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

Titu Maiorescu University in Bucharest

EVALUATION REPORT

February 2014

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Titu Maiorescu University in Bucharest. The evaluation took place in 2013 in the framework of the project “Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

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

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

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- a strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase;
- a European 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?



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- 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. Titu Maiorescu University's profile

Titu Maiorescu University (TMU) is one of the private universities in Romania. It began life as Association Titu Maiorescu Independent University (ATMIU) in 1990. It was granted its present name of Titu Maiorescu University and status as an accredited private educational institution of public utility in 2002. Though its main campus is in Bucharest, a branch with two faculties is situated in Târgu Jiu.

As the IEP team understands from its two visits and the documentation provided, TMU is a well-established university on the education market. Its nine faculties offer a wide range of cutting-edge subjects and study programmes, though it has not reached the status of a fully comprehensive university as the natural sciences and engineering are not (yet) covered. All in all, TMU is exceptional in that it is one of the rare examples of private universities that teach medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

TMU is situated in the urban, rather competitive environment of Bucharest. The capital is advantageous for TMU as it provides the university with a large number of potential students. In addition, TMU can access a large pool of talent among prospective students as well as among potential academic staff. However, TMU must compete with numerous institutions of tertiary education in the capital, in relation to these very talents. Besides its main campus in Bucharest, TMU has an equally well-established branch in Târgu Jiu. Here, subjects and programmes are offered that are relevant for the region, i.e. law and economics. Maintaining the branch in Târgu Jiu is an important objective for TMU as it serves societal and economic demands there, offering tertiary education for a region whose inhabitants could not necessarily afford studies in Bucharest.

Regarding the national context of tertiary education, TMU was classified as a teaching university in the national classification exercise carried out in 2011. In addition to this classification, TMU also participated in a second accreditation in 2012, carried out by ARACIS, i.e. the national quality assurance agency, in which it was awarded the highest trust certificate of "high level of confidence". As far as TMU's mission and vision are concerned, its own objective has been from the beginning to develop into a teaching and research university. Not only had it been a major mission of the initial ATMIU "to perform specific activities of higher education, including scientific research",¹ but it is also TMU's mission today "to generate and transfer knowledge through advanced scientific research; initial and ongoing training at undergraduate and postgraduate level

¹ Information on Founders. In: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 23, p. 1.



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[and] continuing education and training of adults”,² as stated in the University Charter³. Therefore, TMU pursues the goal of reaching the status of an advanced research and education university.

As far as TMU’s autonomy is concerned, it has proven throughout its development that it is strong in taking the initiative and making strategic decisions that are beneficial to the university and to the student body. It shares constraints and a thereby somewhat reduced autonomy with all Romanian universities in general and private universities in Romania in specific. The constraints that all universities face are the consequences of the financial crisis and the demographic development, which both lead to a substantially reduced number of (prospective) students. In addition, the regulation of student numbers for study programmes by ARACIS does not necessarily allow autonomous decisions on an increase of such student numbers in successful study programmes. For a private university that is considerably dependent on income from tuition fees, this is an especially critical issue, a constraint, however, that TMU shares with all other private universities in Romania.

TMU had a student body of 7 015 in the academic year 2012/2013. As far as full-time study programmes are concerned, 4 644 students were enrolled in the first cycle, 664 and 29 in the second and the third cycles respectively. 1 678 students attended distance learning programmes of the first cycle. The students were taught by 446 members of academic teaching staff, 62% tenured and 38% non-tenured staff. Thus, the student-staff ratio was at 1:16. In 2012, the budget of TMU comprised approximately 12.5 million euros, with 78% originating from tuition fees, 16.5% from European structural funds, 3.2% from income related to student support facilities, 1.5% from donations and sponsorships and 0.8% from Erasmus funding. As no income from European structural funds is expected for 2013, the budget is anticipated to be reduced to 8.1 million euros in 2013. Due to substantially lower expenses than income, this development will only reduce the surplus from 2.3 million euros in 2012 to one million Euros in 2013. However, TMU has become even more dependent on tuition fees as 93.5% of it were generated from such fees in 2013, the only other substantial source of income being student support facilities with 5.25% of the total income.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a group (SEG) of two professors, two associate professors, two lecturers and two students. This group represented three of the nine faculties of TMU, with only members of the Faculties of Law, Informatics and Psychology involved. All members hold positions in TMU’s university management, the two most prominent being the Vice-Rectorate and the Presidency of the Senate. Though not all faculties were represented in the

² Article 13. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.

³ The University Charter was drafted in 2011 and subsequently revised and approved in 2013.



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SEG, the university community actively participated in the self-evaluation process on all levels, providing information for the self-evaluation report (SER) as well as feedback to the draft versions that were regularly published on the university website. The SEG considered the task to be rather challenging due to the time constraint of accomplishing it in three months as well as persuading the university community as a whole to see its benefits. In the long run, however, the SER was considered a useful means of reflecting on the current situation of TMU and considering options for future development.

As a result of this process, the IEP team was provided with a self-evaluation report (SER) of 22 pages and 21 appendices amounting to 55 pages and eighteen supplementary appendices amounting to 133 pages. The SER as such adhered to the IEP methodology as stipulated in the guidelines and covered not only information related to the four key questions but also a detailed SWOT analysis. On the basis of the SER, TMU developed an Action Plan in March 2013 (SER, Appendix 21); the analysis seems also to have had an impact on the 2013 update of the already existing Strategic Plan for 2012-2016 (SER, Appendices 13 and 14). The numerous appendices also included executive summaries and full versions of fundamental documents such as the University Charter, the Rector's Report to the Senate of April 2013, the Research Strategy of TMU as well as a faculty for 2012-2016, organisation charts, statistics related to the student body, the financial situation, staff evaluation questionnaires and internal evaluation results as well as the previous ARACIS evaluation results. All this thoroughly compiled information substantiated and supported the information of the SER and provided the IEP team with a comprehensive insight into TMU.

The self-evaluation report of TMU, together with the original appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in April 2013. The visits of the evaluation team to TMU took place from 15 to 17 May 2013 and from 17 to 20 November 2013, respectively, on the main campus in Bucharest. However, the team did have the opportunity to meet the Dean of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the branch in Târgu Jiu. As mentioned before, in between the visits TMU provided the IEP team with additional documentation.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Sokratis Katsikas, former Rector of the University of the Aegean, University of Piraeus, Greece, team chair
- Thierry Chevaillier, Emeritus Professor, University of Burgundy, France
- Johan Cloet, former Managing Director, Lessius University College, Belgium
- Mikus Dubickis, MA student, Riga Technical University, Latvia
- Dorthe G. A. Hartmann, Course Director and Instructor in English for Specific Purposes, University of Greifswald, Germany, team coordinator

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to TMU's Rector Professor Smaranda Angheni and Vice-Rector Professor Dumitru Gheorghiu for the welcome and hospitality provided during the two visits. Special thanks to Professor Gheorghiu, who also acted as liaison person for the team, for his excellent preparation and support before and during the visits and his thorough



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work on the translations of the supplementary documentation during the summer break 2013. Thanks are also due to the members of the self-evaluation group as well as all staff and students of TMU whom the team met and with whom it discussed relevant matters in an open and constructive way. Thanks are also extended to the stakeholders of TMU who were prepared to meet the team and thus give insights into TMU from a rather different angle.



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2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

As stated in TMU's profile, the University Charter is the basic document regulating TMU's norms, values, missions and goals also in relation to governance and institutional decision making. Based on this document, four-year strategic plans as well as their yearly updates are developed, the last plan having been issued for the period of 2012-2016 and having been updated in 2013. These plans include policy statements such as the previously mentioned goal to reach the status of an advanced research and education university.

2.2. Governance and activities

Governance structure and management

Governance at TMU is based on a three-tier structure, comprising the Senate, the legislative power of TMU, and the Rectorate and the Administrative Council,⁴ both forming the executive power of the university.

The Founding Association of TMU still has a considerable impact. It appoints all members of the Administrative Council; in addition, its president is also the president of the Administrative Council. The Administrative Council has fifteen members, of whom fourteen are members of TMU; at present, the rector, the vice rector and seven deans, one from Târgu Jiu, are included in the Administrative Council. Looking at the member's academic status, all in all thirteen professors or associate professors are part of the council, the other two being a lecturer and a lawyer. Ten of the members of the Administrative Council are also members of the Founding Association.

