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POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894

AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ
DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII
ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
REGISTRATURA

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Report

of the foreign evaluator for
Universitatea Tehnică "Gheorghe Asachi" din Iași

SOLICITAT RAMBURSARE
FSE-POSDRU
POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894
ID 141894

ETS – FOREIGN EVALUATOR EXPERT

Date:May 2015.....

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Foreword

At the beginning of November 2014, I received notice from CEENQA¹ of a call for experts on a QUALITAS project for institutional evaluation of higher education institutions (HEI) in Romania. I applied and my candidature was retained. My name was passed to ARACIS and I was formally nominated at the beginning of February 2015. ARACIS appointed me on the Iași Technical University evaluation.

ARACIS sent me on April 7th a link to a document describing the work expected from the evaluation team and the Romanian regulator context.

Confirmation of the dates for the visit of the university was given only after insistent follow-up messages. I then obtained a link and a key to the evaluation documents, namely the self-evaluation report in English language. I downloaded them immediately as the date (April 17th) left only less than a month to read through and analyse the university report.

Recommendation for ARACIS: *set time-frame objectives to report transmission so that experts can have sufficient time to thoroughly read the report.*

As is customary with institutional ARACIS evaluation, the foreign expert participates in the activities of the institutional group whereas the programme group is composed exclusively from Romanian auditors.

Language was not an issue as many professors spoke French or English. This was the same with students or invited business partners. Moreover, the University dedicated a French-language professor to translate the speakers address during the introductory and interview sessions. I only regret that the session dedicated to ethics was held in Romanian (since such a commission does not exist in France, understanding what is at stake in practice would give arguments in the debate about the opportunity of introducing it).

Personal background

I have been a full member of the French accreditation agency for engineering programmes, Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs – CTI, for two 4-year mandates (which cannot be extended) and am now an “expert” to CTI, participating in CTI international promotion and helping the full members during the evaluation visits.

I occasionally collaborate with foreign accreditation agencies. My most recent participations were with Belgian AEQES² (2012-2013, global evaluation of all engineering programmes in French-speaking universities) and with Croatian AZVO³ (2013, institutional evaluation of a HEI).

Two decades ago, I was quality manager in a telecommunications company and charged with ISO-9001 certification.

1 Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

2 Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité dans l'Enseignement Supérieur, agency for quality evaluation in higher education

3 Agencija za Znanost i Visoko Obrazovanje, agency for science and higher education



Considering this background, I focused my attention on the normative quality aspects present in the Iași technical university.

Preliminary work

This part began as soon as I downloaded the self-evaluation report.

The [English] university self-evaluation report is an 83-pages document structured in seven short chapters. It follows an ARACIS outline and addresses all the relevant items one would expect to find in an institutional evaluation. It exposes facts or asserts opinions which are proven (in the Quality sense of the word) by reference to extensive explanations in 134 annexes (unfortunately for me written in Romanian, out of which I painfully extract the general idea).

The report is concise, yet fully informative and already gives an in-depth view of the proposed programmes and the way they are taught.

Emphasis is put on quality demonstrating that the recommendations stemming from the European Standard Guidelines (ESG) are already in practice in day-to-day management of the University.

The self-evaluation report ends with a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis. As far as I can judge, this SWOT seems to be realistic, showing that the University has a clear and objective knowledge of its state and (legal, academic, economic, social, ...) environment.

The outcome of this reading was the a set of notes and questions about Romanian peculiarities (regulation, procedures, ...) and items needing further explanations from the University.

General presentation

It should be noted that the rector did not paraphrase the report, which would have taken hours, but was able to highlight in a quarter of an hour the important points of his institution and synthetically present the financial situation.

“Strategy statement”

I did not read in the report any statement expressing goals or ambitions for mid-term evolution of the University. In his introductory address, the Rector did not mention either any commitment on future orientations.

The report perfectly defines the mission of the University (e.g. in I.2 or in III.10) but these sections reflect a legal or generic definition which could be used for any university with a name change.

In my expectation, a *strategy statement*, approved by the board of directors and the senate (Senatul), gives internal and external goals which serve as references for the definition of daily management actions. Goals can be qualitative or quantitative and are associated with a deadline. Their achievement is measured with indicators.

Such a strategy statement helps people feel they share objectives and makes them actors of the institution development. This document is also the backbone of the quality policy as the basis from



which everything is derived.

