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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

### UNIVERSITY NICOLAE TITULESCU OF BUCHAREST

#### EVALUATION REPORT

*August 2014*

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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University Nicolae Titulescu of Bucharest. The evaluation took place in 2014 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. University Nicolae Titulescu of Bucharest's profile

The University Nicolae Titulescu of Bucharest (UNT) was among the first private universities to be established in Romania (after 1990). UNT has a strong identity associated with the field of law, but has been expanding to other related areas in economics and in administrative and political sciences. The university is not very large and its size (that is, the number of students, staff, and faculties and departments) favours an atmosphere of close relationships and good collaboration among stakeholders. UNT has traditionally presented a solid commitment to teaching activities and has been trying to build a reputation for quality in that respect. The university also presents a strong practical orientation. In recent years UNT has been trying to develop its engagement in research activity. It has also been trying to develop other aspects of its mission, notably the so-called third mission as well as greater internationalisation of its activities.

UNT faces a very challenging environment and the complex context is due to a multifaceted set of factors. The Romanian system of higher education has undergone, like many of its European counterparts, a period of intense and rapid massification over the last decades. However, in recent years, demographic changes have negatively affected the patterns of demand and UNT has been facing a very adverse context in this respect, with very intense competition for students among public and private higher education institutions. As most private institutions in Romania, UNT has been under the double pressure of demographic decline and the expansion of the number of publically-funded higher education institutions that enjoy a higher degree of public trust.

The adverse context regarding student demand has created significant financial challenges for UNT. As a private institution, UNT is significantly dependent on tuition fees for its revenue, which strongly affects its financial strength and its capacity to pursue a coherent and long-term strategy regarding important issues such as education, research, or internationalisation. Thus, the university has been trying to diversify its sources of funding such as research funding, private donations and revenue from services to industry and to other external stakeholders, though these still play a minor role in its revenue structure.

To these financial limitations should be added a context of significant limitations to institutional autonomy. Despite being a private university, like the other Romanian public and private higher education institutions, UNT is subject to very detailed national regulations. These hinder its capacity to develop an autonomous development strategy. Legal instability also undermines the UNT's potential to pursue its mission and strategy in a consistent manner. These issues are part of a wider problem of limited institutional autonomy affecting management and creating serious systemic constraints felt throughout the Romanian higher education system.



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The challenges faced by Romanian universities are not restricted to the national level, but are increasingly taking a European and international dimension. In fact, one of the major driving forces for recent changes in Romanian universities has been the process of reform of the European Higher Education Area, to which the Bologna Process is central. Among the major priorities of the Bologna Process mention should be made of the structural changes associated with the introduction of the three-cycle system (Bachelor/Master/doctorate), the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms, and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study across Europe. The development of the Bologna Process has led to intense discussions and policy changes in many European countries and Romania is no exception.

Current trends require universities to be more responsive and capable of reflecting on their mission and refining their major priorities. However, Romanian universities face significant constraints regarding their capacity to live up to those challenges. On the one hand, like many European universities, they have a limited degree of institutional autonomy, though this has improved in recent decades. On the other hand, the development of institutional reflection and self-improvement has only recently become a major issue of concern and Romanian universities are still adapting to those changing times.

Despite the challenging context, the evaluation team hopes that the following report may help the University Nicolae Titulescu of Bucharest to better fulfil its mission and priorities.

### 1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was developed in good collaboration across UNT. The self-evaluation group met several times and scheduled a number of meetings in the faculties (to meet professors and students) and with the deans and departments' managers in order to communicate the objectives of the evaluation. There were also meetings with the university Senate. The self-evaluation process was perceived across the university as a positive learning experience allowing the institution to learn more about its activities, its strengths, and its weaknesses. The evaluation team is grateful for the significant effort undertaken to develop the self-evaluation report.