Up to now, cooperation between Senate, Rectorate and Administrative Council has worked very well. However, the team would like to point out that this may lead to difficulties in the future when the composition of the members of the Founding Association changes and consensus may not be reached in the same way as it has been achieved up to now.

An important factor in the governance of a university is the degree to which students are involved. As stated in the previous chapter, students formed part of the SEG drafting the SER. However, in general, student involvement in formalised governance structures is less than desired. In fact, it was TMU management that encouraged students to establish a student association. As the team learned, one reason for this is that student representatives holding positions in the university's self-governance are considered to side with administration rather than with the students. On the

⁴The report refers to the "Administrative Council", which is the term for this body in translations of the Law on Education of 2011, instead of "Management Board", which is utilised throughout the SER and its Appendices.



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other hand, student representatives have proven in rather non-formalised procedures that they can successfully support students in issues of their concern.

As the team noticed, there are two lines of administration in the organisational chart (SER, App. 12) reporting to two different line of authorities. Units such as the Department for Distance Learning, the Specialised Department with Psycho-Pedagogical Profile, the Office for International Relations, Community Programmes and Foreign Students and the Institute for Studies, Research, Development and Innovation, which are involved in so-called primary processes related to educational and research matters, are supervised by the rector. Units involved in secondary or supporting processes, such as marketing, finances, HR and IT, report to the Administrative Council. As a consequence, as the team learned, contracts related to educational matters are primarily signed by the rector, whereas the president of the Administrative Council is responsible for contracts related to financial matters. This division of responsibilities is an option that TMU has deliberately chosen as its form of governance, and, up to now, it has worked. However, as the team points out, the two lines of command may cause some difficulties in the future, especially as they may not always converge and educational or research projects may lack support from the secondary processes if the two lines of command pursue different objectives.

Closely related to this issue is the fact that the Administrative Council is involved in every day operation and strategic management. The team would like to propose that TMU reconsider the role of the Administrative Council and has the Board focus on strategic management, which does not only include setting the policies and strategies for TMU but also controlling the operational management as performed by the Rectorate. Such a reconsideration of the role of the two executive bodies of TMU may not be considered necessary at present when the majority of the members of the Founding Association still consists of founding members of TMU; however, in the future people and relationships may change and thus the need for a clearer division between operational and strategic management may arise.

As the team also realised, there are two sets of committees at TMU, one established by the Senate, the other by the Administrative Council (cf. SER App. 9 and 11). Though the emphasis is more on educational and research matters with the committees of the Senate and more on administrative matters with the committees of the Administrative Council, there are numerous areas that both sets of committees cover. Interestingly, members of an Administrative Council committee may act as experts in a Senate committee that deals with similar issues and vice-versa. All in all, the team learned that a lot of good administrative work is prepared and accomplished in the committees. The team would like to point out that a downside of this approach is substantially overloading the teaching and research staff with the administrative work of these committees.

Basically, as has become evident by now, management is highly centralised at TMU. The team understands that TMU has operated successfully along these lines from its beginning. However, as TMU intends to grow in terms of subjects and programmes offered as well as research



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accomplished, such centralised management can only be maintained with an increased number of administrative staff. The team would like to suggest that an alternative would be to decentralise relevant aspects of management on the basis of the subsidiarity principle and allow for more responsibility on lower levels such as the faculty level, which may also lead to even greater motivation and satisfaction on these levels.

Institutional decision-making

Based on the centralised approach to management, decision-making takes place mostly top-down, no matter if related, for instance, to policy statements or strategies. Procedures are clear and transparent, i.e. TMU's community knows how decisions are taken, and decisions are communicated; however, as the team learned, the implications of decisions are not always made fully explicit, which may lead to the fact that they may also not be fully implemented. To provide an example, TMU's mission of providing education and advanced research is clearly stated in the University Charter and thus known to TMU's community. Similarly, the vision of TMU becoming an advanced research and education university has been clearly stated. What such a vision implies, however, does not seem to be fully clear to all staff, as the team realised during its visits and the meetings with faculty members. Similarly, this rather crucial vision is mentioned in the Strategic Plan for 2012-2016; however, it has not been explicitly incorporated into the faculty strategic plans, and no concrete tasks and activities have been planned in how to achieve this goal on the faculty level.

In addition to this, there may well be agreement on issues such as values or strategies. What is missing, though, as the team noticed, is a full documentation of these values and strategies. In the view of the team, this is probably due to the fact that TMU is still a young university where the majority of members belong to the founding members' community and there is, to some extent, a tradition of passing on information orally. However, such values need to be fully documented for two groups: on the one hand, students need to be informed; on the other hand, staff needs to be made familiar with the shared values as an increasing number of new teachers and researchers will join TMU as founding members will retire or TMU will develop and thus be in need of additional staff.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning is exemplary in that the specific features of TMU's governance and decision-making become most apparent here. Similar to all other decision-making, strategic planning is accomplished mostly top-down. As mentioned before, the team suggests that this is possible because of TMU's present size but at the same time recommends reconsidering this approach and introducing more bottom-up decision-making, especially once TMU has grown.

The strategic plans, whether at university or faculty level, are normally drawn up for a four-year period and are updated yearly. All in all, as the team perceived, they are more of an operational than a strategic character. This is proven by the fact that numerous goals are rather short-term.



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However, the team suggests that strategic plans should comprise medium- to long-term objectives, which may well exceed four years and are independent from any terms of office or mandate of administrative positions, such as the rector's. Such a long-term strategic plan needs to then be complemented by short-term operational plans with concrete time schedules and milestones.

As far as the content of the strategic plans is concerned, numerous aspects generally included in such a plan are covered; however, essential areas, such as quality assurance, service to society and internationalisation are not dealt with but should be considered in future strategic plans. Moreover, the team anticipated that a SWOT analysis must have been the basis for the actual strategic plan. The team recommends that the SWOT analysis be explicitly stated and referred to in future strategic plans.

As mentioned before, besides the university strategic plan, the faculties develop their own strategic plans. For the team, it has not become fully evident whether and how they are reviewed and whether the faculty plans match the university plan. In addition, the mechanism of monitoring whether and how the objectives of strategic plans at both faculty and university level have been reached has not become fully apparent. Thus, the team proposes that such processes and their results be documented, especially when taking into account that TMU intends to grow in size and will continue to exist beyond the term of office of those who implemented the processes initially.

Financial governance

Similar to the overall management, financial governance is centralised at TMU. As emphasised repeatedly before, this is still practicable at present but may become a rather critical issue once the university has grown. Centralised financial governance means that the budget is formed and agreed upon, monitored as well as executed centrally.

As a consequence, the deans of the faculties and faculty administration as a whole know how much the faculties may spend; however, they are not in control of the budget and cannot independently decide how to spend their funding. Additional financial resources for research projects need to be applied for separately. In general, as the team learned, such requests are usually met. Moreover, as the team realised, faculties are mainly considered cost centres with a budget to be spent. The team would like to suggest, though, that faculties are also regarded as profit centres, given that they provide most of TMU's revenue by attracting students to their study programmes. This would lead to a financial structure that is more optimised for strategic decision-making. Such a financial structure would, for example, reveal faculties whose expenditure differs significantly from revenue, thus facilitating the planning of new, additional activities, while at the same time enhancing transparency in financial decision-making.

As already stated in section 1.2, in 2013 93.5% of TMU's income depended on tuition fees. Such high dependence may cause difficulties in the future because of two reasons: firstly, decreasing



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demographics will lead to decreasing numbers of prospective students applying for studies at all universities including TMU. Secondly, like all universities, TMU depends on ARACIS to decide on the student numbers to be admitted to individual study programmes. Not being able to freely decide on the size of its student body, TMU has a limited control on its income.

In order to overcome this situation, the team proposes that TMU substantially reduce its reliance on tuition fees as part of the overall budget. This can be accomplished by diversifying the income sources and more strongly focussing on profit-making areas in which TMU can exercise autonomous decision making. TMU has several options at hand: firstly, it could invest even more in and benefit from offering student infrastructure and support facilities, such as the dormitories, student diners and student clubs. As the team understood, TMU can rely on customers not only from its own student body but also on students from other universities in its vicinity. Secondly, TMU could considerably expand its range of lifelong learning programmes as already included in the University Strategic Plan for 2012-2016. The team noted that the current leadership is already aware that this would attract additional revenue.⁵ Thirdly, TMU could examine whether and how applied research results could be exploited commercially. The team would like to emphasise that these are only some options that can be further investigated. Depending on its analysis, TMU can decide which one of these options and to which extent it will pursue in the future.

