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Site Visit of The "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi (TUIASI)
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## Introduction

The "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi (TUIASI) has 11 Faculties, 5 departments, and 3 main administrative Units : the General Administrative Directorate, the Financial Accounting Department, the Human Resources Department).

IASI is, quantitatively and very visibly, a university city, with a relatively great percentage of students in the population as a whole, as compared with other Romanian and European cities. This gives universities as well a specific importance in local and regional life, as a necessity to consider the impact of their education and research role and missions far beyond their immediate environment.

The experts have appreciated the welcome and commitment of all people encountered with their institution and the success of the site-visit. A great number of informations have been made available by the self-evaluation report, other data were provided on request during the site-visit or were available on the website of the University.

The present report will deal only with a few specific important aspects which have been adressed by the University and discussed during the site-visit.

1. The quality assurance process
2. Academic and didactic aspects
3. The institutional capacity : Strategic planning and previsional management

## 1. The Quality assurance process

In 2005, A Commission for Quality Assesment and Assurance (CEAC) was established according to law stipulations, as well as a Department for Quality Assessment and Assurance (DEAC)

At university level was developed a large number of procedures, guidelines, methodologies and instructions. Quality concern covers, at various stages of development, all activities related to education, research, services to students and management of TUIASI. Currently, the university has a set of procedures for assessment and assurance of academic quality, used in the past three years, for annual assessments, authorization and accreditations.

The aim of improving the quality of the academic and administrative management of the university, faculties, departments, directions and services, has been followed through analyzing and formalizing the major procedures to be followed in the main university activities domains. This has led to the elaboration of a Standard Operating Procedures Manual and its use and improvement in periodic reviews.

This Manual was produced and published in 2008 together with additional working instructions, procedures and guidelines. It represents the result of an intensive common work and communication between the Department for Quality Assessment and Assurance (DEAC) in the central services and the Faculties and their deans and administration, who are the first in charge of assessing and improving the quality of their activities. It has been very well received both inside and outside the TUIASI. The periodic reshaping and republishing of this Standard Operating Procedures Manual is foreseen.

The university created a team of auditors which analyses and assesses the quality of study programs. This joint activity between the University and its Faculties, and the strong participation and commitment by the various university entities (108 self assessment reports have been produced) have led in every faculty or department to the constitution of a core of teachers interested, trained and qualified on academic quality issues.

## 2. Academic and didactic aspects

The main focus of this quality assurance work has quite normally been on academic and didactic aspects of the University life.

2.1. The University has adopted the European structure of three training cycles (Bachelor- Master-Doctorate), which is today generalized to all faculties, harmonizing the study programs with those of similar universities in the country and in Europe,

The legal and formal adoption of this structure is to be completed by an activity of periodic assessment of disciplines / programs of study and teaching methods at the department and faculty level, taking into account successful experiments and good practices in similar Romanian and European universities,

It would be useful for this purpose to take stock on the experience, and participate in the Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Network funded by the European Commission « Tuning Educational Structures in Europe » (« Tuning ») which is now extended to engineering areas and focuses on educational structures with emphasis on subjects curricula, the content of studies, learning tools and assessment methods.
(see http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm , http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/ and reports of the Engineering Synergy Group

This might help the ongoing work on further adequation changes and updating in the different aspects of study programmes.

Students met during the site-visit have expressed their interest and satisfaction on the usefulness of courses evaluation processes and considered they were efficient in the sense that they led to effective improvements.

2. 2. The classical issue of the right pattern of contents between general and specialized studies was debated several times with the different categories of stakeholders encountered during the TUIASI site visit .

The variety of often apparently conflicting views exchanged on this issue with the students, the degree-holders and employers during the site-visit invites to keep the main focus on acquisition of a broad knowledge base rather than to seek for too early spezializations.

TUIASI has pointed among its weaknesses (self-evaluation report) « A reduced efficiency of specialized technological practice for students because of low interest of companies in using the practice stage in order to recruit students after their graduation »

« Professional practice is conducted with some problems, because it is not yet established a corresponding organizational framework: guiding for practice, tutorials, agreements with enterprises, so that the insufficient accumulation of practical skills is inducing difficulties in integrating in work environment of university graduates »

2.3. The development of reflexion and work on « learning outcomes », through the Bologna process, should help renovate the context and elements of this debate when revising contents of courses, keeping in mind that « competences » does not mean only specializations but also the research-updated broad base of general knowledge that only the University can provide. The focus should be on the right articulations between both, also on organizing a sufficient variety of approaches in order to take into consideration the great diversity of backgrounds and students profiles, and the special needs of a growing number of students-workers. The transition between high school and the first year of licence at TUIASI , is a strategic period for efficiency of the further studies : it requires to consider, and cope with, the diversity of students' achievements and assimilation of prerequisites in High Schools.

The « learning outcomes » and « competences » approaches, together with consideration of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education, are also an incentive to create new opportunities for more interactions with present and future employers of TUIASI graduates. The pragmatic development of these useful relations between the university and the economy requires them to be both ways, with initiatives in a common interest coming both from enterprises and academic units and individual teachers.

This would also help to facilitate and enrich the second important transition period for students between the end of University courses and the entrance to the labor market. Another important tool is the development of existing transversal courses (both « general » and « vocational ») across faculties such as engineering projects management, legal aspects of engineering activities, team work, verbal and written expression and communication.

