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Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest

EVALUATION REPORT

MAY 2013

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Performance
in Higher Education





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Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Governance and institutional decision making.....	9
3. Teaching and learning	14
4. Research.....	19
5. Service to society	23
6. Quality culture.....	26



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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the *Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest*. The evaluation took place in 2012-2013 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The 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 National Education and the various related normative acts.

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

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European 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.



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The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. The profile of the Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest

The Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest (thereafter, UTCB) is a public university that is located on four campuses in the capital city of Romania. UTCB traces its history back to the mid-nineteenth century when training in civil engineering was first introduced in Romania. In the 1920s, a division of civil engineering (later a faculty) was created at the Polytechnic School of Bucharest. Following the 1948 educational reforms, the faculty of civil engineering separated from the Polytechnic School (which was renamed the Polytechnic Institute) and was established as an independent higher education institution. Called initially the Civil Engineering Institute Bucharest, its name was changed later to the Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest.

UTCB enrolls 7 500 students across seven faculties and three independent teaching departments. The faculty of civil, industrial and agricultural buildings and the faculty of engineering for building services are the largest faculties, with 2 634 and 1 438 students, respectively. The following table captures the distribution of students by faculty or department during the academic year 2011/2012.

Number of students in academic year 2011/2012	
Faculty or department	Number of students
Faculty of Civil, Industrial and Agricultural Buildings	2 634
Faculty of Engineering for Building Services	1 438
Faculty of Geodesy	872
Faculty of Hydro-technics	806
Faculty of Railways, Roads and Bridges	797
Faculty of Technological Equipment	396
Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages	322
Department of Foreign Languages and Communication	126
Department of Training of Teaching Staff	105
Department of Lifelong Learning	-
TOTAL	7 500



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UTCB delivers Bachelors in Romanian, French and English (four years), Masters in Romanian (two years) and PhDs in Romanian, French and English (three years). According to the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), UTCB offers 15 accredited Bachelor programmes and four temporarily authorised ones; 23 accredited Master programmes and PhDs in 24 doctoral fields.

In the academic year 2011/2012, 874 employees worked at UTCB: 455 academic staff and 419 administrative staff.

In 2011, the budget of UTCB totalled 80,634 million Lei, of which 43,975 million came from the state. The Self-Evaluation Report notes that the percentage of state funding has been constantly decreasing (SER, p. 22) and the financial position of UTCB seems very fragile because of the insufficient level of public funding. During the second visit, the evaluation team was told that reimbursement of some (non compulsory) teaching activities have not been paid on time.

The following set of contextual factors has had an impact on UTCB:

- The world economic crisis has significantly affected the Romanian economy, leading to a significant drop in public and private funding and to a hiring and promotion freeze in the public sector. The latter was slightly relaxed recently and universities are now allowed to replace one in seven vacancies. Between the first and second visit, the evaluation team noted that the overall mood had further deteriorated within the university community and that the financial conditions seemed to have reached a critical level.
- The construction sector has been badly hurt by the crisis. Up to 2008, some of the university income derived from national projects and national and international companies.
- The legal higher education framework in Romania has been in constant flux, which makes long-term planning difficult and generates a wait-and-see attitude.
- The total number of students at UTCB started decreasing at the start of the economic crisis in 2009. The university expects this decrease to continue due to a demographic decline combined with a loss of attractiveness of engineering among high school leavers. Since state funding is partly based on student numbers, this is a critical issue for UTCB, which has engaged in an outreach campaign (e.g., through social networks) to persuade potential students that civil engineering is an attractive academic and professional path. UTCB also plans to boost its lifelong learning activities.

Whilst these are serious threats, there are also a few opportunities:



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- Romania's recent access to the European Union offers UTCB increased opportunities to gain access to European partner universities, to benchmark activities and to apply for European research funds.
- UTCB is part of the Romanian network of technical universities. These institutions appear to work closely together: they discuss issues of common interest, such as new policies, and come to an agreement on how to address them. They learn from one another and informally benchmark their activities.
- Within the city of Bucharest, the current relationships with the Polytechnic University of Bucharest and the University of Architecture seem good. The evaluation team was told that there is staff exchange and that about six academic staff members from the Polytechnic teach at UTCB and vice-versa. A similar staff exchange is arranged with the University of Architecture of Bucharest. However, these seemingly good neighbourly relationships have not lead to discussions about closer alliances between the three institutions in spite of the fact that they are specialised in cognate disciplines.
- Institutionally, UTCB is led by an experienced team and its rector was re-elected for a second term by a wide margin, thus ensuring the legitimacy of decisions taken. UTCB seems to be highly regarded by its stakeholders. The university shows commitment to teaching and to providing a range of expertise to Romania (e.g. through the production of building codes and participation in the construction of major infrastructural projects). The main goals of the current leadership are to ensure appropriate levels of student enrolment, increase research capacity and ensure the financial stability of the institution.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a small self-evaluation group that included the following members:

- Prof. Radu Vacareanu, Vice-Rector for Research – Chair
- Prof. Iordan Petrescu
- Prof. Lidia Niculita
- Prof. Laurentiu Rece
- Assoc. Prof. Alexandru Aldea
- Ms. Ancuta Neagu, PhD Student – Secretary

This core group received support from an enlarged group that included:

- Prof. Zoia Manolescu
- Prof. Tudor Bugnariu



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- Prof. Loreta Batali
- Assoc. Prof. Daniel Stoica
- Assoc. Prof. Florin Baltaretu
- Assoc. Prof. Amelita Legendi
- Assoc. Prof. Gheorghe Badea
- Cristina Ungureanu, student

The self-evaluation process took place shortly after the rector was re-elected for a second term. The self-evaluation group started meeting in July 2012. It made a first selection of public documents to include in the SER. These documents had been prepared at the end of the rector's first term and constituted to a large extent the rector's campaign material; they had been discussed in the faculty councils and in the academic Senate. The first draft of the Self-Evaluation Report was translated into English. After this draft was reduced to 30 pages, it was not translated back into Romanian. Nevertheless, those staff and students whom the evaluation team met seemed reasonably familiar with it.