Turning to TMU's expenditure, the team noted that most of it is inflexible. While approximately 59.25% of the expenditure was spent on staff salaries in 2013, another 12.75% were used for supplies for education and research, rents, building maintenance and utilities, taxes and other non-specified expenses. Accordingly, approximately 28% could be used flexibly and were, in fact, spent on endowments and investments.

Examining these figures, the team realised that there is somewhat a disparity between the strategic planning and the actual budgeting, and it looks as if strategic priorities are not fully and explicitly taken into account when preparing the budget. To give an example, the team noted that the percentage of the income which could be spent flexibly was invested into infrastructure rather than spent on developing advanced research, which was stated to be a strategic goal. Thus, in the team's opinion, if TMU pursues the goal of establishing itself as an advanced research and education university, the freely accessible funding should be spent on this goal and should be invested, for instance, in research. However if, in pursuing government requirements, TMU had to favour the investments in facilities in its financial planning, such priorities should be translated accordingly into the university's strategic plan. All in all, as the team proposes, strategic planning and budgeting are interdependent and should be explicitly and consistently linked in relevant documents such as the budget and the strategic plan.

⁵"Strategic objective no. 2.8". In: Strategic Plan of Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest for the Period 2012-2016. 2012. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 13, p. 5.



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The team noted that TMU relies on annual budgeting. The reason for this is, as the team learned, that the amount of student fees which, as stated before, comprises most of TMU's revenue, are not known in advance and can neither be anticipated nor calculated on a multi-annual basis. Nonetheless, the team would like to point out that strategic planning is closely linked to budgeting and together should ideally be multi-annual processes. TMU could benefit from such multi-annual strategic and financial plans and could develop them on the assumption that they may well become subject to amendment. The annual budgeting, however, would be based on the actual revenue that can be expected and would therefore be compulsory. Thus, TMU would profit from long-term planning and, at the same time, remain realistic in reconsidering short-term expenditure on the basis of actual expected income.

Human resources

As far as governance and institutional decision-making are concerned in relation to human resources, TMU management has been successful in creating an environment which is appreciated by staff, be it teaching or administrative staff. As the team was able to observe during its visits to TMU, staff are enthusiastic, committed and loyal and identify with the institution.

As previously emphasised, academic staff are involved in administrative duties to a significant extent. Though the team understands that participation in administrative work may also lead to a greater commitment to an institution, it would recommend that academic staff be relieved from purely administrative work. As the student-staff ratio at TMU is exceptionally satisfactory, the additional resources could be utilised for more research and thus serve the major objective of advancing in research.

Recruitment and promotion at TMU are heavily dependent on strict national regulations. TMU shares this constraint with all other institutions of tertiary education in Romania. All in all, the team understands that the situation may become even more critical the more often such regulations are amended. The team was told that TMU has found it rather challenging lately to recruit researchers. In the team's view, there are two reasons for this: on the one hand, the strict regulations may make it difficult to find appropriate staff; on the other hand, TMU has to face severe competition in Bucharest and may find it more difficult to compete with seemingly more established public institutions. Accordingly, TMU needs to find alternative methods of recruiting researchers, for instance by cooperating with hospitals not only in relation to internships for students but also in relation to research.

Autonomy

Reconsidering governance and institutional decision-making at TMU as depicted above, TMU is mainly autonomous in its activities with some restrictions. Here, three levels can be identified on which autonomy may be considered limited: firstly, TMU as a whole is limited in its authority in that it needs to comply with national regulations in relation to recruitment and promotion as well



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as student numbers, to provide the most prevalent examples. This is a constraint, shared with all institutions of tertiary education, no matter if public or private, which TMU cannot influence. Secondly, on the level of university management and the two executive bodies, it looks as if the Rectorate is slightly restricted in its autonomy by the Administrative Council. The team would like to emphasise that here TMU would benefit from more clearly separating the operational management of the Rectorate from the strategic management of the Administrative Council. This will allow both bodies to reach their full potential in their respective areas of responsibility and expertise and will also allow the Administrative Council to control operational management more easily. Thirdly, the faculties are limited in their autonomy by the fact that management is mainly centralised. Again, the team would like to recommend that TMU considers decentralising management on this level, especially as larger institutions usually benefit from more autonomy on the faculty level.

2.3. Quality assessment practices and capacity for change

As has been emphasised above, practices in governance and institutional decision-making at TMU are reflected on and reconsidered; thus, TMU has proven that it is capable of change. What the team would like to point out, though, is that such practices should be accomplished more consciously, in a more formalised as well as a fully documented manner. This would be especially advantageous for TMU during its further development

2.4. Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, as a private university TMU relies on a three-tiered governance structure consisting of the Senate, the Rectorate and the Administrative Council. Whereas the Senate fulfils the legislative function, the Rectorate and the Administrative Council share executive functions for which two parallel lines of authority and numerous committees have been established. Most decision-making is accomplished top-down and is thus similarly centralised as, for instance, strategic planning or financial governance. Decision-making processes are transparent, though not always fully communicated and documented and thus broken down in all their implications.

As has been emphasised, the present practices and activities have assisted TMU in developing into the successful university it is today. In order to remain as successful and effective also in the future when TMU will have grown in size and initial founders and members of staff will have retired, the team recommends that some issues be reconsidered:

- The Administrative Council may fully concentrate on its strategic management, which will allow it to more effectively supervise the operational management of the Rectorate, which will ultimately lead to a more effective system of checks and balances.



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- In the same way the balance of power between the two executive bodies and the Senate may be reconsidered and the role of the Senate strengthened, also in relation to the heads of the two bodies, the president and the rector.
- An increasing number of bottom-up rather than top-down decision-making procedures may be implemented and thus allow for less centralised management.
- If management is accomplished at the university as well as the faculty level, procedures must be introduced that ensure that decentralised strategic decisions remain in line with centralised strategic decisions.
- In order to achieve this goal of monitoring, measures need to be implemented which guarantee a full documentation and comparison of objectives and results vertically as well as horizontally. Whereas the former relates to matching, for instance, faculty strategies with university strategies, the latter refers to linking budgeting with strategic planning and recording any possible changes in such planning.

All in all, a well-developed TMU will need to clearly communicate essential messages, such as mission, vision, values, which includes encouraging not only their communication in all its implications but also their documentation.



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3. Teaching and learning

3.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

Article 13 of the University Charter covers teaching and learning as an inherent part of the mission of TMU:

The mission of the university is to generate and transfer knowledge through [...]

- initial and ongoing training at undergraduate and postgraduate level to develop and improve personal, job seeking skills and acquire the skills needed for socio-economic, cultural and administrative environment;
- continuing education and training of adults.⁶

Accordingly, TMU has developed study programmes of all three cycles as well as programmes related to lifelong learning. Following the mission, the objectives in Article 14 of the Charter lay special emphasis on graduate and postgraduate studies, on Master and doctoral programmes. Moreover, clearly stated objectives of TMU that are related to teaching and learning are to offer student-centred education, to promote teacher and student mobility and to develop a quality culture at TMU. These goals correspond to the overarching objective to adhere to the criteria established by the Bologna Declaration as well as national legislation.⁷ The individual goals as presented in Title I, Chapter III “Mission and Goals” are further detailed in the other titles and chapters of the Charter; student-centred education, for instance, is covered in Title II, Chapter VII.

Norms and objectives are even more detailed and substantiated in various regulations stipulating, for example, how studies are organised and carried out in all three cycles respectively, how the students’ learning outcomes are assessed and how the European Credit Transfer System is applied in practice. Finally, concrete goals to be reached in certain periods of time are laid down in the respective chapters of TMU’s as well as the faculties’ strategic plans; the progress achieved is announced, for instance, in the rector’s Annual Report to the Senate.

3.2. Governance and activities

In general, teaching and learning activities at TMU are positively influenced by the fact that teachers and students form a learning organisation. This is a distinctive feature of TMU and a competitive advantage. TMU offers a learning environment and culture in which students and

⁶ Article 13, Chapter III, Title I. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.

⁷ Cf. Article 14, Chapter III, Title I. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.



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teachers are equally committed to learning and teaching respectively, cooperate openly in team learning in order to share the vision and ultimate goal of advancing in knowledge and expertise. This approach is reflected in the almost collegial relationship between students and teaching staff. Thus, students are enthusiastic and highly satisfied with their studies at TMU.

