

Report on the Institutional Accreditation

**of Tishk International University
(formerly Ishik University)**

Erbil, Iraq

Reference Number I-1741-1



XX Meeting of the ZEvA Commission on XX

Item X

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I Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the Accreditation Commission

1 Decision of the ZEvA Commission

I. Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the Accreditation Commission

1. Decision of the ZEvA Commission

Will be included in the document after the decision has been taken.

2. Final Vote of the Expert Panel

Accreditation with Preconditions

2.1.1 Preconditions:

- The library of TIU shall be improved substantially. An action plan to develop its resources and infrastructures shall be documented. It might include the following aspects:
 - The opening hours of the library should be extended.
 - The number of working places and computer work stations should be enhanced.
 - The allocation of scientific literature needs to be enhanced. This should include subscription to renowned international scientific journals in the disciplines offered by TIU. Publications by university staff should be made available.
 - The data base should be made accessible to students from outside campus.
 - The non-lending collection of the library should be enhanced in order to establish an easy access, open shelves reference library. This allows for self-directed knowledge generation.
 - Regular events for students in the library pertaining to for example selected subject literature, research skills training, webinars, guided analyses of sources and indexes should be staged.

2.1.2 Recommendations:

- The panel highly recommends to issue Diploma Supplements according to the requirements of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- The panel recommends to consider the development of a distinct profile ('branding'), building on the strengths and well established study areas of TIU, in the mid- and long-term development.
- Strategic measures should be aligned closely with financial planning and governance. A fixed annually lump sum for the respective Departments at their own disposal should be installed. The allocation of lump sums should go along with cost-centred accounting mechanisms, based amongst others on overheads, research plans, temporary student assistants and guest lectureships.
- Setting up an administrative unit for support in development of research projects, acquisition of third-party funding etc.

I Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the Accreditation Commission

2 Final Vote of the Expert Panel

- The development of a 'quality culture', including external stakeholders and students into decision making processes, should be regarded as high priority by leadership, academic and non-academic staff as well as students.
 - The quality assurance system should be reflected upon. Further enhancement, and – possibly – simplification might contribute to the overall “fitness for purpose” of the internal quality assurance system. In order to avoid excessive compartmentalization of tasks and duties, a one-stop approach together with custom-tailored business processes, could provide for coherent monitoring and reporting in quality assurance.
 - The Deans should be given more freedom in terms of planning, decision making and financial means, by introducing subsidiary autonomy on faculty level, counterbalanced by self-responsibility and accountability. More administrative influence for the Deans might enable the simplification of current organizational structures and enhance the profile of TIU in terms of academic content and research.
- The panel recommends the infrastructural enhancements, including
 - Facilitating access to workshops for students, by extending opening hours.
 - Increasing the quality of equipment and provide guidance on utilization of tools.
 - Acquiring 3-D-printers to allow for up-to date hands-on experience for students.
- The panel recommends to improve conditions for (applied) research, including
 - Reduction of teaching workload for staff to enable the development and implementation of (even small-scale) research projects.
 - Further development of the system of financial incentives for applied and commissioned academic research. Soliciting of commissioned/contract research in terms of public-private-partnerships (PPP) with co-financing facilities.
 - Enhancing support of graduates for taking up Master's and/or doctoral degree programmes (at home, e.g. with collaborating public university, or abroad).
- TIU should focus on the quality of international co-operations and networks and focus the efforts for internationalization with selected (already existing) partnerships.
- Learning Agreements should be signed prior to studies abroad to enhance and ease recognition of credit points after return.
- The stronger use of elements of e-learning like webinars or online lectures could enable an international learning experience even if structural obstacles hinder physical mobility.
- In general, full programme licenses should be obtained. Crack versions should not be used by the university. When full programme licenses are obtained:

I Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the Accreditation Commission

2 Final Vote of the Expert Panel

- Licenses should be made available for students during coursework, for staff of the university for research projects and administrative procedures.
- Measures to enhance the share of female academic staff in key ranks should be taken. This should include
 - the awarding of postgraduate scholarships to pursue studies after graduation and awarding of scholarships for female applicants in areas of study where women are underrepresented
 - A clear indication of whom to report to in case of harassment based on gender, race or religion might be a useful enhancement of the equal opportunities policies as, amongst others, laid down in the staff handbook, Chapter 13.
- In regard to the continuous monitoring and improvement of study programmes, the experts recommend the following points:
 - A stronger involvement of external advisors in the quality management and programme development processes, i.e. external academic advisors as well as representatives from the regional or national labour market and societal stakeholders.
 - Strengthening problem-based learning, thus to eventually enhance the ability of students to relate facts to one another and deduct potential solutions.
 - Align the used teaching methods and forms of student assessment closer to the competencies to be examined.
 - Practice-based learning could be implemented through compulsory and academically supervised internships as part of the curriculum.
- More public events, involving the families of the students, so that they can get acquainted with the teaching body and the International Relations Office, might enhance students' mobility.

2.1.3 Recommendation to the ZEvA Commission:

The expert group recommends the institutional accreditation for the duration of 6 years with the preconditions listed above.

II Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel

0 Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

II. Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel

Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

It is the purpose of the accreditation procedure to assess the quality of higher education at Tishk International University (TIU), Erbil/Iraq, against international standards. The focus is on the quality of student learning as enabled by an appropriate and effective internal quality management of the higher education institution. A positive accreditation decision certifies that TIU has developed and implemented an encompassing system of quality goals, quality assurance procedures and continuous quality enhancement. It also takes into account the supporting infrastructure, personnel in teaching, leadership and administration as well as the overall academic context (research, internationalization, cooperation etc.).

The assessment report presented hereby is based on ZEvA's Assessment Framework as laid out in the "Institutional Accreditation Manual for Auditors and Higher Education Institutions".¹ This assessment framework is in part based on the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)" (ENQA 2015), the "Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area" (2005) and the "ECTS Users' Guide" (European Communities, 2015). The assessment of the Internal Quality Assurance had been combined with the assessment of the study programmes "Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)" and "Interior Design (B.Sc.)", for which a separate report will be published.

