



Europe and International Department

EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION  
DOCUMENTS

**Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU)**

**JULY 2018**

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International evaluation and accreditation

EVALUATION REPORT

**Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU)**

**June 2018**



**For the Hcéres<sup>1</sup> :**

Michel Cosnard, President

**On behalf of the experts committee<sup>2</sup> :**

Cyrille van Effenterre, President of the committee

In accordance with the decree n°2014-1365, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014,

<sup>1</sup> The president of Hcéres "contresigne les rapports d'évaluation établis par les comités d'experts et signés par leur président." (Article 8, alinéa 5) — "countersigns the assessment reports made by the experts' committees and signed by their president" (article 8, alinea 5).

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation reports "sont signés par le président du comité". (Article 11, alinéa 2) — "are signed by the president of the committee" (article 11, alinea 2).

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# I. INSTITUTION IDENTITY SHEET

## General context

In 2017, Vietnam had a population of ~ 95 million inhabitants (66.4% in rural areas) spread over an area of 331,041 km<sup>2</sup>. The human development index<sup>1</sup> was 0.666 (rank: 116e / 186). The growth rate was 6.7% and the GDP per capita was \$ 2,111 (agriculture: 17%, industry: 33%, services: 40%). At the same time, the poverty rate in Vietnam has dropped from 20.7% of the population in 2010 to 9.8% in 2016<sup>2</sup>.

After a long phase of planning, the Vietnamese economy opened up to the world from 1986, with the policy of "renewal" ("Đổi Mới") which has been concretized by the integration of Vietnam to various international organizations (ASEAN in 1995, WTO in 2007). This has enabled the country to integrate the group of middle-income countries and to show a dynamic growth of more than 6% per year<sup>3</sup>. Unemployment, however, affects around 200,000 young graduates among the 1.1 million unemployed persons across the country. One of the main reasons is the discrepancy between the rather theoretical contents taught at the university and the professional skills required by the companies<sup>4</sup>.

## Higher education in Vietnam

In higher education, Vietnam has made a lot of progress. The gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education increased from 11% in 1998 to 24% in 2010 (World Bank, 2013).

Thus, the number of students has doubled since the beginning of the 2000's and now stands at 2.2 million (86% enrolled in public institutions). At the start of the 2012 academic year, there were 419 higher education institutions in Vietnam, of which 207 universities (with degrees at the undergraduate or higher level) (including 153 public and 54 private) and 212 higher schools<sup>5</sup>. Registration fees are \$ 230 to \$ 325 for public universities and \$ 500 to more than \$ 5,000 for private institutions.

In terms of training, Vietnam suffers from a lack of PhDs among its Faculties, since only 17% of them have a doctorate. Regarding the employability and needs of Vietnam at its stage of development, we may note the major importance of the Bachelor level degree, resulting from the country's acute needs for high quality technicians.

In order to address the challenges posed by infrastructure development, Faculty training and the quality of education, Vietnam has embarked on an ambitious reform aimed at empowering higher education institutions and encouraging participation of the private sector<sup>6</sup>.

This reform and the related laws<sup>6</sup> reveal an effort by Vietnam towards greater autonomy of higher education in terms of: i) financial management, ii) student recruitment, iii) setting fees (within a given range), iv) definition of training curricula.

At the same time, Vietnam wanted to significantly introduce accreditation and quality assurance processes in higher education. For example, very recently the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has set up four accreditation centres for the quality of higher education in order to carry out external evaluation and accreditation activities in accordance with the procedures laid down by the MOET. In addition to Vietnamese standards, institutions can choose European (Hcéres) or Asian (ASEAN) standards<sup>4</sup>.

An important transformation also comes from the existing dichotomy between research and training, the former being so far carried out by the Academies (Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, VAST, Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences, VAAS, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, VASS, for example), the latter being performed by the Universities<sup>3</sup>. This allows the emergence of a new category of research-oriented universities, facing the challenge of increasing the salaries of their research professors so that their entire duties (teaching and research) are carried out within their own research community and institution.

<sup>1</sup> Human Development Index (IDH) is a statistical index which takes into account standards for health, education and level of life. It has been proposed by the UN program for development (UNDP) in 1990.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank : Vietnam data.

<sup>3</sup> Les Dossiers de Campus France n° 36 - Avril 2017

<sup>4</sup> *The conversation*, Les défis de l'enseignement supérieur au Vietnam

<sup>5</sup> Sophie Cerbelle, L'enseignement Supérieur au Vietnam : les enjeux d'une réforme inspirée des orientations occidentales, Cahier de la Recherche sur l'Éducation et les Savoirs, 15/2016, pp 239-262, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, de Lorraine, France.

<sup>6</sup> Law No. 08/2012 / QH13 on Higher Education of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam complemented by Decree No. 141/2013 / ND-CP of the Vietnamese Government and by the "Charter of the University Promulgated on 10 December 2014 by the Prime Minister's Decision 70/2014 / QĐ-TTg

Concomitantly, one may note a rise in research supporting agencies such as NAFOSTED (Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development), responsible for developing and funding a policy for research projects.

The vast majority of universities are attached to MOET, with the notable exception of the two National Universities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, which are directly attached to the Prime Minister's services.

In an original way, Ton Duc Thang University is supervised by Vietnam General Confederation of Labour, the sole national trade union centre in Vietnam.

## Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU)

Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU) is a public multidisciplinary institution based in Ho Chi Minh City. TDTU was founded on 24/09/1997 by decision 787/TTg-QĐ. With the rapid growth of the university, and in order to have a legal status which fits its nature (*i.e.* a university under the union structure and not completely private), the Prime Minister released decision 18/2003/TTg-QĐ changing its name to Ton Duc Thang Semi-Public University, under the management of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City. On 22/06/2006, Ton Duc Thang Semi-Public University moved its organizational form to public university with a self-financing mechanism. On 11/6/2008, decision 747/QĐ-TTg changed the name of Ton Duc Thang Semi-Public University under the management of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City to Ton Duc Thang University under the management of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour<sup>7</sup>

TDTU Diplomas have remained under the formal control of MOET until 2015, when full autonomy was allowed.

The state of Vietnam is the owner of the real estate assets, which are managed by TDTU. Indeed, they are composed of two campuses down town HCMC (including a 30 ha main campus half built today), and by three other sites, in Nha Trang, which is a coastal city and capital of Khanh Hoa Province, on the South Central Coast of Vietnam, in Ca Mau in the Mekong delta, and in Bao Loc in the central highlands region of Vietnam. 85 % of the students are enrolled in the main campus in HCMC and 15 % in the three other campuses.

## Key Figures

During the academic year 2017-2018 TDTU recruited approximately 6,000 new students, and had 20,000 students enrolled overall, distributed over its 16 faculties.

The academic staff is 936, among them 65 % as lecturers and 35 % as researchers. 4 % of the academic staff is composed by full professors, 3 % by associate professors. 200 lecturers/researchers are partially involved in lectures. Supporting (administrative and technical) staff is 384<sup>8</sup>.

45 research groups are present at TDTU and one foundation for research (FOSTECT).

Considering education, TDTU delivers 37 bachelor (4 years) and 13 master programs. TDTU develops also 4 PhD programs in site and 13 PhD sandwich programs.

## TDTU Governance

Governance and main strategic orientations of TDTU rely on the University Council, chaired by the president of the General Confederation of Labour and composed of 50 % of members from TDTU and at least of 30 % of external members. The Academic and Research Council is involved in proposing research and education trends.

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%B4n\\_Duc\\_Th%C3%A0ng\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%B4n_Duc_Th%C3%A0ng_University)

<sup>8</sup> Self-evaluation report of TDTU, 2018.

The presidential team is very tight, with only two vice-presidents respectively in charge of academic and international affairs.

In 2017 income was 494 billion VND (~ 21.7 M\$)<sup>9</sup>, 80 % arising from tuition fees (~800-1000 \$/y), and ~16 % from the scientific-technological service transfer. Income from the State is about 3 %.

It may be noted that the direction of TDTU is intending to increase tuition fees by about three times within five years.

In 2017, 16126 students were enrolled in the standard programs, 2889 in "high quality" programs. 1024 were following master programs and 94 PhD programs.

### Positioning, strategy and challenges

Ton Duc Thang University initial mission, first established in 2007-2008, focused on: i) training and retraining the working class of Ho Chi Minh City, of the southern provinces and of the whole country, in order to improve the professional skills of high-quality human resources and to expand academic and applied research in the scope of the industrialization and modernisation of the country.

Being a young university without any property, no funding by the State, no past and no prestige, TDTU has faced numerous challenges in order to reach its first goals.

In 2015, the Government confirmed the objective of the second stage of development of TDTU, which is to become a leading research-oriented university. The vision of TDTU is to enter the Top 60 best schools in Asia by 2037, and to become a world-class research university by 2087.

Thus, TDTU's development plan defines immediate objectives for the next coming years: 1) improving the quality of the work already done; 2) developing a postgraduate education; 3) establishing key research institutes; 4) enhancing the global engagement; for the long term: 1) strengthening the size and the level of the faculty; 2) increasing the scientific production; 3) increasing investment in laboratories; 4) developing international research; 5) enhancing of the identity and values; 6) reaching Asian and world-ranking.