As already emphasised in the previous chapter, TMU is strong in selecting equally committed and qualified staff dedicated to offering high-quality teaching. This is partly due to the fact that a high percentage of teaching staff are experts in their fields and have collected practical experience either prior to starting teaching or while teaching at TMU. They are willing to share their practical expertise with the students during their seminars. In addition, they may invite them to their workplace and thereby allow them to experience the practical application of the knowledge taught at TMU at first hand.

TMU is good at offering high-quality teaching and student-centred education in that, firstly, students are exposed to authentic learning situations. The Law Faculty, for instance, organises mock trials in which students can practise legal drafting and advocacy in real-case scenarios. Secondly, practical experience is an inherent and compulsory part of all undergraduate programmes with four weeks per annum in Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy and three weeks per annum in all other subjects. TMU assists in securing placements and arranges training periods with renowned stakeholders for excellent students.

As far as the study programmes are concerned, the team noticed that TMU aims at offering innovative programmes in all three cycles, including an increasing number of interdisciplinary ones. For instance, as far as the first cycle is concerned, TMU has introduced a Bachelor programme in modern applied languages. This programme focuses on a clearly practice-oriented and professional approach in contrast to the traditional and solely academic study of philology. Regarding the second cycle, new Master programmes have been established that combine medicine and informatics as well as management and sports and thus offer a distinctly interdisciplinary approach. As far as the third cycle is concerned, PhD students have the opportunity to engage in research projects that are interdisciplinary in their approach or innovative in that they combine, for instance, informatics with economics or focus on food safety law. As TMU staff emphasised repeatedly, such programmes are initiated on the basis of regular exchange with stakeholders and market research. This range of study programmes could be enhanced even more in order to provide TMU with an even greater competitive advantage.

The team learned during its two visits that an array of good teaching methods is employed at TMU and that there is an understanding of teaching and learning processes that is commonly shared at the faculty level. Learning and teaching could be improved, though, if teaching and learning methods were clearly defined and propagated and thus institutionalised university-wide. Two examples can be provided here: firstly, in various disciplines, academic staff successfully apply the problem-solving approach in their teaching; others have not done so yet. If the innovative and, in the long run, also more effective teaching methods were disseminated at TMU



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as a whole, all subjects and their students could benefit from them. This could be accomplished, for example, by establishing a professional development programme. Such a programme could be organised and run by the Specialised Department with Psycho-Pedagogical Profile, which, as the team understands, at present focuses on initial teacher training and some further training but not yet on a fully comprehensive professional development programme. As part of this programme, good practices could be disseminated and incentives, such as teaching awards, initiated to emphasise the relevance of perfecting one's teaching during one's career. Secondly, an improved e-learning platform has been successfully launched for some subjects; again, all subjects and especially also distance learning programmes could benefit from this effective tool if it was introduced to all subjects in due course and thus led to TMU excelling even more in comparison to other universities.

The team also understands that stakeholders are involved in the development of curricula. At the university level, a Council for the Relationship with the Socio-Economic Environment has been established. Most of the cooperation, as the team noted, takes place at the faculty level and seems to be partly initiated ad hoc and on a personal basis, though some more formalised collaboration appears to have been set up, too. The team would therefore like to suggest that TMU formalises and institutionalises the exchange with stakeholders and the involvement of such experts in the development of new and assessment of running programmes and curricula. Besides establishing a regular exchange, this measure would also include thorough documentation and monitoring of this collaboration. As has been emphasised before, this step will become even more relevant as TMU develops.

3.3. Quality assessment practices and capacity for change

Quality assessment in teaching and learning focuses to a great extent on regularly assessing teaching staff. This is accomplished through self-, peer, head of department and student evaluation. Questionnaires have been developed to record students' own involvement as well as the teachers' attitude towards students, their use of teaching methods, ability to present information meaningfully and the expected relevance of the content taught for their later professional lives. Results are delivered to the respective dean and the Senate. In case of unsatisfactory feedback, results are discussed on a personal basis between staff and dean.

Study programmes and their curricula are also regularly assessed and reconsidered at the staff, faculty and university levels as well as in exchange with the respective stakeholders. Student representatives may also get involved, especially if requests from the student body require them to, for instance, increase the number of practical courses. Here, deans are approachable and ready to help and improve the quality of the study programme.

Similar to previously depicted processes in governance and decision-making, the team would like to suggest, as will be described in more detail in chapter 6 on quality culture, that questionnaires be developed first to define what the criteria assessed actually comprise, before asking students



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to actually evaluate them. Thus, a clearer and common understanding of what quality in teaching includes for TMU will be formed and what the underlying education model is. From what the team was able to collect as information on processes of assessing quality in study programmes and curricula, it appears as if regular assessment is in place; however, there seems to be a need to develop more formalisation and documentation.

All in all, TMU has proven that it has the capacity to change also in teaching and learning and to regularly work on improving existing as well as designing new study programmes on the basis of latest developments in society and on the labour market. As most of this work is accomplished on faculty level, the team recommends that documenting and monitoring clearly defined measures be introduced university-wide, thus increasing the quality of teaching and learning and contributing to the competitiveness of the university.

3.4. Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, TMU's asset in teaching and learning is the learning organisation that has successfully been established among teachers and students. Teaching is especially rewarding for students as a high percentage of practitioners are part of teaching staff, who offer authentic learning situations, and a lot of good practice of teaching can be detected. Study programmes on all three levels are constantly reconsidered, also in collaboration with stakeholders, and therefore rather innovative, which includes an increasingly interdisciplinary design of programmes. Quality assessment is in place and covers both the teaching as well as study programmes.

The team would like to suggest, though, that TMU develop university-wide standards, linked to an educational model, which need to be clearly defined and information on them disseminated. Such definitions of preferred teaching methods could be supported by information on good practice at TMU and fully implemented by offering a professional development programme. Considering evaluation processes, defining standards would further the understanding of the assessment and produce results of greater informative value, which could then be used to enhance the teaching and learning experience. The assessment of study programmes would also benefit from clearly defined standards as well as formalised and documented procedures, which will become even more relevant as soon as TMU develops further. Thus, TMU would be well-prepared for the highly competitive market in tertiary education in Romania.



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4. Research

4.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

Similar to teaching and learning, research is an inherent part of TMU's mission as laid down in the University Charter, which states in Article 13:

The mission of the University is to generate and transfer knowledge through [...]

- advanced scientific research; [...]⁸

Similar to teaching and learning issues, scientific research activities, their objectives and organisation are more detailed in subsequent parts of the Charter, i.e. in Title II, Chapter V. National legislation as well as European regulations, including the Bologna Declaration are external norms that research at TMU is supposed to comply with.

Interestingly, research is mentioned first in the mission statement before academic education of all three cycles and lifelong learning are referred to. This corresponds to the overarching ambitious vision and goal to reach the level of an advanced research and education university.

TMU does not cover research in its strategic plans only, whether on the university or on the faculty level, but also develops specific research strategies of the university and the faculties, which relate to the same period of time as the strategic plans. The university research strategy provides general principles and objectives, e.g. encouraging research activities, publication of research results in renowned publications, participation in conferences. These goals would be reached, for instance, by increasing the number of full-time researchers, offering scholarships to doctoral students and establishing collaboration of TMU researchers of different disciplines as well as collaborations with other research facilities.⁹ The faculty research plans develop subject-specific strategic and operational objectives as well as concepts on how to capitalise on research results; the latter focuses mainly on academic exploitation in contributions to journals and conferences but also considers the patenting of research results.¹⁰ In addition, detailed regulations have been adopted for research activities. Finally, research activities at TMU and their results are also an important part of the rector's Annual Report.

⁸ Article 13, Chapter III, Title I. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.

⁹ Research Strategy for the Period 2012-2016 (Executive Summary). 2012. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 24, p. 2.

¹⁰ Research Strategy of the Faculty of Informatics for the Period 2012-2016. 2012. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 25, p. 2.



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4.2. Governance and activities

When visiting TMU, the team noticed a strong will in academic staff to engage in research activities. The team was informed that academic staff publishes two to three articles on average, and that this is substantially more than the one article required by national regulations. They happily invest fifteen to twenty percent of their time in research and would be interested in spending even more time on it.

