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

“Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, Romania

EVALUATION REPORT

November 2012

Team:

Virgilio Alberto Meira Soares, chair

Gülsün Saglamer

Karol Izydor Wysokiński

Emilie Todorova

Christina Rozsnyai, coordinator





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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi (TUIASI), Romania. The evaluation took place 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 first site visit to the university took place from 24 to 26 June 2012 and the main visit from 28 to 31 October 2012.

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.

Whilst 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 extent 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. TUIASI and the national context

TUIASI is located in Iasi, a city of in the region of Moldavia in the north-eastern corner of Romania. The city is one of the largest in the country, with a population of around half a million people in the larger area, and boasts five public and three private higher education institutions. TUIASI is an established university with a 200-year history; its predecessor institution was established in 1813 and offered “the first form of higher technical education in Romanian” (Self-Evaluation Report p. 4).

In the national classification (Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sport's Order 5262/20IL), TUIASI was classified among the twelve “advanced research and teaching universities”. According to the university's Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the total number of students at TUIASI is over 16000, including 1400 PhD students (p. 4), and an academic staff of 753, with 190 professors, 208 associate professors, 233 lecturers and 122 assistant professors. An additional 48 academic staff members hold temporary contracts. There are 341 auxiliary-technical and 477 administrative staff (p. 6).

The university offers “64 engineering specialisations (BSc), 73 Master of Science programmes, [and] 14 doctoral domains” (SER p. 4). Besides its educational mission, TUIASI has an important research dimension, having 23 accredited centres and laboratories for scientific research.

TUIASI has eleven faculties, all in the main field of engineering:

- Faculty of Automatic Control and Computer Engineering (established in 1990)
- Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Environmental Protection (Industrial Chemistry since 1937)
- Faculty of Civil Engineering and Building Services (1941)
- Faculty of Machine Manufacturing and industrial Management (1990)
- Faculty of Electronics, Telecommunications and Information Technology (1990)
- Faculty of Electrical Engineering (1937)
- Faculty of Hydrotechnical Engineering, Geodesy and Environmental Engineering (1962)
- Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (1948)
- Faculty of Materials Science and Engineering (1990)



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- Faculty of Textiles, Leather and industrial Management (1952)
- Faculty of Architecture "G.M. Cantacuzino" (from the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Building Services 2003).

Autonomy of universities is laid down in the country's constitution. As stated in the SER (p. 7) universities are regulated by the "National Education Law (1/2011) and other ministerial orders or government decisions. As an autonomous institution, TUIASI has freedom of decision regarding the mission, institutional strategy, structure, activities, teaching, scientific, administrative and financial management, as well as in relations with similar institutions in Romania and abroad". The actual degree of autonomy is affected by the financing system and by national regulations governing hiring and professorial promotions, programme frameworks and other aspects of universities. Moreover, many frequent changes in framework legislation and regulations on the national level contribute to a general instability and the draining of resources.

The global economic crisis has affected Romania, including its budget for higher education. Only 0.15% of GDP was dedicated for research in 2011 (SER p. 9). Unemployment in the country reached 7.43% in 2010, and the "regional GDP per capita is the lowest in Romania, at about two-thirds of the national average" (SER p. 5). In this environment, the role of the city's universities is crucial in upgrading employment skills for the population, and in introducing globally competitive graduates. TUIASI, with its engineering profile, is particularly well situated in producing professionals trained in areas in high demand.

However, the current economic situation has put a halt on the development of higher education institutions and is felt, in particular, by the recruitment moratorium at national level, whereby no new academic or administrative staff may be employed. This is true even if, in principle, assistant, lecturer and assistant professor promotions are decided on the university level and only promotions of associate and full professors are decided by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport.

1.3. The Self Evaluation Process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken on the basis of the university administration council decision and the members of the self-evaluation group were nominated by the rector.