## II. ON-SITE VISIT DESCRIPTION

### 1- PRESENTATION OF THE INSTITUTION'S SELF-EVALUATION APPROACH

After the first contacts with Hcéres staff, by mid 2017, Ton Duc Thang University set up a dedicated committee around the Presidential board, in order to monitor the self-evaluation process. Six groups of staff were created, and 26 meetings were held during this period<sup>10</sup>.

The TDTU's self-evaluation report, dated January 2018, is a rather consistent document, unfortunately with some redundancies, and three times as thick as requested. It is nevertheless very well organized, and clearly written. It follows precisely the various areas and fields of the Hcéres's external evaluation standards framework, and addresses in detail all criteria.

It reveals the excellent state of mind of the institution as regards to the process of self-evaluation, and its good understanding and awareness of the Hcéres's criteria. The swot analysis is complete and detailed, and seems to have been an opportunity for a deep self-critical analysis. The number of demonstrations and regulations listed in annex is impressive. The well-developed quality management culture of the institution seems to be an important asset for a pertinent self-evaluation approach.

<sup>9</sup>On June 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, 1 \$ = 22.810 VND

<sup>10</sup>Self-evaluation report.



## 2- COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL OF EXPERTS

- Mr Cyrille van Effenterre, general engineer, former chairman of Paris Institute of Technology, France, chair of the panel of experts,
- Ms Cecile Chicoye, head of administration, Toulouse University, France
- Ms Marie Erard, Professor in chemistry, Paris-Saclay University, France
- Ms Manon Plagnol, student representative, Paris, France
- Mr Gabriel Desgranges, Professor in economics, Cergy-Pontoise University, France
- Mr Jean-Philippe Eglinger, CEO of Viet Phap Strategies, Paris.

Hcéres was represented by Mr Pierre Sebban, science advisor.

## 3- ON-SITE VISIT DESCRIPTION

The on-site visit took place in the Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) main campus of TDTU from April 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

During the first day, the opening session was chaired by the President of the University, Prof. Le Vinh Danh, with the Presidential Board and directors. Then the panel of experts met successively:

- members of the University board, in two different sessions,
- a representative of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee,
- members of the Education & Research Council
- the director of the FOSTECT foundation.

The second day, the panel of experts, split into three groups, held twelve meetings with members of the Presidential Board, faculty members, administrative staff students, and partners. In the afternoon, two visits were organized:

- one visit of the campus, facilities, students accommodation, library,
- one visit of some teaching rooms and research laboratories.

The third day, nine meetings were held in the morning, with administrative staff, foreign researchers, partners (foreign universities, economic partners, local communities). In the afternoon, the whole panel of experts met the President for a last series of questions.

The panel of experts has highly appreciated the quality of the welcome by TDTU, the practical organization of the meetings, and the full collaboration of all the people met throughout the visit.

## III. EVALUATION REPORT

### 1- STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

#### Field 1: The institution's missions and its strategic positioning

##### **A specific, thoughtful and ambitious strategy**

Ton Duc Thang University has established an explicit and purposeful strategy for the middle and long term. This strategy takes into account its particular status and the socio-economic context at the local and national levels in Vietnam, and is targeted to result into significant regional impact.

Its plan to expand its current activities is rather ambitious, and its implementation, namely in terms of research development, will constitute a challenge.

TDTU has defined a clear strategy, in line with its specific institutional framework of a public university which does not benefit from State funding, a status that TDTU wittingly chosen in 2007.

To sum up, this distinctive strategy is built upon:

- a business model essentially relying on tuition fees and technology transfers,
- a teaching activity focused on employability and soft skills,
- a vision, a strong identity, a set of core values and a shared state of mind,
- the challenging ambition to become a research university in the future.

The self-evaluation report clearly establishes a high-level strategic planning at TDTU, the critical importance of its strategic plans for its leadership, and a clear vision of its role in the Vietnamese society and in the country's economic and cultural development. This has been confirmed throughout the interview process. The panel has also been able to confirm that this vision is fully shared by most of the persons in charge, by the staff, and by partners. The links between TDTU and Ho Chi Minh City and the local authorities of its other campuses contribute to a good appreciation of the needs of the country by TDTU. That also confirms its real integration in the local context, and its ability to expand its community outreach and to respond to the country's current economic challenges.

Since its creation and due to its origin and its supervising authorities, its missions have been mostly focused on teaching activities at the undergraduate and bachelor level, in order to provide its students with technical and soft skills. In its 2007-2037 strategic research plan<sup>11</sup>, TDTU targets to become the leading research university in Vietnam and a research university at the global level in a very long run.

Divided into periods of five years, this plan, specifies the actions to be engaged for each period, and the specific tasks dedicated to the various departments in charge, whether administrative units or academic units . There is also a detailed five-year progress plan<sup>12</sup> and a two-year plan for global engagement, (currently 2017-2019), which is also supposed to enhance and expand the research development.

The panel of experts considers that TDTU's objective to be a research-oriented university in the long run is ambitious but realistic and reachable, and may respond to the country's upcoming challenges. The action plan and the phase-in approach are reasonable options, but there will probably be a need for TDTU to better define and justify its research priorities and to further develop carefully its research partnerships.

Finally, the development strategy regarding the outside campuses hasn't been described in the self-evaluation report. Moreover, this point has only been swiftly mentioned during the visit. The panel has been said that the main motivation of establishing these outside campuses is to train scholars for localities, because many students do not want to return to their homelands for working after completing their studies in Ho Chi Minh City. These campuses focus on training programmes in response to local needs and demand. This represents a "political duty" for the country. The outside campuses are actually also land reservations for the future expansion of TDTU to other cities and provinces. However, the panel considers this to be a key strategic choice for TDTU's development, and therefore advises TDTU to address it more explicitly.

## Field 2: internal organization and strategy implementation

### A very centralized governance with an impressive efficiency

Up to now, TDTU has strictly followed its general strategy, and has reached all its goals. The current internal governance structure, organized around a strong leadership and a small but really committed team, has proven its efficiency in the past, despite its relative fragility.

However, the panel of experts recommends that the university anticipates its change of scale and increasing complexity by adapting accordingly its governance structure. This will become compulsory considering the planned development and the programmed evolution of TDTU, as regards research structuring and internationalization.

TDTU's governance mostly concentrates on the Presidency and the Presidential Board. The University Board does approve the strategy and the annual budget, but seems nevertheless to have rather a supervisory mission. Among its members, the economic partners have a rather limited place and, according to the national regulations, students and alumni are only indirectly institutionally associated to the governance(see area 3, field1).

<sup>11</sup> cf. Progress Plan for Research TDTU in 30 years, (2007-2037)

<sup>12</sup> cf. Five years Progress Plan 2014-2019

The Council for Education and Research is an advisory institution for the Presidency, with no power of decision.

The organisational chart is organized like a rake, with 16 faculties, 14 administrative units and 20 institutes and research centres, without any intermediate levels. There are 49 separate research groups, and TDTU just began to bring together some of these groups to create research institutes. Unlike traditional universities, there is no gathering of faculties into a small number of schools.

The creation of three outside campuses is rather recent: Nha Trang and Bao Loc campuses have only been active since 2016; the campus in Ca Mau province will officially open in September 2018. The outside campuses do not have yet neither administrative nor full teaching autonomy. TDTU is underway to build teams of faculty and on-site scientific experts, but so far the outside campuses still rely on the faculty members of the main campus.

All the staff that the panel met during the visit seem to clearly share the strategy and the established internal rules. The University complies with an impressive number of internal regulations<sup>13</sup>, regarding for instance admission and recruitment processes, quality assurance, finances, calls for proposal, bidding processes, etc..... The decision-making processes are clear and understood. The organization of the administrative bodies is at usual standard for universities. The support services duties are clearly defined and well-staffed although probably undersized, and they seem very effective (see area 5, field 1). Monitoring, reporting, evaluation and quality management are in the core of the university functioning (see area 6, field 1).

The current organization has proven efficient for teaching activities, students and faculty recruitment, research outcomes, international opening, or real estate development. In the last decade TDTU has strictly followed its plans and reached its main goals. More precisely, TDTU fulfilled all its commitments regarding its research plan for the period 2013-2017 (see area 3 field 2), and its objectives in terms of global engagement (see area 4, field 2). In the most recent years, the first outcomes of this new ambition have materialized, as indicated by several key performance indicators: publications activity, networks and international partnerships at an appropriate level, launching master programmes, and recently creation of doctoral programmes.

It is likely that the current organization and operating modes will still be adapted to the needs and goals of TDTU for the next five years. However, the panel of experts expresses some concerns regarding the long run. Still relying on few people, the implementation of the development strategy, in particular regarding research development and internationalization, may face some difficulties. Therefore, the panel considers that the setting up of intermediary levels of governance will probably be useful for the planned change of scale of TDTU.

### Field 3: The institution's identity and communication

#### **TDTU only communicates on "What we (TDTU) can achieve"**

TDTU cultivates a strong specific identity and seeks to distinguish itself from academic competitors by highlighting its excellence in undergraduate programs, and infrastructures. Its current policy of communication relies on the extensive use "of ambassadors" (foreign alumni, professors, actors) to promote its image and attractiveness.