For the purpose of assessing the internal quality management, Tishk International University submitted a self-report. Apart from detailed descriptions of the university as a whole, the internal quality assurance system and descriptions of the Bachelor study programme "Civil Engineering" as an illustrative example, the self-report included a number of additional documents, as e.g. quality assurance policies, staff handbook, course catalogues, selected course syllabi, CVs of teaching faculty and sample questionnaires for as well as results of course evaluations. All documents were submitted in English.

The present evaluation report is based on the experts' assessment of the self-report submitted by Tishk International University and on their findings during the site-visit on September 24th to 26th 2019. It will serve as a basis for ZEvA's Commission to decide on the accreditation of the university's internal quality assurance. In the case of a positive decision by the Commission, ZEvA will award its quality seal for a limited time period, after which the university can reapply for accreditation.

The experts would like to thank the President and Vice-Presidents of Tishk International University, the Heads of the respective Faculties and Departments and their staff for professionally organizing the stay at the institution. Special thanks goes to both quality management Coordinators (ISO/Accreditation and Quality Management) as well as to the students. The experts enjoyed the open, self-reflective and constructive atmosphere during

¹ <https://www.zeva.org/international/information-in-english/institutional-accreditation>

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0 Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

their on-site talks in Erbil. With this report, the experts do not only assess the internal quality assurance, but would also like to give recommendations for further developing the overall quality assurance mechanisms at Tishk International University.

II Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel

1 Governance, Management and Profile of the University

1. Governance, Management and Profile of the University

Tishk International University was founded under the name “Ishik University” in 2008 as a private institution in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. It was renamed “Tishk International University” in 2018. Thus both names appear on some of the official documents and parts of the website.

The expert panel gained an overall impression of TIU's academic profile and institutional governance through the detailed self-report and intensive talks with the University, Faculty and Departmental Leadership.

In 2009, five Bachelors' programmes were established and in 2010/11, the university moved to a new campus at the outskirts of Erbil. As of today, Tishk International University offers 21 Bachelor's degrees in eight faculties: Dentistry, Pharmacy, Engineering, Science, Education, Administrative Science and Economics, Law, and Nursing. All except Law are entirely taught in English. Tishk International University also houses, among others, a Prep School, a Center for Continuing Education and a TOEFL IBT Test Centre. A second campus is located in Sulaimani, the second-largest city in Iraqi Kurdistan.

From 2017 onwards, Tishk International University has established joint Master's with public regional universities; i.e. Erbil Polytechnic University, Salahaddin University and Hawler Medical University.

The language of communication on the campus is generally English, partly on account of a diverse teaching faculty and staff originating from Iraq, Turkey, Syria and other countries.

As a private institution, Tishk International University (TIU) has been licensed in 2008 as an officially recognized private university by the Kurdish Ministry of Higher Education; in 2017, it has become recognized by the Iraq Ministry of Higher Education. The University is governed by a Board of Trustees; it includes the TIU President, its Director of International Relations, five international members from academia and labour market and three representatives of the shareholding bodies.

Tishk International University does not receive state funding but raises fees from students. The institution and its programmes are – as all private higher education institutions in the Kurdistan Region – under supervision of the Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research and its Inspection and Quality Assurance Unit. While the current status gives Tishk International University, like other private universities, a certain degree of autonomy, some central issues like tuition fees, number of intake in each programme per year, the hiring and assignment of full- and part-time faculty staff or the license to offer new Bachelor's and Master's are regulated or at least observed by the Ministry in considerable detail.

Organizational Structure and Mission of the University

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1 Governance, Management and Profile of the University

The University is strategically governed by the Board of Trustees, the President and the University Council, the latter comprising the President, Vice-Presidents, Faculty Deans and the Head of International Relations. President and Council are responsible for the academic and operative planning and implementation as well as financial management. Each faculty is headed by a Dean and has a Faculty Council as a body to develop academic strategies and planning (which then have to be decided by the President & University Council). On the lower level, each of the 21 Departments – each responsible for one study programme – also have a Head and a Council, responsible for evaluation and improvement of programme-related aspects. The Departments are financially bound by the decisions of the President and University Council.

In addition, Tishk International University installed several additional committees at the central university level, including amongst others

- Exam Committee
- Committee of Appeals
- Accreditation Coordinating Committee
- ISO Implementation Committee
- Quality Assurance Committee
- Central Quality Development Committee

In the provided self-report (p.27), the vision of Tishk International University is described as follows:

“To be a leading university in the country and region in the areas of education, research and development as well as service to the community by raising educated individuals with universal ethical values”.

The university’s mission states:

“To raise well-prepared, productive and competent individuals with a research-oriented spirit, who possess professional ethics and sensitiveness to the realities of the country and the world, in order to serve to fundamental human values; contribute to the improvement of the quality life of humanity based on regional and universal needs.”

These general strategic aims have been developed in a strategic process from 2014 onwards with the help of a Strategy Commission, including the TIU leadership and the Faculty Deans.

The website of Tishk International University states the following about the Quality Assurance Unit:

“(…) the process of quality assurance was first introduced with the establishment of the University in 2008. However, with the full implementation of quality assurance system at Kurdistan public universities and as instructed by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a more solid and structured implementation of the process was executed in 2011 in the University. (...) At Tishk University, under the process of quality assurance several are functioning. These include Teaching Quality Assurance (TQA), programme and curriculum development, ranking, benchmarking and auditing; processes that uphold the core values of Tishk University. These

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1 Governance, Management and Profile of the University

processes are systematized and monitored by the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) which oversees the ongoing implementation of these interconnected processes and in connection with the relevant unit or department, where necessary. The three key assessment procedures employed by the department take in Student Feedback (SF), Teacher Portfolio (TP) and Continuous Academic Development (CAD)."

The university and its institutional subdivisions have communicated its strategic and educational goals in a variety of documents, e.g. Staff Handbook or Student Handbook, and developed it into more detailed and applicable rules, guidelines and regulations. These include e.g. sanctions for causing "polarization due to differences of language, race, color or religious sect" (cf. Student Handbook), or "using position [...] for partisan political or religious purposes" (Staff Handbook).

In the academic year 2018/19, 2,309 students have been enrolled at Tishk International University.