They included:

- Professor Carmen Teodosiu, M.Sc., PhD, Vice-Rector for Research, Chairperson of Self-Evaluation Group
- Professor Neculai-Eugen Seghediu, PhD, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs
- Assoc. Prof. Irina Lungu, PhD, Vice-Rector for International Relations and University Image



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- Professor Nicolae Hurduc, PhD, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Environmental Protection
- Assoc. Prof Mariana Ursache, PhD, Head of Department, Faculty of Textiles, Leather and industrial Management
- Professor Florina Ungureanu, PhD, Faculty of Automatic Control and Computer Engineering
- Professor Iulian Ciocoiu, PhD, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Electronics, Telecommunications and Information Technology
- Professor Dorina Isopescu, PhD, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Building Services
- Professor Gheorghe Dumitrascu, PhD, Head of Department, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering
- Lecturer Brandusa Robu, PhD, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Environmental Protection
- Assistant Calin Gabriel Corduban, Faculty of Architecture "G.M.Cantacuzino"
- Cojocea Cristina, Student, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Building Services
- Dr. ec. jur. Petru Condrea, General Administrative Director
- Prof. Luminita Saruleanu, Secretary, Vice-rectorate Research
- Eng. Delia Todorean, Secretary, Vice-rectorate Academic Affairs.

The composition of the group was intended to ensure representation of the main fields of teaching and research and staff and student categories. The self-evaluation process took place between April and May 2012.

It is this narrow timeframe for the self-evaluation process to which the IEP evaluation team attributes the complexity and lack of clarity of the SER. Many appendices received were in Romanian, although the major points were explained in the Self-Evaluation Report. As a consequence, the report was highly descriptive with analytic parts limited to just a few comments. Given that a self-evaluation report is always a reflection of an institution's quality culture in its broadest sense, the team believes that a more in-depth process of self-reflection is always preferable to speed. The self-evaluation process revealed that there are many quality-related activities implicitly in place; the current existing processes and procedures were not reflected in the SER, but were referred to in the interviews.

1.4. The evaluation team

The IEP evaluation team (later team) consisted of:

- Professor Virgilio Alberto Meira Soares, former Rector, University of Lisbon, Portugal, Team chair
- Professor Gülsün Saglamer, former rector, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey



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- Professor Karol Izydor Wysokiński, former vice rector, Marie-Curie Skłodowska University, Poland
- Ms Emilie Todorova, European Students' Union, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland
- Ms Christina Rozsnyai, programme officer, Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Team coordinator.

The team thanks Rector Ion Giurma, Vice-Rector Carmen Teodosiu and the other members of the self-evaluation commission as well as the heads and members of the schools and service units who contributed to the self-evaluation report and the fruitful and open discussions during the two team visits to TUIASI. The team also expresses its appreciation for the organisation of the visits and the university's kind hospitality.



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2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The team found that TUIASI in general is very active and responsive to change in its steering direction on many levels and there is a collegiate atmosphere throughout the university. TUIASI presented its mission in its SER (p. 6-7) and in the strategic plan 2008-2011 (SER appendix 17, pp. 4-5). It was evident to the team that the mission is not succinct. It is presented together with principles and norms, aspirations and values, vision and goals, altogether comprising more than a page in which the identified features appear interchangeably. The team believes that all the presented descriptions and goals are valid for TUIASI, but it would suggest working out a brief and precise mission statement that could guide the university as a motto for its internal and external stakeholders. This would be the reference point for all activities and the axis to which the university's strategy could be aligned. Therefore, *the team recommends TUIASI to reconsider its mission in order to reflect its profile and strengths as being among the top universities in the country.*

A ministry-steered decentralisation process took place in Romanian higher education in 2011-2012. As a consequence, the university management structure separated the "deliberative function" (SER p. 8) of the senate, headed by a president, and the executive function by the administrative council, led by the rector. Senate members are elected by the academic community. The university strategy is proposed by the administrative council to the senate, which approves it.

The TUIASI administration council is comprised of the university's Rector, six vice-rectors (for education, research, strategy, information management, international relations and university image, student activities), faculty deans, the general administrative director, and student representatives, with the legal advisor and the union leader as invited members. The rector is elected by vote of the university academic community when the new governance structure was introduced.

Students are represented in the senate and faculty councils, where they make up 25% of the membership, but not in department councils. Student representatives are also on the administration council, the ethics committee and the quality evaluation and assurance committee.

As seen from an international perspective, the team found that university autonomy is limited, with government regulations determining such facets as staffing and hiring, promotions and student numbers amongst others. The position of associate and full professor requires national-level approval. Administrative staff numbers are set. It can be argued that most national-level regulations are those that have financial consequences. The team recognises that this is a very traditional and accepted structure. Nevertheless it believes that this kind of detailed external governance impinges on university-level decision-making with



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consequences on university quality. The frequent changes in legislation only add to the sense of instability and draining of resources.