The panel of experts recommends to reinforce communication plan towards business and international partners as well as Vietnamese academic partners by promoting the assets of TDTU, namely its campus and its undergraduate programs. Thus, it is recommended to gradually communicate on the ambition of research of the establishment.

The identity of TDTU is built on the University's strong will to be recognized as an institution matching international standards in training, research, professional practices as well as ethics.

The paths taken to reach this target have been based on a quantitative scientific publications policy and on the development of both infrastructures and undergraduate programs so as to raise them to the international requirement and recognition level.

Concerning the internal communication, TDTU pushes ahead students structuring values such as ethics, effectiveness, and kindness.

TDTU students are told to communicate only on "What we (TDTU) can achieve" and "do it right from the beginning".

<sup>13</sup>Self-evaluation report

In terms of ethics, it is noticeable that TDTU strongly emphasizes the "fight against corruption" as being a leitmotiv in its way of life. Promoting this, is not only courageous but also seems to be a real differentiator for TDTU, notably towards international potential partners. It also allows the management to mobilize its internal resources in this direction.

In order to promote its image and to attract foreign partners (students, professors, institutional), TDTU resorts on its interpersonal network in a very proactive way. It is also a way to optimize its resources. However, the communication towards these above-mentioned partners makes sense, in the long term, only if the offer of training in English and research activities can meet the demand of potential international partners.

TDTU resorts a lot to modern and free tools such as You Tube to communicate on its activities.

To attract the best students, TDTU communicates towards the high-school pupils of the surrounding provinces. TDTU has a partnership program with high schools in 19 provinces. This partnership allows TDTU to communicate, to recruit and to train a pool of professors. In addition, in order to develop political relays, TDTU interacts with the local authorities enabling the institution to secure its development in several Southern provinces.

The communication towards national and international companies remains limited. In fact, the national companies already recognize the excellence of TDTU concerning professional integration and training. As a result, TDTU claims to have a network of more than 1,000 enterprises in Vietnam. In order to move up the value chain, TDTU begins structuring its research activities so as to start communicating on this point.

The panel thinks that the identity created about the University's training excellence at the undergraduate and bachelor level should not be weakened by a too early communication on "Research university", which is still dawning. Therefore, with international partners, TDTU should progressively communicate, on the ambition to become a "University of Research" highlighting the evolution of its scientific production and its first partnerships.

## 2 – RESEARCH AND TEACHING

### Field 1: Research policy

#### **TDTU, a research university: the early stages are promising due to the ambitious research policy of the institution**

Since 2007, TDTU has decided to launch a 30-year plan to organize its development toward a mature research university. The first phase is currently showing impressive results mainly in term of publications. The institution now enters in a second phase. It should develop, support, and organize its own groups, laboratories and institutes.

The panel of experts recommends adapting the research policy to support long-term innovative programs focused on the priority fields.

The "learning units" of TDTU<sup>14</sup> are currently composed of 16 faculties covering a very wide panel of topics, which are also the main directions for research activities (Computational Science, Materials Science, Information Technology, Mathematics and Statistics, Environment and Labor Safety, Electronics and Electrical Engineering, Applied Science, Civil Engineering, Foreign Languages, Industrial Fine Arts, Accounting and Auditing, Finance and Banking, Business Administration, Labor Relations and Trade Unions, Sports Science and Physical Education, Social Science and Humanities, Laws, Pharmacy)<sup>15</sup>. These topics are covered by 49 research groups composed in average of 4-6 researchers, 24 of them are led by foreign professors. The most advanced groups are the Computational Mechanics Research Group, the Bone and Muscle Research Group, the Mathematics and Computational Engineering Research Group<sup>16</sup>. Some research groups in science and technology are already organized in institutes. 2 were launched recently, the Institute of Computational Science (INCOS)<sup>17</sup> and the Institute of Advanced Materials Science (AIMaS)<sup>18</sup>.

During the last decade, TDTU has optimized a wide array of procedures to manage efficiently within the international standards all research activities. TDTU has established a foundation (FOSTECT, budget ~2 M USD per year) to finance, with the best flexibility and efficiency, projects that promote TDTU's research activities (setting

<sup>14</sup>Self-evaluation report

<sup>15</sup>Self-evaluation report

<sup>16</sup>Self-evaluation report

<sup>17</sup><http://incos.tdtu.edu.vn>

<sup>18</sup><http://aimas.tdtu.edu.vn/>

out of shared facilities, organization of international events, researcher exchanges ...). Those activities were also successfully funded by regional and national agencies and companies up to 7.5% of the total income of the university<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the institution settled a close network of international collaborators and foreign professors that allows its researchers to perform experimental work and publish their results.

In order to improve its visibility as a research university, both at the national and international levels, TDTU strongly encourages the rapid publication of results in journals referenced in internationally recognized databases (ISI and Scopus) by a clear and well-understood policy<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, it is mandatory for all faculty members to do research; teaching duties can be adapted depending on the publication rate; salary increase<sup>21</sup> and awards are intended for faculty members with outstanding activities. The number of publication almost doubled every year since 2013 to reach 583 in 2017 in ISI and Scopus data bases<sup>22</sup>. The ratio publications per PhD is 1,26 publication in 2016-2017<sup>23</sup>. Beside the impressive increase of the publication rate over the last 5 years, the dynamism of the research activities also allowed to organize several conferences, obtain a few patents and set up two journals. Considering, the scientific edition market where the number of journals is constantly increasing, the committee does not recommend creating new scientific journals. Indeed, it remains very challenging, even for a well-established research university, to render its journals attractive.

TDTU now enters in a second phase of development as exemplified by the acquisitions of larger instruments (high performance computing facilities, equipment for bone and musculoskeletal metals analysis, equipment for analytical chemistry) and by the recent organization of some research groups in institutes.

The panel of experts thinks that this phase requires the development of autonomous research groups within TDTU campus and mostly independent from foreign institutions/researchers. Their fields should be in phase with the local academic landscape such as the Vietnamese universities and Vietnamese academy. The choice of those fields should take in account the socio-economic development of the country in order to transfer easily the research results to the local industries and institutions. In particular, the committee is aware that technology transfer (at large, from short training courses to research and consultancy services for industry) represents already roughly 4% of the institution income<sup>24</sup>. TDTU rightly emphasizes that it focuses towards three directions: basic research, applied research and technology transfer. Research domains, where technology transfer is needed, should be identified and probably developed at first to increase this percentage. Finally, to be competitive abroad, the institution should make choices consistent with the current trends at the international level.

The 16 faculties and their deans should play a key role to define the priority research fields and propose an efficient organization of the research activities, thanks to their intermediary position level between the research groups and the Council for Education and Research and the presidential board. As a consequence, they could easily identify the specific needs in term of research staff and equipments. They should also play a key role to define the postgraduate education, maintaining a pool of skilled PhDs mandatory for efficient research activities (see below). The actual organization of some groups into institutes (currently two have already been launched) is a model that could be generalized. Another option would be to gather several groups around shared equipment and facilities.

For a few years, TDTU has been supporting its lecturers to help them to reach the PhD level. In parallel, the faculties in the more mature fields have been developing master and PhD programs. Currently postgraduate students represent 5% of TDTU students. The committee believes that this number should increase in the next years. Indeed, well-trained research staff and PhD students will build the research workforce of TDTU in the next step of development.

In summary, an adapted internal organization promoting a more bottom up process may be key to the success of the next step in the development of research. Indeed, TDTU will significantly recruit new staff in the next few years and it is therefore very important to identify very quickly the fields where recruitments are most needed. The identification of such priority fields may require an intense effort of the intermediate level (faculty and/or research institutes) to suggest developments of the research activity. Indeed, the intermediate level is best able to state a strategy at the field level (i.e., to exhaustively describe the needs (HR, material) of a development in a given field and to assess the scope of its possible success). The top level (president, university boards) can then choose what fields are of priority, based on the synthetic information provided by the intermediate level and advices given by outside experts. From this viewpoint, TDTU should make sure that the organization at the

<sup>19</sup> personal communication President (email Pierre Sebban).

<sup>20</sup>Self-evaluation report,

<sup>21</sup>cf. <http://demasted.tdtu.edu.vn/index.php/en/vacancies/858-announcement-on-recruitment-of-scholars-and-experts-2017>

<sup>22</sup>Self-evaluation report

<sup>23</sup>Self-evaluation report

<sup>24</sup>idem.

intermediate level remains clear (the respective roles of newly created research institutes and faculties must be clear to everyone).

TDTU could usefully collect advices from outside experts either on a one-time basis, or on a recurrent basis (a board of experts). If the solution of a board of outside experts were to be chosen, then TDTU might usefully include representatives of the intermediate level (deans or other researchers and lecturers) in this board. The collaboration between outside experts and members of TDTU might result into a collective view on research activity at TDTU. The need to publish in good journals cannot be the only ingredient of the identity of TDTU as a research university.