The academic staff consisted in the same time period of 443 persons, of which 119 hold a PhD, 126 hold a Master's degree and 198 are assistants with a Bachelor's degree.

Tishk International University has been audited against the ISO 9001:2008 and was certified in May 2015 by British Certification Inc. (BCI). This certification procedure had been organized by TIU's Quality Management Division which was also responsible for organizing and supporting the present evaluation. A re-certification against ISO 9001:2015 has been granted in May 2018.

Strategic goals

According to the provided self-report, the strategic goals from 2016 to 2020 are the following:

- "1. Achieving international accreditation of various departments across the university to upgrade departments curriculum and teaching quality up to international standards*
- 2. Successfully complete the process of 3 years renewal audit and procedures for BCI Certification and Standardization Inc. for ISO 9001: 2008 and upgrade ISO 9001:2015.*
- 3. Increase the number of International students*
- 4. Organize National and International Conferences from all Faculties and in partnership with other universities*
- 5. Increase number of research publication in high impact factor and indexed journals.*
- 6. Organizing university curriculum development and other academic procedures adaptable to European Credit Transfer System and Bologna criteria*
- 7. Increase Professional memberships in international organizations and associations*
- 8. Increase the student involvement of social, cultural and sports activities*
- 9. Identifying and implementing Internal, National and International projects and acquiring grants from different international associations*

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10. Commencing Post-graduate and new departments

11. Community involvement and engagement”

The strategic goals are reviewed annually by the mentioned Committee and evaluated by the ISO Office. The goals are part of a wider strategic plan, which also contains a detailed SWOT-analysis. As stated by the leadership, the current strategic plan has been developed by the Strategic Planning Committee, consisting amongst others of the Board of Trustees and the University Council and other stakeholders from the university and community. After its development, this plan has been intensely discussed with the Departments. It has then been finalized by the University Council and finally been approved by the Board of Trustees.

The interplay of different levels of governance inside TIU has been described of being mostly bottom-up. Especially academic aspects mostly come up on the Department's level, than go into the Faculty Council, the University Council and finally the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees has been described by the present members (including President and outside stakeholders) as non-interfering with academic objectives, but rather relevant in its advisory and financial capacity.

The aspect of overall strategic development as well as its impact on curricular development had been intensely discussed during the on-site talks. The University leadership and Faculty leadership stressed the need for more cooperation with different stakeholders in the Kurdistan region, including state-funded and private universities as well as public and private employers.

Regarding the development of study programmes and curricula, it was mentioned that a considerable share of companies provide input, e.g. in architecture, which is taken up during curricular reform and development. At the same time, international academic developments are considered as highly important to keep programmes up to date.

The development of new programmes also takes societal and economic developments into account. An example is the decision to start a new Bachelor's programme on Tourism and Hospitality due to increasing importance of the tourism sector in the Kurdistan region.

Another important aspect mentioned several times is the strategic goal of involving students in overall social and ethical learning, e.g. by delivering teaching classes in nearby refugee camps or considering human rights as important pillars of student learning.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts commend the overall impressive commitment of Tishk International University and its stakeholders to rapidly develop the institution, its academic level and its reputation in the Kurdish society, based on outlined strategic goals.

The vision of the University – *“to be a leading university in the country and region in the areas of education, research and development as well as service to the community by raising educated individuals with universal ethical values”* – seems to be taken seriously. In general, and also with regards to branding, the expert panel recommends the TIU leadership to attempt to answer the question ‘what should this University or respectively Faculty be famous for’?

A highly engaged leadership and academic staff are supportive of the current strategy. They

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are also involved in future strategic development. The self-presented 'bottom-up approach' for academic development appears to be implemented. Still, efforts to establish a broadly supported 'quality culture', involving all stakeholders (including students and possibly external advisors) should be enhanced.

However, concerning financially sensitive aspects, there seems to be a rather top-down approach in place. For the experts' panel, the basic financial basis and economic governance has not become fully transparent. While financial resources seem to be overall sufficient (as indicated e.g. by an overall well-established and well-maintained infrastructure), a more stringent alignment of strategic measures and financial governance is recommended.

In the given situation, the experts recommend that after a period of rapid growth and expansion in terms of programmes and disciplines, TIU should focus now on consolidation, on the evaluation of existing programmes and in general a sustainable growth of organizational structures and workload.

While TIU has taken efforts to foster a higher integration of teaching and research (e.g. by establishing joint Masters' with public Kurdistan universities), the latter should still be given more support. While some incentives for research exists (e.g. staff promotion, international staff exchange), the overall context for allowing academic staff to develop and implement research activities appears still limited. To bolster these initiatives, the experts recommend the following measures:

- ➔ Fostering a university-wide culture of research-based learning which leads to research-based perspectives of students and enhances their respective motivation.
- ➔ Setting up an administrative unit for support in development of research projects, acquisition of third-party funding etc.
- ➔ Reduction of teaching workload for staff for developing and implementing (even small-scale) research projects.
- ➔ Further develop the system of financial incentives for academic research
- ➔ Support of graduates for taking up Master's and/or doctoral programmes (at home, e.g. with collaborating public universities, or abroad).
- ➔ Introducing prize competitions for student research labs with well-posed problems: In the natural or engineering sciences with applicable solutions, in the humanities in terms of ideational labs.

Internationalization

Throughout the site-visit and in TIU's self-report, internationalization appeared as an eminent strategic objective. Tishk International University has implemented several mechanisms to support and enhance international co-operations. For example, the International Relations Office (IRO) was established in 2013 to support international endeavours. The provided documentation states that 58 Memorandums of Understanding with European and non-European higher education institutions are currently signed, of which 46 are active. The field of collaboration include amongst others exchange of staff and/or students, joint research activities and lectures, realization of seminars, conferences and academic meetings, exchange of academic materials and distance learning.

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The University also has taken considerable measures to align its study along the standards of the European Higher Education Area (so called Bologna-area). This includes programme-related aspects like the ECTS credit system, documented intended learning outcomes on the programme and course level and on a wider level the notions of student-centered learning and external as well as internal measures of quality assurance, embedded in a transparently documented governance structure.