Faculties at TUIASI have enough autonomy to run smoothly, their responsibility extending mainly to scientific and academic areas. For the positions of deans, the rector posted a public tender and appointed them in consultation with the vice-rectors. Faculties decide on new programmes to be put forward for accreditation after approval by the department. Faculties collaborate on some teaching programmes as well as research projects. Funding is allocated to faculties based on the proposal of the administrative council as approved by the senate. It is allotted based on student numbers and some quality indicators. The team believes that in many ways the subsidiary steering structure supports the function of the university, nevertheless, in order to streamline strategic governance *the team recommends that the coordination role of the central administration of TUIASI be strengthened to bring into line university actions with its general strategy.*

State funding for TUIASI is critically low at present. As described in the SER (p. 12), and corroborated in the interviews during the team's site visits, the funding structure follows a 2012 ministerial order (No. 3998 of May 5), in three main categories:

- a) "Basic funding (FB): 68%
- b) Supplementary funding (FS): 30.50%, out of which:
 - o Supplementary funding based on excellence (FSE): 25%;
 - o Preferential funding for master studies and doctoral studies in science and advanced technologies, in programmes taught in international languages and co-tutoring of doctoral studies (FSEP): 2.50%;
 - o Development of the institutional capacity and management efficiency (FSCM): 0,00%;
 - o Playing an active role at the local and regional level (FSL): 3.00%
- c) Institutional development: 1.50%"

There is additional competitive funding from the state that is based on quality indicators and contracts. In the internal allocation of the budget the final word belongs to senate. Given the national funding formula, *the team recommends that TUIASI continue to diversify its funding sources to balance the existing economic constraints and to strengthen its autonomy.*

In spite of the economic constraints, the team saw that TUIASI makes visible efforts to improve the physical conditions of its campus. Several dormitories have recently been restored and a new rectorate building planned, though the construction is presently on hold for financial reasons. TUIASI has also made efforts to upgrade its IT infrastructure.



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3. Teaching and learning

The bachelor/master structure was introduced in Romania by law in 2004. As a consequence, the programme curricula were revised, with specialisations appearing in master's programmes. The team found that both types of programmes at TUIASI seem to be generally organised according to the Bologna principles regarding the number of credits, taking into account the workload of students, contact hours, and learning outcomes descriptions, but also heard instances where this was not case. As far as learning outcomes are concerned, although there are some changes in examination types, there is still much work to be done because student assessments do not always take into account the stated objectives of the learning outcomes. The focus on learning outcomes in curricular set-up, teaching and assessment methodology, is still in the process of development in many European countries. TUIASI would profit from a university-wide approach to staff training, such as immersing some of its staff in international workshops on the subject who could present it to the other staff in order to understand the full implications and concrete tasks. *The team believes that the university should make efforts to adapt the assessment of students to the real concept of learning outcomes.*

As far as the current curricular structures are concerned, the team wonders if there are not too many constraints in designing curricula that prevent students from choosing electives. The team heard such comments in several interviews. It also heard from students, however, that that on an individual basis, teachers often dedicate more time to help and teach students than is required by law.

As far as the employability of graduates is concerned, the team was pleased to learn from employers, that training at TUIASI produces good professionals. In many faculties a three-week internship with companies is mandatory for students. Whether this is enough may be questionable as students at one faculty reported that more internships are needed for most fields of study.

Students at several faculties reported that their overall grades were based on a variety of results from class projects and essays to laboratory grades and final examinations whereas a few years ago only the end of term examinations were in place. However, there were also those students who noted that in class, lectures still dominate over practical work and that only a small fraction of their timetable can be filled with electives.

As noted in the chapter on governance, the team believes that the approach whereby faculties decide on academic matters works well for TUIASI in many respects. The team believes, however, that there are issues where university-level steering and assistance could help all faculties. This includes the training of staff at all faculties for the implementation of Bologna features of teaching and learning, such as learning outcomes-based teaching and assessment, student-centred learning and principles of curriculum design. On the other hand,



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as a case of good practice with respect to coordination among faculties, the team commends TUIASI for taking the initiative to teach core modules, such as mathematics, in an overarching way for students of all faculties.