The panel of experts recommends for the future, adapting the research policy to support long-term innovative programs focused on the priority fields. The institution should start considering this evolution, which will be necessary to increase the impact of the publications and gain the leadership in those fields at the national and international levels. This is a key point if TDTU wants to increase its attractiveness as a research university and recruit the best students and group leaders. Such evolution of the research policy will help TDTU raise funding from national and international agencies and develop partnerships with economic stakeholders.

## Field 2: Teaching policy

### **An outstanding teaching policy fitting international standards, sustaining mature undergraduate programs, and promising (yet preliminary and fragile) graduate programs**

Up to now, TDTU has been very actively implementing a well-defined teaching policy. The core of this policy is to offer training programs that fit international standards (curriculum and learning environment). This policy is outstanding and has produced remarkable achievements. Most of them concern the undergraduate programs. The graduate programs (at both the Master and PhD level) are just emerging, and not yet mature.

The panel of experts underlines that the further development of the post graduate programs, at master and PhD levels, requires paying specific attention to the link with research (see below field 3).

TDTU has approximately 20000 students (it is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest university in Vietnam): 19000 students enrolled in undergraduate programs, 1000 in Master programs and less than 100 are PhD students. TDTU offers a wide range of undergraduate programs: 37 "standard" majors and 16 "high quality" majors at the bachelor level (4 years programs) and 20 vocational programs (3-year programs). There are 13 majors at the Master level. PhD programs are still very preliminary (they do not exist in all the fields, and are run in cooperation with foreign universities). Around 80% of the students entering TDTU get a degree. All graduated students find a job within 12 months after graduation.

In the near future, TDTU does not plan to increase much the total number of students, except from the possible creation of new majors. Its strategy is rather a qualitative one: It aims at developing the number of students in the "high quality" bachelor programs and graduate programs (Master and PhD) and attracting better students in undergraduate programs.

In the past few years, TDTU has increased the attractiveness of its undergraduate programs. It now receives around 40000 applications every year (5,000 to 6,000 students enrolled every year in undergraduate programs). TDTU estimates this number as the largest number of applications for a Vietnamese university<sup>25</sup>. TDTU's general assessment on its attractiveness is that the quality of the high school pupils applying to TDTU is increasing, even if it does not attract the best high school pupils yet. The strategy to improve the attractiveness further considers the southern part of Vietnam (approximately, one third of the country) to be the basin of recruitment of TDTU. The strategy primarily relies on the connections with more than 500 high schools, and in particular high schools for gifted pupils. It consists in various actions: offering free training (in English and IT) to high school teachers (to improve TDTU's reputation), sending current students visiting their former high school, inviting pupils to visit TDTU, asking alumni to help, and offering scholarships for high school teachers in higher education, especially for Master programs in Computer Science, Chemical Engineering and Applied Mathematics. The quality of the teaching environment (see below) is another element of this strategy for greater attractiveness. Lastly, the local campuses (5 existing ones, a few more to come in the next years) help TDTU to better attract students from the districts where they are established. This fact is stressed by TDTU together with the idea that these campuses promote higher education in areas where it is not widely developed yet (the proportion of people holding a university degree in Vietnam should keep on increasing in the next years).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. interviews of Presidential board members and others.

In comparison with the great success of the undergraduate programs, the graduate programs appear to be much less developed. Still, TDTU has set up the basis to develop graduate programs. The learning environment and the compliance of international standards (see the remark below about curricula) are two important assets. The ongoing strong increase in the proportion of the faculty staff holding a PhD<sup>26</sup> is a necessary step in order to develop Master and PhD programs (in addition to TDTU's requirement that teachers publish in scientific journals). This latter point seems well identified by TDTU, and this explains why, contrarily to the development of other programs, TDTU plans the creation of PhD programs with the utmost care. Up to now, PhD programs have relied on partnerships with foreign professors and universities (they are 21 "sandwich programs"). TDTU has nevertheless already opened four own PhD programs (Computer Science, Civil Engineering, Business Administration, Computational Science). The committee thinks indeed that proper PhD programs should be developed only if the faculty is mature enough. Given the small number of PhD students, TDTU easily provides them with scholarships (scholarships are competitive in the Vietnamese context). However, besides these quantitative aspects, further developments of graduate programs may require further structuring the research activity accordingly (see next section below).

The proportion of students in Master programs is quite low. The explanation provided by TDTU for this fact is twofold: i) the low specific labour demand in Vietnam for Master graduates (a Bachelor degree is a high enough qualification level in most cases), ii) the competition with foreign universities (undergraduate students willing to pursue their studies prefer to study abroad). Beyond the core strategy of "international standards" (providing programs comparable to those of foreign universities), TDTU recently created a specific program to bridge the gap between undergraduate and graduate studies by encouraging bachelor students to enter a master program. TDTU has set up a policy to encourage TDTU's undergraduate students to proceed to postgraduate studies: transferring TDTU's students who recently graduated (within 12 months) to a Master program without sitting the entrance exam and offering scholarships according to their academic achievement at the undergraduate level.

Continuing education is also part of the mission of TDTU, but does not appear to be central in TDTU's teaching policy. Still, short-term courses are designed to create opportunities for learners to adopt lifelong learning, and TDTU has specifically developed various certificates (for about 1000 students - the training lasts from 1 week up to 6 months). The primary goal of these certificates is not to raise funds (the demand for more expensive certificates may be insufficient to open specific certificates), but rather to develop partnerships with private companies. Note that, due to government regulation, it is not possible to adapt existing programs and degrees to continuing education. Indeed, all students (even those enrolling in continuing education) have to attend the same courses and take the same exams.

Regarding tuition fees, TDTU has a financial autonomy but has to respect above limits set up by the Vietnamese government, and the panel has been said that TDTU hopes that the Government will shortly raise this limits. Considering that tuition fees represent more than 70% of the total source of revenue of TDTU, and that TDTU doesn't want to increase its overall number of students, the development of TDTU almost entirely relies on the potential increase in the tuition fees. TDTU is currently increasing the number of students in the so-called "high quality" undergraduate programs (the fees for this programs are higher than the ones for the other programs). Increased resources will be key to the development of both, PhD programs (financing scholarships and research) and local campuses. In the outside campuses, the tuition fees are indeed lower (they are adapted to low living standards of minorities and people from remote areas), and the training costs are higher.

Another element essential to TDTU's teaching policy has been the renewal of all the curricula after 2015. TDTU took great care to choose for each program a curriculum similar to those of "top 100" universities around the world (curricula were supplied by foreign universities, sometimes sold). In addition to these international curricula, TDTU pays attention to teaching methods and teaching materials. In particular, TDTU promotes communication between students and teachers. It encourages undergraduate students to visit business partners, and every undergraduate has to take one post-graduation/graduated internship (at least 2-6 months). Besides, during the course students also have to achieve other internships at local companies according to the course requirement. These internships take mostly place in a local company, as only around 100 students per year can afford to go abroad, mainly to countries in Asia including Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, and also to other countries in Europe (Belgium, Netherlands, Hungary) through the program Erasmus plus or scholarships from the University in partnership with other institutions).

TDTU offers a learning environment that fits international standards. One finds all the elements expected in a university: well-equipped labs to teach experimental and engineering sciences, modern facilities offering services like Wi-Fi and air conditioning, digital resources, on-line services like registration and time schedule, on-

<sup>26</sup>From less than 9 % of academic staff in 2013 to 55 % in 2017 (SER)

line evaluation of courses by students, health services for students, building access for disabled persons. As already mentioned (see above, area 1, field 1), these support services are performed by a rather limited number of administrative staffs. This suggests an effective organization of support services.

The quality process of the teaching activities is impressive (this corresponds to a quality management system ISO 9001). Under the supervision of the Department for Inspection, Legislation & Security, TDTU evaluates every course at the unit's level and departmental level, using a feedback from students, business partners and other professional parties<sup>27</sup>. The teaching skills of young teachers are evaluated as well (experienced teachers sometimes attend classes taught by young teachers) and, in case this inspection is unsatisfactory, one helps the teacher to improve his teaching methods). The quality of exams is monitored along the same lines. These evaluations are globally reported at the faculty level and are used by the Department for Personnel & Administration to manage the career of teachers. Two cases are: short term teaching contracts may not be renewed (if the teacher gets bad evaluation and does not improve his teaching methods subsequently), newly hired teachers need to be successfully inspected to become assistant and then full-time lecturers. The curricula of the different training programs have to be periodically discussed and improved based on feedback by students, lecturers, business partners and alumni. TDTU claims that, regarding this level of quality system, the assessment method, satisfaction of information and systematization are unique in Vietnam.

### Field 3: The link between research and teaching

#### **The mobilisation of a body of young teaching lecturers and researchers and the building of the postgraduate programs should be consistent with the emerging research fields**

Research activities and teaching programs at the master and PhD levels have been developing together for a few years. Their link is obvious and mandatory to train the best master students able to follow a PhD program in TDTU's laboratories.

The panel of experts insists on the need of a strategy for developing the attractiveness of postgraduate programs. It is necessary to build them in line with selective undergraduate program and with the emerging research field.

Currently, postgraduate students represent around 5% of all students in TDTU. Most PhD students come from abroad or work as lecturers of the university. To become a research university, TDTU needs to increase the number of postgraduate students and in particular the number of PhD students. Such an increase will not result from the attractiveness of TDTU at the undergraduate level. A specific policy is needed for the graduate programs to become a significant activity of TDTU.

