental level), accompanied by other structures (e.g. the

Commission for evaluation and quality assurance; the Commission of Ethics and Professional Deontology etc.) which support the management.

In the self-assessment report it can be read that the Senate is “consisting of 17 members” from which 75% teaching and research staff, and 25% representatives of the students.

The Faculty Council is the forum of the top management of all educational and scientific activities taking place in the faculty. The Faculty Council consists of 5-13 members so that a maximum of 75% of the council members are teachers, researchers and a minimum of 25% of the members are students.

The Board of Directors is the supreme forum of administrative, financial and economic management of TUT. The members are appointed by the founder of TUT and the Senate is the superior management forum of the whole teaching and research activities.

The leadership of TUT is ensured by the rector, the president of the Board of Directors, the president of the Senate, the vice-rector, the deans, the department directors. The selection and election of the rector is made with the advisory opinion of the founder of the university/Board of Directors, in accordance with the requirements of professional competence and performance. The appointed rector is approved accordingly by the founder and confirmed by the Minister of National Education, and he/she appoints his/her vice-rector. The deans of the faculties are selected through a public competition organized by the rector and is validated by the university Senate.

Comment: As the staff is relatively small in the university, the work load seems too much of the employees. It seems that the human resource is not enough at TUT. Who could complete all the tasks which are attached to this structure?

Teaching Staff

TUT employs a mixture of full-time and part-time academic staff, supported by a team of administrators.

The number of academic staff at the TUT in the academic year 2021/2022 is 56. There are 42 employees in the academic staff who is employed full-time by the university and 14 of them are professors and associate professors. The part-time employed (14 person) members of the academic staff are experienced teachers and professionals. Everybody of the full-time academic staff members at TUT is PhD holders.

The ratio is approximately 17 students to 1 teaching staff, if part-time teachers are taken into consideration.

Comment: The quantity of human resource should be developed at any rate at TUT, but it especially should be increased in the future if the number of students increases. The workload of the teaching staff is too much.

Facilities

It is very difficult to gauge that the infrastructure of TUT fulfil all the requirements (classrooms, laboratories, libraries etc.) without being presence on site myself. I could only rely on the documents I received.

The faculties carry out their didactic and research activities in the building located on Lascar Catargiu street, no. 6 Timisoara. Most educational premises are in the property of TUT, but the university hires also classrooms. TUT does not have its own dormitories and canteen. As far as sports are concerned, the university has no facilities for students, according to the Internal Evaluation Report.

Comment: The university need social, cultural, sport spaces for students, more developed and equipped spaces for educational, scientific research activity. It is important for TUT to invest in its physical infrastructure when the funds allow.

The info-documentary support for higher education and scientific research at TUT is assured by its library. The library of the university was founded in 1992. It was designed to support the higher education process in the faculties of TUT. The aim of the library is to provide students with quality and new information. The main users of the library are the

students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff of TUT. The library currently has 6 rooms (6x40=240m²).

Students

Two types of study programmes (BA/BSc, MA/MSc) are available for the candidates at TUT. There is only a little decrease in the number of students if we compare the data to the last academic years. It is a great success nowadays as the regressive tendency is very common in most of the higher education institutes because of the demographic problems and economic crises. The number of students are 926 (including all levels, forms and types of studies) in the academic year 2021/2022. There are no foreign students at the TUT, only foreign citizens of Romanian origin. The information available in English for potential international students is completely lacking at TUT. The average age of students is higher at TUT than it is usual in most of the universities.

At the organized appointment with the undergraduate students (approximately 50 participants) they seemed to be very loyal to TUT and they were pleased with the education and the circumstances. It was emphasized that practical education was on a very good level. In their opinion TUT is student-friendly higher education institution.

During the discussion with the former students (approximately 25 participants), they seemed pleased with the members of the TUT's teaching staff. It was mentioned that TUT employed well qualified professors with good reputation and involve leading practitioners in education, which was very beneficial for them. One of the most important reasons of their selection among higher educational institutions was that they could study also in the afternoons and evenings at TUT.

