

TIRADENTES UNIVERSITY

EVALUATION REPORT

EVALUATION WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON INTERNATIONALISATION

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Tiradentes University, located in Aracaju, State of Sergipe, Brazil. The evaluation took place in 2018, and included two visits to the campuses of Aracaju, on 16-17 April and 10-12 September.

1.1 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. 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 IEP are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of 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.

All aspects of the evaluation are guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

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

The evaluation with a special focus on internationalisation uses the same IEP methodology, but within this context pays special attention to the policies, structures and processes in place for supporting internationalisation at the institution. This includes looking at specific actions for internationalisation, as well as exploring how internationalisation issues are mainstreamed throughout the institution’s policies and processes.

1.2 Tiradentes University's profile

Tiradentes University (hereinafter also referred to as the UNIT) is a private Brazilian higher education institution located in Aracaju, capital of the State of Sergipe in the northeast of Brazil, belonging to the holding company *Sociedade de Educação Tiradentes Ltd.* The roots of the UNIT go back to 1962, when the so-called Tiradentes Elementary School was founded. According to the self-evaluation report (SER, p. 5), in 1969 this school was upgraded to offer both middle and high school education, alongside technical courses in Accounting and Pedagogy. In 1970 the new Tiradentes Faculties (*Faculdades Integradas Tiradentes, FIT*) launched undergraduate programmes in Administration, Accounting and Economics. Finally, in 1994 the Tiradentes Faculties were officially recognised by the Ministry of Education in Brazil as reaching the full university level according to Brazilian law, and its name was changed to Tiradentes University (UNIT).

In addition to the two campuses located in the city of Aracaju (Centro and Farolândia), Tiradentes University has three more campuses within the State of Sergipe: Estância, Itabaiana and Propriá. In 2017, considering face-to-face and distance programmes of all kinds, there were out of the 48 undergraduate programmes (of which 28 bachelor, eight teaching and 12 advanced degrees), 35 *Lato Sensu* graduate programmes, and nine *Stricto Sensu* programmes (5 Master plus 4 PhD degrees). About 32 000 students were enrolled in these programmes. Twenty-two undergraduate programmes and *Lato Sensu* programmes are offered via distance education modalities, supported by “32 distance learning offices with in-class support to students, covering almost 70% of the State’s territory” (SER, p. 8).

It is important to note that, according to the Brazilian regulations on higher education, a bachelor’s degree is obtained through a programme in a given field of knowledge, intended to prepare students for academic or professional activity (the average minimum duration being between 3 000 to 3 200 hours, which corresponds to a minimum of eight academic semesters). A teaching degree programme is intended to prepare students to become teachers of basic education (the minimum duration being 3 200 hours of effective academic work, with a minimum of eight academic semesters). The technological degree is obtained through a programme conforming to the hourly workload recommended by the National Catalogue of Higher Education, with shorter durations than the previous ones (ranging from 1 600 to 2 400 hours).

The postgraduate *Lato Sensu* programmes provide theoretical and practical knowledge to prepare, qualify and improve professionals for the labour market (with a duration of at least 360 hours),¹ which award a certificate rather than an academic degree. They comprise specialisation and MBA programmes. The *Stricto Sensu* postgraduate programmes give graduates the title of master or doctor in a certain area of knowledge (the typical duration of

¹ See <http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/content/article?id=13072:qual-a-diferenca-entre-pos-graduacao-lato-sensu-e-stricto-sensu> (in Portuguese)

Master programmes is between one and half and two years, and PhDs between three and four years).

It should be emphasised that in relation to financial revenue, the undergraduate programmes at UNIT are, by far, the most significant elements of its educational activity. Taking as a reference the year 2017, undergraduate programmes (including distance learning - EAD) contributed 95% of UNIT's net revenues (9% from EAD alone). The *Lato* and *Stricto Sensu* programmes accounted for only 2% of the net revenue of the UNIT (General Report Document - GRD, p. 100).

During the last three-year period (2016-2018), UNIT's enrolment slightly declined. This is in accordance with the enrolment patterns in the state of Sergipe. This decline is being offset by growth in distance learning.

Brazilian regulations on higher education require that the University offers at least 4 *Stricto Sensu* programmes, one-third of the academic staff having academic qualifications, and one-third must work full-time. The UNIT has a total of 740 teachers, of whom 26.5% have the qualification of "Doctor", 23% of "Specialist" and 50.5% of "Master". Out of the 740 teachers, 255 (35.3%) are full-time professors (GRD, p. 82).

The undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Brazil are assessed through external bodies. Undergraduate programmes are evaluated by a national institution affiliated to the Ministry of Education (INEP), which discloses performance indicators on the results obtained by students in the mandatory national exams for undergraduate studies (grouped according to areas), and also on faculty, infrastructure, didactic-pedagogical resources and other inputs. In addition, another indicator (the General Index of Programmes – IGC) assesses the quality of the higher education institutions. In 2016 the IGC placed UNIT as the 2nd best private university in the Northeast Region, and as the 28th best private university in Brazil out of 89 universities (GRD, p. 53). These indicators are computed annually.

Postgraduate *Stricto Sensu* programmes are closely assessed through CAPES - the Foundation for the Improvement of Higher Education (in Portuguese *Fundação para a Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior*) which is affiliated to the Ministry of Education and responsible for the expansion and consolidation of Master and doctoral degrees in all Brazilian states.

All universities, both public and private, must periodically (every four years) undertake a process of re-accreditation of their *Stricto Sensu* programmes. The results are made public through grades ranging from 1 to 7, grades 1 and 2 implying disqualification of the programme, grades between 3 to 5 (the maximum grade for Master programmes) are, respectively, "fair", "good" and "very good", while grades of 6 and 7 express "excellence" at the international level and can only be attributed to programmes that include a doctorate. Four *Stricto Sensu* programmes currently offered by UNIT are graded 5.

An important part of the research developed at UNIT is related to its *Stricto Sensu* programmes. In fact, the UNIT seeks to consolidate a policy of scientific research by creating strong links between teaching and industry/services of the region. Another important element for the UNIT's research is the Institute of Technology and Research (ITP), created in 1998 by the Tiradentes Group. This institute plays a very important role in the articulation of the research carried out by the academic staff of UNIT with external institutions (public and private), as well as in the funding of scholarships and fundraising in general.

Beyond teaching and research, the UNIT sees itself as an important partner for the regional (and state) development and takes social extension seriously. The university is visibly committed to social development and plays an important role in this field in the state of Sergipe, offering free services to the needy population, such as health services (clinical psychology, dentistry, neonatal clinic, biomedicine laboratory), basic education, and legal assistance. Undoubtedly, the UNIT has an excellent reputation among representatives of municipal and state bodies, as well as in civil society, and it is recognised as an important element for regional and state development.

It should also be mentioned that the founder and current Rector, Jouberto Uchôa, has a great personal prestige in the local and state community, thus contributing to the UNIT's high reputation and brand awareness at the local and regional levels.

The Rector and the senior management of the institution show a strong aspiration for the UNIT to become the best private university in the Northeast Region of Brazil, while maintaining great concern for serving society, in particular poorer communities. They also hope to spread higher education all over the of State of Sergipe, reaching out to communities that experience difficulties in accessing formal education. In addition, they see the internationalisation of the UNIT as a new challenge which, if successful, would bring great benefits to the region.

Today, the Tiradentes Group (the holding company) includes the UNIT located in the state of Sergipe, the Tiradentes University Centre (located in Maceió, capital of the state of Alagoas) and the Faculdade Integrada de Pernambuco – FACIPE (located in Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco), as well as distance learning units in various cities of the states of Sergipe, such as Alagoas, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Norte.