The team recommends that TUIASI focus on the constant improvement of teaching and learning in a systematic manner, with the plan-do-check-act cycle as a basic procedure that is applied in all departments and faculties, and to elaborate the use of the European standards and guidelines with respect to the quality assurance of teaching and learning.

Study programmes accredited by the national quality assurance agency ARACIS meet a minimum threshold of quality, but that by itself is not a guarantee for the high quality of programmes. The team heard that TUIASI's quality assurance commission is aware of the European standards and to an extent they are integrated into their procedures. The team heard, for instance, that the creation of a new programme takes the needs of the market into account, and these needs are discussed with the private sector. On the other hand, the team was informed that in some cases of students spending time studying abroad they had difficulty in having their credits recognised when they came back (although apparently new legislation to avoid such situations in the future has recently been approved). *The team recommends that TUIASI take care to solve the problems raised with regard to the recognition of credits earned during study abroad.*

The team took note that several faculties of the university have correction measures to avoid high dropout rates and anomalous situations like continuous lowering of the average mark in a particular course. *The team recommends that the procedures to track and correct excessive dropout rates and student marking be applied consistently throughout the university.* All of these issues will benefit from central-level oversight via a coherent quality assurance system and a central data-collection system.



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4. Research

In its registration for IEP evaluation the university stated that "The major research and education activities are carried out within 14 priority domains, 10 of which have been classified as "A" category, according to the Laws 7/2011 and 789/2011." TUIASI claims to be among the top research universities in Romania. In its SER (p. 6), the university states that it has "23 accredited research/excellence centres (accredited by the National Research Council, CNCS)." According to the findings of the team it believes that the claim is justified. However, the review team fears that the effects of the reduction of funding by 70% in the last years may have a negative effect on the university's commendable performance.

The team understood that there is no systematic benchmarking for comparing the university with others in Europe. TUIASI shows through several indicators (the number of ISI publications, rankings like Scimago, European projects, the performance of its students abroad in joint programmes, etc.) that it compares very well with many similar universities. *The team suggests that TUIASI set up a permanent benchmarking structure that would allow better knowledge of its positioning.*

A national law requires university staff to publish and an additional salary of 25% is allocated for scientific achievement. Nevertheless, not all academic staff publish regularly, and sometimes not at all. According to Romanian law, a professors' full workload is seven hours per week, for associate professors eight hours, for assistant professors ten and for teaching assistants eleven hours. This load may be increased when publishing activity is low. It is a matter of concern for the university that the number of publications is not evenly distributed throughout the faculties. *The team suggests that the university makes an effort to correct the asymmetry in publication output between the faculties where it is not field-dependent by offering the necessary incentives to those who may be less productive.* These could be, in addition to the nationally regulated 25% salary incentive, e.g. teaching load adjustments, sabbaticals, quality awards, etc.

Another indicator of the research quality of the university is its participation in the Technopark that is externally administered and where professors from the university cooperate in research projects. It is active in helping to create new companies with success even in times of crisis. This allowed the team to conclude that the university is using its research to transfer knowledge and technology. Moreover, the university is active in the creation of patents, stating in its SER (p. 5) that it produced nearly 65% of the Romanian patents in the last 10 years. This indicates that the university is attentive to intellectual property, which is a proof of the spirit of innovation that must be inherent to a technical university.

The team examined how the university strategically supports research and found, however, that there is no systematic approach in obtaining external funding to support research. *As an*



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advanced research and engineering university TUIASI should develop a strategy to attract external research funding based on its strengths in particular fields.

In addition, the team believes it would be of advantage to TUIASI to allocate seed money (from a small percentage of its own income) to encourage research that would underscore the university's strategic areas regardless of any externally funded project.