TUT has bilateral international agreements with different universities and also a few Erasmus agreements. The numbers of students participating in international programmes are very few. (Although I had asked for figures about Erasmus Mobility of the students and the teaching staff, I have not received them.)

Monday at noon we had a meeting with a group of about 15 representatives of employers both of the private and public sector. They were satisfied with those students who graduated from TUT. It was mentioned that the cooperation is operating very well between TUT and the employers. Several internships were established for the students. Without doubt they recommend to their employees to study at TUT.

Comment: Information in English is needed on the website of TUT for increasing the number of international students. It is also recommended to extend international activity of TUT. They also should increase the number of students taking part in mobility activities, especially doing a traineeship abroad. It will help them to gain some experience abroad and it is also suits to the EU recommendations which inspire the students to study one semester abroad.

Research

The scientific research should be one of the priority areas for TUT. Scientific research at the university is structured into research centres. At the university level, the Department of Scientific Research and Academic Creation (DCSCA) was established in 2019. DCSCA is the structure subordinated to the vice-rector of the university, which manages the database on the activity of scientific research, academic creation, theoretical-applied and contractual research of TUT. DCSCA includes four research centres (Centre for Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy; Multidisciplinary Informatics Research Centre; MediaMorphosis Research Centre; Centre for Advanced Studies in Forensic Psychology) and also research centres are operating at faculty level. Each research centre has the annual Operational Research Plan.

Research activity at TUT is continuously monitored and evaluated annually (Commission for Scientific Research and Evaluation of the Teaching Staff).

The academic staff develops scientific research activities, capitalized through didactic materials, publications in specific magazines or publishing houses in the country, through scientific communications, presented within sessions, conferences and symposiums organized by TUT or within other universities in the country.

Comment: The master programmes can be based on advanced standards of teaching, combination of lecturing with scientific research and students must acquire advanced skills in critical analysis and scientific research.

It is worth strengthening much more the research cooperation with more international partners. I would encourage TUT to strengthen its collaborative links also to the business sector.

Quality Management

TUT pays special attention to quality assurance as an integral part of the quality management system in the university. TUT has structures, strategies, policies and procedures for quality assurance of the teaching and research process. The quality assurance system at TUT is focused on quality assurance in teaching and scientific research; quality assurance for management processes.

The components of the quality assurance system of educational services are incorporated in the Commission for Quality Assessment, which was reorganised recently. The Quality Assessment and Assurance Code defines the basic principles and policies promoted by the university for quality assurance. It seems that the regulations and the procedures of quality assurance are clear and transparent at TUT.

Involving students in assessment and quality assurance has become a common practice in the university. They are present in all the evaluation and quality assurance processes. TUT regularly reviews its courses and gathers student feedback.

Comment: TUT has a responsive approach to improve the assessment, implementation and the results of the quality assurance system.

Conclusion

The basis of my report was the delivered documents and the data collected from the interviews. They were submitted to thematic content analysis. From the view of international expert I appreciate the efforts that was made by TUT to fulfil all the standard and indicators required in the higher education in Romania. I was mostly satisfied what I have experienced although everybody knows the limits of an online audit. To summarize my observations and opinion: TUT does not meet all the standards of higher education and scientific research. So they have to continue what they have started. In the present situation I have my confidence in connection with the university, but they have to improve in accordance with laid down regulations ruling in the higher education system of Romania and the recommendations made by ARACIS. I hope that some of the comments, which I made, will help the university management in the process of continual improvement.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to leadership of TUT and all the university staff for the support during the evaluation process. Also much gratitude to my colleagues from the evaluation team for the professional, open and gentle way in which the audit was conducted. Also thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

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Péter Várnagy
dr. jur., PhD, Dr. habil.
Associate Professor
University of Pécs