1.3 The evaluation process

This IEP evaluation started with the UNIT's self-evaluation exercise which was performed between October 2017 and January 2018 by a group of eight members, chaired by Professor Adailton Barroso da Silva, and coordinated by an external consultant, Professor José Fernandes Lima. The group also included an academic staff member, an institutional member of the Tiradentes Group, UNIT's quality manager, the UNIT's pedagogical assistant, a UNIT teacher of languages, and a student member of the Evaluation Commission of the UNIT (CPA).

According to the SER (p. 1), in order to prepare the report, the self-evaluation group analysed the strategic Institutional Development Plan (PDI), as well as data concerning the external and internal evaluations carried out by the Ministry of Education and the Evaluation Commission of the UNIT, respectively. The group met with the members of this commission, as well as with various academic offices and managers responsible for the institutional goals included in the PDI.

The SER was given to the evaluation team (hereinafter referred to as the Team) on 15 March 2018. It describes the UNIT's government, processes and priorities, providing material to brief the Team and to enable it to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the development, current situation and aspirations of the UNIT. However, the SER tends to be more descriptive than analytical, not always reflecting critically, nor explicitly addressing the UNIT's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The first visit to the Campus Aracaju (Farolândia) of the UNIT took place on 16-17 April 2018. Following this visit, on June 4 the UNIT provided the evaluation team with a substantial set of additional data and information included in the General Report Document (GRD), and was a valuable contribution to support the assessments, judgments and recommendations of the institutional evaluation. The second visit took place on 10-12 September 2018.

During the two visits and through very informative meetings, the Team had the opportunity to openly discuss the situation of the UNIT with many players and stakeholders. The Team enjoyed meeting the staff of UNIT, who were open and friendly.

The evaluation team was composed of:

- Tatjana Volkova, member of the of Higher Education Council of Latvia, Head of the Licensing and Accreditation Commission, former Rector of the BA School of Business and Finance, Riga, Latvia, Team Chair
- Simona Lache, Vice-Rector for University Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- Nina Waaler, Vice-Rector for Education, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
- Matthew Kitching, student at Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University, Scotland, UK
- José Sarsfield Cabral, member of the Board of the A3ES agency, former Pro-Rector of the University of Porto, Portugal, Team Coordinator

The Team thanks the Rector Jouberto Uchôa, the Vice-Rector Amélia Cerqueira Uchôa, and other members of the Uchôa family, for the warm welcome and generous hospitality, as well as for the helpful and open discussions. Our special thanks go to Professor José Fernandes Lima, coordinator of the self-evaluation team and UNIT's liaison person, who prepared and organised all the meetings during the two visits perfectly, and promptly assisted the Team in all its requests. The Team also wishes to thank those who provided services, in particular, our interpreters and those who prepared and delivered an excellent catering service.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Mission, vision and strategy

In its Institutional Development Plan 2018-2022 (PDI 2018-22) the UNIT explains its mission through a holistic statement: to "inspire people to broaden their horizons through teaching, research and extension, with ethics and commitment to social development" (SER p. 23).

Based on its mission, values and principles, on page 7 of the SER the following sentence expresses the vision for the future of UNIT: "to be recognized as the best private educational institution in the Northeast Region of Brazil". In GRD (p. 7), the UNIT clarifies this vision to "maintain leadership among private institutions in the State of Sergipe, expanding participation in the market by recognizing the quality and excellence of our educational services, following the Ministry of Education quality indicators". Although it includes a specific message, the vision statement focuses exclusively on the role of the UNIT in the region. *The UNIT should ensure that both vision and mission capture its international ambitions.*

The values and principles of the UNIT are established in the PDI 2018-22 (pp. 15-16): "Human being valuing, Ethics, Humbleness, Innovation, Cooperation and social responsibility". The principles are expressed through the following nine guidelines: "University autonomy; Promotion of the inseparability between teaching, research and extension; Participatory and efficient management; Plurality of ideas; Commitment to the quality of the educational offer; Constant interaction with the community; Regional, national and international insertion; Respect for diversity and human rights; Action directed towards sustainable development".

These values (and the related principles) are not explicitly mentioned in the SER, and neither are they expressed on the university web page, nor in UNIT's outreach brochures and documents. According to the Team's view, *values and principles need to be better communicated and articulated in order to be incorporated by UNIT's academic and administrative staff in their daily work, and well understood by external stakeholders.*

The SER (pp. 7-8) depicts the institutional goals of UNIT that were in place during the self-assessment process: (1) to "prepare and train professionals and specialists at a higher education level"; (2) to "promote the creation and spreading of knowledge and culture across different fields of study"; and (3) to "participate in the socio-economic development of the Country and mainly in the State of Sergipe and the Northeast Region".

It is timely that the new Institutional Development Plan 2018-2022 establishes 12 strategic objectives, and, for each one, specific targets and actions. Hence, the PDI 2018-22 essentially answers the first key question of the IEP evaluation methodology – "what the institution is trying to do". Nevertheless, some of the institutional objectives expressed are too simplistic and task-orientated.

It should be noted that, during the meetings, the Team generally had the impression that UNIT's academic and administrative staff are aware of the goals set out in the strategic plan and aim to achieve them.

2.2 Governance and decision making

The SER (p. 8) describes the two “general management” bodies of the organisational decision-making structure of UNIT: the Board of Directors (CONSAD) and the Higher Council for Teaching, Research and Extension (CONSEPE).

According to UNIT'S bylaws,² the CONSAD is the maximum normative, deliberative and advisory body for administrative and university policy matters. The rector convenes and presides over meetings of the CONSAD, which includes the vice rector, the five pro-rectors (Pro-Rector of Undergraduate Programmes, Pro-Rector of Distance Under-graduation, Pro-Rector of Post-graduation and Research, Pro-Rector of Extension, and Pro-Rector of Administration and Finance), as well as representatives of the holding company.

On the other hand, the CONSEPE is the maximum normative, deliberative and advisory body in matters of teaching, research and extension. This council approves study programmes, research and scientific initiation projects, as well as extension programmes. The CONSEPE has around 20 members including the rector, the vice rector and the pro-rectors, as well as representatives of the holding company, a student, and academic and administrative staff. The CONSEPE's decisions can be appealed to the CONSAD.

The SER (p. 8) also states that “the executive body of the general management is composed of the Rectory and assisted by the Pro-Rectorates”. The head of the Rectory is the rector who is assisted by the vice rector and who replaces the rector in his absences or other impediments.

In the organisational chart,³ the next level corresponds to the top of the pillars of the organisational structure of the UNIT: “Administration and Finance”, “Undergraduate Programmes” (on-campus studies and distance learning), “Post-graduation and Research”, “Extension”, and, according to the English version of the chart, “External Relations”. Other bodies have a cross-sectional nature throughout the whole of university, providing services to all the afore-mentioned pillars (e.g. library, publications office, laboratories).

It should be emphasised that the organisational chart misrepresents the actual structure of the UNIT. This is particularly evident when looking at "External Relations," which does not make clear how the International Office actually operates and on whom it depends. In addition, the terminology used in English is not consistent nor in-line with international practice. This comment also applies to much of the oral and written communication in English that is used at the university. *The UNIT should reconsider the 'External Relations' element of*

² See <https://portal.unit.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Regimento-da-Unit-SE.pdf> (in Portuguese)

³ See <https://portal.unit.br/institucional/organograma/>

its organisational chart to reflect the manner in which it actually operates. In addition, it should ensure consistent usage of terminology internally and externally, particularly when interacting with international stakeholders.