International student mobility, focusing on outgoing mobility, is enhanced by exchange. So far, 43 students from different departments have participated in them. The conditions and process of outgoing mobility is formalized and laid out in the documentation. The IRO also supports incoming students in e.g. obtaining a visa for Iraq/Kurdistan, student placement or accommodation. During the site visit, however, TIU stakeholders mentioned the quite volatile political and economic context of the Kurdistan region, which at times hinders efforts to attract foreign students as well as staff. In view of the current situation triggered by a pandemic, it is recommended that other forms of continuous exchange with international students, e.g. via chatrooms linked to a particular semester and supervised by lecturers are made available as long as there is no possibility for studying abroad.

International staff mobility is a further key element of internationalization at TIU. Just like for students, the application process is clearly formulated. In the period from 2016-2018, four staff members have engaged in staff mobility abroad. Staff exchange may be more reciprocal in the future.

In addition to that, international conferences are organized annually covering various fields of study offered at Tishk International University. An international summer school and seminars providing information on the practical aspects of studying abroad complete the services of the IRO. The current teaching staff also brings an international experience to the TIU campus.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts support TIU's policy on internationalization and regard it as an important measure to further develop the quality of teaching and research. It commends the achievements of TIU in this realm, given the political and socio-economic context.

While an impressive number of Memorandums of Understanding with national and international higher education institutions exists, it remained unclear how deep the cooperation efforts are. TIU should try to focus more on the quality and enablement of some specific cooperation and networks and canalize the efforts for internationalization with partners that have already led to fruitful co-operations.

International mobility of incoming and outgoing students is supported by policies on recognition of credits, the certification and external accreditation of TIU's programmes, and administrative support structures like the International Relations Office. A student's exchange programme has been established and led to outgoing student mobility. A further positive aspect is the general use of English as language for teaching and student administration (except for the Law Programme). This truly enhances student mobility (and employability) before and especially after graduation. With regards to international mobility of the graduates

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of TIU, expert panel highly recommends to issue Diploma supplements according to the requirements of the European Higher Education Area.

Moreover, the experts learned that recognition of achieved learning outcomes from outgoing TIU students is not always implemented in line with the European Credit Transfer System/Bologna standards. It is recommended to implement learning agreements prior to studies abroad to enhance and ease recognition of credit points after return.

Moreover, the panel suggests to conduct information fairs about studying abroad, addressing both the students and their families.

In addition to that, the stronger use of elements of e-learning like webinars or online lectures could enable an international learning experience even if structural obstacles hinder physical mobility. This can also take the form of guest lectureships or guest colloquia and does not always have to cover entire semester-based courses. In the foreground should be a continuous input by international experts as well as the acquisition of intercultural competence on the part of the students.

Staff mobility is also regarded as an important measure for academic development of teaching staff. Yet, political and financial difficulties often exist (including visa application etc.). A strong administrative support could bolster these efforts and support staff mobility. In order to increase mobility, more efficient workflows and easier communication, full programme licenses for the installation of mobile gadgets for all members of the university could be offered.

Equal Opportunities

TIU has laid down clear policies on equal opportunities regarding staff employment procedures, conduct of staff and students and disciplinary cases leading to expulsion. TIU distinctively attempts to provide a non-discriminatory environment for all members of the university.

According to the self-report, 50% of the student body is female. About a quarter of the lecturers and research assistants are female as well. The percentage of female teaching staff at TIU was increased by 58.3% between the academic years 2015-16 and 2017-18. In the academic year 2018/19, the first woman joined the University Council as Dean of the Nursing Faculty.

Experts' Appraisal

The expert panel generally has a positive impression of the efforts to implement equal opportunities at TIU. It especially would like to commend the university on the high share of women in the teaching body. The first steps taken for positioning women in higher academic ranks and decision making bodies of TIU is commendable. The establishment of a Gender Studies Center at the university underlines the conscious approach towards gender equality at TIU.

The panel would like to encourage to pursue the path taken. The awarding of postgraduate scholarships to pursue studies after graduation is one useful measure to eventually position

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women in key academic ranks. The empowerment of women could be further enhanced with the awarding of scholarships for female applicants in areas of study where women are underrepresented.

The expert panel suggests that a clear indication *of whom to report to* in case of harassment based on gender, race or religion might make the equal opportunities policies more transparent. It is, amongst others, laid down in the staff handbook, Chapter 13.

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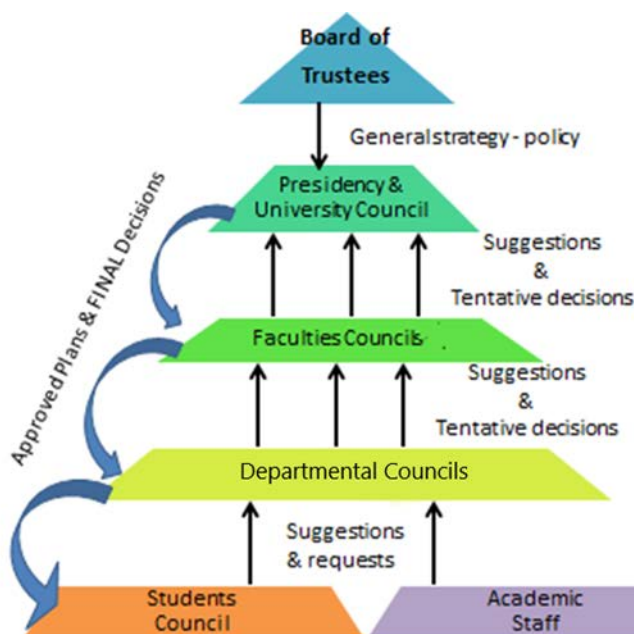
2 Assessment of the Internal Quality Assurance

2. Assessment of the Internal Quality Assurance

2.1 Internal Quality Assurance

The self-report and the talks, including the Director of Quality Assurance and the Coordinator of Accreditation and Quality Management Systems, provided a sound basis for the experts to assess the internal quality assurance of Tishk International University.

The self-report provided a general basic overview about decision-making structures at TIU:



The governing bodies on the University, Faculties' and Department level interact with a range of committees, administrative units and different stakeholders to regularly assess, revise and enhance the existing study programmes.