TDTU has identified this difficulty and the program linking undergraduate and master programs is an interesting step in this direction (see the Field "Teaching policy" above). Still, TDTU should further develop the preparation of a significant pool of undergraduate students for postgraduate studies. To this purpose, the panel of experts recommends that the specific needs of postgraduate studies should be included in the undergraduate programs. This includes the definition of specific curricula containing all the prerequisites but also the gradual orientation of the most motivated students toward long-term studies.

It is also necessary that this pool of undergraduate students develop a strong interest for research. The panel of experts therefore suggests that faculties, taking advantage of the research workforce, propose undergraduate courses that take in account recent innovations (this is particularly true in science and technology). It also suggests that undergraduate curricula could contain internships in TDTU laboratories.

TDTU already has an experience in transposing foreign curricula into its own context and hiring foreign experts to foster the development of research activities. Master and PhD programs curricula are already developed and revised based on curricula of "top 100" universities around the world. The panel of experts recommends that TDTU further exploits this experience to identify and implement the best practices in building successful Master and PhD programs. Along the lines developed above, these best practices include undergraduate courses preparing students to graduate studies. They also include a relationship between the set of Master programs and the structure of the research activity. Typically, a Master program is likely to be successful in a field where the university is a leading one and business partners acknowledge its expertise (technology transfer, consulting activity,...). Hence, it is important to develop a Master program only if the associated research unit exists and is strong enough.

<sup>27</sup>Self-evaluation report.



More specifically for PhD programs, TDTU sets up an international standard quality for its PhD programs, that is unique in Vietnam: each doctoral candidate must publish at least one ISI/Scopus paper as main author if he wants to defend his thesis. But there are at least two other prerequisites for PhD programs to be implemented. One is the structuring of the research activity into large teams (such as the newly created research institutes), in order for the PhD students to develop their activity in a rich environment. Another one is a clear policy for financial support of most PhD students. Up to now, TDTU did not need any funding policy given the small number of PhD students. But the need for a clear policy about the funding of the PhD students will appear along with the increase in the number of PhD students, and such a policy should be defined. The committee suggests that this policy may rely on a committee (at the university level) allocating the funds in 2 steps: first, choose what subjects of PhD are funded; then, after the research unit in charge of the subject has found a student, validate the choice of the student (so that only good students are allocated scholarships).

### 3 – STUDENT ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

#### Field 1: Academic pathways, from career guidance to employment

##### **A humanist life path, from students guidance to professional insertion**

From student guidance to professional insertion, TDTU places students at the core of all its processes: TDTU is involved in student guidance before enrolment thanks to partnership with high schools, takes care of student life during their stay at TDTU, and has a high rate of professional insertion after graduation.

Nevertheless, if TDTU wants to keep improving its curricula together with its economic partnerships, the committee recommends implementing a unit in charge of the follow up of TDTU's alumni. The committee regrets that students and alumni can't be more involved in the governance decisions. The committee recommends finding a way to better associate students and alumni to the institutional governance.

**Recruitment.** In about 10 years and thanks to its high quality education, TDTU managed to promote and develop its image. TDTU has partnerships with high schools in 19 over 63 provinces of Vietnam. TDTU can therefore drive a high level of quality students, by filtering a high number of applicants. Its partnerships with local authorities also enable TDTU to diversify its recruitment and to contribute to an easier access to university for students stemming from remote areas.

**Help & Special needs.** TDTU has two types of help-desk: one for student affairs (10 employees + ~200 voluntary students) and one for student services (6 employees + 3 psychologists). The Student Affairs office takes care of career guidance, scholarships, organisation competition and soft-skills events. On the other side, the Student Services Department takes care of the daily issues of student and of mental health. In 2017, the department has welcome ~300 students with mental health problem. The department organizes workshops (~400 in 2017) to sensitize students to these issues. Soft skills are central for TDTU. They are taught during courses with extra curricular activities managed closely between the administration and the students.

**Scholarships** are managed by the Student Affairs Department. It represents a budget of 15 billion VND (~700,000 USD). In 2017, 2000 students had access to those scholarships and more than 1200 received excellence grants.

Scholarships have different levels from partial reduction of the tuition fees to total exoneration plus cash to live. Excellence grants mainly depend on the results of the student. Also, voluntary students can be partially exonerated of fees or may have free access to the dormitories. For example, students helping in the dorms do not pay any rent.

**Internship & Professional integration.** During the first three years of Bachelor Program, students have to complete a one-month internship in a company each year, and TDTU can help them if they have some difficulties to find it. On the last year they have to complete a 6 months internship. In addition, some major include special courses on professional insertion. It would be a good idea to deliver these courses to every major in TDTU.

TDTU takes advantage of its relationship with its alumni in very different ways: first, some of them contribute to workshops or deliver conferences during the year. Alumni, in conjunction with Vietnamese Confederation of Labour, are also helping newly graduate students find a job, with great success, as 100 % of TDTU students obtain a job shortly after graduation. Nevertheless, the committee has not been able to obtain data about

professional insertion of TDTU's students. Tracking those data would be a very good feedback for TDTU in order to upgrade his continuous involvement quality system of education. Finally, it would be a great benefit for TDTU to integrate its alumni more in its governance and strategic choices, even if they are only advisors.

**Student involvement in the governance.** Students are not directly involved in the governance of TDTU. Every class has a representative student. TDTU has implemented a sophisticated path of communication with students to take their input into account. Every semester each faculty organizes a meeting with students to discuss various subjects. During those meetings, students may raise some issues that cannot be addressed at the faculty level. As a bottom-up process, students questionings are transferred to the direction of TDTU in order to address them at the appropriate level. Students can also request a meeting with the presidential board if they want to discuss specific issues.

However, in an institution which promotes so much soft skills, the committee thinks that it is regrettable not to involve more students in the governance decisions. The committee recommends the creation of a board of students, which can be an advisory board, in order to help TDTU to deal with student issues and student life.

## Field 2: Learning resources

### Up to international standards

TDTU has a modern learning environment which clearly fits international standards. The learning centre is equipped with a state of the art IT system and can be open 24/7 if students ask for. WIFI is also available everywhere. Moreover it is important to underline that desktop computers are accessible and ready to use for students who do not have their own.

Students can find and access many online resources and reviews since TDTU possesses many subscriptions to various international press. International students can also work easily and without any language problems. The full database of books and reviews is accessible online.

Since all students do not have their own computer, a possible evolution of the learning centre would be to lend, for free, laptops to students who need it for their study.

## Field 3: Learning environment

### A student life context rich and modern

TDTU owns two healthcare centres on the campus and supports a yearly medical visit for all students. Those centres have a doctor and a psychologist. Students can go there to have career advice since psychologists play the role of guidance counsellors.

The dorms have many bedrooms, each of them containing 8 beds for Asian students and 5 beds for international students. They can accommodate there almost 2200 students. Students have access to state of the art sport infrastructures (swimming pool, football stadium, basketball field...). In addition, TDTU have 5 pianos in free service on the campus.

Overall, TDTU possesses 69 clubs (19 of sports, and others for cultural activities) which are totally free of charges. As stated before, students who are involved in clubs or competitions can benefit from a scholarship. The clubs are managed by students with the support of the administration if needed.

About international students, their integration in TDTU is supported by the university and well-managed. TDTU helps for visa obtention, registration and even with accommodation: TDTU offers beds in its dormitory for international students. However, the number of international students coming to TDTU remains still rather low. The committee recommend that the establishment develops a dedicated strategy to attract more international students. Until TDTU can promote specific and very attractive high quality training in English, this strategy could rely on a communication around the excellent infrastructures, the life in the campus, and the cultural environment on a down-town university in HCMC. In fact, many international students came there to learn about Asian culture.

## 4 – EXTERNAL RELATIONS

### Field 1: Partnership policy

#### From an interpersonal relationship to an integrated co-operation?

TDTU has developed a policy of external relations with local companies and political actors both at the national and local levels.

The panel of experts thinks that it would be useful to work on the setting up of a strong partner club to enhance the external relationships of TDTU and adapt its internal structure which currently is acting more on an "informal" basis to a "formal" one in order to professionalize the approach. Furthermore, the Committee thinks that the absence of relations with the national academic partners could have a negative impact on the dynamics of its research in the future.

TDTU considers the development of both political and economic partnerships as an integral part of its development strategy in order to face the increasing competition of the Universities in Vietnam. The nature of the relations established with these partners is multiple.

As far as companies (both private and public) are concerned, these partners are involved in the construction process of the university such as the Joint stocks companies Hoa Binh and Toan Thinh Phat for the civil works and the joint stock company Tan Tin Thanh for waterproofing. These companies are also part of the main recruiters of the newly graduated students.

TDTU has also developed with Industrial and Electrical companies such as the Joint Stocks company Hiep Phuoc (in charge of the development of the Industrial zone of Hiep Phuoc) and the Ho Chi Minh Branch of the Vietnam National Electricity Company. Besides employing students of TDTU, these companies develop with the university training programs for their employees, namely in the electric and industrial fields.