Given the transverse and comprehensive nature of internationalisation, *the UNIT may consider that the respective policy should be defined at the Tiradentes Group level and be operationalised through the provision of shared services across the group*, assuring the effective planning and coordination of all international activities related to staff development, programmes, mobility, research and extension, and partnerships. To this end, *the Team recommends that the UNIT review the role of the International Office.*

According to the SER (p. 8), the "local management" is carried out by three groupings, namely Programme Collegiate, Programme Coordination and Nucleus of Teaching (NDE). The UNIT's bylaws shed light on this issue.

Articles 72 and 74 of Section I stipulate that each undergraduate course is administered by a programme collegiate, which includes the coordinator of the programme, three teachers and a representative of the students. Among other duties, the programme collegiate plans on an annual basis the provision of human resources, materials and equipment, and also approves improvements to teaching methodologies and courses' syllabuses.

The programme coordinator is appointed by the rector, while the three teachers are proposed by the programme coordinator and appointed by the respective pro-rector. Both the programme collegiate and the coordinator report to the pro-rector.

On the other hand, the Nucleus of Teaching (NDE) is composed of a group of five highly qualified full-time or part-time teachers, and takes part in the process of conception, consolidation and continuous updating of the "Pedagogical Project" of the study programme. The GRD (p. 80) states that the NDE has an advisory nature and evaluates the "Teaching and Learning Plan" of the respective study programme. It is unclear to what extent this academic management structure also applies to postgraduate and *Stricto Sensu* programmes.

The structure of the "local management" briefly described above, and the analysis of the organisation chart, raise doubts about the adequacy of the current organisational model and the decision-making process on academic issues.

According to the SER (p. 9), the UNIT undergraduate studies can be positioned in three scientific areas: Humanities and Social Sciences, Mathematical Sciences and Earth Sciences, and Biological and Health Sciences.⁴ It is worth noting that three strategic objectives of the PDI 2018-22 mention explicitly the need to reinforce the education offer by expanding the portfolio of programmes in the areas of Health, Engineering and Technology, and Human Rights (GRD pp. 8-9, objectives 1, 3 and 5).

⁴ In the GRD the names of the scientific areas are referred to in slightly different ways: Human and Social Applied Sciences; Exact Sciences and Technology; Biological and Health Sciences.

However, it is not clear how the organisational/functional structures relate to (or care for) those scientific areas (or sub-areas). The emphasis on the academic governance structure is weighted towards study programmes. Given their number (between 43 and 48 undergraduate programmes) together with the corresponding management bodies (programme coordinator, collegiate and NDE), the governance dispersion of academic structures weakens the ability to have a more focused view on a specific academic area of studies. This can impair the efficient use, planning and management of human resources (as well as facilities, laboratories, etc.) and contributes to undermining the critical mass and capacity required for a scientific area to develop at a significant rate.

It would be advantageous for the UNIT to have a more aggregated and focused academic organisational/functional structure, by forming groups around academic areas (for instance, creating "schools", "faculties" or "departments"). Accordingly, each area could have a transverse coordination, its own budget, and resources.

Taking into account what has been said, *the Team recommends that the UNIT consider changing the governance model, introducing a more coherent and suitable structure, bringing together more easily the academic staff, administrative staff, and other resources, according to the needs, perspectives and prospects of the respective scientific area.* This type of structure could deal more efficiently and effectively with the current size and complexity of the UNIT, ensuring that future strategic objectives would be achieved.

Although it has not reached the necessary level, the UNIT already practices an academic organisational/functional structure based on some scientific areas. For example, the Health Sciences area has already adopted a structure of this type, with a coordinator and a vice-coordinator, and integrating undergraduate, *Lato Sensu* and postgraduate programmes. Through interviews, the Team learnt that, in general, the academic staff in Health Sciences consider this model beneficial. The Team was also told that, in some cases, more than one programme shares the same coordinator and NDE, basically depending on the number of students enrolled.

Even though students participate in relevant decision-making bodies (e.g. CONSEPE, Programme Collegiate), the number involved is limited. *The team encourages the UNIT to strengthen student participation in decision-making bodies*, believing that this not only will contribute to improving the decision-making processes, but also to creating and enhancing students' sense of belonging to their university. Additionally, *the Team suggests that the UNIT promote the establishment of a Student Council* as a way to empower students and to encourage their participation in the UNIT life.

Apart from the representatives of the holding company (*Sociedade de Educação Tiradentes Ltda*) and a representative of the civil society in the Evaluation Commission (CPA), the SER does not refer to other external participants in governance or advisory bodies. This means that a limited number of external stakeholders actually participate in the decision-making processes of the UNIT. However, during the meeting with representatives of external

stakeholders it was unanimously stated that, if there was an advisory board (or a similar body) in place, they were prepared to meet at the UNIT twice a year. This availability may be used so that the UNIT can better define its strategic directions and better support its main decisions and overall development. *The UNIT should consider setting up an Advisory Board and to include international members in it so as to support the University in fostering internationalisation.*

Likewise, the meeting with alumni revealed not only that UNIT's former students remain closely connected to their *alma mater*, but also that they are willing to participate actively in initiatives for the promotion and enhancement of UNIT's practices. *The Team recommends that the UNIT support the institution of an Alumni Association*, which, among other activities, would establish a formal communication link with the UNIT, reinforcing its relations with external institutions and companies. The participants in the meeting were extremely receptive to this idea.

3. Quality culture

According to Brazilian law, each higher education institution must have an Evaluation Commission (CPA) to coordinate and articulate the internal assessment processes and to provide information for functional and educational enhancement. These committees must include representatives of all segments of the university community and society.

In 2017, the CPA of the UNIT had 18 effective members, including the chair (a senior member of the academic staff), seven student representatives, five academic staff representatives, four administrative staff representatives, and a representative of an external organisation.⁵ The UNIT's CPA is responsible for enhancing academic and administrative performance in the current structure, and ensuring the quality of teaching, research and extension.

As stated in the SER (p. 19), UNIT “develops a Continuous Institutional Evaluation Program, based on the following evaluative axes: Institutional Planning and Evaluation, Institutional Development, Academic Policies, Management, and Infrastructure”. The SER continues that all administrative and academic processes are mapped together with the respective performance indicators, and the activities are regularly monitored in monthly strategic follow-up meetings to assess “indicators and current projects, identify difficulties, identify any project implementation problems, take steps to eliminate obstacles and define goals” (SER, pp. 19-20).

In practice, the UNIT's quality assurance system is basically organised and prepared to help the institution to comply with the requirements of the external evaluations established by the National System of Higher Education Evaluation. Accordingly, the UNIT plans and monitors its academic activities following the quality criteria set by the Ministry of Education in the Curricular Guidelines of Undergraduate Programs (SER, p. 7) and also by CAPES for the *Stricto Sensu* programmes. Nevertheless, the SER states that, in order to perform its internal assessment, the UNIT also takes as reference the “internal parameters defined by the Continuous Institutional Evaluation Program, which is under the responsibility of the Self-Evaluation Committee” (SER p. 20).

The Team was told that the UNIT's CPA conducts internal evaluations since 2004. The study programmes are assessed each semester through an internal evaluation system. Students evaluate teachers and the coordinator of the programme through questionnaires. Likewise, academic staff also evaluate the coordinator and vice-versa. The system comprises a questionnaire supported by an IT application that students use in classes, grading the content of the class and the pedagogical performance of the teacher, aimed at improving the quality of teaching and even the syllabus of each course.