Quality assurance at TIU is conducted by several quality assurance units, namely the following four core units:

- Quality Assurance Office, using the three key procedures Student Feedback, Teacher Portfolio and Continuous Academic Development to assess teaching activity and quality and enhance the staff's academic proficiency and generally monitoring quality assurance at TIU
- Quality Management Office, which is amongst others responsible to streamline the quality management system according to the ISO 9001 Standard, its implementation at all university units and preparation of accreditations
- Quality Assurance Committee, which follows up the implementation of quality assurance regulations and general academic activities, discussing the evaluation results and plan measures to enhance students' satisfaction and teaching quality

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2 Assessment of the Internal Quality Assurance

- ISO Implementation Committee, which is responsible to apply the ISO 9001 standards to all units of the university, prepare for internal and external auditing cycles, inform all university units about changed quality management instructions.

The applied mechanisms of quality assurance at TIU consist of

- Students Feedback: conducted online, students evaluate each course of the respective academic term. The results are then sent to the Vice-President of Academic Affairs, the University Council and the Quality Assurance Committee. Depending on the result, appreciation letters or warning letters are sent out to the respective teacher.
 - Questions comprise the effectiveness and content of the course, the conduct of the teacher, the use of teaching methods and the students' assessment.
- If the results of the Students' Feedback are generally low, workshops and discussion debates can be held to enhance the performance of the teaching staff. If an individual teacher receives three warning letters, his or her contract may be terminated.
- Classroom observation: conducted when a Head of Department realizes that the teaching performance is low, at least 10 minutes of a class should be attended by either the Head of the Department and/or members of the Quality Assurance Unit. A "Class Observation Form" is to be filled out by the observer(s).
- Syllabus Evaluation: the syllabi are evaluated by the Heads of Departments and a Scientific Committee for quality and efficiency.
- CAD Points: the "Continuous Academic Development" of faculty members is monitored and rated with points. The teaching staff is required to meet a certain level of points during each academic year. The higher the academic rank, the more points must be achieved either through active or passive participation in e.g. seminars, workshops, trainings, conferences, publications, reviewing articles or postgraduate supervision. If a faculty member scores low in the CAD points, he/she will be contacted through the Heads of Department and monitored in the following year.
- Lecturer Self-Assessment: the self-assessment is an opportunity for teaching staff to reflect on their teaching performance. Personal and structural aspects which might influence the teaching performance are considered. The responses are only shared with the Head of Department and the Director of Quality Assurance for monitoring purposes.

The assessment mechanisms of the teaching staff and the measures for support or regulation have been discussed during the on-site talks. In writing, the staff assessment appeared quite formalized and rigorous – regarding promotions as well as sanctions. During the talks with the Quality Assurance Unit, the TIU leadership and the staff, the developmental and supportive character of the actions taken was stressed.

During the on-site talks, the TIU staff explained the development and refinement of the internal quality management at TIU during the last 10 years. An important starting point has been the ISO certification process, which led, among others, to developing and implementing

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over 100 job descriptions for TIU staff, the establishment of a so-called 'quality processes' and the institutional set-up of the overall quality assurance of TIU. Regarding the latter, it was stressed that quality-related decisions are not taken by single persons (leadership) but are elaborated on mainly in Committees and Councils on different levels. In 2015, TIU has been certified with ISO 9001:2008 and in 2018 with ISO 9001:2015.

The measurements of quality assurance implemented in line with the ISO requirements comprise:

- Pre-graduation surveys: assessing the students' satisfaction with the overall learning experience at TIU.
- Alumni surveys: assessing the overall satisfaction with studying at TIU, the employment situation and general life situation of graduates.
- Career surveys.
- Risk assessment.
- Evaluation of the achievements of the quality objectives.
- Internal Quality Auditing Cycles, covering academic and non-academic units of TIU.
- Analysis of the context of TIU along the lines of "PEST-analysis", "Porter's Five Forces analysis and the Portfolio Matrix Model (BCG).

The outcomes of the above-mentioned measures were made available in the self-report of TIU.

Since 2016, TIU has successfully participated in external quality assurance procedures. The Bachelor programmes Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Information Technology, English Language Teaching, Physics Education, Mathematics Education and Biology Education have been evaluated and successfully accredited by European accreditation agencies. In 2018, the Law Bachelor Degree Program has been accredited by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre of the Association of Arab Universities.

Implementation of new study programmes

When a new study programme is being planned, a variety of different stakeholders of the university are involved. Officially, the process is initiated through the top management. The respective Deans fill out the pre-defined form "new study programme proposal", which is decided upon by the University Council. Upon approval, another form, issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, is to be completed and is internally revised and discussed by the Quality Assurance Director, the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Board of Trustees. Eventually, the form is submitted to the Ministry which conducts a site-visit to check the existing infrastructure of the university against the plans.

Driving factors behind the implementation of a new programme are market needs, the target audience, the geographical target area of the programme, to which extent the programme differs from already existing programmes, the required financial, human, infrastructural and scientific resources and a preliminary budget projection.

If the Ministry approves the plan, a new Departmental Board consisting of specialized academics is set up. This board designs the curriculum, mission, vision, objectives and

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intended learning outcomes of the new programme. The planning also comprises, amongst others, staff, classrooms, a weekly schedule and a yearly activity plan.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts highly commend the differentiated and transparent system of internal quality management at TIU. Based on a clear policy and the intention to continuously develop the quality in teaching, learning, research and supporting services, TIU has developed an encompassing, detailed and helpful system with core processes and detailed methods for evaluation and assessment of staff and students.

The experts commend that TIU has taken up the experts' recommendation during the accreditation of the Bachelor's Programme in 'Civil Engineering' (2017). The recommendations were obviously discussed, adapted and – if possible – implemented. This shows a positive understanding of accreditation as a process of accountability as well as of quality enhancement.