The self-evaluation report (SER) of UNT, together with the appendices, was sent to the IEP evaluation team in December 2013. The two visits of the evaluation team to UNT took place from 15 to 17 January 2014 (first visit) and from 13 to 16 April 2014 (second visit), respectively. In between the visits, UNT promptly provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation, as requested, in order to attain a better grasp of the university's activities and main challenges.

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

- Prof. Jean-Louis Vanherweghem, Chair, former Rector, Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)



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- Prof. Carmen Fenoll, Professor and former Vice-Rector, University of Castilla-la Mancha (Spain)
- Prof. Gintautas Bražiūnas, Rector, Vilnius Kolegija/University of Applied Sciences (Lithuania)
- Ms Liliya Ivanova, University of National and World Economy, Sofia (Bulgaria)
- Prof. Pedro Teixeira, Team Coordinator, Professor at the University of Porto and Director of CIPES (Portugal)

During the two visits, the team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of UNT with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders. The visits included several meetings with the leadership, members of the academic and the administrative staff, students, and representatives of public authorities and other external stakeholders. The team also visited the facilities of the university to increase its understanding of the institution.

During the visits, the team found evidence that the SER was developed in good cooperation with faculties and departments and that it was widely disseminated among academic staff. Nevertheless, there has been a more limited engagement of students in the process, which is frequently a difficulty observed in this type of activity in many institutions. This should require additional attention from the university in future quality assessment activities.

The discussions with the members of UNT have greatly helped the team to understand better some aspects of the university's internal organisation, its history and its dynamics. The participation of all those involved in the evaluation was very positive. The current report benefitted greatly from the engagement of the various internal and external stakeholders of the university in those meetings.

The SER provided very useful information about UNT, including the data from various appendices. The self-evaluation process has indicated that the university has a reasonable knowledge about itself, benefitting from previous experiences with quality assessment at the national level. The team found the SWOT analysis to be honest and noted that it could become a good starting point for future improvements and developments. The main challenge faced by UNT and its leadership will be to find ways to deepen the diagnosis found in the SER and to use it effectively to address the perceived weaknesses and challenges.

The team believes that the preparation of the SER helped UNT to develop a better degree of self-knowledge through discussion of the current situation and collection of relevant data. This evaluation process was an important first step in deepening a self-evaluation culture. The team believes that the self-evaluation process has helped UNT to improve its degree of self-knowledge through discussion of its current strategy and a reflection on future developments. That development can be achieved through a systematic and realistic approach linking strategic and operational plans to financial and human resources. The process should be based on critical reflection and on the mobilisation of the whole university.



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## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Since the establishment of the university, there has been a significant continuity in the leadership of the university and of its vision about the mission and purpose of the institution. During the two visits, the team identified that the leadership of UNT presents a good level of commitment to the institution and that there is a general appreciation for this across the university. This was also confirmed in the meetings with the external stakeholders. The academic staff has also expressed satisfaction regarding the working conditions at the university.

UNT shows a significant degree of responsiveness to current opportunities of training (signalled by the labour market), in accordance with a permanent concern with attracting more students. As a private university facing a very challenging context, UNT needs to have a strong and unique identity to increase its recognition and attractiveness for both prospective students and external stakeholders. The university has been trying to forge a distinctive identity, largely linked to the quality of its teaching and its students, which seems an intelligent strategy given the aforementioned constraints.

UNT has been trying to implement strategic planning, although its current vision could benefit from further elaboration and consolidation. Moreover, the steps taken towards strategic planning seem to require the definition of more clear objectives and milestones and a reflection about the opportunities and strengths, as well as the threats and weaknesses faced by UNT. Although the university has a distinctive identity, its size poses some issues regarding its sustainability and viability and should require further reflection and action from the university leadership notably in ways to exploit more fully its current disciplinary portfolio and strengthen its reputation in the existing fields.

Like most of the other Romanian universities, both public and private, UNT has been adjusting to recent changes in the governance structure that have been implemented nationally and trying to find ways to use effectively the existing governing bodies to help the university to fulfil its mission. This is particularly the case of the Senate, which has been playing an important role as a significant forum for discussion of major issues for the life of the university. The team considers very positive that UNT is exploring ways in which the Senate can play an important role in the life of the institution and contribute to strengthening the academic core of UNT. Thus, the team encourages the leadership of UNT to pursue this approach of using the Senate as a central body for its strategic reflection.