In addition, at the end of each semester the UNIT conducts a survey (the Team was told that around 9000 students participate), which includes the assessment of various dimensions of

⁵ See <https://portal.unit.br/institucional/cpa/>

academic management and programme support services. It should be noted that UNIT has implemented an information system, “Magister”, that allows teachers and students to communicate and to exchange data with the administrative and teaching/learning bodies, as well as with the services of the institution.

According to the GRD (pp. 54-57), the data collected during the self-assessment conducted by CPA between November and December 2017 showed an average level of overall satisfaction of 3.67 (on a scale of 1 to 5) by students who are physically present (face-to-face) and of 3.92 for the distance learning (EAD) students. The four quality dimensions (or axes) evaluated by students received a satisfaction average value greater than 3.62. The alumni employability rate, as well as satisfaction with the quality of the training offered by UNIT, were also evaluated. Of the 2 349 trainees who participated in the survey, 85% answered that they were satisfied or very satisfied.

The results of the evaluations, including teaching performance, and the quality of the academic management and support services, are disclosed internally and externally. On a semester basis, data is updated and made available to academic staff and students on the UNIT's website.⁶

The data is analysed by UNIT's managers and programme coordinators, and by the CPA itself, which proposes actions to improve the quality of the services provided by the institution. Despite this, and although a great deal of data is available, its use for quality assurance beyond teaching does not seem to be commonplace. Additionally, the team learned through the meetings that formally documented remits for the different committees of the UNIT are limited as is the flow of information across decision-making bodies. Accordingly, *the Team recommends that the UNIT establish procedures to formalise the communication flow and the recording of relevant information across Teaching Nucleus, collegiate, CONSEPE, CONSAD, etc.*

Although the CPA is not formally an executive body, but rather a follow-up and coordination group, *the Team recommends that its role should be strengthened in order to be implemented an overarching quality system and, particularly, to assure that the self-assessment has consequences in all areas and at all levels of the UNIT.*

The need to improve the very high dropout rates (see page 24 of this report for further details) is an example of the potential benefit that could result from increasing the CPA's intervention capacity. In fact, the reduction of dropout rates requires not only a centralised approach, but also the coordination of actions among the various management bodies of the UNIT, supported by an empowered entity with a holistic vision of the UNIT. For that reason, *the Team recommends that, based on a management body such as the CPA, the UNIT focus centrally on addressing the dropout rate problem.*

It is clear that the UNIT has already implemented some elements of a comprehensive quality system, but currently the main focus is compliance and how its academic activities respond to

⁶ See <https://portal.unit.br/institucional/cpa/>

the external requirements and assessments. Although there are several quality assurance processes in place, they should be extended, with the same rigour, to all other areas and activities, be formalised, documented and coordinated in an internal institution-wide and consistent quality management system, including policy, methodologies and tools. In other words, *the Team encourages the UNIT to evolve towards a more systemic approach to assure and improve quality*. However, all things considered, it can be stated that a quality culture is already under development at the UNIT.

4. Internationalisation

The UNIT identified “the process of internationalization as a preponderant factor in the development of teaching and research”, and, in addition, that “it is necessary to provide students, professors and administrative technicians with training that considers the diverse cultural and social realities of today's world” (SER, p. 14). Moreover, the intensification of the internationalisation process of Tiradentes University corresponds to the strategic objective number 10 of the PDI 2018-22: “to intensify the internationalization process of Tiradentes University” (GRD p. 10).

Stated in this way, the aims and objectives of internationalisation are rather vague. But the two goals established in the PDI 2018-22 shed more light on the subject: “to expand and diversify by 30% the number of international partnerships” and “to implement two new programs to promote the internationalization of teachers and students between 2017 and 2018”. Three strategic actions are associated with these goals: (1) to “implement a program to attract foreign students”, (2) to set “adequate signage of campuses for internationalization” and, “to expand the number of language studies scholarships for collaborators” (GRD p. 10).

In addition, in the section dedicated to policies for graduate and postgraduate education, extension and research, the Institutional Development Plan 2018-22 defines a set of 11 internationalisation guidelines covering a much larger spectrum of activities,⁷ such as the insertion of the UNIT into foreign collaboration networks, the promotion of student mobility at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and the promotion of initiatives to increase joint research with foreign universities.

Undoubtedly, the UNIT’s top management wishes to internationalise the university. The university signing up to the Institutional Evaluation Programme of EUA with a special focus on internationalisation is strong evidence that the goal is taken seriously. Despite this, and although the theme of internationalisation is a transversal issue, the leading role apparently belongs to the International Office.

It is recommended that the UNIT develop an overarching internationalisation policy and implement the respective planned activities (crossing study programmes, staff development, mobility opportunities for students and staff, research collaboration, etc.) with specific objectives, associated targets and key performance indicators. But as mentioned earlier on page 10, the location of the International Office in the organisational structure of the UNIT and the way it operates, does not seem to be the best to accomplish these tasks.

Additionally, in the Team’s view not only the prominence given to internationalisation in the governance structure is insufficient, but *a shift of culture around internationalisation at the*

⁷ See *Plano de Desenvolvimento Institucional 2018-2022*, pp. 94-95
(<https://portal.unit.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PDI.pdf>, in Portuguese)

Tiradentes Group level should take place, based on a better awareness of its complexity and interdisciplinary nature.

The UNIT wants to follow two paths simultaneously: to reinforce academic cooperation and mobility (“incoming” and “outgoing” for students and staff), and to intensify relations with foreign research and development institutions. Despite this, the interviews showed that there is some uncertainty about the priority actions that Tiradentes University should follow in order to succeed in internationalisation.

The UNIT has established a reasonable number of agreements with foreign universities for mobility of students, but *a more strategic approach for developing and monitoring international partnerships should be introduced, focusing on effective mechanisms for attracting international students, specifying from which countries they will come and for which study programmes.* Indeed, it seems clear that mobility is still at a preliminary stage and it will be necessary to refine the ideas on how to attract international students.

It is very difficult for most of the UNIT’s students to go abroad, not only for economic reasons, but also due to language barriers. In fact, not many of UNIT’s students are fluent in foreign languages (English or French, for instance). Participants in the meetings recognised that difficulties with foreign languages are a major limitation for internationalisation based on students’ mobility. Nevertheless, “outgoing” mobility has started to increase, but is still incipient with regard to the number of students enrolled at the UNIT.

Regarding “incoming” mobility of undergraduate students, the results are still very poor. It is difficult to foster “incoming” mobility from countries where Portuguese or Spanish are not native languages (Portuguese and Spanish speakers understand each other more or less). Most of the UNIT’s staff (both academic and administrative) do not speak English, nor, in general, do the inhabitants of the city. It will take a great deal of effort at various levels to prepare the university and the city of Aracaju to host foreigners who do not speak Portuguese or Spanish.

However, some measures have already been taken to overcome existing barriers. For example, the UNIT introduced incentives for teachers to learn foreign languages, and the Language Centre launched courses (e.g. English and Spanish) to prepare students and staff for mobility. *The Team recommends to strengthen the role of the Language Centre in supporting foreign languages proficiency amongst students and staff.*

Immediate measures could also be implemented. *The Team suggests that a welcome handbook for incoming students and staff should be made available, documenting a set of useful indications and relevant support services provided by the UNIT and by the city of Aracaju. A similar document should be prepared for “outgoing” mobility, although this may need to be tailored according to the destination. Even though much of the content of the UNIT website is already translated into foreign languages, it is also recommended that the UNIT expand the volume of foreign language content on the website.*

Additionally, *the Team suggests that the UNIT integrate English language topics into curricula (e.g. content, bibliographies, case studies, etc.), ensuring its internationalisation. On the other hand, the UNIT could consider to develop subjects/courses taught in English as a part of study programmes - for the time being this is still a very limited number. It is also suggested the integration of the study of foreign languages as a part of study programmes.*

It should also be stressed that the UNIT benefits in terms of funding from federal and state agencies in order to promote the internationalisation of its graduate programmes and research. With the help of the "Sandwich Doctorate Scholarship Program" promoted by CAPES, via which doctoral students spend one year in a foreign university to prepare their theses, "the Tiradentes University annually selects and sends between 6-12 doctorate students to attend part of the course in foreign higher education partners of the University" (GRD, p. 88).