In practice most research projects include students, although the Team was not able to determine whether there is a policy for it. Students are involved in research activities to varying degrees, as reported by different faculties and their students. In some cases faculties linked their research to the educational process. *The team encourages the university to spread the good practice to involve students in research at all levels in the appropriate manner.*

TUIASI teaches PhD programmes as third-cycle studies organised by all faculties, with the exception of the recently established faculty of architecture. The schools are grouped into ten doctoral schools, and the team was told in interviews that several of which have been acknowledged for their excellence by national reviews. The doctoral schools also run post-doctoral research. Doctoral schools are supervised centrally under the vice-rector for research. In some cases the schools have co-supervisors from other faculties, accommodating the need for interdisciplinarity. *The team believes that it would benefit TUIASI to reconsider the structure of its doctoral schools to be detached from the faculty structure in order to provide a systematic framework to accommodate and indeed encourage interdisciplinarity.*



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5. Service to society

The university has many contracts with industry and also has good contacts with local authorities. According to the information the team obtained, the services provided by TUIASI satisfy its "customers", who are willing to contribute more to the development of the university with their expertise and experience. *Besides the existing services to the community, the team believes that TUIASI could focus in a strategic way on creating projects as a service to the community in specific areas that are within its profile and build upon the university's strengths, such as those related to grand challenges and extreme situations (earthquake and emergency relief, environmental stress, energy, climate challenges, etc.).*

The team feels that the collaboration of external partners with universities is a positive development and calls for a more open attitude of higher education institutions toward external partners. As a matter of fact, the participation of external partners in some strategic decisions of higher education institutions may be useful not only for the professional integration of graduates but also to enhance the partnership of higher education institutions with society.

External stakeholders reported that they have good cooperation with TUIASI, extending to common development projects but also placement of interns and curriculum development. In general they consider that TUIASI's graduates are well prepared and they are pleased to hire them and provide internships.

The evaluation team discussed with the stakeholders that an external advisory board be set up to establish a formal channel of communication and feedback from the business community. It appeared to the team that this is an unfamiliar concept to some. *If the law does not prohibit it, the team recommends that the university consider setting up a university-level advisory board with external stakeholders that would reinforce the already strong links with society.*

The team noted that alumni organisations are organised at faculty level. The SER states that "the university has an operational online platform through which the contact with the Alumni is partially done, only at the level of certain departments/faculties" (p. 17). The team also explored this issue in its interviews and consequently it *encourages strengthening alumni contacts and associations. A central-level database on alumni would facilitate their involvement to support TUIASI on the university level in the future.*



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6. Quality culture

TUIASI has been evaluated by a number of national organisations. The national accreditation agency ARACIS last evaluated TUIASI in 2009 with a rating of “University of High Confidence”. The evaluation covered the institutional and programme levels, the latter with respect to bachelor and master programmes. Doctoral programmes or schools were evaluated by National Council for the Attestation of University Titles (CNATDCU) (SER p. 4). A number of other evaluations are listed in the SER, including the recent classification as an “advanced research and teaching” institution, all of them focusing primarily on the university’s research performance.

There are many elements of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Areas* (ESG) applied at TUIASI, and the team received a report on internal assessment (SER Appendix 19). The team indeed found that there is a lot of concern within the university regarding quality assurance. Some examples are the manuals of procedures, evaluations of teachers and courses, periodic evaluations of programmes, and the outcomes of research activities. It was evident to the team, however, that not all elements of the ESG are in place, most notably an overarching university policy for quality assurance.

It is a Bologna principle that universities are responsible for their own quality, and this goes hand in hand with accountability for university quality. Therefore, *the team recommends the university to develop more accountability measures relating to systematic quality assurance as well as transparent internal budget allocation mechanisms in order to justify its demand for more autonomy.*

If TUIASI would like to achieve a quality culture throughout the university and involving all its members it is important to integrate all parts of quality assurance into a coherent process. Any quality assurance procedure only makes sense if it really improves quality. *Having manuals of procedures is not enough to produce quality. The procedures must be accompanied by some agents who detect anomalies or deficiencies. Self-evaluation reports should be made and analysed, plans of improvement elaborated, and a system of follow-up actions put into place. This plan-do-check-act circle at the level of teaching and learning procedures will include teacher and course evaluations with deficiencies detected, but action must be taken and the consequences of those actions must be known.*

The team found that part of the plan-do-check-act cycle was implemented at university level, however, there was no coherent means of interconnecting the different processes. Therefore an improvement that could be carried out in one service may not have the same results in another service. *The university is advised to consider integrating all the quality procedures that are in place into a comprehensive and coherent internal system of quality assurance that helps to improve quality in general. This should be steered by the university-level quality*



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assurance commission. Elaborating a quality assurance system should also be accompanied by the development of an information system that could support the quality decisions in real time.