The university tends to adopt a centralised approach to decision-making; this is reflected in the various activities and management in general. The most important management decisions are dependent on the Board of Directors (which includes the rector), especially when they involve financial implications. This centralised approach seems to be related to the small scale and disciplinary specialisation of UNT. However, it was not clear to the team to what extent the university leadership is capable of prioritising important and structural choices from daily and routine decisions and processes. This tends to make the organisational decision-



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making process cumbersome and burdens the higher ranks of the institutions, and it may distract them from more essential strategic reflection and choices.

The team considers that the university should reflect on how to avoid making the organisational structure unnecessarily centralised and complex, with potential negative effects for UNT's efficiency and effectiveness. A very strong degree of centralisation seems largely unnecessary given the size of the university and the good levels of dedication that the team could observe among the academic and non-academic staff. The leadership of UNT may benefit in many ways by reflecting on how to delegate responsibilities and strengthening the intermediate leadership of the university. Less centralisation may create new opportunities for the involvement of the academic staff and making the university more responsive. This may also increase the motivation and morale of those involved in these processes.

Finally, the team observed that several aspects of the current communication structure (e.g. website) seem to be underdeveloped. For an institution increasingly concerned with raising its profile, nationally and internationally, this is a very important issue to which should be devoted more careful attention.

#### **Main recommendations:**

The team recommends that:

1. The leadership of the institution should give more attention to a long-term strategy regarding external constraints and challenges;
2. Strategic planning should be more focused and better linked with UNT's operational plans. The latter should be more detailed, with clear and feasible milestones and mechanisms for addressing unexpected outcomes and deviations;
3. The university should reflect on its current degree of centralisation, notably by distinguishing between structural and everyday decisions;
4. The university should reflect on its disciplinary diversification and ways to exploit its full potential and sustainability.



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### 3. Teaching and learning

UNT has traditionally focused on teaching activities and regards it as its major mission and asset to attract students and the attention of external stakeholders. This was confirmed by the team, who identified a general positive appreciation of students for the teaching staff's dedication. This positive impression of the students is also due to the flexibility adopted by the university and the teaching staff regarding students' support, teaching and assessment. A significant share of the teaching staff have other external professional activities and students are very supportive of this practical orientation of the university, considering that even more emphasis should be placed on that dimension.

Despite these positive aspects, UNT has been facing significant competition in the student market, especially due to the aforementioned demographic retrenchment and the way it affects potential enrolments. Thus, the university has been placing a greater emphasis on the quality of the students it attracts and the quality of the graduates it places in the labour market, as a strategy to improve its profile and differentiate itself from its competitors. The fact that the university has a strong commitment to teaching quality has been recognised by ARACIS, which awarded UNT a high confidence rating.

This emphasis on quality of teaching is also important since, like other private universities, the university faces the disadvantage of charging full-cost fees to all of its students, as it does not receive any major financial support from public or other private sources. Thus, in order to remain an attractive option for future students, UNT has to pursue a strategy that overcomes the cost difference. It should also be noted that the university awards a few scholarships and provides some support to a limited number of students, although this could be extended.

UNT has made great efforts to follow the main developments of the European Higher Education Area and has achieved a formal implementation of the Bologna cycles and introduction of ECTS. The team found some awareness of changes in teaching and learning promoted by the Bologna Process such as student-centred learning, though the team considers that the university should develop greater commitment regarding pedagogical innovation. Moreover, the team observed that students would like to see a greater use of IT and multimedia resources in instruction.

The university has developed several distance learning programmes, in line with the institution's disciplinary breadth, that enrol a large proportion of students. These programmes are mainly an attempt to seize economies of scale through unexplored markets of mature students and do not present major innovations regarding the programmes' and courses' portfolio.