Likewise, and again within the scope of graduate programmes, through the "Foreign Student Scholarship Program", approved in 2017, the UNIT grants scholarships to foreign doctoral students. Unfortunately, state and national contributions for mobility have been severely reduced in recent years, as was the case of the federal government mobility programme "Science Without Borders".

Participants in the meetings suggested the possibility of launching summer courses or research topics focused on special subjects for which the UNIT and the region have special conditions or expertise (e.g. "sea", or "oil engineering"). *The Team recommends that the UNIT consider the possibility of launching "summer/winter courses" as a starting point. The Team also proposes that the UNIT encourage foreign students to participate in internships in some of its excellent extension programmes.* This could be a strong argument in favour of the "incoming mobility".

Top managers at the UNIT believe that research can be an effective way of stimulating internationalisation. The University intends to increase both scientific production and international collaboration in order to enhance the CAPES scores of its *Stricto Sensu* programmes. To this end, the "Visiting Professor Program" (promoted by the UNIT or occasionally by external entities) seeks "to insert UNIT teaching staff in foreign universities for long-term missions (6 to 12 months)" (DRG, page 88). *This program is a good initiative and it is recommended to be pursued and, if possible, intensified.*

Besides that, and as a means of improving international exchange, *the Team recommends that the UNIT promote more sabbatical periods abroad, as well as the organisation of "joint" or "dual" programmes with foreign universities.*

According to the additional information released by the General Report Document (GRD, page 88), the UNIT "aims to attract visiting foreign professors to undertake scientific and teaching missions at the University" through the "Academic Cooperation Program". This programme promotes annually between 5 and 10 missions of foreign teachers. *It is recommended that the UNIT uses this promising programme to increase the number and*

relevance of visiting foreign professors by reinforcing internal grants and promoting its announcement on international social media sites.

As regards the participation in international scientific projects, the role of the Institute of Technology and Research (ITP) has a special relevance. ITP is “a non-profit entity, created in 1998 by the Tiradentes Group in response to demands for an appropriate structure in order to enable the development of Science, Technology and Innovation in the state of Sergipe” (GRD, p. 90). It should be emphasised that 90% of the 55 researchers of ITP are also academic staff at the UNIT.

The ITP has several partnerships with research institutions and universities abroad, as well as with foreign companies, “enabling scientific activities to be carried out and the mobility of researchers and technicians” (GRD, p. 91). The Team was told that about 50% of the UNIT’s researchers working for ITP have already taken advantage of overseas mobility schemes. Undoubtedly, ITP’s role in the internationalisation of the university is already very important, but synergies between ITP and the UNIT could be even better exploited in the future.

In May 2015 the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) and the UNIT agreed to set up an office at UMass Boston with, among others, the following shared objectives: to “promote joint research initiatives among professors, students and staff” (GRD, p. 95). With regard to the activity of this Boston Office and according to the GRD (p. 97), “for the time being, a task force was set up led by the international relations offices of both institutions to create programs that encourage scientific and institutional collaboration and the establishment of student mobility programs”.

The Boston office was inaugurated in December 2017. The task force set up by the international relations offices of both institutions specified that Education, Health, Engineering (focusing on environmental issues) and Business, should be the initial areas of its activity. The task force also defined that the programmes to be carried out in 2018 should be “built on four pillars: professor integration, student mobility, research development and institutional collaboration” (GRD, pp. 96-97).

During the meetings with the Team, participants expressed their high expectations about the role that the Boston office can play in increasing the mobility of researchers and in the development of research projects with higher education institutions in the United States. This indeed seems to be a very promising project, with very interesting initiatives already being set up to be implemented in 2018, as well as over the next two years.

The Boston Office is managed by the head of the International Office of the UNIT. However, in line with what was stated on page 10, the International Office is not in the best position within the UNIT’s management and decision-making structure to conduct effectively and efficiently the highly embedded processes required for international activities, namely those envisaged by the Boston Office, which need to penetrate all strands of the UNIT. For instance, the extent of autonomy of the UMass Boston Office is unclear, which may produce some limitations to the sustainability and growth of its activity. Under these circumstances, *the*

Team suggests that within the context of the review of the role of the International Office recommended before (see page 10), its relations with the Boston Office should also be considered.

5. Teaching and learning

In 2018, about 64% of the 31 769 students of UNIT were enrolled in undergraduate study programmes (GRD, p. 37). Distance learning programmes (EAD) accounts for nearly 32% of the total enrolments at the UNIT. This means that in-class programmes and EAD undergraduate programmes account for around 95% of all the UNIT's enrolments. *Lato Sensu* programmes (in-class and EAD) represent only approximately 4% of students enrolled, and *Stricto Sensu* (Master and PhD) merely about 1%. Thus, the total weight of programmes that assign the degree of Master and Doctorate is very low.

With the exception of Law, Nursing, Medicine, Dentistry and Psychology programmes, "Tiradentes University is accredited to offer both in-class graduate programmes and *Lato Sensu* distance programmes without the need for prior authorization. For *Stricto Sensu* programs (masters and doctorates), authorization from the Ministry of Education (MEC) is required prior to the [sic] its offer" (GRD, p. 78).

The CONSEPE establishes policies, guidelines and targets, as well as standards, for the creation of new programmes (GRD, p. 78). Acceptance of proposals for new programmes depends on the fulfilment of a set of criteria, which includes the relevance and feasibility of the project, the existence of internal resources (academic staff, infrastructure, equipment, etc.), its economic viability and compliance with national legislation and regulations (GRD, page 78). It should be noted that the Brazilian "National Curricular Guidelines" defines, for the various study/scientific areas, the qualifications and competences that the study programmes must provide.

The Team was informed that, currently, the Pro-Rectors (Undergraduate Programmes, Distance Under-graduation, Post-graduation and Research) are responsible for making proposals for new programmes based on demand surveys and market studies. The proposals are directed to the Rectory and approved and updated by the CONSEPE. The Pro-Rectors are also responsible for the respective teaching methods, qualification and training of the academic staff required for the respective programmes.

According the organisational chart of the UNIT, both Pro-Rectors of Undergraduate Programmes and of Distance Under-graduation, head the following functional entities: "Course Management", "Pedagogic Nucleus", and "NAPPS" (Nucleus for Psychological and Psychosocial Support). The Pro-rectory of Post-Graduation, Research and Extension is also the head of the "Scientific Committee", the "Ethic Committee" and the "Ethic Committee for Animal Use".

The SER (p. 16) states that "the didactic-pedagogical proposition of Tiradentes University involves monitoring and evaluating the planning and execution of academic practices to make the educational proposal of the Institution more effective". Although the study programmes are regularly reviewed, it is unclear how the UNIT benefits from formal feedback of some relevant external stakeholders. In fact, the procedures in place as to how the UNIT takes care

of external stakeholders' information, and how it uses it to inform curricula development and to improve teaching and learning processes do not seem to be sufficiently robust.