The well-established quality management system should now become an object of reflection itself. Further enhancement of the system, and – possibly – simplification, might contribute to the overall "fitness for purpose" of the internal quality assurance system. The overall strategic goal should be the establishment of an internalized 'quality culture', driven and supported by all stakeholders at TIU, including the student body. The students' involvement into formalized quality assurance processes might contribute to this endeavour and align the QA processes closer to the requirements of the "Bologna-area" (compare European Standards and Guidelines², 1.2). Generally, developing from the current approach of students as visitors of deciding boards, students could become permanent members of the respective boards. With the stepwise development of a living quality culture, it would be possible to de-regulate the sometimes rather complex and formalistic processes.

A focus should also be on clarification of the tasks and responsibilities of the existing units that are related to internal quality management, i.e. the governing bodies of TIU, the committees and regular councils on the Faculty and Department level. Overall, the experts highly recommend a stronger autonomy on the Department and Faculty level in regard to academic matters, staff development, and programme development. Here as well, a "bottom-up"-approach might contribute to the academic excellence of TIU. This might even include an allocated budget on the Department or Faculty level that can be autonomously spend, e.g. on measures to support research and teaching, like webinars, teaching workshops or didactical training.

Given the impressions of the different rounds of talks, the experts conclude that the Deans are pivotal actors in the overall development of TIU. The engaged and highly qualified Deans could benefit from more freedom both in terms of planning, decision making and financial means. More administrative influence for the Deans might enable the simplification of current organizational structures and enhance the profile of TIU in terms of academic content and

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research. Consequently, a reduction of the teaching workload might be considered.

Moreover, the experts recommend a stronger involvement of external advisors in the quality management and programme development processes, i.e. external academic advisors as well as representatives from the regional or national labour market and societal stakeholders.

2.2 Institutional Objectives in Student Learning

The self-report provided an overview on TIU's offerings, statistics and developments in the currently implemented study programmes. The experts could, as an exemplary basis, assess three Bachelor study programmes, namely Architectural Engineering, Interior Design and Civil Engineering. The latter has been assessed and accredited by ZEvA in 2017, thus taking now the implementation and further development of the programme into account.

According to the documentation provided, each study programme has a defined vision, mission, aim and education objectives. Moreover, documents on the internal regular assessment of the achievement of the self-set standards were provided. The following mechanisms are in place:

- External international programme accreditation (does not apply for all study programmes of TIU), conscious reflection of the given recommendations and implementation of these if deemed useful.
- Evaluation of the CAD Points.
- Evaluation of the Students Feedback.
- External Course Assessment of individual courses, taking into consideration:
 - Quality of the course objectives,
 - Course structure and content,
 - Effectiveness of the assessment methods,
 - Grading process,
 - Satisfaction with the general educational experience.
- The calculation of the success percentage, relating the number of passed students to the number of total students.
- Pre-graduation survey, assessing the overall satisfaction of students with the educational experience.
- Quality objectives achievement, in which specific quality objectives (formulated for each study programme, for example: "reviewing the curriculum based on the needs of the industry" or "increasing the number of social projects conducted") are measured with matching Key Performance Indicators against an annually defined target.
- Risks Analysis, analysing potential risks for departments, the likelihood of their occurrence and including – if necessary – mitigation plans.

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- Records Controlling of the respective departments, comprising a detailed list of internal records, their content, folder number and records code.

In order to ensure an adequate learning environment for the students, the general class size ranges from 25 to a maximum of 40. If the student number exceeds 40, the course is split and offered twice.

During the site visit, the teaching staff and Heads of Departments (i.e. Head of respective programmes) also gave insights into the development of updated teaching methods and didactics, including a strong focus on problem based-learning, issues of ethics and society and case study methods.

Experts' Appraisal

Overall, the panel has a positive impression of the institutional objectives in student learning at TIU. The university has taken big steps to adopt structures of student-centred learning and teaching ('Bologna style').

The formulation of the profile of graduates from the different departments seems appropriate. Amongst others, the teaching methods, forms of students' assessment, content and structure of the study programmes and learning environment are examined as single components leading to the Educational Objectives. A suitable variety of mechanisms is in place to assess, evaluate and – if necessary – adapt the educational aims of the study programmes.

In general, the panel recommends to develop a more research-based style of imparting knowledge and competencies on the Bachelor level. Graduates should have developed a perspective and culture as research practitioners. The potential of 'critical thinking' combined with an understanding of science as empirically-based research should be developed and supported (instead of 'fact feeding', imparting of presumably 'correct' knowledge).

Teaching methods

TIU has already taken first steps towards the implementation of participatory teaching methods which actively involve the student body into the teaching process. The panel would like to encourage the university as a whole to further pursue this path. Problem-based learning which eventually enhances the ability to relate facts to one another and deduct potential solutions, should be further strengthened. This can be done with the help of a multi-stage plan, from an introduction to the methodology to a more in-depth study of the methodology based on increasingly complex issues. The proportion of problem-based learning in the course of studies should be increased continuously over several years. Case-based learning can also be combined with problem-based learning in such projects to improve the acceptance of the methodology.

Workshops for teaching staff on higher education didactics might be a beneficial contribution to enhance research-based teaching.

Consequently, the infrastructure should be adapted in order to enable the use of problem-based teaching approaches. Classroom equipment that can be moved, instead of fixed tables allowing mostly for the teaching method 'lecture', could enable collaborative work amongst the students. The panel recommends to encourage self-guided learning among students, which shall be closely interwoven with the enhancement of the library on the one hand and a revised approach to didactics on the other hand. Thus, self-directed knowledge

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generation instead of lecture notes-based memorization could be fostered.

The establishment of a student Debating Society with free and unrestricted expression of opinions in a structured way, directed and feedbacked by the student body could strengthen civil society-oriented personality traits.

Assessment methods

Regarding the study programmes mentioned above, students and teachers seem to be satisfied with currently used forms of students' assessment. Nonetheless, it is recommended to extend the range of assessment methods and include more (small scale) research-based projects to assess, and at the same time enhance the competencies of students. These projects might for example be conducted in the form of group work and stretch over several study units. Research-based projects should of course be credited higher than e.g. written exams. Interim presentations (optionally in front of guests) and mutual criticism between students could strengthen the students' problem-oriented awareness of problems and their problem-solving competence.