Annex A.1.2.2.a Planul strategic pentru 2012-2016 does not correspond to a “top management-level” statement. It is too long, exhibits too many objectives, going into details. In my opinion, it is already an operative-level document which can hardly be traced back to some other higher order declaration of intent.

External goals are related to the university “environment”: its rank among national universities, its distinctive programmes, its international attraction, the number of articles in peer-reviewed journals, etc.

Internal goals are for some of them akin to quality, others are relate to training efficiency improvement and outcome, such as student failure ratio or number of defended theses.

The closest document to such internal goals is annex 1.2.1 *Misiunea și obiectivele universității Tehnice “Gheorghe Asachi” din Iași* but no deadline is given, nor indicators defined apart from financial objectives.

In his opening address, the Rector summarised the essential elements of the self-evaluation report but did not take this opportunity to touch on the future of the university..

Recommendation: *TUIași should be encouraged to write a short (1-2 pages) strategic statement as a roadmap defining mid-term evolution objectives.*

Partnerships

Employers

Company representatives were invited to show their satisfaction about the training provided. They find graduates can adapt quickly to new situations and are fit to work in companies. But, they think the student ability in foreign languages or in management could be improved.

Companies are willing, at least those present, to offer internships at various moments in the programme.

Feedback about company needs is collected through various channels: alumni association, direct contact with professors, “job days”, ... However, I have not understood if company representatives had seats in the different boards, at least with consultative status. If this is not the case, the information collection circuit should be formalised to give it an official status. Section B.1.2.3 alludes to meetings with employers and alumni without details.

Recommendation: *clarify relations with socio-economic world to build an effective feedback loop between needs and programme contents.*

Meeting so many employers in a amphitheater is not favourable to a dialog between them and the evaluation team. Some topics would have been worth a debate. I did not participate in programme evaluation but I understand that the equivalent meeting in each programme was held at a much reduced scale allowing for more effective bilateral communication.



Research

TUIași is firmly built upon research laboratories. The laboratories cover a very wide spectrum of sciences and are used both for research and teaching (practical application of courses). They seem to be up-to-date with current state-of-the-art. They even deal with topics neglected in Western Europe such as adverse fluid interactions in plumbing systems (faculty of Civil Engineering and Building Services).

During the visit, professors cited their cooperation with renowned French laboratories (since I am French). The list shows that research at TUIași has at least the same level and quality as in those laboratories. This is also demonstrated by the number of articles accepted by international peer-reviewed journals.

International

TUIași has implemented the Bologna process. This has allowed to sign numerous agreements for the benefit of students and teaching staff. The agreements provide mobility opportunities through Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and other programmes.

However, in-bound statistics show that TUIași is still in a “vicinity process” where the majority of students come from Moldova and Ukraine (issue with language and cost of living?). No out-bound information is given in the report.

Recommendation: *TUIași should strive to promote more diversity in student exchange.*

Resources

Teaching staff

Permanent teaching staff leads to a supervision ration of 13 to 18 students per professor. The lower figure is achieved with the officially authorised number of professors (which gives a fair supervision ration according to Western European standards), while the higher figure is obtained with the occupied teaching positions (such a ratio automatically results in a recommendation).

Recommendation: *the Ministry for Higher Education should allocate resources so that a better supervision ratio can be attained.*

Teaching staff qualification is set by regulations. Most professors are PhD and active researchers. This gives assurance to students for state-of-the-art teaching and higher level education.

Equipment

Visit of the facilities showed laboratories are numerous and seem to be adapted to programme objectives. Number of students per “booth” is fair enough to achieve efficiency.

As is common today, simulation is also heavily used. Program evaluation teams should check that care is taken to prepare students to face perturbation phenomena in real systems such as noise, quantification in time and space, bandpass limitations, ...



Employers complain that equipment is not at latest generation standard, but university role is to give graduate a sound method to adapt to existing company devices, not to train for a specific one.

Budget

Budget is under close management. Applying “rules of thumbs” to correct cost of living, available amount per student compares with West European universities budget.

Enrollment

Student enrollment is described in detailed procedures. It is based on a file containing previously obtained diplomas (baccalaureate, bachelor or master) and marks. The applicant must pass a qualifying exam which insures student quality. Moreover, foreign candidates must prove fluency in Romanian language.