As discussed previously in this report (see page 12) an Alumni Association could be very helpful in capturing alumni opinions about their educational experience and skills acquisition. *Besides that, the Team recommends that employers be recurrently questioned and have more active participation in determining the adequacy of programmes, analysis of future trends and changing needs of society. Additionally, the UNIT should reinforce formal relations with employers and other external stakeholders, incorporating links with them into curricula in order to enrich students' learning experience (e.g., internships, study visits, projects).*

The SER also states (p. 18) that the UNIT implements "active teaching and learning methodologies". However, the SER is rather laconic about the teaching and learning methodologies practised at the UNIT whereas the General Report Document (GDR) includes more information about the topic. Referring to undergraduate programmes, it states that each course must have the respective "Teaching and Learning Plan", which is prepared by the teacher responsible for the disciplines of that specific area of knowledge (GDR, p. 80). The Teaching and Learning Plan should be written following a template including the topics "Summary", "Objectives", "Skills", "Content", "Methodological Procedure", "Evaluation Procedure", and "Basic and Complementary Bibliography" (GDR, p. 81). According to the samples provided by the GRD (pp. 19-30), students' expected workload in hours is also specified.

This plan should be approved by the Nucleus of Teaching (NDE). Once approved, the plan is "incorporated into the pedagogical project of the course, registered through the Magister system and, at the beginning of each semester, presented and discussed with the students" (GDR, p. 80). Finally, a "Course Plan" is issued specifying the contents and teaching strategies of each class, its objectives and extra class activities (GRD, pp-80-81). It must be stressed that the distance learning model is hybrid, using face-to-face and online education, since the UNIT believes that distance learning (EAD) requires a physical link with the institution.

According to the Teaching and Learning Plan template, courses should make explicit their intended learning outcomes. Yet, the team identified that there is a lack of shared understanding of the "learning outcomes" methodology, in particular on how to write and assess learning outcomes. Accordingly, *the Team encourages the UNIT to increase its efforts to ensure the systematic use and application of the "learning outcomes" approach (and the assessment methods directly linked to it).*

A paper published in the *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*,⁸ describes a project of the UNIT for the design, implementation, and assessment of courses based on the competency-based learning approach. Among other encouraging aspects of this practice, the authors of the paper highlight "as a positive point of the competence-based approach used by the University Tiradentes the joint planning of teachers before the beginning of each academic year". In fact,

⁸ See <http://www.tuningjournal.org/rt/prINTERfriendly/96/1271>

each semester, the UNIT organises “Pedagogical Days”, in which the academic staff discuss teaching methodologies and plan the teaching work. It should be noted that the average teaching load is substantial, about 20 hours per week.

Additionally, through interviews the Team learned that the UNIT has developed a competency-based approach for curriculum design, and also that part of the UNIT academic staff have been trained on the “Active Learning Methodology”, and on how to use the principles and rules of the “Student-Centred Learning” methodology in their pedagogical practice. *The Team encourages the UNIT to develop and implement an institution-wide understanding of the student-centred learning approach.*

Indeed, there are some examples of good practices on teaching/learning but these are not circulated on a systematic basis to all academic staff of the UNIT. The Team recognises the difficulty in ensuring that appropriate teaching/learning methods are practised across all the nearly 85 study programmes (of all kinds) of the UNIT by its 740 teachers, particularly when only about one-third of the UNIT's academic staff work full-time in the institution, about 34% work part-time, and the remaining 30% are paid on an hourly basis (GRD, p. 82).

As referred on pages 26-27 of this report, the Unit has in place a system for supporting the research initialisations of its undergraduate students. *The Team stimulates the UNIT to pursue its efforts to promote students' research initiation and to ensure research integration in the teaching and learning practices.*

Although the SER (p. 16) states that “the Graduation Department promotes the continuous formation of its professors, so that they are progressively updated and trained to conduct the teaching-learning process”, apart from the “Pedagogical Days” it is unclear whether there is a real plan for the pedagogical updating of the academic staff, and how and when it is implemented. *The Team recommends that the UNIT provide more opportunities for sharing good practices for pedagogy across the UNIT.*

The GRD (pp. 69-76) describes the selection procedures for academic staff recruitment. This is carried out through an open process, including curriculum analysis and a didactic examination conducted before a selection jury. The promotions to the desired category (either horizontal or vertical) are ruled by “Internal Procurement Notices”, using the criteria of seniority and merit, as well as the categories of the national regulations governing the careers of higher education academic staff.

The UNIT has a policy and defined criteria for the admission of students (SER, p. 18). In accordance with current national legislation and/or regulations issued by CONSEPE, the credits obtained from Brazilian higher education institutions, or credits obtained through student mobility in foreign institutions, as well as curricular components obtained in postgraduate courses, may be transferred. It should be noted that in six years of study students can obtain a dual undergraduate and postgraduate diploma.

Data on the results of face-to-face and EAD undergraduate study programmes are collected every semester, and added for both modalities, enabling the regular monitoring, review and improvement of study programmes, and the computation of performance indicators. In particular, the Preliminary Grading of Programmes indicator (CPC) refers to the quality of the undergraduate programmes. The SER (p. 21) states that the UNIT has a good teaching/learning performance since “the latest results have shown that 73% of all undergraduate programs obtained Grade 4” (the CPC scale ranges from 1 to 5).

The General Report Document (GRD) includes a section on dropout rates (pp. 45-51). In undergraduate face-to-face programmes these rates are very high: between 2012 and 2017, the values gathered by scientific area vary between a minimum of 56% (Biological Sciences and Health Sciences) and a maximum of 70% (Engineering). Taking into consideration distance learning programmes, the dropout rate is even higher. It should be noted that those dropout figures include the several categories of students who did not renew their enrolment in the transition between semesters: the “abandonment”, the “cancellation” and the “lockup” of the programme.

According to GRD (p. 49) the UNIT has undertaken a number of initiatives to reduce dropout rates. Those initiatives entail, typically, academic, social and financial support: a monitoring programme for students with low undergraduate academic achievement; scholarships for participation in extension activities and initiation of research; a mentoring programme; professional orientation; a centre for professional placement aimed at achieving internship or a first job; and the expansion of opportunities for access to student funding.

Apparently, these actions are producing some results, especially in face-to-face programmes. Nevertheless, the completion rate is still very low, giving room for future improvements. As stated earlier, the dropout rate is a serious problem that requires an energetic approach from the UNIT’s management bodies. *The Team recommends that the UNIT strength its initiatives for monitoring and reducing dropout rates and empower CPA in addressing and managing this problem (see page 14).*

In the central campus of Aracaju, the UNIT facilities and the Rectory building are modern and adequate. The same can be said of the Library, which offers excellent conditions. According to the SER (p. 17), students, academic and administrative staff can access the bibliographic resources (books, theses and dissertations, scientific journals, databases, etc.) through the Integrated Library System (SIB) available 24 hours per day. The UNIT also has excellent sports infrastructures and provides a regular offer of extra-curricular activities.

Candidates wishing to study at the UNIT can benefit from a governmental scheme of scholarships, aimed at increasing the possibility for young people to enrol in higher education. In addition, the SER (p. 19) states that “Tiradentes University has been constantly developing several support programs, such as a Master's and Doctoral Scholarship Program”. Page 22 the SER adds that “by granting scholarships and exemptions from tuition to students that are

unemployed leads to demand for the masters and doctorates positions in the various *Stricto Sensu* postgraduate programs”.