The satisfaction of students was also visible in their appreciation of mechanisms of feedback about the development of teaching activities. In general, students expressed confidence about the impact and effectiveness of feedback provided. They were also generally satisfied



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with the pedagogical and scientific conditions offered by the university and in the way it tries to respond to students' concerns about major and routine issues.

Given its emphasis on training with a strong practical orientation, it hardly comes as a surprise that the university has been consulting employers about its programme offer and has been making efforts to track employability, which is an area of concern for students and teaching staff. However, there is a more limited attention to graduates' career counselling and in preparing them for the transition to the labour market. The professional guidance of our students and graduates benefits from the support of the CICOPS Centre (The Centre for Information and Professional Guidance of Students), though the University recognizes that the activity of this centre still needs improvement. Moreover, a lot of these activities seem to take place more at an individual and/or informal level, rather than as a reflection of an institutional structure.

In general, the team found a good level of investment in supporting facilities. Libraries and computer laboratories seem to be well equipped and reasonably up-to-date, although there seems to exist a limited use of the latter in pedagogical strategies. Other ancillary facilities such as canteens and accommodation are also adequate and well maintained.

#### **Main recommendations:**

According to the team, UNT should:

5. Reflect on its strategic positioning, namely by pursuing further its commitment to quality of teaching and its reputation as a demanding and selective institution;
6. Balance the focus on expanding the number of enrolled students and of programmes with an emphasis on the quality and motivation of prospective students;
7. Consider ways of making its teaching more interactive;
8. Explore possible ways to enhance graduates' career counselling, notably by nurturing its networks with employers.



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#### 4. Research and doctoral education

Until recently, UNT has paid very limited attention to doctoral education and research activities, reflecting an institutional identity that has traditionally privileged teaching and training. This is confirmed by the fact that most of the staff present a limited engagement with research activities, which seems to be due to a variety of factors. Among these factors are limited time, the insufficient institutional resources and support, and a heavy teaching load that makes it difficult for many of them to pursue a more significant research activity.

This is reflected in a very small number of publications, especially in prestigious international academic outlets. Research outputs are not very significant and tend to be disseminated in national and local publications. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the university is aware that its publications are mainly in national outlets, but there are some recent signs of internationalisation in the fields of economics, social and administrative studies.

Although, as a private institution, it is understandable that UNT is not likely to become a research university, it is expected to develop a visible research activity in order to strengthen its academic and external reputation. The university is aware that research plays a minor role in its activities; thus, in recent times, UNT has been trying to develop a more visible commitment to research activities and doctoral education.

The team considers that the leadership of UNT is correct in paying more attention to research activities, though it considers that the university is still reflecting about how to develop its research activity in order to strengthen it. At the moment, the institutional research agenda and priorities are not obvious. Aspects that deserve greater reflection and elaboration include the types and profile of research and the degree of transdisciplinary and pluridisciplinary research, through the combination of specialists from different areas. At the same time, UNT needs to reflect more about the way it wants to organise its research and the kind of mechanisms it needs to put in place to support a sustainable research strategy.

The team considers that UNT needs to consolidate an institutional approach to research activities that may build on the university's main fields of activity and expertise. The university should examine the extent to which there is research strength across the whole institution and in each field. Being particularly oriented towards social sciences, the university should therefore give particular attention to the way it may strengthen research in that field and the way it can link those developments with knowledge transfer.

Moreover, the profile of UNT as a private university with a strong practical orientation and with a focus in social sciences are aspects that should be taken into account. Thus, its research portfolio could privilege, at least in an initial stage, a strong applied focus and its contribution to relevant policy and social debates. This may be more congenial to the institutions' identity and to the profile of its academic staff. It may also provide some synergies with its teaching profile and its relationship with external stakeholders.