Employability

Company representatives and graduates have asserted the good and quick adaptability to enterprise jobs. As expected, the former estimate the time needed to one year while the latter talk about six months.

A key factor for success in our global economic world is language mastery. Though employers complained about average student level in English, I found students could understand and answer rather fluently my questions, even those in first years. They could give their opinion with nuances.

A fellow team member suggested that the student sample, consisting of delegates, was biased because education success was a condition to be maintained as a delegate. Anyway, when I asked for direction in the corridors, I always got correct information without difficulty.

Student life

TUIași offers a high accommodation capacity (for about 60% of students). Catering is available on the campus. The university is totally integrated in the city with ample cultural and leisure activities.

TUIași also has an extensive scholarship awarding system whose rules are publicly available.

Programmes

Programmes are advertised in the public part of the web site. However, faculties provide different levels of detail. Some are minimally described as a set of knowledges or courses. At the opposite, Facultatea de Electronică, Telecomunicații și Tehnologia Informației (FETTI) has the best ESG-compliant information: every course is described in a synthetic form where learning outcomes are expressed in terms of competences (both generic and specific) in addition to knowledge.



Recommendation: *faculties should be encouraged to present their programmes like FETTI.*

Teaching modules receive ECTS quotation. Credits are allocated based on a generally accepted ratio of 1 credit for 15-20 student work hours (including academic face-to-face time and personal work).

As is usual, by their interview answers, students underestimate the necessary personal effort to master the taught topics.

Teaching is based on a traditional model: lecture, seminar, lab session. Students would prefer to spend more time in lab where they are confronted to real systems

Student evaluation of programmes

This evaluation is carried out according to a procedure. Data are transmitted to selected faculty members having the capacity to take decisions. Evaluation follow-up seems efficient and effective. However, students receive no feed back on the reason that nominal confidential data might be released.

Recommendation: *to encourage participation, find a way to return a “neutral” synthesis to students*

Diploma

Presentation of the diploma itself is ruled by national regulations. The diploma supplement complies with the European guidelines except on a minor item. The curriculum summary shows the modules list with capitalised credits and national mark. The bottom line bears the national average mark instead of the gaussian European mark A-E.

Universities all over Europe are reluctant to throw up their traditional mark system since the European mark is relative to a year and does not allow comparison between years. The traditional mark system is an internal tool to assess credit acquisition. In academic exchange or job application, only credits are relevant since marking system varies from country to country or even from university to university.

Recommendation: *qualify the global student success with the ECTS mark A-E instead of the average mark in the national notation system*

As far as I understand the Romanian higher education system, the term *engineer* (which is not defined by the Bologna process anyway) carries a different meaning than in other countries. Since the meaning varies according to country culture or history, there would be advantage to clarify the term for European comparison and equivalence. Here, I take it as granted to a Bachelor graduate in engineering.





Quality management

This is a well developed topic in TUIași. Procedures are well written and rather short (which encourages people to read them). The whole quality system relies on a dedicated organisation supported by the top management. Quality meeting are regularly held.

The quality team is composed of enthusiast members who are aware of the psychological limitations to quality penetration. They proceed at a pace avoiding rejection by unprepared faculty members. They prefer to consolidate the existing benefits before extending the quality perimeter.

Presently, 30+ procedures are officially approved, covering both selected administrative and academic processes.

SWOT

Surprisingly, the Department of Teacher Education and Training (*Departamentul pentru Pregătirea Personalului Didactic*) has not been identified as a strength and an opportunity. Besides its legal mission, this department hosts professors in human sciences, among which psychologists. The department could explore new directions in the science of teaching to improve education efficiency. It could be an invaluable tool for professors to adapt to new audiences. The department could also pave the way for newer teaching methods such as “project-based/problem-based learning” by preparing professorial teams to face such challenges.

Conclusion

TUIași has all resources needed to face its missions. Professorial staff is highly skilled and its diversity encompasses a wide scientific spectrum allowing to cover all offered specialties. They behave very professionally.

Equipment is adapted to research and programmes, in number and quality.

Quality management has already reached an impressive degree of achievement. It is headed by a wise and careful team, skilled enough to avoid traditional doctrinal pitfalls.

TUIași has knitted a large network of relations with other institutions, both for research and academic purposes. Its reputation is growing.

In my opinion, TUIași deserves a **high degree of confidence** rating.