The process by which the SER had been prepared produced a document that was somewhat promotional and UTCB would have benefited from having a SER that was more analytical and self-reflective. Nevertheless, the SER did identify a number of weaknesses and not all of these were attributed to external factors. In addition, the SER pointed to ways that UTCB could improve.

The Self-Evaluation Report, together with its appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in November 2012, one month before the first visit. The two visits of the evaluation team to UTCB took place from 2 to 4 December 2012 and from 14 to 17 April 2013, respectively. In between the two visits, UTCB provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation as requested.

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

- Prof. Christina Ullenius, former Rector, University of Karlstad, Sweden, Chair
- Ms. Ieva Baltina, student, European studies, University of Latvia, Latvia
- Prof. Edward Jezierski, former Vice-Rector, Technical University of Lodz, Poland
- Prof. Gerard Wrixon, former President, University College Cork, Ireland
- Dr. Andrée Sursock, Senior Adviser, European University Association, Belgium, Team Coordinator

The team wishes to thank Rector Iohan Neuner and Vice-Rector Radu Vacareanu for their time and active engagement with the evaluation process. Professor Vacareanu, assisted by Ms. Ancuta Neagu, made sure that the team's working conditions were optimal; both are gratefully thanked for their attention to all aspects – large and small – of the two visits. The team wishes also to acknowledge the contributions of all the colleagues, students and



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external stakeholders whom it met and without whom this evaluation would not have been possible.



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2. Governance and institutional decision making

2.1 The university's main decision-making bodies

The university leadership team includes the rector and three vice-rectors: for research, for education, and for student and administration.

As defined by the law, UTCB has two main decision-making bodies, the Senate and the Administrative Council.

- The Senate includes 55 members, 41 of which are academic staff, and 14 are students. The Senate is chaired by a president, elected from amongst its members.
- The Administrative Council is the executive body of the university. It is chaired by the rector and includes the three vice-rectors; the seven faculty deans; five directors of academic services; the general administrative manager; the quality officer; and a student. The Administrative Council meets once a week for about five two hours.

As required by the 2011 Law, a management contract is signed between the Senate and the rector. This contract lists 60 objectives to be realised by the end of the rector's term: twenty objectives are related to the research mission, fifteen to the educational mission, eleven to relationships with students, nine to administration and finance, and five to human resources.

The bifurcated leadership structure holds a potential for paralysis that seemed to have been partially overcome by the election of the academic members of the Administrative Council to the Senate. This allows the vice-rectors to be members of the relevant Senate committees. Nevertheless, the pace of decision-making is rather slow. The evaluation team was told that policy decisions take about six months for a decision to meander its way to the Senate — from the department, to the faculty, the Administrative Council, the Senate commission and the plenary meeting of the Senate.

2.2 Faculties and departments

The faculties' prerogatives include:

- Deciding on the number of students, the admission's process, including of transfer students, recognition of transfer credit.
- Initiating curricular changes, suggesting new specialisations, or closing down programmes

Academics are attached to particular departments not directly to the faculties. The faculty councils decide the curricula and then turn to the departments for execution. Research is organised by the departments and the research centres (cf. Chapter 4 for details). Any



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decision related to recruitment or promotion must be approved by the Senate and, ultimately, by the rector. The faculties and departments do not have their own budget.

Two mechanisms ensure a strategic link between the university and the faculties. First, the deans are chosen by the rector (right after his/her election), based on a short list that is the result of an election within each faculty; therefore, successful deans are more likely to campaign in support of the rector's strategic project. Second, the faculty deans sit on the Administrative Council.

It appeared to the evaluation team that some degree of devolution of responsibilities would ensure greater dynamism in the university. Thus, the team recommends:

- Delegating some decisions to the faculties and departments.
- Providing them with some devolved budgeting.
- Ensuring clear reporting and accountability across the different hierarchical levels: leadership, faculties, and departments.

Such devolution and clear reporting and accountability would allow the faculties and departments to plan their developments whilst ensuring a measure of university steering and monitoring. For instance, faculties could be encouraged to find ways of supporting and developing their young researchers by mentoring them, celebrating their success, providing more opportunities for intellectual exchanges and entrusting them with leadership positions.

At the same time, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, some processes, particularly admission, require central steering because they touch upon the general standards and quality of the university and these need to be defined and monitored centrally.

2.3 Students' involvement in governance

Students are represented through an association, and student representatives sit on the University Senate and the faculty councils. The student association appears to be focused on social activities and contributes positively to the students' social life but seems to be disconnected from academic issues.

Students seem more comfortable in their faculties than in the Senate. They stated that "the faculty councils feel like home"; they know the dean and vice-deans and find them approachable and responsive. By contrast, the Senate seems more formal and they admit to not being as outspoken in that forum. They are intimidated by the number of professors whom they do not know and by the presence of the rector. They recognise that in spite of the student association, they need to be more organised in order to ensure that they speak with one voice. They do not meet in advance of the Senate meetings as they come from different faculties.



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The Self-Evaluation Report mentions that although students are represented in all bodies that deal with issues of interest to them, they show “limited interest and involvement”. The report mentions that this is due to a complex set of reasons, “starting from an inappropriate culture of involvement and responsibility, problems of mutual trust, etc.” The SER notes that “Efforts for improving this situation are being made, especially through dialogue with the student’s association” (SER, p. 13).

In the view of the evaluation team, dialogue is one first step that can be taken; progressing on this issue, however, will require developing the student leadership more actively. Therefore, the team recommends:

- Fostering student involvement through specific leadership courses, or at least a substantial orientation targeting the student leadership and that would help prepare them to take greater responsibilities for their affairs and be more active.
- Finding ways of increasing the responsibilities of the student association in order to strengthen its leadership and engagement.
- Introducing student representatives to issues coming up in the senate to make them better prepared, providing them with formal opportunities to present reports on certain aspects of student life, and giving them feedback on results of the decision-making process.