Teaching and research are not considered two separate entities. On the contrary, research informs teaching at TMU, as the team learned during its visits. Students do not consume the results of research only; instead, they are involved in research from the first cycle. On the basis of real case scenarios in law, for instance, they do not only solve the task of applying the law in force but also reconsider its practicability and are encouraged to contemplate how the law could be improved and amended, if necessary. The results of the application and reconsideration of law and thus the research on possible changes to the law are recorded in articles. Excellent papers may also receive recognition in the author being invited to present the results at one of the in-house conferences. As will be explained in more detail in chapter 5 on service to society, students of all three cycles may be allocated a research topic from the recently established website, which collects research requests from the Association of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses and the Association of Young Entrepreneurs in Romania. In order to follow appropriate criteria from the beginning, research methods are taught optionally to Bachelor and Master students; naturally, they are a compulsory part of PhD studies.

TMU has been strong in finding niches for innovative and interdisciplinary research and establishing partnerships and collaborations with academic institutions and commercial businesses alike. To give an example, one of the three major niches is medical informatics. Here, TMU has been successful in establishing research combining the subjects of psychology, IT and medicine. This research area is also an example for TMU successfully establishing collaboration with Siemens, thus fulfilling one of the major objectives of the university as well as faculty research strategies, the ultimate goal being greater national and international visibility. Siemens will not only finance and set up three laboratories and the IT platform but also plans to conduct research in collaboration with TMU after the establishment of the laboratories and thus continue its partnership. Moreover, it is expected that applied research at TMU will also lead to medical equipment being invented. Here, the researchers of the medical research institute hope that patents will be granted, which, as the team believes, would then give TMU the possibility to exploit these inventions and innovations commercially.

TMU has taken a major step forward in promoting research by reorganising its research structure. The nine research centres, which used to be independent entities, have been united under the auspices of the Institute for Studies, Research, Development and Innovation (ISRDI). ISRDI is supposed not only to coordinate research projects, ensure the financial sustainability of research and establish interdisciplinary platforms but also promote the visibility of research by organising



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conferences and ensuring the publication of conference proceedings and research results in general and in ISI indexed journals in specific.¹¹ In addition to ISRDI, a medical research institute has successfully been established very recently. All in all, the more centralised research organisation structure will clearly stimulate interdisciplinary research.

Regarding the overarching ultimate goal of becoming an advanced research university, however, the team must admit that it has not found sufficient indication that the transition has been fully strategically and operationally planned, that progress has been thoroughly monitored and that the project has been adequately supported financially in general and in terms of human resources in specific. Besides the overall vision and strategy, a more detailed operational plan with a concrete general time-frame and intermediate milestones seem to be lacking. Whereas the objective seems to be implied in the University Charter and is generally stated in the university strategic plan, it is neither specifically mentioned nor explicitly detailed in the research strategies of TMU and the faculties, provided that the research plan of the Faculty of Informatics may be considered exemplary for all faculty research strategies.

In view of its overall research strategy, TMU will need to make a basic decision in relation to the following two options and thus prioritise: on the one hand, it could continue concentrating on the research niches already established and become excellent in these. On the other hand, TMU could decide to establish capacity in all disciplines, which may be essential in order to reach the ultimate goal of becoming an advanced research and education university. On the basis of this strategic decision, TMU will then develop an operational plan, which will need to be mirrored and reflected in the available resources, i.e. financial as well as human, and documented accordingly.

In addition, the team observed that TMU needs to set up a comprehensive administrative support mechanism for researchers and thus fully implement what has been laid down as objectives of ISRDI. The team proposes that qualified professional staff are essential for this task and should therefore be recruited. Such administrative staff with expertise in attracting research funding, managing research funds and exploiting research results would relieve the researchers from the rather bureaucratic tasks they are neither interested in, nor trained for. As a consequence, TMU could ensure that the innovation cycle is closed and both the university and society can benefit from the research results.

Moreover, TMU could profit from the high motivation in staff and doctoral students even more if incentives were offered to conduct research. Though the team understands that the provision of additional financial support may be challenging, staff may well be encouraged by the prospect of academic recognition. Such recognition could be created by the rector's annual list of excellence in research. Similarly, TMU could consider reducing the teaching workload and the administrative tasks of academic staff to allow more time for research. As the student-staff ratio is more than

¹¹ Strategic Plan for the Period of 2012-2016. 2012. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 13, pp. 5-6.



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satisfactory, this could be accomplished without further reallocation of resources. Actual financial remuneration may, however, be considered in relation to doctoral students so that they no longer need to cover their costs when participating in conferences or publishing their research results. In general, the team encourages the university that financial resources allocated to research be distributed on a competitive basis.

4.3. Quality assessment practices and capacity for change

As with teaching and learning, the team has recognised a strong motivation in TMU to improve its research in quantity and quality. On the one hand, an additional eleven positions for full-time researchers were advertised. Even though the positions could not be filled most probably because of the competitive environment of Bucharest as well as the increasingly strict requirements of national legislation, this move shows that TMU has realised that it needs to allow for more full-time research. It was not fully clear to the team, though, which strategy TMU pursued in intending to recruit researchers of such a disparate choice as aerospace engineering, robotics, psychology, physics, law, mathematics, computer science and management, some of the research areas such as aerospace engineering or physics not yet being part of the overall range of subjects taught at TMU and being represented by any of the faculties. To provide another example, TMU has proven that it also has the capacity to change research structures in order to allow for more coordinated and thus effective administration of research. Hence, ISRDI was established. Interestingly, though, when a medical research centre was considered, it was not integrated into ISRDI but set up as an independent research institute.

All in all, the team could not fully trace which assessment practices developments such as the ones described above are based on and therefore justify the respective strategic and operational decisions. The team anticipates that they may be based either on coincidence and opportunities opening up for TMU. Alternatively, they may be founded on thorough analysis and evaluation, however without fully monitoring or documenting them. As far as the assessment of research is concerned, the team learned with interest that performance indicators and a system to measure research will be established by the academic year 2014/2015. Here, it will be essential as with all other standards to clearly define them for the entire institution and disseminate them accordingly before establishing quality assurance instruments, which should avoid counting the number of publications per annum and thus on quantity in research only but should provide substantial information on the quality of research.

4.4. Conclusion and recommendations

All in all, TMU has created an atmosphere and environment that has potential for excellence in research as academic staff and doctoral students are highly motivated to contribute to research. It has been successful in developing research in certain niches, which is recognised nationally and internationally as collaborations with renowned academic organisations and businesses prove. It



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has taken the first step in supporting research more effectively in that a central institute was established, which furthers interdisciplinary research on the one hand and, according to its objectives, is supposed to assist researchers in administrative tasks whether related to research funding or the dissemination of research.

As TMU's vision is to develop into an advanced research and education university, the next step that needs to be taken, as the team recommends, is to take the strategic decision of either investing in research in the already established niches only or into developing comprehensive research in all disciplines. The decision will have a major impact on the allocation of financial and HR resources, which will need to be documented and monitored. No matter what the decision is, a comprehensive administrative support mechanism closing the innovation circle must be established so that academic staff, doctoral students and researchers can concentrate on their scientific work while professional administrators take over the auxiliary tasks. This will increase motivation among academic and research staff as they may, as a result, spend more time on research. Such an atmosphere could be even more supported by offering academic recognition for excellence in research for academic staff, while supporting doctoral students also financially. Financial support for research projects could be based on competition. Finally, as already considered in its planning, a system to measure research based on a clear definition of standards and in relation to performance indicators, which will be applied and disseminated university-wide, will enhance research at TMU.



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5. Service to society

5.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

As stated in the University Charter, it is TMU's declared mission to train its students in "skills needed for socio-economic, cultural and administrative environment."¹² Serving society and its needs is also a clear mission when it comes to quality assurance:

TMU considers quality assurance of its educational and research activities as a process designed to permanently improve the level of its graduates and to guarantee to the society that they acquired the declared skills, competence and knowledge.¹³

TMU fulfils its mission in that it provides society with well qualified professionals, as the generally positive feedback of external partners and stakeholders proves, who certify TMU graduates knowledge, excellence and high performance in their respective fields as well as transferrable skills.

5.2. Governance and activities

Besides providing society with well-qualified professionals, which is an objective every academic institution is bound to pursue, TMU excels in various projects with a focus on service to society, a selection of which will be presented in the following.

First of all, preliminary steps have been taken recently to provide applied research services to small and medium enterprises and young entrepreneurs. In fact, collaboration with the representative professional bodies of both groups has been established. A website has been set up on which SMEs and young entrepreneurs can insert research requests. TMU decides on who of its students, i.e. participants of Bachelor, Master or PhD programmes, and of which field and specialisation can be allocated the task to do research on the respective topic. Thereby, research is matched to the demands of the market, and students are linked with the market and learn what is requested by the market.