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Steps have also been taken regarding the development of doctoral education. UNT has created a doctoral school in one of the faculties (Law) and a Doctoral Council at the university level, but doctoral education is absent from the other fields. The doctoral school benefits from the support of 10 PhD supervisors who are all currently engaged in this academic activity exclusively in UNT and it may become an important development and play an important role in strengthening the quantity, quality and interdisciplinarity of research undertaken. Its creation will give the university the opportunity to expand its activities in advanced training and research, notably by combining the existing efforts across the university in a creative and innovative way.

One of the major obstacles to the establishment and development of doctoral education has to do with external regulations regarding the eligibility of supervisors. The team is aware that the university already has some members of staff who are qualified to supervise doctoral research, though some have been performing that role in other institutions. The team encourages UNT to reflect on how to internalise those capabilities and increase the number of PhD supervisors in order to develop doctoral education at the university.

The financial stringency affecting the Romanian higher education system is leading UNT, like many of its counterparts, to search for alternative ways to pursue its research activities. During the evaluation, the team became aware of the efforts that many faculty members have expanded to obtain national and international funding. Although the team recognises these efforts and understands the pressures that led to this situation, it also considers that the university should monitor these efforts in order to avoid the risk of pulverisation that may hinder the coherence and effectiveness of the overall research mission. That also means that a funding strategy needs to be subordinated to a definition of research priorities and that these activities do not become too much more financially-driven rather than scientifically-driven. This should be carefully addressed in relation to the aforementioned aspects regarding research strategy and profile.

Overall, the team considers that the university needs to reflect on these challenges and that a greater institutional attention to the research mission and doctoral education are important aspects in the future development of UNT.

### **Main recommendations:**

According to the team, UNT should:

9. Place more emphasis in supporting PhD students and staff (e.g. scholarships, teaching load for current PhD students; participation in international conferences);
10. Pursue a research agenda that has a strong applied orientation and that is anchored in a few areas of expertise regarded as priorities;
11. Develop these areas of expertise through greater structuring around research teams;



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12. Promote greater internationalisation of research and publications;
13. Organise the allocation of funding to research activities (e.g. travelling to conferences) according to explicit criteria defined by the Senate;
14. Consider the possibility of broadening the doctoral school to other areas (preferably integrated at the university level), which may also favour the development of greater transdisciplinarity and pluridisciplinarity in research.



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## 5. Service to society

One of the most significant challenges faced by European universities refers to their capacity to develop activities that are economically and socially relevant for their local, regional, and national environment. This relationship with their external environment is one of the dimensions of universities' missions that has been receiving increasing attention in recent years. This poses significant challenges to universities since it requires a complex and multifarious network of institutional and individual relationships within universities who continuously show their contribution to the various communities they are serving.

UNT is perceived as having a positive contribution to the local environment and this has improved over the years. It is clear that the university regards the economic, cultural, and social relevance of the activities developed as a relevant part of its mission. The university has shown significant activity in consultancy and services to external stakeholders in several fields related to its main expertise. There are several examples that show that the university's contribution in its fields of expertise is recognised locally and nationally, especially in activities related to legal issues.

During the evaluation process, the team observed that the university is perceived by many external stakeholders as contributing very positively to the local and national environment. An important part of this positive image is due to the fact that graduates from the university have a good reputation among employers and UNT is appreciated for its emphasis on practical and professional training. The university has some interaction with society, notably regarding employers (such as the Employers' Council) and there are several examples of suggestions made by external stakeholders that were followed up by the university.

The team also noted during the interviews the appreciation for the academic staff among stakeholders. Moreover, the team identified a general perception that this has improved and that the university has been trying to strengthen its links with external actors. Thus, there are several positive examples of collaboration including internships, joint projects, and recruitment of graduates.

The development of students' professional and social skills may also benefit from a greater interaction with the external environment. The team is aware that there are some efforts in giving more attention to that and that the Student Association has been making efforts to develop students' involvement with voluntary work. This is an area deserving more attention, not the least given the emphasis of UNT in quality of teaching and a strong practical training.