Student evaluations in some faculties are done annually, but there is no overarching university policy on this either. One faculty reported a 75% return rate, with surveys carried out via their database; however it noted that a university-wide quality approach has not yet been initiated by central management.

The same faculty also reported that it has a staff assessment system in place for ten years. The teachers are evaluated against a set of indicators and then compared with the average rates, with up to 25% additional salary awarded in line with the national regulations to outstanding performers for a period of five years. Decisions are passed by a faculty committee that includes the department chairs. *The only way to convince everyone of the usefulness of quality assurance is to showcase best-case examples of its achievements.*

Regarding the quality assurance of research, it is known that it is periodically evaluated, due to the fact that financing comes from external bodies that require it. Nevertheless, if the economic situation improves, this attitude of relying on external evaluations does not leave room for the university to take strategic decisions on the organisation of its own research activity, as mentioned before.

A centrally directed and integrated quality assurance system will ensure that a quality culture is gradually established involving the quality consciousness of all members of the university. At present, accountability is very much financially driven. A good quality assurance system will certainly eliminate this weakness, since it presupposes accountability at all levels.



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7. Internationalisation

There are numerous initiatives of internationalisation at TUIASI, predominantly under the Erasmus Programme but also other exchange schemes and involving student and staff mobility, as well other actions concentrating on research.

TUIASI sends and receives Erasmus students (though no specific numbers were presented, Appendix 23 to the SER lists extensive numbers of Erasmus agreements by each faculty). It came up in several of the interviews, as noted in the chapter "Teaching and Learning", that there are problems with the recognition of credits for returning students that the university must solve. The same appendix also lists 75 agreements with foreign institutions that potentially could involve staff and researcher mobility. The university hopes that with the start of the Erasmus for All Programme in 2014 it will have access to financial resources to step up its mobility activities.

On the other hand, there are at present very few English-taught courses or programmes, although the university is making efforts to increase them. Some faculties offer selected programmes in English. There are two undergraduate programmes at the faculties of civil engineering and at electrical engineering and computers, as well as two master programmes in structural engineering and in environmental management (SER p. 15).

TUIASI also organises summer courses to improve English language skills. It was reported in an interview that there were c.a. 250 students in the 2011 course with beginner and intermediate levels of proficiency. The evaluation team was pleased to note that many students interviewed had a conversational level of English.

The team noted that TUIASI does not have an explicit policy for internationalisation, and the *team recommends that TUIASI devise an explicit policy on internationalisation at university level.*

The team recommends that in order to strengthen internationalisation as an important aspect of a research university, it should extend its perspective to include all related activities (various types of exchanges, agreements, foreign language programmes, publishing, website) into a coherent internationalisation plan. For this, a functioning database on all international activities should be established.



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8. Conclusion

TUIASI is a serious research university with a university community that appreciates the value of the institution and its members, as well as its external stakeholders, and clearly eager to improve the university's position within the region and internationally. As a large university, it has extensive management and quality assurance elements in place, building on its long history and reputation. It is the elements that the IEP team encourages TUIASI to coalesce into a focused mission and strategy from which to implement synchronized day-to-day management and ongoing quality assurance.

The purpose of the evaluation team report is to help TUIASI at institutional level. Therefore, the team focused on the institution as a whole and its evaluation involved neither programme nor research assessments. Nor does the team compare TUIASI to other higher education institutions; rather it attempts to uncover the university processes and the university's potential on its own merits. This report – and indeed the entire evaluation process – should serve to provide governance and management with an overarching perspective. At the same time, it should give all members of the university community some strategic directions, based on an external view of TUIASI's current situation. The IEP evaluation is a collegiate review by peers, who cannot proffer ready-made solutions, nor should this be done since any external prescriptive approach would be futile and ineffective because it would prevent TUIASI from truly “owning” its aspirations, concepts, and implementation practices. TUIASI must ask its own questions to arrive at the right answers in order to set out its own optimal course, and in particular since only TUIASI understands fully the internal facts and external circumstances within which it operates its strengths and weaknesses, and its opportunities as well as its risks.