2.3 Study Programmes

For all programmes, basic elements of the Bologna-requirements have been implemented, including

- A clear definition of the study programmes' profile,
- A clear definition of the study programmes' aims,
- An encompassing development of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) on the programme level,
- Referencing the ILOs to the European Qualification Framework,
- A matrix-based matching of the study programmes' ILOs to the respective course learning outcome,
- Clear-cut and published regulations on the student life cycle, including
 - a student's handbook, providing information on students' admission and enrolment, transfer or academic achievements, students' assessment, the documentation of gained qualifications and the graduation diploma
 - a quality assurance policy.

A variety of quality insurance instruments is regularly applied, including course evaluation, overall satisfaction, as well as graduate surveys. All programmes are intended to be continuously monitored and revised.

During the on-site talks, students reported that a variety of teaching methods was already in use but expressed the wish that a wider range of didactical approaches would be implemented.

In addition to that, especially in the Architectural Engineering programme, the students mentioned that the feedback to their design sketches is usually delivered in the form of

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comments in the actual drawings.

Experts' Appraisal

The expert panel concludes that the formulated ILOs are coherent and in line with the intended qualification level. As laid out in the given documentation, there is a constructive alignment of course contents with the European Qualification Framework.

Regarding the above-mentioned commentary from the students, the panel recommends to align more closely the used teaching methods and forms of student assessment to the competencies that should be examined. Moreover, the teaching staff should give written feedback to the students' works and designs that goes beyond merely commentary in the actual drawings. It is strongly suggested to give feedback in separate documents in order to extend and facilitate the academic dialogue between teachers and students.

The expert panel highly recommends to foster practice-based and problem-based learning approaches in order to enhance students' learning experience. Eventually, this approach might foster the skill of independent learning and enhance general lifelong learning.

Practice-based learning could be implemented through compulsory and academically supervised internships in the curriculum. These could for example be conducted either in companies, administration or societal institutions. Alumni might provide assistance with internship placements. Generally, a stronger institutionalized network with external stakeholders from society and industry might be beneficial for the students learning process and subsequent employability.

As mentioned above, the use of blended learning could stimulate the self-learning experience of students. The introduction of MOOCs, recorded lectures or webinars into the standard curriculum could enrich the international and overall learning experience at TIU at acceptable costs.

Consequently, the infrastructure should be adapted accordingly. The provision of state-of-the-art online resources and access to them also from outside campus is one prerequisite for the suggestions mentioned above. More practice in modern laboratories (electronics laboratory, workshops) would be a further asset to enhance research skills and process-oriented learning.

2.4 Resources and Learning Environment

Infrastructure and Technical Equipment

The expert panel has been to the modern campus building of TIU in Erbil. Classrooms, the library and studio facilities have been visited by the experts. All visited classrooms are equipped with drawing tables. Located on campus, there are workshops in order to work with wood and metal.

Library

The campus houses a central library; however, opening hours are limited and equipment with books and journals were described as slightly underequipped by staff and students alike. According to the university staff, online sources are the biggest information resource, most of

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which can be downloaded by the students only while being on campus.

Student Support Services

Tishk International University has established a range of services to support students in academic and non-academic matters.

The Deanery of students consists of several student support services in order to help them integrate into the university life. It delivers advice on “Social affairs and Guidance”, “Clubs and Cultural Affairs” and a “Future Builders Team”.

Moreover, it includes a Career Center advising students on career planning and an Alumni Office works on using graduate networks also to advise current students.

In addition, the TIU Students’ Council is composed of students elected democratically as class representatives, department representatives and faculty representatives. It aims at supporting students in resolving problems, informing the university administration of ideas emanating from the student body and representing the students in other associations or university bodies. The University also regularly organizes competitions and charity projects, e.g. teaching in refugee camps outside of Erbil.

There is a further unit for Academic Advising. Each student is provided academic advising sessions by a beforehand appointed full-time employed academic staff member of TIU. During these sessions, tips about effective self-study and self-management are provided. Furthermore, a common office hour policy is applied which requires all faculty members to communicate two contact hours per week to the students in the official documentation like course syllabi and on the office doors. During the on-site talks, students favorably mentioned the overall accessibility of the teaching and administrative staff.

The Students Information System provides students with answers to academic and organizational questions online. The institutional rules and regulations of student conduct, examinations etc. are comprehensively made transparent in a Student Handbook that all students receive at the start of their study and that can be downloaded via the website in an updated format each academic year. A formalized reporting system in case of “Nonconformities” found by staff or students is in place.

The International Relations Office supports students in international mobility with information on exchange, grants and recognition procedures.

Teaching and Learning Environment

Overall, the campus houses several buildings and includes premises for extracurricular activities like a sports field/center, cafeterias, accommodation etc. The main building provides elevators and special ramps for disabled students.

Experts’ Appraisal

In general, the experts would like to applaud the university’s recent development. It is remarkable how Tishk International University has developed in terms of infrastructure within roughly ten years.

However, especially regarding the equipment of the library, the experts *formulate* the following pre-condition:

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- The library of TIU shall be improved substantially. An action plan to develop its resources and infrastructures shall be documented. It might include the following aspects:
 - The opening hours of the library should be extended.
 - The number of working places and computer work stations should be enhanced.
 - The allocation of scientific literature needs to be enhanced. This should include subscription to renowned international scientific journals in the disciplines offered by TIU. Publications by university staff should be made available.
 - The data base should be made accessible to students from outside campus.
 - The non-lending collection of the library should be enhanced in order to establish an easy access, open shelves reference library. This allows for self-directed knowledge generation.
 - Regular events for students in the library pertaining to for example selected subject literature, research skills training, webinars, guided analyses of sources and indexes should be staged.
- In general, full programme licenses specific should be obtained. Crack versions should not be used by the university.

More funding should be allocated to enhance the staff number and equipment of the library.

Besides that, the panel recommends that fully equipped workshops with long opening hours should be made available to the students. A 3-D-printer could be a useful asset.

Generally speaking, the expert panel confirms an adequate state of the laboratories for the Bachelor level. Laboratory assistants are in place to provide aid and maintenance.

During the on-site talks with the students, it was mentioned that family decisions and information provided by the International Relations Office are a decisive factor for student mobility. In order to enable students' mobility, the experts recommend to hold more public events, involving the families of the students, so that they can get acquainted with the teaching body and the International Relations Office.