TDTU is also working with pharmaceutical companies to enhance the partnership it signed with Colorcon corporation. Moreover, some service companies such as Rex Hotel and the joint stocks company Sang tao Viet (Innovation Vietnam) are also recruiting TDTU students, mainly for their soft skills.

The main part of technology transfer towards external organizations (companies as well as local authorities) is stemming from training and consultancy activities, mainly in industrial and electrical activities with the entities here-above mentioned. At this stage the level of research that can be applied to the needs of companies seems to remain low. The committee didn't know of any research programs jointly conducted between companies and TDTU. The incubation center project is in its infancy so a question mark remains concerning the usefulness of all these technology transfer centers.

The internal structure in charge of promoting such external relationships still remains unclear to the committee. In fact, notwithstanding the existence of a "Center for Enterprise Cooperation and Alumni" the setting up of these partnerships is based on the network developed by the President and his management team as well as the network of former students and professors who are acting as ambassadors for TDTU. The committee thinks that TDTU should reinforce the role of this unit dedicated to the development and the management of these partnerships.

TDTU does not have yet many relationships with well-known international companies. The committee recommends that TDTU gives priority to build partnerships with foreign companies. They may increase its international visibility and could also be an active vector for the development of its activities.

Beside the strong political partnerships established by TDTU with the National Confederation of Labour and its Ho Chi Minh City's branch, the University also develops strong links with the representatives of three southern provinces (Lam Dong, Gia Lai, and Binh Thuan). TDTU has a clear ambition to be one of the major universities in the Southern part of Vietnam. The links built by TDTU with the local political representatives consist in assisting them developing their training capabilities of high school, sourcing their future students and relying on the local authorities to establish a network of campuses outside Ho Chi Minh City.

Despite a fast developing network, it seems that the external partners, in particular the enterprises, are not yet fully implicated in the different decision making process of the University. A partnership club is under creation<sup>26</sup>,

<sup>26</sup>In May 2018, TDTU inaugurated the Alumni Entrepreneurs Club, which connects the university with industry to create employment opportunities as well as support for students.

but its power remains limited. The committee suggests to foster the implication of this club into the steering of the institution.

Finally, regarding the academic sector, except for an existing cooperation with a hundred of scientists from other Vietnamese institutions (mostly about research and scientific conferences), it is noticeable that currently TDTU has only few institutionalized relationships in particular with national academic institutions. This might have a negative impact on its emerging research activities in the near future. The panel of experts considers that TDTU should develop in the near future a real coordination with the other main actors in the field of the Vietnamese research, in order to better articulate their research priorities, and maybe to develop joint projects.

## Field 2: International relations

### From interpersonal relationships to institutionalized interactions

In terms of international relations, TDTU has defined a clear vision of the action plan that needs to be implemented. The results of the first development stages are already tangible and extremely promising.

However, for the next stages, the committee considers that TDTU needs to better structure its internal organization for international relations and to better define the timing of the implementation of the actions as well as the priorities. Lastly, the Committee recommends TDTU to "institutionalize" its approach until now based on an effective interpersonal interaction for a better effective execution of its plan.

TDTU is aware that it needs to develop strong relations with its international counterparts in order to face the increasing competition of the universities in Vietnam and in the region. The goal of TDTU is to be part of the best 60 Asian Universities by 2037.

Currently, the international relations activities are linked to one vice president who reports directly to the President of the University. That tends to demonstrate that this activity is considered as a priority. At the faculty level, there is dedicated staff for International Affairs, who is also a support staff for the International Cooperation, Research and Training Institute (INCRETI). This staff provides the faculty with support in international cooperation, and is regularly involved in the updating of the internationalization strategy and plan. Sending students abroad is managed by INCRETI and the dedicated staff for International Affairs from faculties (from designing programs, making connections, finding partners to preparing documents, visa application, giving consulting service).

TDTU knows that being a "young" university without great historical renown is a handicap, and is currently trying to find and build a "development model according to the strong points of TDTU" (undergraduate programs, physical infrastructures to welcome foreign students) to improve its international relations at the regional and international level to be recognized and become more attractive.

The reference to Chulalongkorn (Thailand) or Polytechnic Hong Kong as a model has been stated several times by members of the Presidential Board during the visit.

Currently, the aim of TDTU is to set up active relationships through the different vectors that it can activate quickly. Therefore, so far, the relationships engaged at the International level have been initiated by the management of the University who liaised with previous colleagues to set up international relationships with Universities in Europe (Technical University of Ostrava, Hasselt University, Wrocław University of Science and Technology), Asia (Chung Ang University, National Kaohsiung University), and hopefully the United States.

TDTU has also developed a relationship with Finland, which is one of its partners to develop joint programs, at the undergraduate and bachelor level. Moreover TDTU is the Vietnamese partner of the Vietnam-Finland International School (VFIS), project which is deployed with two Finnish partners (Educluster Finland and Wise) and aims at building an educational system from primary to high school with the Finnish education model.

One other way to initiate and develop these international relationships was to support the publications of invited experts in TDTU.

At this stage the international relationships are also active through 130 bachelor students who benefit from an exchange program with several foreign universities: Nanhua University, Lunghwa Science and Technology University, Penghu University (Taiwan), University of Lille 1, Seoul National University (South Korea), Hasselt University (Brussels).... These programs are a way for the students abroad to convince foreign partners to come in Vietnam and work with TDTU.

The management of TDTU is well aware of the time needed to develop international relationships with foreign partners. It has been said that it usually takes four years to transform the first contacts made by the President himself into the first concrete achievements.

The committee thinks that there is a need to progressively "upgrade" the interpersonal approach that was adapted and efficient at the beginning. Indeed a more institutionalized approach is needed. It will require the improvement of the internal organization and the setting up of internal key indicators to measure the quality of these partnerships.

## 5 – MANAGEMENT

### Field 1: The institution's finances

#### **A rigorous and efficient management with appropriate tools**

The fast growth of TDTU has been developed in line with rigorous management practices: although TDTU still lacks an explicit multiyear planning framework, the credibility of the next 5 years development seems well assured if the main hypotheses on which they are based (increased tuition fees) are confirmed.

The panel of experts considers that the degree of formalization of the multiyear financial planning is insufficient and/or insufficiently shared.

In line with an expansion strategy that enabled TDTU to double its number of students, between 2013 and 2017, TDTU's budget has also doubled growing from 263.749 MVND to 494.175 MVND. Tuition fees have been increased by 67 % in the same time span: their relative part in TDTU's revenue has fallen from 89% to 80 %.

Consistently with TDTU's intention to become a research university, technology transfer issued funds have been multiplied by 4 reaching 80.956 MVND, representing 16.4 % of the budget as compared to 7.9 % in 2013, demonstrating a constant effort to diversify resources.

On the other hand expenses have grown accordingly with the rapid development of the establishment and have been well managed in coherence with the strategy exposed. Training expenses (mainly salaries) have increased from 22 to 25 % of the budget in the last 5 years. Research spending has been multiplied by more than 5 during the same time period but still only represents 6.5 % of the main budget. This figure demonstrates that TDTU is a dynamic institution with a rigorous management. This will preserve its capacity to invest through careful planning of expenses.

The budget planning is established on an annual forecast of the number of students, which relies on an active policy of promotion in high schools. Concerning expenses, the different institutes and faculties must be very precise in their analysis when they apply for further support, using internally developed tools to calculate the return on investment. The financial management allows little or no autonomy of the components, ensuring thus a strict control of expenses coherent with the centralisation policy.

The budget for building, renovating facilities, purchasing fixed assets is only 17.5 % of the global budget in 2017. This demonstrates an astonishing mastering of construction cost and maintenance considering the outstanding quality of the facilities provided to the students and staff (see further). This figure is remarkable even if one takes into account the expenditure on depreciation of assets (around 10 % of the total expenses).

Although the financial data on capital expenditure and multiyear real estate planning is not available, the results obtained through a rigorous management of expenses are impressive. All the more in a context of revenues based mainly on tuition fees without support from the national government. Even if the business model, based on an increase of future tuition fees seems to have well performed in the past, there is a lack of formalization of a multiyear planning. The lack of a tool that would allow cost analysis as well as risk analysis is regrettable: it is necessary to allow the development of an alternative model, in case the main assumptions for future developments suffer a setback (e.g. tuition fees deregulation). Notwithstanding this, the budgetary management seems well in line with the establishment's strategy towards more research.

## Field 2: The institution's human resources

### A modern but demanding management

The institution's human resources management policy is adapted to its current objectives but needs reconsidering for the future on some aspects

From 2013 to 2017 the number of staff has grown in line with the expanding activity: from 564 academics (8.65 % having a PhD) to 936 (55 % having a PhD). It has to be noted that among the academics, the number of researchers has grown from less than 5 % to a third of the academic staff; the non-academic staff has grown but very little. This high rate of recruitment follows closely the budgetary evolution, managing thus its total wage bill in a satisfactory manner.

Recruitment methods for academic staff are clear: recruitment offers are made public on the institution website according to formally defined procedure.