One of the areas in which the university is also starting to take initial, but promising steps is in its relationship with its alumni. The Alumni Association is recent and is becoming a vehicle to link with external stakeholders. Its potential is crucial and it may contribute significantly in linking UNT with the professional world. The team considers that this requires greater effort and institutional support in order to provide an important return for the life of UNT, and that the university should face this not merely as a potential source of additional revenue to deal



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with short-term financial constraints, but more as a long-term relationship. Alumni can be a source of support and feedback for UNT's activities and can help the university to develop its mission more effectively. Alumni can also provide an important network for the dissemination of lifelong learning activities.

Although there is an important programme of distance learning education, this is largely an extension of the on-site education. Thus far, the university has not developed continuing education and lifelong learning. Regarding this aspect, and although there are some initiatives, the role of the university in continuing education and lifelong learning is still very limited and it can be significantly improved through a stronger partnership with alumni. This is somewhat striking, given the important links with external stakeholders and the strong professional and practical orientation. The future development of these activities requires further reflection, not only as a contribution to strengthen those aspects, but also as important from a financial and reputational point of view, helping the institution to generate other revenues and increase its visibility among external stakeholders.

As is the case with many other European universities, the team formed a general perception that the relationship with the outside community could still be improved. Many existing collaborations seem to be the result of individual ad-hoc initiatives, often taking place outside the institutional channels. Although this is often a privileged vehicle in the development of interactions, the experience of many institutions indicates that it is not necessarily the most adequate for an institution that wants to regard this dimension of service to society as an important part of its activities. If UNT wishes to regard the development of the so-called third mission as a major part of its mission, it needs to make a stronger institutional commitment to those activities that can encourage, help, and sustain individual and institutionally-led initiatives.

### **Main recommendations:**

According to the team, UNT should:

15. Develop greater institutional commitment and organisation of services to society;
16. Explore possible ways to develop lifelong learning, possibly in association with its distance learning competences;
17. Develop the participation of students in extra-curricular activities outside the university (such as NGOs and voluntary work), which may be valuable also in developing their social skills and, thus, their employability.

## **6. Quality culture**

In recent years, quality has become a growing concern in higher education for policy makers and institutions. This has led to a rise in quality assurance (QA) mechanisms that aim both at improvement and accountability purposes. In many countries, regulators have placed



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increasing demands on universities regarding quality issues and the need to make their daily commitment to permanent quality improvement more explicit. Therefore, one of the major aims of the IEP process is to help institutions to develop a stronger quality culture.

In the case of UNT, the team thinks that the university has been developing some institutional awareness about quality and accreditation. This has been fostered by previous national experiences with accreditation and quality assessment processes. An important step in this respect has been given by the production of an annual report by the Quality Committee, which is submitted to the Senate. This also underlines the role that this body can play as a central forum within the institution for the discussion of major institutional concerns and priorities.

The team formed the impression that the existing QA system at UNT seems to be mostly driven towards external purposes and the assessment of processes and procedures steered towards external and accountability purposes. This may be partly explained by the fact that the experience of the university has been mainly related to national processes of accreditation and inspections and enhanced by a context of mistrust between regulators and the private sector. Regardless of the explanatory factors, the team considered that there is limited emphasis on self-evaluation and QA as a tool for institutional improvement.

One of the first steps for an institution to develop an effective quality system is to know what is happening and how it is happening. UNT has been developing its capacity to document its activities and the current evaluation process may have provided an important stimulus in this respect. In general, the main pieces of information were available and with sufficient level of detail. This is certainly an important step in building a quality culture and needs to be deepened and refined.

However, the existing QA structure has very limited staff resources and most of the work has to be performed by academics on top of their other multiple tasks. Moreover, the existing QA culture seems to be dominated by concerns about short-term labour market trends. Although the team recognises that this fits with the ethos of the UNT, it is a narrow approach that misses the fact that quality in higher education (including quality of teaching) is a multidimensional issue that should cover other aspects beyond labour market needs and employability.