The General Report Document (GRD, p. 87) explains that the Master’s and Doctorate Scholarship Programme “can be seen as a strategy to obtain the student’s full dedication to the course, therefore scholarships are conceded. These scholarships are offered by CAPES (national promotion), FAPITEC (state promotion agency) and by the HEI itself. About 37% of our students are on scholarship”.

Finally, it can be stated that, in general, students are motivated, appreciate UNIT's modern facilities and benefit from an open atmosphere that stimulates critical thinking.

6. Research

The Institutional Development Plan 2018-2022 identifies research as one of the main action lines of the UNIT: "to inspire people to broaden horizons through teaching, research and extension, with ethics and commitment to social development" (SER, p. 23). The self-evaluation report (p. 11) clarifies this statement saying that "the research policy at Tiradentes University aims at consolidating a culture of scientific research linking it to teaching and extension projects", and also that "upon the achievement of its goals, Tiradentes University defined its purposes and decided to carry out research and to extend teaching and research findings to the community, through extension programs and special services" (SER pp. 7-8). The research policy is defined at the Tiradentes Group level and discussed in the Scientific Committee of the UNIT (which includes representatives of the Institute of Technology and Research).

The Pro-Rector of Post-graduation, Research and Extension is in charge of research coordination, the Scientific Committee, as well as supporting programmes for research. The Pro-Rector is also in charge of the Master and PhD programmes, the Ethics Committee and the Ethics Committee on Animal Experimentation. The Pro-Rector is headed by the CONSEPE, the Higher Council for Teaching, Research and Extension.

Having research projects and scientific production are requirements to universities so that the *Stricto Sensu* programmes may be authorised by the Ministry. In fact, the criteria used by CAPES for the evaluation of postgraduate programmes include specific indicators of scientific production, such as the number of master's dissertations and doctoral theses, participation in research projects, and the number and quality of publications (including citations and impact factor). It must also be noted that the scientific performance of the academic staff involved in the *Stricto Sensu* programmes is evaluated and classified centrally by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).⁹

The UNIT has in place a system to support research and research initiation, by means of financial grants and other stimuli to increase the scientific productivity of academic staff and students. Those programmes include scholarships (partially financed by external agencies and by the UNIT) to encourage and support the scientific initiation of undergraduate students, the scientific production of master and doctoral students, post-doctoral projects, and international doctoral programmes.

The participation of UNIT's academic staff in national projects and research networks is organised through an annual competition to obtain research funds (more than one project may be proposed). Students also participate in research projects for which they receive support. According to the SER (p. 12), "in 2017, Tiradentes University in a partnership with State of Sergipe and national development agencies, offered 148 fellowships to foster the

⁹ CNPq is an agency of the Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovations and Communications, and has as main attributions to foster scientific and technological research and encourage the formation of Brazilian researchers.

participation of undergraduate students in research and technological development projects". Students are also involved in the evaluation of those research projects.

In turn, the General Report Document (p. 84) states that 129 scholarships were granted in 2017 to undergraduate students who develop research projects through the Programme of Scientific Initiation, 87 being financed by the UNIT, 33 by the CNPq, and 9 by the state agency FAPITEC. Although the UNIT is already committed to engaging students in the early stages of research, *the Team encourages the university to strengthen the use of financial stimuli in supporting research initiation within undergraduate study programmes.*

As regards initiatives to increase scientific productivity, the Research Week of Tiradentes University (SEMPESq) deserves special mention.¹⁰ This is a scientific event held annually by the UNIT and the Institute of Technology and Research, whose purpose is to present and disseminate the results of the Scientific Initiation projects, and to promote discussions on a specific theme relevant for the regional development. The last edition of SEMPEsq counted around 3 000 participants.

In addition to the SEMPEsq, the Pro-Rector of Post-graduation, Research and Extension supports the hosting of academic events, and funds student and teacher journeys to national and international scientific events. The Pro-Rector also promotes the training and updating of the faculty of the *Stricto Sensu* programmes through mobility (up to one year), and awards scientific productivity of professors/researchers through a salary bonus. "Currently, 95% of the researchers receive the minimum bonus and about 3% reach the maximum bonus" (GRD, p. 88). The publication of books and papers is also encouraged. It should be noted that UNIT has a publisher which also includes international members on its Editorial Board and which produces the "Cadernos de Graduação" (Graduation Notebooks).

Besides those initiatives, *the Team encourages the UNIT to offer training for academic staff to ensure up-to-date understanding and skills in the use of latest research tools and methodologies.*

The Institute of Technology and Research (ITP) shares human resources and laboratories (19 different research laboratories in Sergipe and Alagoas, and three branches for provisional services) with the UNIT and plays a very important role in research and fundraising. Out of the 55 ITP researchers, 90% are academic staff of the UNIT and 34% "are on productivity scholarships by the CNPq" (GRD, p. 91)., The research priorities of ITP are aligned to a great extent with the UNIT's doctoral programmes.

The Institute is a privileged partner for establishing an interface between the UNIT and industry, as well as with researching networks, and national and international scientific and technological institutions. The main areas of the ITP activity are Energy, Environment, Biotechnology, Engineering, Education, Law, Health and Social Technologies. The ITP has a

¹⁰ See <https://portal.unit.br/blog/extensao/abertas-as-inscricoes-para-sempeSq/> and <https://portal.unit.br/pesquisa/anais-sempeSq/>

portfolio of 70 registered patents and has recently licensed one relevant pharmaceutical product that was launched on the market. Currently three other patents are under negotiation for licensing. *The Team stimulates the UNIT to explore opportunities such as those offered by ITP for building up closer relations with external stakeholders in order to strengthen scientific capacity and research informed teaching.*

The results of evaluations of UNIT's study programmes carried out by the external national agencies show that the production and scientific capacity of academic staff in some areas is increasing. In particular, CAPES scores for *Stricto Sensu* programmes (which include scientific performance criteria), show clear progress between the 2009-12 and 2013-16 assessment periods.

While progress is evident and the results listed above promising, given the small number of students enrolled in *Stricto Sensu* programmes and, consequently, the relatively small number of teachers/researchers involved, the research at the UNIT still has a limited presence. In the Team's view, the recruitment of researchers by the Institute of Technology and Research and its integration or collaboration into the UNIT's educational programmes is a sound option to increase the critical mass necessary for scientific research to produce significant results, namely in postgraduate studies.

Additionally, the partnerships and projects established by the ITP with other research institutions and with industry represent a very interesting potential, not only to define relevant research themes, but also to foster a rapid growth in the scientific capacity building of academic staff and students of the UNIT. *In the Team's view, the research expertise of the UNIT/ITP should be clearly identified to better communicate and inform external partners about the value proposition of the research carried out at the Tiradentes University.*

During the second visit, the Team learned that a newly established Innovation Centre building was under construction. This entity is intended to function as an incubator for projects for UNIT students and academic staff, as well as to host business units belonging to established firms wishing to develop innovative projects. The UNIT also intends for this Centre be a vehicle for developing closer relations with employers and for capturing opportunities for applied research. To this end, *the Team recommends that the UNIT communicates clearly the role of the Innovation Centre.*

7. Service to society

At the UNIT, "extension activities" are understood to be a way of responding to its social responsibility (SER, p. 6). In fact, "extension" comprises the temporary or permanent interventions that are performed by the UNIT for the benefit of the community beyond formal education. Indeed, the philosophy adopted by the university in its extension projects has a strong social approach, aiming to benefit vulnerable communities. According to the Rector, the UNIT intends to fill the gaps of the public services in social support with extension programmes.

The active participation of students in "extension" practices and projects, bringing them closer to and integrating them into the local community, is one of the main characteristics of the extension model adopted by the UNIT. "By doing that, the University seeks to contribute to the promotion of a more just and inclusive society" (SER, p.14).