The strategic importance of these two transition periods, at the beginning and the end of studies would be stressed by a significant increase in the visibility and professionalization of guidance and information services within the University.

More generally, looking for the development of external support for TUIASI and its students requests an increase of contacts with employer enterprises and former graduates - alumni (establishing a database Is already envisaged)

## 3. The institutional capacity. Strategic planning and management

In conformity with the indicator I.P.A.1.2.2. strategic management, each Faculty has a strategic, at least 4 years plan (at present for the period 2008-2011 ) annual operational plans, and activity reports. These documents are subject of public discussion within the academic community, approved by the Senate and communicated within the university

All faculties have a good knowledge of their present resources and future needs. Their plans show a variety of situations, presentations and levels of detail of information and forecasts.
These are consolidated by the central services of the university (Prorector Strategy) which have a global view of these informations related to each Faculty, and make all required synthesis.

In order to stay ahead and allow global university objectives and interests to prevail , further improvments might be sought in the methodology of elaboration and updating of these strategic plans with more guidance from the university itself. Insistance could be on prevision work required to help anticipation action and prepare well in advance for all the decisions related to

- The pedagogic needs of a diverse and changing student population,
- the required renewal of staff and
- all implications of changes and innovations in new courses and research focuses and priorities.

This requires to improve constantly the knowledge base of the University on itself, that is on Students, Staff, facilities and equipments, other functions and policies such as student services, the documentation (books, reviews, electronic resources, staff, structures), the international politicy and activities of the University (mobility of professors and

students, collaborations between the university and institutions of higher education and/or research abroad).

TUIASI has pointed among its weaknesses (self-evaluation report)
« 2.1. The University has communication systems in the administrative activity, but they are not integrated and do not facilitate the collection, processing and analysis of information relevant to assessing and ensuring institutional quality of university »

Such increased focus on strategic planning and management would help to consolidate and integrate data in the perspective of further decision-making.

3.1. Data-Base on Students

- a better knowledge of their geographical, school and social background, their level of school achievements and prerequisites for a better adaptation of their level of preparation and expectations with the requirements of their university courses, the numbers and situations of students-workers.

- The follow-up of their studies at TUIASI : intermediate results, orientations, changes, practical work periods, feed-backs on courses evaluations

- a better knowledge and understanding of jobs, and working and pay conditions, obtained by TUIASI graduates after their studies as well as of expectations of employers and their forecasts on recruitment policies.

Improvements and systematization of this type of informations would help to increase the visibility and role of orientation and information services within the University

3.2. Data-Base on Personnel

The University and Faculties have an important database on staff which gives tools for designing human resources strategies with important quantitative and qualitative indicators such as :
- the number of teachers under the age of 35 years (132)
- the percentage having the title of doctor in science (668),

The university can monitor replacement needs, due to aging and also the number of vacancies in the different Faculties (838,5 occupied posts/1123 theoretical number of positions)

There are disparities in the percentages of vacancies between Faculties and grades :

25% vacancies in the average (838/1123), but :
43% in Faculty of Architecture
41% in Faculty of Civil Engineering and Building Services
35% in Faculty of Hydrotechnical, Geodesy and Environment Engineering and Faculty of automatic Control and Computer Engineering

7% for the category of professors, 13% for the category of assistant professors, but :
40% for the category of assistants
36% for the category of lectors

It would be useful to improve and precise these tools for previsional management and recruitment policy

- revision of the theoretical structure of positions and dotations of Faculties (numbers of positions of each grade for each group of subjects) in adequation with evolutions and priorities forecasted or decided of student numbers and courses structures and contents,
- age pyramids of staff for all groups of subjects, giving the measure of aging of staff and replacement needs in constant demographic and pedagogic structures
- comparative evolution of vacancies and recruitment needs
- staff development needs

Simultaneously the recruiting of future professors and researchers will be facilitated by the success of the "BRAIN" project for financing the studies of 147 TUIASI PhDs with the help of the european social fund which will be an important tool for attracting young PhD students to the academic and research carreer.

3.3. Data-Base on Facilities and Equipment
TUIASI has pointed among its weaknesses and opportunities (self-evaluation report)
« 2.10. Equipment of technical laboratories does not meet current standards, the modernization efforts being limited because to reduced investment funds

3.2. The opening of the lines of financing from European structural founds offers the possibility of acquisition of new teaching and research equipment »
Some laboratories visited show a remarkable level of up-to-date equipement. The general computer equipement has also been a priority : « The computers number at the university level has exceeded 9000 units (3500 in the university campus area and over 5500 in the students campus) »...the use of the Internet, there is a number of more than 1000 and -mail addresses of university staff »

The diversity of situations between and within Faculties and laboratories, the great extent of expressed needs requests a continuing development and update policy which needs to rely on precise inventories, maintenance, renewal, safety requirments assessments.

## Conclusion

The Self - Assessment processes conducted by the Faculties and TUIASI have created impulsions to improve the knowledge base on all aspects of TUIASI life that should lead to improvement, maintenance and development in the quality culture and decision-making processes.

The main focus of this quality assurance work has quite normally been on academic and didactic aspects of the University life. The convincing ongoing quality assurance policy conducted with the DEAC and its manual of procedures could now increase its focus on the other aspects of management and strategic planning of TUAISI.

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