2.4 Human resource management

The 2011 Law resulted in the abrupt retirement of almost 40 professors in the middle of the academic year. UTCB had to find replacements in a hurry; thus, professionals from industry and second-year PhD students were asked to deliver four hours of teaching per week. Since then, the law has been modified to allow a professor who reaches retirement age to complete the academic year and the universities were allowed to employ again retired doctoral supervisors, at least temporarily.

The evaluation team notes the following characteristics related to human resource management:

- The human resource functions are spread across the organisation chart. This does not ensure a common approach. UTCB risks losing capacity and competence for the development of its staff.
- Many of the key senior administrative posts are filled by academics.
- Administrative staff members appear weak in number and quality.

This set of characteristics has three interrelated consequences:



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INNOVATION FUNDING



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- When academics take up administrative posts, it diverts them from spending more time on the core missions of the university — teaching, research and service to society — and does not ensure high quality administrative services.
- Given that academics are occupying the senior administrative posts, the administrative staff in the next hierarchical level are unable to perform at the senior professional level required of modern universities. This leads to setting up administrative processes that are not very efficient.
- The absence of administrative staff from the decision-making process is rather glaring (e.g., none is included in the Senate, as specified by law; none was included in the self-evaluation group). Except for five directors of academic services who sit in the Administrative Council (and are academics), administrative staff do not appear to be involved. This means that they cannot understand fully the service function of their work, i.e. how it can support the academic functions of the university and its development.

The evaluation team recommends:

- Strengthening the administration by professionalising it and gradually populating the senior administrative posts with competent administrative staff. The most promising administrative staff should be identified, offered staff development courses and, subsequently, leadership opportunities.
- Consolidating the human resource function and centralising it in order to ensure a common approach, transparency and greater efficiency. The human resource office should be viewed as more than just the place for processing salaries: it has a role in developing staff, academic as well as administrative. It could also support the doctoral school offering e.g. seminars for doctoral supervisors.

2.5 The vision, mission and strategy

The quality of the vision, mission and strategy documents are critical, particularly in time of crisis. They can serve to rally the community and to guide it. The SER defines UTCB's vision as follows: "UTCB vision is to promote the excellence in education and research. UTCB assumes its fundamental mission of generating and transferring knowledge to students and trainees, through graduate and postgraduate programs of initial and continuing professional training as well as through scientific research, development, innovation and technology transfer. Moreover, UTCB assumes the task of providing essential contribution to the education offered to students to develop their personality as active citizens of a democratic society." (SER pp. 8-9)

The evaluation team notes that:



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- UTCB's mission statement is found in its Charter and a variety of other documents.
- The main strategic document of the university is in fact the campaign material of the rector and therefore not perhaps the result of wide consultation.
- Several strategic documents provided to the team appeared somewhat at odds with one another. UTCB approved recently a consolidated strategic document that addresses this problem. This document was presented to the team at the end of the second visit. It is in Romanian and the team was unable to study it but the document appeared very long (35 pages).
- Based on the documents that had been put at its disposal, the team was able to gain the view that these lacked detailed milestones, key performance indicators, identification of responsibilities, etc. The team team was told that the next draft of these documents would specify these aspects.

Therefore, the evaluation team recommends developing the following documents:

- A mission statement as a single, stand-alone document that can be easily accessed and used to guide the activities of the community.
- A long-term vision that speaks to the potential of the institution and is not bound by present day constraints.
- A strategy with precise milestones, resources, responsibilities, etc. An effort should be made to summarise this into a one-page strategic document that would present the main priorities. This exercise would serve to focus efforts and channel energies.



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3. Teaching and learning

3.1 The curricula

According to the Self-Evaluation Report (p. 6), the undergraduate programme is structured as follows: “In the first two years (four semesters), the curriculum is similar for all degree programmes (specialisations) of a given field, prevailing subjects in basic sciences and general engineering disciplines. The third year is mostly devoted to common core engineering subjects for the given field, while the fourth year is almost entirely reserved for in-depth studies in the area of specialisation, including a diploma project. Students are granted a degree in engineering after fulfilling the courses requirements, passing a graduation examination and successfully defending the diploma project.”

Although the title of engineer is conferred after the Bachelor, the professional engineer is limited in what s/he can do at that point: for instance, responsibility for constructed area and height are limited. Most students whom the team met expressed interest in earning a Master, which would lift these limitations. As an example, 80% of students in the faculty of engineering for building services pursue a Master’s degree.

The Bologna reforms were introduced at the university in 2005. The team heard from a variety of sources that the previous five-year engineering diploma was squeezed into the four-year Bachelor and that the progression from the Bachelor to the Master should be re-examined. This issue is fairly common across Europe and many universities have been reviewing the initial ways in which they implemented the Bologna reforms. This review is essential in order to fine-tune a rather complex set of reforms.

The faculty of engineering in foreign languages appears to have been successful in introducing innovative curricula. It could be considered as the UTCB’s incubator of new ideas for teaching and learning and be encouraged to innovate and then “spin off” its innovations to the other faculties.

The team was told that all study programmes at UTCB have been accredited by ARACIS, the national accreditation agency, and that most of them are in the top “A class”.

Courses appear to be well thought out and incorporate theory and practice but students wish to have more practical work in the third and fourth year and stakeholders complain that internships are too short (three weeks). In addition, only 20% of students are able to find external internships and companies complain about the students’, and indeed the graduates’ lack of practical experience. The SER points to the need to shift to student centred learning, which should include a shift from rote learning.

The global Solar Decathlon project, an international project in which UTCB students participated, has been a successful experiment and it appears that some form of active



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learning has been introduced but students expressed the following needs: more team-based (uni- and multi-disciplinary) projects like the solar project; the possibility to present projects in front of a bigger audience rather than just one professor (this opportunity seem to vary by faculty); and more problem-based learning that requires more creativity early on in the course.

A diversity of examination formats is administered. The evaluation team views favourably that there is no over reliance on multiple-choice examinations but a mix of written and oral examinations.