Secondly, TMU provides consultancy services for notaries. There is a regular exchange between academic staff and representatives of the Union and Institutes of Public Notaries on examinations for public notaries.

¹² Article 13, Chapter III, Title I. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.

¹³ 1. Framework Provisions. In: Quality Assurance Code in Education and Scientific Research. 2013. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 28, p. 1.



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Thirdly, TMU infrastructure is open to students and society. As far as students from other universities are concerned, they are welcome to use the student facilities and take, for instance, meals at TMU's student restaurant. Society as such can benefit from the services offered by the Private Clinical Centre for Dental Care and the recently established Medical Centre for Diagnosis and Treatment.

Fourthly, TMU also supports social structures. It was successful in establishing collaboration with a public institution that offers dental surgery for disadvantaged people. Dentistry students in their final year work on patients supervised by fully qualified personnel. Interns who have benefitted from this arrangement during their studies often also continue offering pro-bono work in this institution after graduation.

Besides these activities, the team recommends that TMU consider developing a more comprehensive lifelong learning programme than has been established so far. Such a programme would serve two purposes: on the one hand, TMU would serve society to a greater extent than before and would also become more visible in this respect. On the other hand, courses in lifelong learning programmes allow universities to make profit and thus substantially add to their revenue.

As the team has learned with interest, there is a Council for the Relationship with the Socio-Economic Environment, which comprises forty external partners with links to TMU's nine faculties. These stakeholders are representatives of organisations, businesses or administrative bodies, which usually provide internship placements, collaborate in (research) projects or offer exchange of information on the labour market and advice to the respective faculties. Whereas the former two types of cooperation take place on the basis of formal agreements, such as contracts, the latter exchange of information works on a regular though mostly non-formalised basis but with some faculties also participating in annual information weeks. In general, the first contact between the stakeholders and TMU was either established rather accidentally, for example when placements were offered to TMU students for the first time and their education was valued during the internship, or on a personal basis, for instance, when TMU graduates contacted their Alma Mater. The team recommends that an advisory board be established at the university level with a selected number of eminent representatives of society. These stakeholders could offer information on how society assesses TMU as a whole and external advice on how to move forward. All in all, the stakeholders would improve TMU's reputation and visibility without interfering with its internal governance and decision-making as they would have an advisory function only.

5.3. Quality assessment practices and capacity for change

As specified in the Quality Assurance Code in Education and Scientific Research, quality assurance is vital in collaborations with external partners and society as a whole; consequently, TMU is



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eager to determine common principles for such cooperation and service to society.¹⁴ The team could unfortunately not collect information on how such common principles are established and whether and how the compliance with these common principles is monitored. In the same way, the team did not acquire information on how service to society and the collaborations are strategically decided, implemented and reflected upon. All in all, the team proposes that possible quality assurance measures and their results be more visibly documented and common standards be introduced for the entire university. That TMU is eager to improve its exchange with society and is open to innovative measures, such as the recently established website and offer of applied research to small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs.

5.4. Conclusion and recommendations

Besides providing society with well-educated graduates, TMU has developed various activities in order to either serve society on a pro-bono basis or for mutual benefit or also to profit financially from such commitments. As these commitments seem to have been established more at random and on the basis of offers having been made to specific faculties rather than TMU as a whole, the team recommends that TMU contemplate a more systematic and strategic approach to service to society, especially since various relations and collaborations have already been set up and the mutual gain has been recognised. This should include considering how to financially benefit from these projects to a greater extent. As has been pointed out before, profits could be gained from further investments into student facilities or from offering a more comprehensive lifelong learning programme, the fees of which could also considerably contribute to TMU's income. In order to obtain an even greater insight into TMU's recognition and potential in society, the team recommends that TMU establish an Advisory Board composed of renowned stakeholders. This would allow TMU to benefit from their informed advice and, at the same time, increase its visibility and reputation, which are invaluable assets in times of growing competition.

¹⁴ 1. Framework Provisions. In: Quality Assurance Code in Education and Scientific Research. 2013. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 28, p. 1.



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6. Quality culture

6.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

Quality culture, quality management and quality assurance (QA) are covered in numerous documents and regulations, starting with the University Charter. Here, the following objectives are stated as means to complete TMU's mission:

- self-assessment and evaluation of teaching and scientific research activities, taking into account standards and performance indicators to ensure quality of education and research; [...]
- promoting quality culture in university life and provide a suitable environment for professional development of university community members based on academic ethics compliance; [...]¹⁵

“Quality assurance in Education and Scientific Research” is more detailed in Title II, Chapter VI of the Charter. The emphasis is mainly on internal instruments of evaluating quality in teaching by teaching staff themselves, peers, department director and students, which are based on performance indicators to be established by the university, and external instruments by which study programmes and the university as such are evaluated.¹⁶

According to the University Charter, the reference for quality assurance is the Quality Assurance Code in Education and Scientific Research of TMU (QA Code), which mainly focuses on setting general performance standards and indicators and establishing the organisation of the quality assurance system at university and faculty level.¹⁷ With quality assurance being generally a major issue in education and research, it is also an inherent part of strategic and research plans as well as the rector's Annual Report.

As the compilation of documents made available to the team and their content was meant to show, quality culture does not seem to be explicitly defined; however the team realised during its visits that a well-developed quality culture in teaching is in place at staff level. This quality culture in teaching could serve as a model for developing similar quality cultures in areas such as research as well as administration and management and for TMU as a whole.

The team was informed that TMU is required to adhere to ISO 9001 (2008) in its quality assurance, and has accordingly implemented this standard in its quality management system. The team

¹⁵ Article 14, Chapter III, Title I. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.

¹⁶ Chapter VI Quality Assurance in Education and Scientific Research, Title II. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 32, p. 2.

¹⁷ Quality Assurance Code in Education and Scientific Research (Executive Summary). In: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 28.



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acknowledges that ISO 9001 is a useful device in assuring good quality management in organisations in general; however, the team would like to suggest that it is not fully adaptable to quality and quality management in higher education. Therefore, the team recommends that TMU improve its quality management in teaching and research by complementing ISO 9001 with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Thus, product-specific criteria, i.e. criteria relevant to higher education, could be included and thereby enhance quality assurance in the transfer of knowledge and skills. This would also increase TMU's competitiveness not only in higher education in Romania but also in Europe.

6.2. Governance and activities

As mentioned in the University Charter and further detailed in the QA Code, the Senate Committee for Assessing and Ensuring the Quality of Education and Research (CAEQER) and corresponding committees of the faculties are responsible for the quality assurance system. Whereas the Senate appoints the members, the vice-rector coordinates the committee on the basis of the rector having delegated the responsibility. There are regular reports from the faculties to the Senate on teaching and administrative matters. Information is analysed at the central level and reacted upon in due course, if necessary. In addition, the Senate is responsible for setting standards, also taking into account any national regulations or recommendations.

The team learned with interest from the updated Strategic Plan 2013 that one of the new strategic objectives for 2013 had been to establish a Quality Assurance Department by October 2013; the plan for this department was also mentioned in the rector's Annual Report of April 2013.¹⁸ During the second visit, however, the team was informed that this plan was no longer pursued as the committees at university and faculty level and, ultimately, the Senate fulfil the tasks of such a department. The team, however, encourages TMU to resume the plan and establish the department as the distinct single owner of QA processes as this would substantially improve quality management in general and QA processes in particular.

As already depicted in chapter 3 on Teaching and Learning, quality assurance practices in relation to teaching are in place, covering self-evaluation as well as evaluation by peers, head of department and students. The team recommends that graduates, alumni and stakeholders be included in this formalised process. In addition, assessing the questionnaires used to accomplish these evaluations, the team realised that these questionnaires make it difficult, for instance, for students to provide substantial information as they do not fully describe and explain what the students are asked to evaluate. Moreover, the questionnaires do not lead to sufficiently differentiated results as nearly all staff are rated excellent. Thus, the team recommends that

¹⁸ Smaranda Angheni 2013 "E. The situation of the quality assurance activities." In: State of Titu Maiorescu University. Annual Report. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 27, p. 6.



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quality assurance practices be reconsidered, as quality assurance measures should neither disregard the quality culture that is already in place nor be reduced to a bureaucratic exercise of filling in forms, which both may ultimately lead to a destruction of the good quality culture that already prevails.