IEP encourages the university to write a progress report within a year, reflecting on the actions taken following the IEP team recommendations and explaining why some recommendations were not considered. The university may also request a follow-up evaluation by IEP within one to three years following the initial evaluation.

The team hopes that its evaluation is able to stir discussion at the university on the way forward, but also that decisions will be made and implemented as a result of the discussions.

Recommendations

The key recommendations found in the text of the evaluation report are listed below for each thematic chapter for better reference.

Governance

1. The team recommends TUIASI to reconsider its mission in order to reflect its profile and strengths as being among the top universities in the country



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2. It recommends the university to develop more accountability measures in accordance with the Bologna principle that universities are responsible for their own quality, in order to justify their demand for more autonomy.
3. The team further recommends that the coordination role of the administration of the university should be strengthened in order to align the main university actions.
4. The team encourages TUIASI to continue to diversify its funding sources in order to balance the economic constraints and to strengthen its autonomy

Teaching and learning

5. The team recommends that TUIASI focus on the constant improvement of teaching and learning in a systematic manner, with the plan-do-check-act cycle as a basic procedure that is applied in all departments and faculties, and to elaborate the use of the European Standards and Guidelines with respect to the quality assurance of teaching and learning.
6. The team believes that the university should make efforts to adapt the assessment of students to the real concept of learning outcomes.
7. The team recommends that TUIASI take care to solve the problems raised with regard to the recognition of credits earned during study abroad
8. The team recommends that the procedures to track and correct excessive dropout rates and student marking trends be applied consistently throughout the university.

Research

9. Despite what the team said about the indicators used by the university to compare with European partners, it suggests that TUIASI set up a permanent benchmarking structure that would allow better knowledge of its positioning.
10. The team suggests that the university make efforts to correct the asymmetry in publication output between the faculties where it is not field-dependent by offering the necessary incentives to those who may be less productive.
11. The team believes that it would benefit TUIASI to reconsider detaching the doctoral schools from the faculty structure in order to provide a systematic framework to accommodate and encourage interdisciplinarity.
12. As a top research and engineering university TUIASI should develop a strategy to attract external research funding based on its strengths in particular fields.
13. The team encourages the university to spread the good practice to involve students in research at all levels in the appropriate manner.



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Service to society

14. The team recommends that if the law does not prohibit it, the university should consider setting up a university-level advisory board with external stakeholders that would reinforce the already strong links with society.
15. Besides the existing services to the community, the team believes that TUIASI could create projects as a service to the community in specific areas that are within its profile and build upon the university's strengths, such as those related to challenges and extreme situations (earthquake and emergency relief, environmental stress, energy, climate challenges, etc.)
16. The team encourages strengthening alumni contacts and associations. A centralised database on alumni would facilitate their involvement to support TUIASI on the university level in the future.

Quality assurance

17. The university is advised to consider integrating all the quality procedures that are in place into a comprehensive and coherent internal system of quality assurance that helps to improve the quality in general and also that of all the elements. This should be steered by the university-level quality assurance commission. Elaborating a quality assurance system should also be accompanied by the development of an information system that could support the quality decisions in real time.
18. The team recommends the university to develop more accountability measures relating to systematic quality assurance as well as transparent internal budget allocation mechanisms in order to justify its demand for more autonomy.
19. The only way to convince everyone of the usefulness of quality assurance is to showcase best-case examples of its achievements.
20. Having manuals of procedures is not enough to produce quality. The procedures must also include the identification and analysis of anomalies or deficiencies. Self-evaluation reports should be drawn up and analysed, plans of improvement elaborated, and a system of follow-up actions put into place. This plan-do-check-act cycle at the level of teaching and learning procedures will include teacher and course evaluations with deficiencies detected, but action must be taken and the consequences of those actions must be known.
21. A centrally directed and integrated quality assurance system will ensure that a quality culture is gradually established involving the quality consciousness of all members of the university. At present, accountability is very much financially driven. A good quality assurance system will certainly eliminate this weakness, since it presupposes accountability at all levels.



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Internationalisation

22. TUIASI should have an explicit policy on internationalisation.
23. The team recommends that in order to strengthen internationalisation as an important aspect of a research university, it should extend its perspective to include all related activities (various types of exchanges, agreements, foreign language programmes, publishing, website) into a coherent internationalisation plan. For this, a functioning database on all international activities should be established.