International students, whom the team met, enjoy and seem satisfied with the education received in UTCB and for the openness of the welcome. They appreciate very favourably their learning experience at UTCB as compared to their experience in other countries, including in Italy and in the United Kingdom, although they seem to lack a centralised support office that can assist with their specific issues.

3.2 Admission's process

The students are selected through an admission's process. The evaluation team notes the following features:

- The admission's process varies by faculty. Each faculty has its own admission requirements — some stricter than others and its own processes. Thus, some have developed a written test; others use the baccalaureate results.
- There are two examination sessions in order to enable students to sit two examinations and apply to two faculties. This could be avoided if one exam tested basic skills that are commonly required across all faculties.
- In addition, the Self-Evaluation Report admits to weaknesses in filtering the potentially good engineers: "the admission procedures and criteria... have not proved to be efficient for the selection of students with engineering-specific skills. This issue requires a cohesive and efficient system meant to guide future specialists in their career paths, even from secondary school." (SER pp. 15-16) The students confirmed this and noted that the level of mathematics and physics of entering students is not good and that the math test does not filter out the weaker students.

3.3 Dropout rate in the first year

Students report that their studies are demanding (about 28 contact hours, leading to 45 to 50 hours per week when study time is included) and require good high-school preparation and commitment to meet the challenging requirements of a heavy class load. In fact, about 35% of students are reported to drop out during the first year. The reasons for this are unclear and



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INNOVATION FUNDING



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complex and are not all attributable to academic failure. Nevertheless, it does seem that a portion of these students are dropping out because of failure.

The evaluation team was struck that there seemed to be a culture — shared by both staff and students — that such failure rate is acceptable. There are no attempts to identify at-risk students until they fail their first examinations. Some students mentioned that high-school leavers underestimate the work and the difficulties and are underprepared. When asked if remedial courses could help, the students respond that it is a “good idea but the students need to be prepared and motivated”. They added: “Teachers do everything they can to help the students: they never say no.” They offer extra hours before exams but this is communicated as help for those who do not understand the material. Typically, the weaker students do not show up. This type of avoidance behaviour is found in many universities across the world and requires that the institutions present these activities not as “help” but as further enrichment.

The acceptance of the high dropout rate struck the evaluation team as counterproductive if only because of the declining demographic trends and the current difficulties that technical universities encounter in attracting students to engineering careers.

3.4 Student support services

Nevertheless, UTCB staff appears to be very committed to the university’s teaching mission and open to helping students. Similarly, deans seem to be available and to have an open door policy. There is a tutoring system (one tutor to 25 students) and an orientation for new students organised by some faculties.

The career centre organises activities to help students find jobs. It provides some help with CV writing and organises events such as job fairs (although these have been recently abandoned), visits of companies to the campus or visits of students to construction sites, and roundtable with employers and students but the take-up of students is low. Faculties also have career officers. 60% to 80% of graduates get a job within a year and 35% within a three-month period.

There is one “resource-based learning centre” that provides a place for students to study individually or in groups. UTCB plans to open more such centres in the future. Libraries are organised by faculty but the library director and a small team coordinates all these branches. There are a few study places in the libraries and a few in the residences. Some faculties seem to allow students to use empty classrooms as study places, including in the evenings, but the team heard complaints from some students about the lack of study places. The library stocks appear limited although it is clear that the head librarian makes every effort to develop exchanges with partner institutions.



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UTCB has residences that can house 2 500 students. It seems that 70% of students interested in a university residence gain access to a bed, with a priority given to first-year students. The bedrooms appear small and not suitable as study places, but the residences offer communal study places. Some students noted, however, that the residences are crowded and noisy and that new dormitories are needed.

UTCB has an attractive and rather big athletic centre. Students are required to take physical education during their first year. The university offers a summer camp to the most successful students.

Some services are missing such as psychological counselling or help to students facing a family, academic or personal crisis.

3.5 Recommendations

The team's recommendations are:

- To canvass students' opinions about the requirement for additional practical work and how this aspect of curricula could be strengthened.
- To provide soft skills development: team work, public speaking, etc.
- To ensure university-wide steering for the following aspects:
 - Introducing uniform standards and processes for admission across all faculties.
 - Investigating and acting upon the reasons for the high "drop-out" rate. Particularly, devoting greater attention to the first-year students and identifying at-risk students before they fail (e.g., by trying to establish correlations between grades in high schools, results on the entrance test, and performance at UTCB; looking at the students' sociological background such as first-generation university students; etc.).
 - Developing further students' support services, including orientation, tutorials, academic advising, counselling, etc.
 - Reviewing students' workloads and ECTS to ensure that workloads are manageable.
 - Viewing students' life as a contributor to academic success; that is, residence, cultural activities, etc. constitutes essential elements of students' well-being, which have positive academic consequences.
 - Tracking students during their studies and collecting and analysing data on their professional development after they graduate.



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- To review the effectiveness of the implementation of the Bologna Process by:
 - Collecting feedback from the students and the teachers.
 - Reforming the Bologna reforms by taking into consideration the following aspects:
 - ✓ Be more selective and prioritise courses from the previous five-year curricula.
 - ✓ Distinguish clearly between the Bachelor and the Master level.
 - ✓ Review curricula to eliminate overlap between parallel courses.

- To shift to student-centred learning by introducing:
 - More active learning.
 - Learning outcomes for courses and developing the examinations in the light of learning outcomes.
 - Improve the balance between theoretical and practical work.
 - Increase IT-based learning.
 - Offer staff development to introduce active learning.



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4. Research

4.1 Doctoral education

The evaluation team commends UTCB for having created a single doctoral school rather than one per faculty. A single doctoral school has the potential for ensuring common processes and standards across the university and, most importantly, for creating a stimulating intellectual environment.