The Institution provides training for its staff in basic skills like English but also in teaching methods: such training is particularly important for persons who should intensify their training activities following a non-accomplishment of research objectives, or for persons whose evaluation have been less than excellent. TDTU also provides doctorate studies abroad for a significant number of lecturers or researchers so as to improve the percentage of PhDs in coherence with the master plan to become a research institution. Considering the national and international context, the number of foreign academics is important (30% of the professors and PHD are foreigners)<sup>29</sup>.

The wage system should be emphasized: based on a fixed rate to which is added a bonus system that can exceptionally go as high as doubling the revenue, the system is based on the reaching of the objectives defined in the 5 year plan: the system is transparent and known by all. The individual performances are not public. This characteristic seems very much appreciated and widely applied. The rate of turnover is moderate. TDTU is eager to keep it this way (wage policy, privileged access to the international secondary school under construction, promotion of ethical values shared by staff,...).

Regarding administrative staff, TDTU has proposals for job placement as well as personnel development plans. TDTU is satisfied with the situation, but the ratio of the administrative staff remains nevertheless rather low, in comparison with the average university. Therefore, there is a risk in the future that some academics could be in charge of administrative tasks. In line with its plans for the future, TDTU could then contemplate a policy to upgrade the size of the administrative staff. The real involvement of all the staff in TDTU's project, cannot replace the necessary upgrading of professional staff.

## Field 3: IT system

### A state of the art IT system

In terms of IT, TDTU has developed a systematic dematerialisation policy including the quality assurance process. The applications, databases cover the whole range of activities, from student affairs, to HR, maintenance management, finances etc. According to the Self-evaluation report, they provide the indicators necessary to run the system. With a team of 25 people, which also provides computational science services, one should highlight the efficiency of the system.

## Field 4: Real estate owned by the institution

### A marker of its attractiveness

TDTU's facilities are of high international standard and represent a significant marker of TDTU's attractiveness policy: in line with TDTU's ambitions for the future their development still needs to be spelled out.

The quality of the facilities in HCMC is remarkable (167 000 m<sup>2</sup> gross floor including a 10 000 m<sup>2</sup> library and 36 000 m<sup>2</sup> sport facilities) and of a high international standard, including the library which is most modern in terms of building and internal architecture as well as in terms of equipment. The remarkable achievement is also that TDTU has managed to complete its facilities in line with its growth thus ensuring a steady expansion. If the

<sup>29</sup>28 Self-evaluation report

support of HCMC Popular Committee is of the utmost importance in terms of providing land use rights, facilitating authorisations, and providing interest free loans, the implication of the university staff including its civil engineering faculty seems a strong factor of success. This relies on a systematic implementation of clear bidding processes, to be particularly noted. The plan for the future which includes considerable extension (dorms and the international Finnish high school already started) is in line with the expected changes in the tuition system from next year on.

In this context, the policy consisting of increasing the number and the size of outside campuses needs spelling out. Even if the need to welcome more students is understandable, a specific study on the pros and cons of this policy would be appropriate: in other words, does the low price of land in the provinces compensate for the cost of operating outside campuses including transportation to and from HCMC to the outside campuses? Multiyear planning as called for above, would allow a clarification of the financial consequences of existing and future local campuses.

## 6 – QUALITY AND ETHICS

### Field 1: Quality and continuous improvement policy

#### Quality management at the heart of the management

TDTU has placed the quality management at the heart of its policies.

Quality management has been developed in Vietnam since 2003 following a national policy to upgrade Vietnamese universities: in this framework, TDTU has really placed quality management at the heart of its strategy, and a marker of its identity.

The quality management process has been designed in accordance with Iso 9000 quality management standards, and then updated to ISO 9001-2015 and certified by a third party (DNV-Norwegian organization). It is at the heart of the management system and is run by a team of 12 persons whose director answers directly to the president and is involved in monitoring all activities of other departments and faculties throughout the university. All staff (administrative and academic) have to follow training in quality management at different stages, on average once a year.

TDTU has also invested in participating to world ranking or accrediting organizations: QS (it reached 3 star in the QS Star ranking), Greenmetric World University Rankings.

### Field 2: Ethic and Deontology

#### Ethics as a “way of life” and as a key differentiator

TDTU sets up an exemplary Ethic policy which can be used to mobilize its internal resources as well as to promote it externally as a key differentiator in line with the international standard requirements.

TDTU has put forward internally and externally a clear and comprehensive anti-corruption policy. In order to implement it, TDTU has set up a clear and devoted internal organization in charge of dealing with Ethics and anti-fraud subject matters<sup>3029</sup>. The person in charge of this structure is also member of the Party Cell of the University. Regulations as well as tools such as anti-plagiarism software are in place to sustain the policy conducted by the University. All breaches in the regulations are brought to the attention of President of TDTU. A special attention is brought to the rightness of the allocation process of scholarships to the students.

The Management of TDTU made it clear that it was important for the University staff to be an example for the students in order for them to develop strong values such as “exemplary attitude” throughout their training

<sup>3029</sup> The Department in charge of Ethics is also responsible for maintain security and order in the Campus. This team is monitoring a staff of 52 security officers that are taking care of the entrance of the campus, the 5 parking lots for cars and motorbikes. TDTU has received a congratulation certificate from the Ministry of Public Security for its outstanding results in maintaining security on the campus.

process at the University. A special emphasis is also given to the teaching of "soft skills" to the students with a practical approach such as the "Little UK" program for instance.

## IV. CONCLUSION

### 1 – PAST ACHIEVEMENTS

Created in 1997, Ton Duc Thang University is a relatively young university. In less than twenty years, this «rocket university» has managed to become one of the major actors in the Vietnamese higher education landscape. At the undergraduate level, TDTU has achieved impressive outcomes, in terms of:

- students recruitment, with a dramatic increase in enrolment, quality, and diversity in ten years,
- undergraduate programs, with a large array of curricula, externally assessed and reviewed,
- infrastructures building, with modern teaching facilities, equipment and accommodations meeting international standards,
- creation of a body of teachers from scratch, with an important effort in the recruitment of lecturers and young researchers,
- global engagement, with the welcoming of a significant number of foreign students mostly at the regional level, and several solid academic partnerships, in Asia and in Europe,
- development of research, with a noticeable activity in research publications, and the creation of three key research laboratories.

These outstanding results are mostly explained by:

- the original status of this university, and a solid business model,
- its exceptional leadership, with a clear vision and thoughtful strategy,
- a very dynamic human resources management,
- the quality of the internal management and the robustness of its operating modes and regulations,
- a rigorous and shared quality assurance policy,
- the support of its economic and political partners.

### 2 – SUCCEEDING TODAY

The current objectives for the present decade revolve around the strengthening of a postgraduate education, with several master programs and a doctoral program, the built-up of local campuses' activity, and the enhancement of the research production.

The pillars of the university are recent but really solid and the above-mentioned assets seem sustainable. The panel of experts is therefore rather confident that TDTU will keep its rapid pace of progress for the next five coming years and will most probably reach the next step of its long-term strategy, especially if TDTU is allowed to strongly increase tuition fees.

### 3 – LOOKING FORWARD

TDTU has to make important progress in the future in order to keep up with its rather ambitious strategy for the next twenty years. In order to become a research university at the international level in such a short period of time, the university has to rely on important financial resources, on the availability of high-trained PhD students and of good researchers. All these resources are scarce in Vietnam, and TDTU will face serious competition at the national level, as well as at the regional and international levels.

TDTU has begun to develop its national and international visibility. The panel of experts is nevertheless convinced that TDTU also has to increase its overall attractiveness to do research. The exceptional quality of the campus, the rather favorable salary policy, and a dynamic communication will not be sufficient to ensure this goal. Indeed, TDTU should start looking for the best ways to define corresponding research strategy and policy.

In the opinion of the panel, a more focused strategy for research and a better structured research organization could facilitate the increase of this overall attractiveness. This strategy could be defined according to:

- an investment in selected master programs, built on undergraduate solid knowledge,
- master programs adapted to the job market in order to attract good national bachelors in postgraduate education, and carefully chosen in order to attract foreign students;
- the choice of long-term scientific equipment's and collective facilities, increasing scientific capability and international visibility;



- the selection of scientific topics specifically adapted to the economic environment, and so able to attract companies and economic partners, who will be interested in these research outcomes;
- the elaboration of research-oriented international partnerships, with foreign universities who will have a real and specific interest in working with TDTU's teams;
- other fundraising activities, in particular through national funds and international founders, as no research-oriented university in the world has been able to develop with its own financial resources exclusively.