Thus, the first step the team proposes that TMU take is to define quality and what it means for the university in all areas and at all levels. Such definitions should then be used to formulate performance standards and indicators and redesign QA processes, thereby completing the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle on QA. All in all, quality should be defined dynamically and not as a static recipe. In addition, whereas standards in competence management should be established top-down, suggestions for talent management should rather be provided bottom-up. In good quality management both will meet and converge. Finally, as far as the questionnaires for the evaluation of teaching are concerned, guidance needs to be provided in relation to the criteria assessed. For instance, students need to be informed on what a good relationship between teaching staff and students represents for TMU before they are asked to provide feedback to this question. Only students who are fully aware of the meaning of quality culture in teaching will be able to complete the questionnaires in an informed manner, which will ultimately provide TMU with significant information. This information can then be used to improve teaching and have teachers excel even more.

6.3. Quality assessment practices and capacity for change

At present, the focus in quality assurance seems to be mainly on the teaching of permanent staff. As the team learned, QA in research is in the process of being implemented. In addition, the team understands from the rector's Annual Report that TMU is aware of the need to make further steps towards developing QA in teaching of auxiliary staff, administrative staff as well as student support services and facilities.¹⁹ This proves that TMU regularly monitors and reflects on quality management and assessment. Thereby, areas are detected that are in need of improvement and remedial measures are considered. Similar to other areas that have already been discussed in previous chapters, the team recommends that such decisions be based on stringently conducted and well documented SWOT analyses. All in all, TMU has the potential and thus the capacity for change also in quality culture, especially as management is open to change and teaching staff already practises a good quality culture in teaching.

¹⁹ Smaranda Angheni 2013 "E. The situation of the quality assurance activities." In: State of Titu Maiorescu University. Annual Report. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 27, p. 6.



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6.4. Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, TMU has a quality culture in place in teaching staff. In addition, it is aware of the fact that good quality management is essential for establishing and conducting quality assurance not only in teaching and research, its main businesses, but also in administration and support services and facilities. Accordingly, goals have been formulated to introduce effective quality management and comprehensive QA. TMU has successfully implemented ISO 9001.

The team recommends that, before implementing QA practices university-wide, TMU first defines quality of all activities on all levels. In addition, in order to be able to rely on effective quality management, a quality unit in charge of quality management and assurance should be established. Whatever quality management system TMU decides to implement in the long run, TMU should ensure that it promotes the already existing quality culture among staff, extended quality culture to research and, in general, avoided bureaucratisation. QA would work especially effectively if the initial definitions of quality culture were used as the starting point to complete the full PDCA cycle. In order to establish a fully comprehensive and effective QA system, the team suggests that the standards of ISO 9001 be complemented by those developed in ESG. Thereby, TMU could increase its competitive advantage in Romania and the European Higher Education Area as a whole. All these steps should be planned strategically and operationally and should be well documented and easily accessible for the university community.



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7. Internationalisation

7.1. Norms, values, mission, goals

Internationalisation is included in TMU's mission through the following objectives:

- development of partnerships with institutions, authorities, economic and social units in Romania and other countries in order to organise and adapt curricula and research to benchmarks specific to qualifications and socio-economic requirements of national and European environment; [...]
- development programmes for national and international mobility of students, teachers and scientific research staff; [...] ²⁰

On the one hand, TMU is eager to meet European standards in curricula and research; in order to do so, partnerships with institutions of other countries are formed. On the other hand, TMU intends to focus on offering opportunities for students, teaching and research staff alike of international mobility. These two major objectives are further detailed in Title III, Chapter III on "International Relations, Community Programmes, and Foreign Students". Here, emphasis is laid on depicting the purpose of entering into international agreements: firstly, experiencing teaching and research abroad will have a positive impact on the activities in general and the quality of teaching in all three cycles in particular, which will lead to a greater integration of TMU members into the international scientific community; secondly, establishing joint graduate and post graduate programmes will increase the recognition of TMU degrees; thirdly, establishing bilateral agreements or multilateral projects will allow members of TMU to access European funding. In addition, TMU welcomes EU and non-EU students to participate its degree programmes. ²¹

These overall goals are substantiated in the Strategic Plan for 2012-2016 in two objectives: on the one hand, TMU's intention to develop joint degrees doctoral programmes with foreign universities is expressed. On the other hand, TMU intends to establish study programmes in foreign languages in order to attract Romanian students who would like to start a career in the EU and also to attract foreign students. ²²

²⁰ Article 14, Chapter III, Title I. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 7, p. 1.

²¹ Chapter III International Relations, Community Programmes, and Foreign Students, Title III. In: University Charter. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 32, p. 8.

²² Strategic Plan of Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest for the Period 2012-2016. 2012. In: Titu Maiorescu University of Bucharest 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Appendix 13, pp. 4-5.



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7.2. Governance and activities

Based on the mission and objectives mentioned above, TMU has been successful in establishing a range of internationalisation activities.

As far as the internationalisation of study programmes is concerned, TMU has already been successful in establishing a double degree programme in French: the Law Faculty offers the Master Programme in European and International Law, which comprises four semesters instead of the average two semesters of Master programmes and awards two Master degrees, one from TMU and a second one from the French partner university, Université d'Orléans. During the year 2013/2014 ten students are registered for this programme. In addition, as announced in the rector's Annual Report in April 2013, the Doctoral School of the Faculty of Law has established cotutelle agreements with two French universities and a Spanish one: Université Paris Est Créteil (formerly Paris XII), Université de Nantes and Universidade da Coruña.²³ Finally, the team learned during its visits that several study programmes in English are being planned, for instance at the Faculty of Economic Sciences and the Faculty of Computer Science. At present, curricula are being designed and TMU academic staff are being trained in academic English in order to also fulfil the linguistic requirements. A good number of regular international students are enrolled in courses at TMU — during the academic year 2013/2014, 200 international students are registered, the majority in medicine. For mobile students, i.e. students participating in Erasmus exchanges, TMU offers the possibility to take exams in their language of origin. In order to attract even more international students, it has been planned that a new website will be launched in January 2014.

As far as the mobility of its students is concerned, TMU has been successful in securing forty bilateral agreements over the years, seventeen of them being active during the academic year 2013/2014. In fact, seventeen of twenty applicants could benefit from Erasmus mobility as this was the number of grants approved by the National Erasmus Agency. In addition to study scholarships, TMU has been successful in securing internship placements for its students with various international institutions and businesses. Eleven students could be sent to companies and hospitals, partly utilising the World of Skills Programme, during the academic year 2012/2013. All in all, the good language skills among students, as the team experienced during its visits, would allow even more students to participate in mobility programmes.

Similarly, seven teachers were involved in mobility schemes and benefited from teaching and training abroad in the academic year 2012/2013. During the meetings with staff, the team recognised that considerably more teachers would be interested in mobility scholarships as they are fully aware of the advantages of stays abroad for their own personal development as well as the development of their teaching and research. From a linguistic point of view, such mobility

²³ Smaranda Angheni 2013 "E. The situation of the quality assurance activities." In: State of Titu Maiorescu University. Annual Report. Cited after: Titu Maiorescu University 2013 Self-Evaluation Report. Supplementary Appendix 27, p. 4.



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would be possible as the good language skills of academic staff in English and French prove. What the team appreciated was the fact that not only teaching but also administrative staff was involved in mobility.

Internationalisation activities have become possible thanks to the more than dedicated administrative staff in international relations; however, the team would like to suggest that the office is understaffed. There is one full-time employee who is supported by one assistant; there is a liaison person in each faculty. Staff have been very active in participating in meetings with Erasmus coordinators and securing bilateral agreements for TMU on the basis of contacts established during these meetings. In addition, suggestions for bilateral agreements, made by teaching and academic staff, were duly followed up and agreements arranged.

Now that basic international relations have been established, the team recommends TMU to consider an internationalisation strategy and plan the operational steps to implement the strategy. TMU could, for instance, identify universities and research institutions abroad with similar specialisations in teaching and research. These institutions could be contacted pro-actively, and collaboration could be convincingly offered by the very fact that TMU has expertise in these niches, which automatically turns it into an attractive partner. Moreover, as far as attracting more regular international students is concerned, TMU could analyse the present pool of international students and decide on slightly more aggressive marketing in countries from which students can be recruited easily or reconsider which countries it could also be attractive for and start marketing campaigns there.