The evaluation team also notes that the doctoral students whom it met seemed generally satisfied to be treated by academics like colleagues rather than students but several aspects of doctoral education are worth emphasising:

- The admission's process appears to be limited to ranking the candidates, who are all accepted. The ranking determines who receives funding (150 to 180 EUR per month) and who does not. Standards for admitting students to the third cycle do not appear to be clear or to be university-wide. The number of doctoral students is not fixed prior to the admission's process. The number of students admitted does not appear to be determined on the basis of the following elements: the available funding, the number of research-active thesis advisers, and the number of ongoing research projects, research groups and centres that the students could join.
- The doctoral students seem to be very busy trying to juggle paid work and their research. Although the 2011 law eliminated the part-time PhD, the reality is that students need to work to support themselves, particularly those who are not funded.
- The doctoral students seem to come up with research projects on their own and work individually on their project, with close guidance from their thesis adviser. Thus, in the end, their project is aligned with the research interest of the supervisor but it is an individual project, rather than one that fits into a larger research programme.
- About 20% to 30% of the doctoral students drop out; 10% are dismissed. This seems a very high attrition rate.
- According to comments received, the standard for original work as a standard for PhD theses does not appear to be upheld any longer.

The following recommendations are meant to contribute to the further development of UTCB's doctoral school so that it is in line with best European practices¹. The guiding principle for further development should be for UTCB to consider that doctoral schools have been

¹ UTCB might want to consider tracking the work done by the EUA's Council for Doctoral Education: <http://www.eua.be/cde/Home.aspx>



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introduced in order to improve the quality of doctoral education in Europe. It is a mechanism meant to balance the traditional master/apprentice relationship with the recognition that doctoral students require additional support that can be provided through doctoral schools. Thus, several features can be further developed at UTCB, aimed at giving more responsibility to the doctoral school and shifting the balance from the master-apprentice model to the doctoral school model, thus raising the standards of doctoral education:

- Determine the appropriate number of doctoral students:
 - How many does Romania need?
 - How many can the available supervisors handle?
 - How can doctoral students be connected to research centres?
- Take the doctoral school to the next level by giving it greater responsibility for setting common standards for admission, supervision, time-to-graduation, soft-skills development, and originality of research.
- Set higher standards for publications: students should be encouraged to publish and present in international, peer-reviewed journals and conferences. Of the three reports that doctoral students are required to write, at least one should be of internationally publishable quality.
- Review the teaching and external workloads of doctoral students.
- Provide opportunities for larger groups of doctoral students to get together.

4.2 Research capacity

UTCB seems to have recognised scientific expertise in some fields and the UTCB leadership has expressed a strong aspiration to do more research and be considered as a research-active university.

This view, however, is not shared consistently across UTCB; therefore, the institution's research culture will need to be strengthened if this aspiration is to be achieved. Thus, the evaluation team notes that the development of building codes was often given as examples of research projects rather than being viewed as consultancy activities; in addition, not all academic staff are committed to research. Indeed, the SER notes that: "In principle, every member of the teaching staff within the university should develop research, but not all members of the academic staff are/can be involved in research of excellence." (SER, p. 18)

An analysis of the list of publications by faculty provided for 2010/2012 shows that the most active faculties are the faculty of civil, industrial and agricultural buildings (many publications



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related to earthquake engineering and engineering seismology) and the faculty of engineering for building services.

There is certainly a margin to be more active in research if only because UTCB does have some sectors with high potential, such as those focused on environmental issues, which would address one of the “Great Challenges” whilst providing creative opportunities for interfaculty cooperation and interdisciplinarity.

UTCB research is organised through fifteen research centres. These have been created around accredited research laboratories. They are approved by the Administrative Council and the Senate. Research centres must find their own funding and are responsible for their budgets, although the university approves the research contract and takes 20% to 25% overhead. If a centre cannot find external funding, it will likely have to close.

These centres can provide stimulating and supportive environments for young researchers and — potentially — for doctoral students. The directors of the centres are elected for four years; the evaluation team notes that young researchers have been given leadership responsibilities in some of these centres and that this is a positive sign of dynamism.

UTCB is currently in the process of evaluating the research centres. These will be classified in three bands and will receive university support accordingly. UTCB will also decide if fifteen centres are too many, if they are all viable, if they encourage interdisciplinarity and have the optimal critical mass. This evaluation will help UTCB prepare for Horizon 2020. Whilst the team understands the value of this initiative and fully endorses it, it would encourage UTCB to think about balancing the need for multidisciplinary and critical mass, on the one hand, and that of giving young academic staff leadership position, on the other hand.

The process of planning for the future should also be supported by a more detailed strategic document, based on the short overarching strategy, that identifies priorities clearly and the means to achieve the set objectives. This is recognised in the SER: “UTCB should improve its analysis for constantly evaluating the topics, priorities, excellence and resources, and the results of research (competitiveness and visibility). Certainly there is a need for increasing coherence and increasing the use of the existent RTD resources (human, infrastructure, information, and documentation and partnership resources).” (p. 18)

Other obstacles to achieving UTCB’s research aspiration include the limited public and private funding opportunities (public funding appears to have been reduced by 40% even for ongoing projects); the reduced opportunities for European funding at the moment; the heavy teaching workload of young academics (up to 25 hours per week); the individual consultancy activities undertaken by academics, which reduces the time they could devote to research; the lack of administrative staff who can pro-actively support the engagement of staff with national, European and international projects, via monitoring of calls and during the grant-writing stage.



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The evaluation team recommends:

- Building on existing international contacts to actively search for partners with whom to cooperate in upcoming EU research proposal calls.
- Increasing international visibility and credibility through international, peer-reviewed journals and conferences.
- Identifying UTCB research strengths and priorities more precisely.
- Increasing opportunities for local research contracts, e.g., through a university level external stakeholder forum or partnering with international companies active in Romania.
- Identifying emerging cross-disciplinary areas based on existing research strengths and build on them through:
 - Interfaculty cooperation
 - National and international networks
- Supporting those who can go through the habilitation successfully.
- Recruiting a highly skilled administrative staff to monitor available research calls and provide support when writing project proposals.