The growing prominence of debates on quality in higher education policy has led universities to document their activities more effectively and in greater detail, though it has not necessarily stimulated significant analysis of the data produced. Nevertheless, it is less clear to what extent this influences strategic and management decisions at UNT. The team identified some gaps in the translation of a strategic vision into more operational steps. This is a pervasive problem faced by many universities, due to the fact that governments and national agencies ask for intensive efforts to collect extensive data and stimulate an accountability attitude rather than an improvement one. Hence, data are used to a limited extent in supporting and framing internal decision-making and the definition of priorities.



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Another important aspect regarding the development of a quality culture refers to the way quality issues pervade the different activities of the university. Rather than the fulfilment of certain rules and requirements, quality assurance is expected to infuse the attitudes of the different actors. The team observed that the evaluation of teaching is multidimensional and transparent, covering students' assessment, self-assessment, and peer's assessment. Moreover, students consider that their views are taken into account and that evaluation is valuable.

The development of a quality culture aims at gathering feedback from multiple stakeholders and improving their perceptions about the university. This is an important development in moving from a paradigm of quality development focused on public accountability to quality development as a multidimensional tool to monitor and improve the relationship between the university and its multiple internal and external communities. The team identified efforts in collecting feedback from external stakeholders such as employers and alumni and encourages UNT to pursue further these activities. However, the team also observed a limited involvement of students as active partners in QA.

Overall, the team considers that the university has developed several aspects contributing toward a quality system that may assess and enhance all its various missions. Relevant steps have been taken in this regard, though there is large room for improvement. The university faces significant obstacles, not the least given the impact of financial limitations to staff numbers (academic and non-academic). Nevertheless, the size, the cohesiveness, and the atmosphere prevailing at UNT creates a favourable environment for the university to explore the possibilities of seeing quality assessment less as a mechanism of public accountability and more as an instrument of self-improvement to enhance the university's commitment to education, research, and service to society.



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### **Main recommendations:**

The team recommends UNT to:

18. Rethink and broaden its views about the purposes of QA, notably by placing less emphasis on procedures and reflect more on their effectiveness and implications;
19. Regard QA more as a continuous process of institutional improvement;
20. Strengthen the human resources allocated to the Quality Assurance Department, especially by bringing in specialised support staff.



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## 7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is one issue that has attained increasing visibility among European universities' strategic priorities. Many institutions have been striving to attain greater internationalisation through training and research activities. The current trends in higher education clearly underline this necessity and the move towards a more integrated higher education framework in Europe is only the more visible development of a broader and deeper trend. Hence, growing mobility among students and staff is likely to become a central issue for many universities, especially within the European Higher Education Area.

UNT has been trying to develop some activities related to internationalisation, especially regarding teaching and some institutional networks. The team identified a willingness to strengthen the internationalisation dimension in several activities of the university. The university has been trying to expand its educational offer in foreign languages (e.g. some modules or courses), namely as a mechanism to overcome the language barrier for foreign students. The university has also started to reflect on possible internationalisation developments such as foreign language programmes. Nevertheless, most of the developments are recent and still in an early phase.

In general, the team identified a limited exploration of the current possibilities of internationalisation for the university. UNT seems to have a view of internationalisation that is focused on the teaching of international fields and the organisation of international events. The participation of students in internationalisation activities, especially in Erasmus mobility, is very limited and recent. The team also observed a very limited internationalisation of staff and research activities and thinks that the university should develop strong efforts to improve that situation significantly.

Internationalisation should not merely be the result of individual initiatives; it needs a significant institutional engagement to support and promote internationalisation activities more deeply in making internationalisation a strategic objective. Concurrent to this, the team could not identify a strategy regarding internationalisation. Despite the difficulties and financial and organisational limitations, UNT has the capacity to make internationalisation an important dimension of its institutional life and several of the recent steps in that direction should encourage the university to move decisively along that route.