7.3. Quality assessment practices and capacity for change

As far as study programmes are concerned, their quality assessment is part of the regular internal and external evaluation of teaching and study programmes respectively. Erasmus exchanges and other bilateral agreements for student mobility are assessed through reports that need to be drafted by students after their return and are then analysed. Similarly, staff mobility is assessed in feedback provided by the universities in which the lectures were offered. The team assumes, though, that due to the workload of the international relations office a fundamental quality assurance system has not been established yet. Resources should be set free to also allow the definition of a quality culture in international relations, establish quality management in this field and allow comprehensive quality assurance. Thus, not only quantity could be increased, i.e. the number of incoming and outgoing students and teaching staff or the number of study programmes, but also the quality that TMU intends to offer in internationalisation.

7.4. Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, internationalisation in education and research is an inherent part of TMU's mission. To implement this, three major objectives can be identified: firstly, to establish partnerships with universities and research institutions abroad in order to develop joint study programmes and



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research projects, which will enhance the study and research experience of students and researchers as well as increase TMU's reputation at the European level; secondly, to establish mobility programmes and bilateral agreements, which will offer students, academic and administrative staff the opportunity to collect experience abroad; thirdly, to attract regular foreign students, which will, as the team suggests, also enhance learning and teaching. Mostly on the basis of personal contacts and outstanding commitment, TMU has been able to establish successful activities in all three areas mentioned. The team would like to recommend, though, that TMU develop an overall strategy in international relations including clear statements on the direction that internationalisation should take in the long run and thus pool its resources in objectives, tasks and activities that focus on this direction. In order to regularly monitor the activities, strategies and plans need to be documented and a quality culture, quality management and quality assurance in international relations need to be implemented.



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8. Conclusion

As the team noted during its two visits as well as by consulting the documentation provided, TMU with its extension in Târgu Jiu succeeds in providing high level tertiary education in all three cycles and lifelong learning programmes. Similarly, it has been successful in excelling in research in some niche areas. Despite the budgetary constraints, which are due to decreasing demographics and therefore decreasing income from student fees, TMU has continuously developed as an institution and expanded the variety of subjects and programmes as well as research projects offered and thus striven to ultimately fulfil the mission of generating and transferring knowledge through education and advanced research. Indeed, TMU provides a safe environment to explore new territories and has the capacity and potential to develop and change.

TMU's strength can be detected in the quality of its teaching. Teaching staff are academics and practitioners or experts alike. First insights into research are an inherent part already of Bachelor programmes. An increasingly interdisciplinary approach in teaching and research can be noted in all three cycles. Students are exposed to practice-oriented teaching and experience real-life scenarios. They can also benefit from the good infrastructure offered on the main campus. A positive outcome of this infrastructure is that it is also open to students from other universities and thereby increases TMU's revenue. In addition, a major strength of TMU is that it is eager to develop its graduates' employability: on the one hand, internships are an inherent part of the study programmes; on the other hand, TMU has established clinics owned by the university itself and offers students of the medical subjects the opportunity to collect practical experience in these clinics besides also following the common practice of forming training agreements with hospitals. Moreover, TMU is very active in networking with alumni and other stakeholders and is good at exploiting, for instance, internship and partnership opportunities offered by beneficiaries. All in all, TMU is a young private university with an enthusiastic and optimistic spirit, and relations between the Founding Association, founding members and management are good and harmonious.

In terms of weaknesses, TMU seems to hamper its positive development and progress by setting the challenging task of changing from a mainly education-centred university to an advanced research and education university without having developed a comprehensive strategy of how to reach this major objective as well as comprehensively communicating the objective and its implications in all facets to all levels of the university. Furthermore, based on the fact that it aims to further develop over time, the following aspects restrict TMU in its effectiveness: responsibilities of strategic management and operational management are not fully separated; strategic decisions are not fully documented and then broken down into operational activities with responsibilities allocated to single persons, clear milestones to be reached and deadlines to be met; decisions seem not to be fully communicated and disseminated to all levels of university; decisions are mostly made top-down; budgeting is accomplished annually and fully centralised without allowing autonomy to the faculties; academic staff are substantially involved in



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administrative matters through, for instance, work in one of the numerous committees at the department, faculty and university levels. Moreover, quality culture has not yet been defined for TMU as a whole and its disciplines in particular; quality management is not fully established yet and seems to be more of a bureaucratic exercise similar to the quality assurance practices that, in addition, mainly focus on teaching; numerous data is collected, which seems not to be always fully significant. Finally, the range of research accomplished at TMU is rather restricted in the same way as the publication and dissemination of research results.

As the team learned, TMU does have various opportunities at its command. First and foremost, it has the potential to establish itself as a strong alternative to other universities, including state universities, by making use of the reputation it has with applicants, students, graduates and stakeholders. Thereby, the number of students could be increased. Secondly, TMU is aware of the fact that it will be necessary to expand the range of programmes offered in all three cycles and has started to establish more Master programmes and doctoral schools and develop HR to reach the goal and meet the legal requirements. Similarly, TMU has the potential to expand its lifelong learning programme and thereby increase its income considerably. Thirdly, TMU is eager to extend the interdisciplinary approach not only in teaching and study programmes but also in research; for this, collaboration within the university will be as essential as collaboration with national and international partners in academia and business. Finally, TMU has the potential to develop its internationalisation; joint and double-degree programmes as well as programmes in English are being developed in order to attract national and international students; and Erasmus agreements are being formed in order to increase student and teacher mobility.

TMU's positive development could be threatened if the economic crisis continued and the number of potential students decreased substantially, especially when considering its dependence to a great extent on income from student fees. If this decrease occurred, TMU's limited autonomy in deciding on numbers of students per study programme might turn into a considerable constraint. Still, TMU has proven that it can be pro-active and successfully obtain approval for a higher number of students in some programmes than usually approved. What may also be considered a threat for TMU is the restricted autonomy in recruiting researchers as well as promoting staff, based on the fact that recruitment and promotion criteria are fully state-regulated and frequently amended.

On the basis of the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are provided:

- The team recommends TMU to take the intermediate step and first strive to become a successful teaching and research university instead of trying to reach the status of an advanced research and education university. For the team, this is a goal TMU can achieve considering the status, the potential and the resources at hand at present.



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- In order to successfully complete the transition, the team encourages TMU to consider what its identity is at present and clearly and distinctly articulate its profile as an institution. In the same way, the goal to be reached needs to be clearly determined. Once the initial and final states have been comprehensively defined, the transition needs to be planned at the strategic and operational levels with clearly assigned responsibilities, detailed milestones and deadlines, and in cooperation with the entire university community. Naturally, strategies for all areas need to be developed – for teaching, as well as for research, service to society or internationalisation. In teaching, efforts need to be made to offer an even greater range of study programmes in all three cycles; in research a basic decision needs to be made whether the already established niches are further developed or research is introduced in all disciplines; internationalisation will also need to consider which countries and which areas should be more pro-actively addressed in order to become more attractive for national and international students. The plans should then be implemented according to the design. Processes should be regularly monitored and evaluated whether they still comply with the initial plan. If diverting, they should be adapted or corrected in accordance with the profile that was initially developed.
- Based on the fact that TMU intends to grow in size, the team recommends that TMU reconsider its governance and decision-making, clearly distinguishing between strategic and operational management, allocating the responsibilities to the respective bodies and thus establishing a simple and transparent structure of corporate governance according to the principles of checks and balances.
- Related to the previous aspect, the team recommends TMU to consider decentralising budgeting, allowing faculties to administer the resources they have been allocated, especially when considering that faculties are not only cost but also profit centres. Matching multi-annual strategic planning, multi-annual budgeting could be introduced, which will remain open to annual substantiation and adaptation on the basis of expected revenue. In order to increase the income, the range of lifelong-learning programmes could be expanded, more student support facilities could be established and applied research results could be exploited.
- The team encourages TMU to continue developing a comprehensive quality culture for all areas of university life — teaching, research, service to society, internationalisation, administration and management, including quality management. No matter if a quality culture is already prevalent or still needs to be established, it is essential to document and disseminate information on the quality culture to present and future members of TMU. This quality culture will inform quality assurance practices. As for quality management, the team recommends that TMU pursue its initial task of establishing a quality unit in charge of quality management and assurance practices. Similar to all suggestions and recommendations the team has allowed itself to make, this will enhance TMU's



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performance and assist it in ultimately reaching the mission, vision and objectives it has chosen to pursue.

Envoi

The team would like to conclude the report by thanking the university for the excellent organisation and support provided before and during the visits, and for the welcome and hospitality extended. All members of the university whom the team met spoke very openly about the challenges faced by the university and its plans to address and overcome them. The recommendations and comments in the report aim to support the university to that aim. TMU has the ambition and potential to be successful in its next stage of development.