Yet, overall support and advice of students appears very positive, obviously sustained by an engaged and committed teaching staff and programme leaderships.

2.5 Teaching Staff

TIU has described encompassing policies, transparent processes and usual measures for recruitment, continuous assessment and development of academic teaching staff. The recruitment process is regulated by the policy documents "Human Resources Procedure",

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the “Equal Opportunities Policy” and the “Equal Employment Opportunity Policy”.

Each head of an organizational unit of TIU has to deliver an “Educational Year Personnel Planning” at the beginning of the academic year to the University Council. Consequently, vacancies are published, in which requirements and job details are communicated. Eligible candidates are shortlisted and contacted by TIU. Subsequently, a recruitment committee is formed, consisting of at least three academically qualified and ‘neutral’ employees of TIU. During the interview, the teaching methodology, scientific and English level and class management skills of the applicant shall be evaluated. The number of publications, of citations and the years of teaching experience are also taken into account. If a suitable candidate is found, the presidents’ approval is needed to finalize an employment contract. Equal opportunities for all applicants are granted for.

The hiring process for international staff is similar and the interview is conducted through Skype.

Staff development

Teaching Quality Assurance is conducted regularly (cf. Chapter 2.2.). Financial incentives are offered for academics to conduct research in their respective fields. An “on-boarding” programme for newly hired staff is offered, introducing new staff members to the organisational and academic structures of TIU.

Through the Continuous Academic Development (CAD) programme, faculty members are encouraged to engage in science and research. Depending on the academic rank, a certain number of points should be reached each year.

In general, if a teacher doesn’t reach the minimum score in the applied quality assurance mechanisms, talks with the Head of Department and member of the Quality Assurance Unit are conducted. These were described by the teaching staff during the on-site talks as supportive and solution-oriented rather than as sanctions.

Moreover, classroom observations are conducted when a teaching performance appears to give room for improvement. However, if the students’ satisfaction rates are low, letters of warning are issued. If three letters of warning are sent out, the employment contract may be terminated.

There are policies for international staff mobility in place (cf. Chapter 1 - internationalization), which, however, appear to be not entirely filled with life.

The promotion of young staff is highly important for the overall development of TIU and the region in general. This applies for example to the awarding of post-graduate scholarships. The establishment of joint Master programmes with public universities is a useful asset to strengthen both the students and the scientific community in the region.

Teaching staff and workload

In line with the regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the workload is depending on the academic rank:

For Professors	8 hours/week
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For Assistant Professors	10 hours/week
For Lecturers	12 hours/week
For Assistant Lecturers	14 hours/week

The academic staff of TIU consists currently of 443 persons; 119 of them hold a PhD, 126 a Masters' degree and 198 hold a Bachelors' degree and are employed as assistants.

Generally, the Heads of Department appeared committed and very engaged in their work. The workload of the academic staff of TIU was thematised during the site visit. This accounts especially for the Deans. It was reported that the teaching workload is overall realistic and achievable. However, the involvement in various committees and administrative tasks was described as rather burdensome.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts would like to congratulate TIU for the establishment of a variety of study programmes which are well-equipped with experienced and motivated staff members. Taking the three programmes which were considered in further detail into account (Architectural Engineering, Interior Design, Civil Engineering), the number of teaching staff and external teachers is sufficient. The identification with TIU and the commitment of the overall quite young teaching staff was obvious. The will and wish to further develop existing programmes or implement new ones was tangible. This is also displayed through the active involvement of teachers into quality assurance methods.

Regarding the further development of teaching staff, the panel recommends to implement further measures for international staff mobility. Existing Memorandums of Understanding could be used more intensely in this realm. Scholarships awarded by TIU might also enhance staff mobility. In addition, a regular Teacher Training in didactics of Higher Education (especially covering problem-based learning (PBL) and research orientation) should be implemented. In the medium term, a coordinated system of courses in the didactics of higher education and further academic qualification for teachers and offers in scientific theory for students could increase the number of students opting for doctoral studies.

Active involvement into research could be stimulated, if the Deans, Assistant Professors and Lecturers would be allocated an annually allocated lump sum at their own disposal. A separate budget foreseen to fund research projects or excursions may reinforce existing academic activities of the university. Conference visits of staff members should be financially supported.

With regards to the implemented joint Master programmes, the establishment of jointly carried graduate schools or centers for Master graduates might be a beneficial contribution to the further academic development of young academics and society in general. This might also be conducted in cooperation with national or even international partners like the "German Academic Exchange Service" (DAAD) or the "Humboldt Foundation". The regular exchange and advice of external stakeholders from the Bologna area would be another

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useful element in the further development of TIU.

The panel further recommends to provide incentives for research not only formalized through the CAD system and financial bonuses, but through the reduction of teaching load in case of publications. In addition to that, conference visits should be supported financially. The establishment of more modern equipped research labs should be strived for.

The same applies to the enhancement of the library resources. Basic and up-to-date literature should be obtained, more computer working places should be made available, leading scientific journals should be subscribed to and full versions of software programmes are prerequisites to sharpen the academic qualification of the teaching staff.

Taking the limited availability of academically educated staff in the field of Interior Design – as one of the evaluated programmes in this report – In the region into account, the experts strongly recommend measures to attract disciplinary experts beyond the pool of own graduates. In line with this recommendation, overall efforts to hire international staff should be taken into account. This might include long-term academic faculty as well as visiting faculty. Visiting teachers might contribute to the curriculum through workshops or courses that are taught for a few weeks. Online lectures and/or online courses should be facilitated in order to integrate international staff into the curriculum.

To conclude, the highly elaborate quality assurance system and the enhancement of the academic qualification should become the next target areas of TIU. The panel concludes that TIU has already met a lot of basic requirements of the Bologna area regarding quality assurance, the application of the European Credit Transfer System, the formulation of Intended Learning Outcomes, clearly laid out and published policies regarding organizational questions and students' assessment). The dynamic and effective development of TIU will surely continue.

III Appendix

1 Statement of the University in Response to the Expert Report

III. Appendix

1. Statement of the University in Response to the Expert Report