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5. Service to society

UTCB expressed strong commitment to contributing to Romanian society. Thus, the SER mentions that “UTCB has an important involvement in the cooperation with the community, mainly through its special relations with the Bucharest City Hall, the Bucharest Sector 2 City Hall, the Civil Protection, the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism. UTCB is also supporting the professional associations from the construction industry (i.e. AICR – the Romanian Association of Civil Engineers even has its headquarters on UTCB premises).” (SER, p. 14)

The SER further notes that “The integration of the University with the social and economic environment is highlighted by the number of agreements/partnerships developed by the University with certain economic, management or cultural organizations within the local/regional area. As an average UTCB develops over 20 agreements/year with private profit organisations, 1 agreement/year with non-profit organisations and over 40 agreements/year with public organisations.” (SER, pp. 18-19)

The evaluation team met a large group of external stakeholders who provided evidence that UTCB cooperates with its external environment. Links with external stakeholders appears to be excellent, close and encompassing a range of key actors from industry, professional associations and government.

The external stakeholders noted that UTCB is deeply involved in the protection of the country from seismic risk and has organised several national and international conferences on this important topic. They mentioned that UTCB is the first European university to develop a course on earthquake engineering and that this expertise is one of UTCB’s main strengths.

They noted appreciatively the quality of UTCB graduates and the fact that UTCB alumni are strategically positioned in the economy. They praised the commitment of academic staff, who “give their souls to the students”.

Opinions about the research aspirations of UTCB were mixed. Some mentioned that “risk analysis is a never-ending story that requires research”, whilst others thought that it would be a mistake to become more research-active and observed that “we can have a good civil engineering school but research in civil engineering is slow and incremental.”

The links with stakeholders appears to be by faculty and, therefore, takes different forms although most faculties have an external stakeholder council to assist in curricular review and the development of the faculty strategy (SER, p. 16). Whilst this is positive and useful, there does not seem to be a university-wide, coordinated approach to external stakeholders.

The team was told that a number of academic staff engage in consultancy activities on the side. Thus, the contribution being made to society is sometimes on an individual basis, albeit



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on university time, and cannot be directly attributed to UTCB. Whilst the team understands that such activities complement relatively low salaries, a way must be found for the university to support individual consultants whilst drawing a benefit.

Although the SER repeatedly mentions research, development and innovation as linked activities the team could not identify concerted efforts to promote innovation or to provide support for patenting, spinoff companies or incubators.

The university offers some lifelong learning activities and shows intention to develop the offer further. The SER (p. 19) notes an increased participation from 557 participants in 2006 to 1 089 in 2010. Lifelong learning appears to be decentralised in the faculties and UTCB feels the need to have a more systematic approach: "Integrated approach of the continuous training is hence considered to be necessary, based on an enhanced strategy to lead not only to an increase in the efficiency, but also to an increase of the efficiency in continuous education management."

External communication is developing and the presence of UTCB in the media is growing (SER, p. 19). Press releases have been increasing steadily but these activities are not supported by professionally-trained staff. External communication is done by academics filling senior administrative positions.

The university took the initiative to create a special webpage for alumni, and encouraged them to register: <http://absolventi.utcb.ro/index.php> (SER, p. 22).

The evaluation team recommends:

- Managing and marketing activities that reach out to society (e.g. consultancy, lifelong learning, etc.) through a university level office. It would strengthen these activities and add to the credibility of UTCB. The approach would be to sign contracts between the university and partners rather than with individual academics. If allowed by the Romanian law a holding company could be set up as owner of daughter companies offering services like consultancy, lifelong learning etc. This model has been successfully tried by some European universities and ensures a win-win situation where consultants would receive remuneration and support from the university and the university would take an overhead and increase its income. The university would also improve its reputation, which, in turn, would benefit the individual consultants.
- Developing an alumni network and encouraging alumni involvement in the university, e.g., through lectures, mentoring, internships, etc.
- Expanding lifelong learning activities and using digitally-based, distance-learning.
- Partnering with locally-based international companies to compete for international R&D.



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- Establishing a university stakeholder forum (advisory council) to strengthen ties with targeted partners and to advise of new opportunities.
- Consolidating existing individual consulting activities for the benefit of society and the university.
- Developing further support for innovation activities based on a strategy.
- Benchmarking with other technical universities within the EUCEET in order to identify good practices.
- Strengthening external communication and marketing.



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6. Quality culture

UTCB has a quality officer at central level who reports to the rector and is a member of the Administrative Council. The rector reports annually to the Senate and his annual report includes a section on quality assurance. The university's central quality officer convenes monthly meetings of the faculty and departmental quality officers.

ISO 9001:2008 is in use and a supplemental set of quality assurance procedures have been developed for teaching and research. The university received an ISO certification that is displayed in the rector's office. Although ISO is not strictly used in all parts of the university, the supplemental procedures that have been developed are inspired by the ISO approach and rely on a great deal of documentation.

The introduction of internal quality assurance mechanisms started in 2007 but these mechanisms are still meeting resistance, even from the deans: they are found to be too formal and bureaucratic and the language used is too technical. The mechanisms are firmly based in documentation, but the process appears to be very mechanistic, detailed and formalistic and to have been set up to satisfy the external requirements set by ARACIS rather than be determined by the university's own needs.

Although the SER provides a very extensive philosophical statement on internal quality assurance (e.g., SER, p. 9), this statement seems at odds with the evidence provided during the visit. The processes seemed to have been developed without prior discussion with academic staff and students and there is no evidence of wide ownership of these quality assurance tools or of a shared quality culture.

- The evaluation team recommends a thorough review of the QA processes and a redesign of the whole approach in order to embed these processes and encourage wide ownership. This would require²:
 - A more participative approach that would involve staff and students.
 - Different quality instruments, with a mix of formal and informal, and quantitative and qualitative instruments
 - Using this new set of quality instruments with greater frequency.
 - Making use of the results and communicating about the improvement brought about.

² Three recent EUA studies on internal quality assurance processes may be of interest to UTCB: Loukkola, T. and Zhang, T. (2010) *Examining Quality Culture Part I: Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions*; Sursock, A. (2011) *Examining Quality Culture Part II: Processes and Tools – Participation, Ownership and Bureaucracy*; Vettori, O. (2012) *Examining Quality Culture Part III: From self-reflection to enhancement*; Belgium: EUA; <http://www.eua.be/Publications.aspx>



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- Finding opportunities to benchmark activities with international partners, including for doctoral education.