In the Institutional Development Plan 2018-2022, objective number 11 is stated as follows: "to structure and strengthen programs, projects and extension actions for greater integration of the academic community with society" (GRD, p. 11). This objective has four goals, including to "expand and diversify extension programs by 25%". The objective is rather ambitious and reflects the strong emphasis UNIT places on its contribution to societal development which is undoubtedly one of the biggest strengths of the UNIT.

Extension at the UNIT is mainly directed to the areas of Biological Sciences and Health, Applied Sciences and Earth Sciences and Mathematics. The SER (p. 13) lists several projects in all of these areas. To give only one example, for the Biological Sciences and Health area, the following six projects are mentioned: Nursing Angels, Office of Integral Assistance to Women's Health, Dental Clinic, Babies Clinic, Psychosocial Support Unit, and Clinical School of Physiotherapy.

Among the vast number of internship programmes promoted by the university, several have a strong social vocation. There are programmes in areas as diverse as assistance to prisoners and their families, assistance to needy primary school students, and environmental protection and preservation, to name but a few. The description of these projects (GRD, pp. 58-68) illustrates the magnitude and importance of the extension programmes carried out by the UNIT.

The Team had the opportunity to visit the Education Centre, which serves more than 400 students from 1st to 5th grade of elementary school, and the Centre for Education and the Health Ninota Garcia, where physiotherapy services are provided to between 20 000 and 30 000 patients per year belonging to the local and regional community. The Team was deeply impressed by the relevance and quality of their activities.

Another dimension of service to society performed by the UNIT is knowledge transfer. Many grants awarded by the UNIT are intended for programmes devised to encourage the participation of undergraduate and graduate students in technological development projects.

Objective number 2 of the Institutional Development 2018-2022 is precisely “to structure and strengthen programs, projects and extension actions for greater integration of the academic community with society” (GRD, p. 11). In this field, the role of the Institute of Technology and Research is very important, as it provides the students and academic staff of the UNIT with several technological development projects resulting from partnerships with well-known regional, national and international companies.

Service to society is undoubtedly one of UNIT's strengths, and to which there is a strong commitment. The “extension” purpose is part of the institution's culture, being present in the discourse of top managers and staff. Students see their participation in extension projects not only as an opportunity to learn, but also as a way to contribute to society. Additionally, during the meeting with external stakeholders, the Team understood that UNIT's contribution to the improvement of the quality of life in the city and state is widely recognised.

Hence, the Team strongly encourages the UNIT to maintain its excellent level of commitment to developing services and activities responding to the current and potential future needs of society. The Team also encourages the UNIT to find a way to communicate better its service to society work to national and international partners, thus increasing the awareness of the brand and the achievements of the institution.

In summary, the UNIT should be commended not only for its important role in the region, providing a wide range of social support services (especially in the areas of education, health and culture), but also because the UNIT promotes links with local stakeholders, encouraging the participation of students in “extension” projects and in internship programmes. Finally, it can be said that, as a whole, the UNIT is proud of its activity in this area.

8. Conclusion

The evaluation team found a dynamic university which, although operating in a regional and national context that entails a number of difficulties, has developed successfully since its foundation, reaching a distinguished and recognised position in the region. Currently, the UNIT is a well-established university, having a strong leadership, highly motivated academic and administrative staff, and committed students.

The UNIT is preparing for a significant phase of further development, namely by increasing its international participation and status. This will require a clear view of future direction, hard work, and strong commitment of the entire academic and administrative community.

The Team is confident that the UNIT has the energy and capability required to address the challenges of the future, as well as to seize new opportunities. But for this to be fully achieved, in the Team's view, the recommendations discussed in this report (and summarised below) should be implemented.

8.1 Summary of recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

- Ensure that the vision and mission capture the UNIT's international ambitions.
- Articulate better values in order to be understood by staff and external stakeholders.
- Reconsider the 'External Relations' element of the UNIT's organisational chart to reflect the manner in which it actually operates.
- Ensure consistent usage of terminology internally and externally, particularly when interacting with international stakeholders.
- Consider to provide shared services for internationalisation across the group and review the role of the International Office.
- Ensure more aggregated academic governance of study programmes by grouping these around academic areas, which will likely contribute to the development of those areas and increase efficiency.
- Consider changing the governance model, introducing a more coherent and suitable structure to ensure that future strategic objectives will be achieved.
- Ensure stronger involvement of students in decision-making bodies.
- Empower students by establishing a Student Council.

- Consider the establishment of an Advisory Board, including international members, thus enhancing the UNIT's overall development and supporting it in fostering internationalisation.
- Support the establishment of an Alumni Association.

Quality culture

- Formalise and record the flow of information across UNIT's committees and decision-making bodies (e.g. teaching nucleus, collegiate, CONSEPE, CONSAD, etc.)
- Strengthen the role of CPA in order to ensure overarching quality assurance.
- Focus centrally on addressing the dropout rate problem.
- Develop a more systemic approach to internal quality assurance.

Internationalisation

- Develop an overarching internationalisation policy for the range of activities including study programmes, staff development, mobility opportunities for students and staff, research collaboration, etc., with key performance indicators associated.
- Ensure a shift of culture around internationalisation based on a better awareness of its complexity at the Group level.
- Introduce a more strategic approach for developing and monitoring international partnerships, identifying target countries, study programmes and students.
- Strengthen the role of the Language Centre in supporting foreign languages proficiency amongst students and staff.
- Document better the support arrangements for incoming and outgoing students and staff (e.g. welcome handbook).
- Expand the volume of foreign language content on the website.
- Integrate English language subjects into curricula ensuring its internationalisation (e.g. content, bibliographies, case studies etc.) and consider developing subjects/courses taught in English.
- Integrate the study of foreign languages as a part of study programmes.
- Consider the possibility of launching "summer/winter courses" as a starting point.
- Encourage international students to participate in internships and extension programmes, which could be a strong argument in favour of the "incoming mobility".

- Pursued and, if possible, intensify the “Visiting Professor Program”.
- Promote more sabbatical periods abroad as a way of improving academic staff mobility.
- Organise “joint” or “dual” study programmes with foreign universities.
- Increase the number of foreign visiting professors by providing internal grants and announcing these on international social media sites.
- Review the relationship between the International Office and the Boston Office.

Teaching and learning

- Promote the active participation of employers in updating and developing study programmes.
- Create links with external employers and other stakeholders in the curricula to enrich the student learning experience.
- Ensure systematic use and application of “learning outcomes” methodology and assessment methods that are directly linked to them.
- Develop and implement an institution-wide understanding of a student-centred learning approach.
- Ensure research integration in teaching and learning.
- Provide opportunities for sharing good practices for pedagogy across the UNIT.
- Strengthen initiatives for monitoring and reducing drop-out rates.

Research

- Reinforce use of financial stimuli in supporting research initiation within undergraduate study programmes.
- Offer training for academic staff to ensure up-to-date understanding and skills in the use of latest research tools and methodologies.
- Explore opportunities offered by ITP for building up closer relations with external stakeholders in order to strengthen scientific capacity and research informed teaching.
- Identify research expertise and used it to inform value proposition.
- Communicate clearly the role of the Innovation Centre and use it as a vehicle to develop closer relationships with employers for applied research opportunities.

Service to society

- Maintain the excellent level of commitment to developing services and activities that respond to the current and potential future needs of society.
- Find a way to communicate better the service to society work to national and international partners, thus increasing brand awareness and achievements of UNIT.