### Main recommendations:

According to the team, UNT should:

21. Rethink and broaden its views about internationalisation, with greater emphasis on incoming and outgoing mobility;
22. Regard the development of some courses in foreign languages as an important competitive advantage that enhances the reputation and attractiveness of the university (nationally and internationally);



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23. Give greater attention to tools of international communication such as the UNT's website;
24. Strengthen the institutional international research networks, notably by taking advantage of existing personal contacts and collaborations.



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## 8. Conclusion

The team considers that UNT is aware of the main challenges it is facing, namely regarding its high dependence upon revenues from tuition fees, the adverse demographic trends, the tight labour market for graduates, and strong competition with other universities.

The team is confident that UNT can face these challenges successfully, given its strong position in teaching and its institutional cohesiveness.

The team encourages the leadership of UNT to address those challenges by balancing short-term responsiveness with more attention to the development of a long-term strategy that may be sustainable from a financial and academic point of view.

The team wants to express its gratitude to all participants of the interviews for their openness and willingness to discuss all issues concerning the university during the meetings. Special thanks go to Professor Carmen Caraiman who was the liaison person of UNT with the team and who was responsible for the efficient organisation of all the meetings and discussions. Finally, the team would like to express its thanks to the Rector Professor Gabriel Boroi, and to UNT for the friendly hospitality.

### Major recommendations

#### Governance and decision-making:

According to the team:

1. The leadership of the institution should give more attention to a long-term strategy regarding external constraints and challenges;
2. Strategic planning should be more focused and better linked with UNT's operational plans. The latter should be more detailed, with clear and feasible milestones and mechanisms for addressing unexpected outcomes and deviations;
3. The university should reflect on its current degree of centralisation, notably by distinguishing between structural and everyday decisions;
4. The university should reflect on its disciplinary diversification and ways to exploit its full potential and sustainability;

#### Teaching and learning:

According to the team, UNT should:

5. Reflect on its strategic positioning, namely by pursuing further its commitment to quality of teaching and its reputation as a demanding and selective institution;



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6. Balance the focus on expanding the number of enrolled students and of programmes with an emphasis on the quality and motivation of prospective students;
7. Consider ways of making its teaching more interactive;
8. Explore possible ways to enhance graduates' career counselling, notably by nurturing its networks with employers;

#### **Research and doctoral education:**

According to the team, UNT should:

9. Place more emphasis on supporting PhD students and staff (e.g. scholarships, teaching load for current PhD students; participation in international conferences);
10. Pursue a research agenda that has a strong applied orientation and that is anchored in a few areas of expertise regarded as priorities;
11. Develop these areas of expertise through greater structuring around research teams;
12. Promote greater internationalisation of research and publications;
13. Organise the allocation of funding to research activities (e.g. travelling to conferences) according to explicit criteria defined by the Senate;
14. Consider the possibility of broadening the doctoral school to other areas (preferably integrated at the university level), which may also favour the development of greater transdisciplinarity and pluridisciplinarity in research;

#### **Service to society:**

According to the team, UNT should:

15. Develop greater institutional commitment and organisation of services to society;
16. Explore possible ways to develop lifelong learning, possibly in association with its distance learning competences;
17. Develop the participation of students in extra-curricular activities outside the university (such as NGOs and voluntary work), which may be valuable also in developing their social skills and, thus, their employability;

#### **Quality Culture**

The team recommends UNT to:



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18. Rethink and broaden its views about the purposes of QA, notably by placing less emphasis on procedures and reflect more about their effectiveness and implications;
19. Regard QA more as a continuous process of institutional improvement;
20. Strengthen the human resources allocated to the Quality Assurance Department, especially by bringing in specialised support staff;

### **Internationalisation**

According to the team, UNT should:

21. Rethink and broaden its views regarding internationalisation, with greater emphasis on incoming and outgoing mobility;
22. Regard the development of some courses in foreign languages as an important competitive advantage that enhances the reputation and attractiveness of the university (nationally and internationally);
23. Give greater attention to tools of international communication such as UNT's website;
24. Strengthen the institutional international research networks, notably by taking advantage of existing personal contacts and collaborations.