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7. Internationalisation

The SER notes that the regime change after 1989 marked the opening of UTCB to Europe. The university's international activities include:

- Study programmes in French and English: these are great assets, particularly because they encourage UTCB to think innovatively about the curricula and they represent an opportunity to “internationalise at home”. The evaluation team fully endorses UTCB’s plan to develop Master level study programmes and modules in foreign languages. The tuition fee for international non-EU students is higher than for domestic and these students are often funded by their own governments. It would be important not to view these international students only as a source of funding. They require special support and, therefore, are also a source of expenses.
- UTCB was the initiator and the lead contributor in a technical cooperation project on earthquakes with the Japan International Cooperation Agency JICA. The total budget of this six-year project was over 7 million USD.
- UTCB has 62 cooperation agreements, including with the Ecole nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon, Université de la Rochelle, Institut national polytechnique de Grenoble, Université de Corse Pascal Paoli, University of Redding, Ecole des Mines and most notably, Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées.
- Mobility grants for staff peaked in 2006/2007 and the numbers have fallen dramatically. According to the SER, mobility grants evolved as follows: 25 in 2005/2006; 37 in 2006/2007; 28 in 2007/2008; 29 in 2008/2009; 21 in 2009/2010; 16 in 2010/2011 and 7 in 2011/2012.
- Student mobility: outgoing ERASMUS students peaked at 32 in 2008/2009; the evolution for incoming students is a double-dip curve that peaked in 2008/2009 (11 students) and again in 2011/2012 (17 students) (SER, p. 17). Financial obstacles to outgoing mobility have been reported to the evaluation team.
- UTCB was one of the initiators and is one of the coordinators of the European Civil Engineering Education and Training (EUCEET) thematic network, which includes 131 partner institutions from 29 European countries. EUCEET was created in 2007 and is housed at UTCB.
- UTCB joined a number of international research projects within FP5, FP6 and FP7.
- UTCB was involved at an expert or at institutional level in World Bank projects aimed at reducing the risks linked to natural hazards.
- UTCB was one of the institutional partners of Agence universitaire de la francophonie



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(AUF) in organising the “Festival des étudiants francophones d'Europe centrale et orientale” in Bucharest.

- According to some external stakeholders, there is cooperation between UTCB and industry in international projects but this is not as strong as it used to be just after the regime changed.

These international activities are interesting but fragile: apart from the study programmes in French and English, they are not grounded in a strategy; the number of staff dealing with this area is insufficient; there is limited international marketing to recruit non-European students (UCTB staff traveled to Northern Africa to recruit students for French section) and no specific support office dedicated to their needs. Therefore, there is a risk that activities would wane because of unforeseen circumstances and the lack of strategic objectives and targets.

Current threats, apart from stricter visa policies, include a shift to more targeted and strategic international partnerships that are increasingly determined by international rankings, however misleading these might be. Thus, there may come a time when some of UTCB’s most prestigious partners might want to limit their partnerships to their peer institutions.

There are ways, however, to strengthen UTCB’s international positioning, primarily through the development of an international strategy that would include the following elements:

- Cultivating UTCB’s growing international alumni network. They can be UTCB’s ambassadors abroad and serve to recruit more students.
- Strengthening cooperation with other Romanian technical universities, e.g., by rationalising the course offer and encouraging mobility within Romania. Internal mobility within Romania would, in turn, encourage international, outgoing mobility.
- Increasing and strengthening partnerships from within EUCEET and using this network to benchmark international activities.
- Developing innovative Masters degrees and courses in foreign languages.
- Ensuring that UTCB is ready to host international students: e.g., facilitating administrative processes; offering learning resources, student support services, mentoring, residences, etc.
- Promoting international opportunities for doctoral students.
- Focus international collaboration through a more selective number of international agreements.



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8. Conclusion

8.1 Summary key recommendations

In relation to governance, it appeared to the evaluation team that some degree of devolution of responsibilities to the faculties and departments would ensure greater dynamism in the university. Thus, the team recommends:

- Delegating some decisions to the faculties and departments.
- Providing them with some devolved budgeting.
- Ensuring clear reporting and accountability across the different hierarchical levels: leadership, faculties, and departments.

In relation to students' involvement in governance, the team recommends:

- Fostering student involvement through specific leadership courses, or at least a substantial orientation targeting the student leadership that would help prepare them to take greater responsibilities for their affairs and be more active.
- Finding ways of increasing the responsibilities of the student association in order to strengthen its leadership and engagement.
- Introducing student representatives to issues coming up in the senate to make them better prepared, providing them with formal opportunities to present reports on certain aspects of student life, and giving them feedback on results of the decision-making process.

In relation to staffing, the team recommends:

- Strengthening the administration by professionalising it and gradually populating the senior administrative posts with competent administrative staff. The most promising administrative staff should be identified, offered staff development courses and, subsequently, leadership opportunities.
- Consolidating the human resource function and centralising it in order to ensure a common approach, transparency and greater efficiency. The human resource office should be viewed as more than just the place for processing salaries: it has a role in developing staff, academic as well as administrative. It could also support the doctoral school offering e.g., seminars for doctoral supervisors.

In relation to mission, vision and strategy, the team recommends developing the following documents:



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- A mission statement as a single, stand-alone document that can be easily accessed and used to guide the activities of the community.
- A long-term vision that speaks to the potential of the institution and is not bound by present day constraints.
- A strategy with precise milestones, resources, responsibilities, etc. An effort should be made to summarise this into a one-page strategic document that would present the main priorities. This exercise would serve to focus efforts and channel energies.