## STRENGTHS:

- excellent facilities and modern infrastructures
- strong and dynamic governance
- credible and compelling five years strategy
- solid, transparent, regulated and efficient ethic policy
- rapid growth of scientific indicators
- quality and efficiency of internal processes
- international validation of teaching curricula
- tight partnership with HCMC and local authorities of several southern provinces
- strong identity and sense of belonging shared by students and staff
- excellent occupational integration of the alumni
- ambitious land estate policy for outside campuses

## WEAKNESSES:

- an insufficiently specified long-run research strategy without clear priority domains
- a still limited potential for postgraduate (and primarily PhD) programs
- the absence of pluri-annual financial planning
- a too concentrated management without intermediate relays
- no real partnerships with other Vietnamese academics
- an imprecise internal organization for international affairs
- a weak and not yet enough structured partnership with companies
- a still unconvincing marketing targeted to international students

## SUMMARY LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INSTITUTION PER DOMAIN

Domain	Recommendations
Strategy & Governance & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to accompany the change of scale of the university in the next five years by anticipating a needed evolution in its governance, in particular regarding research structuring, global engagement, and technology transfer</li> <li>to improve the governance in structuring external partnerships and in creating internal intermediate levels</li> <li>to better articulate research actors (faculties and institutes) in order to stabilize the external relations</li> <li>to set up a communication plan towards business and international</li> <li>to communicate only on "what we (TDTU) can achieve"</li> </ul>
Research & Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to adapt the research policy so as to support long-term innovative programs focused on the priority fields</li> <li>to go beyond individual all-round publications and rely on faculties and the current structuring of research institutes, in order to allow the governance to design internal orientations and priorities in line with the international environment</li> <li>to better identify research domains where technology transfer is needed, and to develop technology transfer in coherence with the emerging research activities</li> <li>to secure a pool of highly skilled master and PhD students, thanks to relevant postgraduate teaching programs for TDTU's research activities,</li> </ul>
Student Academic Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to find a way, taking into account the national context, to better associate students and alumni to the institutional governance</li> <li>to implement a unit in charge of the follow-up of TDTU's past students</li> </ul>
External Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to create a club of external economic partners</li> <li>to move from an interpersonal relationship to an integrated co-operation, and to adapt for this purpose the internal organization</li> <li>to set up a monitoring tool of the indicators of the international outcomes</li> </ul>
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop a formal cost-income analysis with options, in order to establish pluri-annual financial planning</li> <li>To upgrade the professionalization of non-academic staff</li> <li>To explicit the strategy regarding outside campuses</li> </ul>
Quality & Ethics	

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INSTITUTION:

The three main recommendations provided to TDTU in order to anticipate the challenges associated with the next steps of its strategy implementation, are the following:

- to identify and support long term innovative programs in priority research fields, carefully develop postgraduate programs (Master and PhD) in line with these priorities, and invest in PhD scholarships,
- to accompany its long term ambitious strategy by a multi-annual financial planning, including different scenarios, and taking into account the development of the outside campuses,
- to gradually increase the responsibilities of internal intermediate levels and enhance the involvement of students, alumni, companies and academic partners into the strategic planning of the institution.

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**Professor François Pernot,**  
Director of the European and International Department  
HCERES

*Date: July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018*

Dear Professor!

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the evaluation team, and in particular to the panel of experts appointed by HCERES. The evaluation would not have been possible without your efforts, expertise and professionalism. Needless to say, your opinion is of great significance to us. We very much appreciate your feedback and will use it to make improvements in our future plans.

Our special thanks also go to HCERES for giving Ton Duc Thang University an opportunity to take part in the process of bringing higher education in Vietnam up to international standards. With the aim of constantly improving our visibility as a leading research-oriented university at national, regional and international levels, we have accomplished the first phase of development; and we are now entering a second phase of supporting an innovative research policy with a long-term perspective.

With respect to the evaluation report issued by the panel in June 2018, we would like to draw your attention to the following points:

1. We are pleased with the strong points identified by the evaluation panel, including the infrastructure and governance, strategy and policy, scientific indicators and teaching curricula, efficiency of internal processes and partnerships with other institutions.
2. With regard to the comments and the weaknesses indicated in the report, while we appreciate this feedback, a few of them should be reconsidered based on the reality of our university and the different social context in Vietnam and Europe. Obviously, we will review the actual weak areas which will be taken into consideration for improvement in the next 5-year Strategic Plans.
3. With regard to the recommendations to the university, we would like to stress that those recommendations are a crucial input for us and will be seriously considered for implementation.

Given our commitment to the development of the University according to the Strategic Plans over the next 20 years, we request the Council of HCERES to approve the accreditation of our university. We would like to offer our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the President of HCERES and the evaluation team for their dedication and professionalism. The experience of Ton Duc Thang University as a pioneer institution in this process will undoubtedly provide valuable lessons to all stakeholders involved in this common interest.

Sincerely!

**PRESIDENT**

**Prof. LE VINH DANH, Ph.D**





Europe and international Department

## ACCREDITATION DECISION

Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU)

**July 2018**

## SCOPE OF THE ACCREDITATION GRANTED BY HCERES

HCERES has built its evaluation process based on a set of objectives that Higher Education Institution must pursue to ensure recognised quality within France and Europe. These objectives are divided up into six fields among which are the accreditation criteria.

As for the "External Evaluation Standards", the accreditation criteria have been specifically designed for foreign HEI. The accreditation criteria were adopted by the Board on June 2016 and are available on the HCERES website ([hceres.fr](http://hceres.fr)).

The accreditation committee, meeting his accreditation decision, has wholly taken into account the final evaluation report of the HEI. This accreditation decision is the result of a collegial and reasoned process.

The accreditation decision issued by HCERES shall not grant any rights whatsoever, whether in France or abroad. The decision to accredit an institution confers an accreditation label and does not infer recognition in France of the qualifications issued by the accredited institution. The HCERES accreditation process therefore has no impact on the qualifications recognition process in France.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

### AREA 1: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

#### Accreditation criterion

The institution is governed based on a strategy adapted to its environment and identity. The internal organisational structure is clearly defined and allows the institution to fulfil its missions. The institution's stakeholders participate in its governance.

#### Criterion assessment

Ton Duc Thang University has a clear and explicit strategy in place, taking into account its socioeconomic environment and the needs of the country and its development.

The current internal organization has functioned very efficiently for the past decade around the President and thanks to a small team of dedicated staff. It nevertheless needs to be clarified, and adapted soon in the near future, in order to keep up with the next phases of development of the university.

Despite its strong vision in line of its role within the society and its economic environment and its international ambition, the overall governance doesn't reflect sufficiently all the stakeholders (economic environment, students, others academics).

### AREA 2: RESEARCH AND TEACHING

#### Accreditation criterion

The institution develops research and teaching policies adapted to its strategy and the needs of the socioeconomic and cultural environment. Study programs are coordinated with the institution's research activities. The programme offering is clear. Student admission, progress and qualification procedures are defined and implemented.

#### Criterion assessment

So far Ton Duc Thang University has been able to develop an exemplary undergraduate training program constituted by clear curricula and well implemented procedures. It addresses the needs and demands of the country. The emerging postgraduate programs are in line with the rising research taskforce.

The research policy still needs a long term realistic focused strategic approach taking into account the anticipating socio-economic demand as well as the competitive environment.

### AREA 3: STUDENT ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

#### Accreditation criterion

The institution is attentive to learning resources and the quality of life of students. It ensures that students are well-informed and provided with student services throughout their academic careers. Students must be able to participate in governance structures.

#### Criterion assessment

The learning resources and facilities and student information system are modern, efficient, and they fit international standards.

The institutional student participation in governance structure is still lacking.

### AREA 4: EXTERNAL RELATIONS

#### Accreditation criterion

The partnership policy is designed and established to provide added value for the institution. The institution has structured its external relations and developed internationalisation mechanisms that are adapted to its strategy.

#### Criterion assessment

Ton Duc Thang University has established partnerships with economic and local political structures that allows its development activities. However, TDTU has no relations with Vietnamese academic partners, which might impact its future research development.

From the international strategic perspective, TDTU has a clear vision of its development, but needs however to better structure and institutionalize its approach.

### AREA 5: MANAGEMENT

#### Accreditation criterion

Financial, budgetary and human resources are managed and organised in a defined and well-controlled manner. They are adapted to the strategy defined by the institution and involve multi-year planning. The institution has an IT system adapted to its strategy and objectives. The institution's assets are well-known and managed.

#### Criterion assessment

The institution provides a rigorous and efficient management, and has developed appropriate tools. It still lacks a clear formal multi-year financial planning.

The IT system seems state of the art, and the institution's assets are well-known and managed

### AREA 6: QUALITY AND ETHICS

#### Accreditation criterion

The institution has defined a quality policy for all its missions and strives towards continuous improvement. It upholds ethical values and professional standards, and applies them in its day-to-day operations.

#### Criterion assessment

TDTU has a clearly defined quality policy, implemented by a professional team. This enables TDTU to operate under a continuous improvement process.

TDTU's ethic policy is a key element of its identity and fits international standards.

## FINAL ASSESSMENT

Considering the accreditation criteria analysis detailed above, the accreditation committee issues the following decision:

### **"Five-year unreserved accreditation decision"**

and draws attention to the following points:

- It is important that the university take into account and implement the recommendations of the expert committee.
- A particular attention must be paid to university management and this management must be more extended to students, professors and external stakeholders.
- It is important for the university to put in place a tactic to move from a teaching university model to a research university model, developing its master's programme, intensifying its external relations and allowing more time for its teachers and researchers to develop their research activities.

### **SIGNATURE**

For HCERES and on behalf of



Michel COSNARD,

President

Date: Paris, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018



The evaluation reports of Hceres  
are available online : [www.hceres.com](http://www.hceres.com)

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