In relation to teaching and learning, the team recommends:

- To canvass students' opinion about the requirement for additional practical work and how this aspect of curricula could be strengthened.
- To provide soft skills development: team work, public speaking, etc.
- To ensure university-wide steering for the following aspects:
 - Introducing uniform standards and processes for admission across all faculties.
 - Investigating and acting upon the reasons for the high "drop-out" rate. Particularly, devoting greater attention to the first-year students and identifying at-risk students before they fail (e.g., by trying to establish correlations between grades in high schools, results on the entrance test, and performance at UTCB; looking at the students' sociological background such as first-generation university students; etc.).
 - Developing further students' support services, including orientation, tutorials, academic advising, counselling, etc.
 - Reviewing students' workloads and ECTS to ensure that workloads are manageable.
 - Viewing students' life as a contributor to academic success; that is, residence, cultural activities, etc. constitutes essential elements of students' well-being, which have positive academic consequences.
 - Tracking students during their studies and collecting and analysing data on their professional development after they graduate.
- To review the effectiveness of the implementation of the Bologna Process by:
 - Collecting feedback from the students and the teachers.



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- Reforming the Bologna reforms by taking into consideration the following aspects:
 - ✓ Be more selective and prioritise courses from the previous five-year curricula.
 - ✓ Distinguish clearly between the Bachelor and the Master level.
 - ✓ Review curricula to eliminate overlap between parallel courses.
- To shift to student-centred learning by introducing:
 - More active learning.
 - Learning outcomes for courses and developing the examinations in the light of learning outcomes.
 - Improve the balance between theoretical and practical work.
 - Increase IT-based learning.
 - Offer staff development to introduce active learning.

In relation to doctoral education, the team recommends:

- Determine the appropriate number of doctoral students:
 - How many does Romania need?
 - How many can the available supervisors handle?
 - How can doctoral students be connected to research centres?
- Take the doctoral school to the next level by giving it greater responsibility for setting common standards for admission, supervision, time-to-graduation, soft-skills development, and originality of research.
- Set higher standards for publications: students should be encouraged to publish and present in international, peer-reviewed journals and conferences. Of the three reports that doctoral students are required to write, at least one should be of internationally publishable quality.
- Review the teaching and external workloads of doctoral students.
- Provide opportunities for larger groups of doctoral students to get together.

In relation to research capacity, the team recommends:



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- Building on existing international contacts to actively search for partners with whom to cooperate in upcoming EU research proposal calls.
- Increasing international visibility and credibility through international, peer-reviewed journals and conferences.
- Identifying UTCB research strengths and priorities more precisely.
- Increasing opportunities for local research contracts, e.g., through a university level external stakeholder forum or partnering with international companies active in Romania.
- Identifying emerging cross-disciplinary areas based on existing research strengths and build on them through:
 - Interfaculty cooperation
 - National and international networks
- Supporting those who can go through the habilitation successfully.
- Recruiting a highly skilled administrative staff to monitor available research calls and provide support during the project writing proposals.

In relation to service to society, the team recommends:

- Managing and marketing activities that reach out to society (e.g. consultancy, lifelong learning, etc.) through a university level office. It would strengthen these activities and add to the credibility of UTCB. The approach would be to sign contracts between the university and partners rather than with individual academics. If allowed by the Romanian law a holding company could be set up as owner of daughter companies offering services like consultancies, lifelong learning etc. This model has been successfully tried by some European universities and ensures a win-win situation where consultants would get their remuneration and support from the university and the university would take an overhead and increase its income. The university would also improve its reputational position, which, in turn, would benefit the individual consultants.
- Developing an alumni network and encouraging alumni involvement in the university, e.g., through lectures, mentoring, internships, etc.
- Expanding lifelong learning activities and using digitally-based, distance-learning.
- Partnering with locally-based international companies to compete for international R&D.



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- Establishing a university stakeholder forum (advisory council) to strengthen ties with targeted partners and to advise of new opportunities.
- Consolidating existing individual consulting activities for the benefit of society and the university.
- Developing further support for innovation activities based on a strategy.
- Benchmarking with other technical universities within the EUCEET in order to identify good practices.
- Strengthening external communication and marketing.

In relation to internal quality assurance processes,

- The evaluation team recommends a thorough review of the QA processes and a redesign of the whole approach in order to embed these processes and encourage wide ownership. This would require:
 - A more participative approach that would involve staff and students.
 - Different quality instruments, with a mix of formal and informal, and quantitative and qualitative instruments.
 - Using this new set of quality instruments with greater frequency.
 - Making use of the results and communicating about the improvement brought about.
- Finding opportunities to benchmark activities with international partners, including for doctoral education.

In relation to internationalisation, the team recommends to strengthen UTCB's international positioning, primarily through the development of an international strategy that would include the following elements:

- Cultivating UTCB's growing international alumni network. They can be UTCB's ambassadors abroad and serve to recruit more students.
- Strengthening cooperation with other Romanian technical universities, e.g., by rationalising the course offer and encouraging mobility within Romania. Internal mobility within Romania would, in turn, encourage international, outgoing mobility.
- Increasing and strengthening partnerships from within EUCEET and using this network to benchmark international activities.
- Developing innovative Masters degrees and courses in foreign languages.



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- Ensuring that UTCB is ready to host international students: e.g., facilitating administrative processes; offering learning resources, student support services, mentoring, residences, etc.
- Promoting international opportunities for doctoral students.
- Focus international collaboration through a more selective number of international agreements.

8.2 Envoi

The team was impressed with the commitment of the staff to UTCB's teaching mission and the university's engagement with society. The aspiration to strengthen research will be difficult to achieve in the current economic circumstances and would require, at minimum that UTCB build on its specific profile and strengths and develop a vision of the kind of technical university it wants to be beyond 2020. Although today's problems are pressing, it is essential to develop a long-term vision and strategy, particularly in view of the current state of staff morale. Young researchers should be placed at the core of this long-term strategy: they are the key to UTCB's future. The research centres and mechanisms that would support innovation could help unleash the education, research and innovation potential of UTCB.

The IEP team hopes that the university finds their comments and suggestions helpful and supportive in planning its future. We believe that UTCB has the ambition and potential to be successful in its next stage of development, and we wish the institution well in this endeavor.