Accreditation: Catholic Theological Private University of Linz (Austria)

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Preliminary Remarks

Joint procedure by AVEPRO and AQ Austria

Findings and valuations based upon unanimous understanding among all peers

A. Vision, mission, Objective of the Institution

The vision should include the long term desired status and positioning of the university. Describe the mission of the university both as an ecclesiastical and an academic institution. Do vision and mission need to evolve? Flowing from the vision and the mission describe the faculty's principal strategic objectives.

The Catholic Theological Private University of Linz (KTPU) is a scientific institution under the sponsorship of the Diocese of Linz, which, for decades, has become well established within the region, particularly within the theological core segment. The challenges, with which the KTPU, within the last few years and past decades, has been faced with, due to inner (e.g. the development of an emphasis on art sciences) and outer (the development enquiries, number of students) developments, have already been addressed.

The decline of enquiries, which has been evident since the 1990s within the segment of theological studies, was counteracted with the strengthening and establishing of the areas of art sciences and philosophy. Based on the profile of tertiary educational establishments in the region, this is principally understandable, since the humanistic field is, comparatively, sparsely represented and, thus, a gap, in terms of course offerings, can be filled. The KTPU's focus lies primarily on increasing the number of students through the development of new possibilities for studies in those fields, which are linked to theology (art, philosophy, ethics).

This recently led to the funding and tendering of further professorships, the implementation of new degree programs, particularly in the fields of philosophy, art sciences, and organizational changes through the creation of a two-faculties-structure (beginning on Oct. 1, 2015). Currently, as these implementations are taking place, the KTPU is creating the basic staffing (professorships and research assistants) in the fields of philosophy and art sciences. This setup process is currently in progress.

Since the course offerings towards the art sciences and philosophy/ethics were already widened several years ago, first observations concerning the development of enquiries compared to the number of students and, thus, the implementation of this goal, can be recorded. Thereby, statistics within the areas of theological studies, as well as in the areas of philosophical and art science studies currently reveal a decline in the number of students. In the field of theology, this tendency can also be observed at other study locations in Austria; to a lesser extent, however, in the field of philosophy and art science. In these cases, a steady or (in some instances rapidly) rising number of students can be observed. Naturally, one must also consider that the creation of new professorships for these new fields of study are still in progress (some of the newly occupied positions begin in the fall semester of 2015/16; other professorships have not yet been announced/appointed). Thus, it should be expected that owing to the new professorships, the attractiveness of the curricula will also increase. The fact that, since 2010, it has not been possible to, at least, maintain the number of students, goes to show that there should be cause for intensive reflection during the regular strategy discussions at the governance level. It is recommended that guidelines be set and that these should regularly be checked in terms of their effectiveness.

Against this background, the private university now finds itself in a long-range structural process of change. The goals of this process can be extrapolated from the documents and discussions. From the reviewers' viewpoint, these, ensuing from the essential preservation of the theological core competency (also in the broadness of subjects and the range of courses offered), lie within the widening, particularly of the course offerings oriented towards art sciences and philosophy. Thus, according to the assessment of the members of the review group, the goal is not so much to follow the (research led) establishment strategy of some, deliberately selected focal points and research

approaches, but rather the attempt is made to achieve the broadest possible coverage of both subjects. This happens presumably in order to increase the number of students.

B. Governance, Management, Organisation

> *What level of autonomy has the university in terms of academic, financial and personnel matters?*
>
> *Describe the organisational structure of the faculty, with a chart (Annex 1) detailing the reporting lines both internal and external (e.g. the local bishop, CEC, the order, university, if relevant). How are decisions made? Where does final responsibility for decisions lie? Assess the effects on the university's ability to fulfill its mission and achieve its objectives.*
>
> *Are the rector, deans and heads of department elected or appointed, and do these posts rotate? How are teaching appointments made? How are promotions decided, and by whom? Again assess the effects on the ability of the university to fulfill its mission and achieve its objectives.*
>
> *Are there regular meetings of faculties and departments, with an agreed agenda circulated in advance and brief minutes of key decisions and action items? Are decisions reached by vote/consensus?*
>
> *Are there formal procedures in place for dealing with staff concerns?*

The KTPU has an organizational form made up of conventional committees and functions. Based on the statutes, this form of organization seems quite complex, especially due to the many processes of coordination, which are necessary prior to making any decisions. The members of the review group, particularly in conversation, got the impression that the organization is, in practice, well established and that the various participants are able to handle the system quite well.

The result of the powerful role played by the committees is, in a positive light, a strong awareness of solidarity and togetherness, on all of the private university's levels. This pertains to the student level, as well. Everyone's firmly anchored involvement in the decision-making-processes presumably contributes significantly to the positive underlying mood of shared participation. Moreover, in the meantime, due to the size of the institution, many decisions are quickly and informally initialized. The "familial business" is perceived by many as something positive; the students have also articulated a deep satisfaction and identification with the university.

An institution, which has an organizational form that is predominantly run by committees, should in particular pay attention to the following developments, in order to counteract any risks this form of organization may have: 1. How can the repeated handling of decisions matters be reduced/avoided? In practical terms, the repeated handling of a topic can lead to inefficient decision-making procedures and, thus, also a delay in decisions. The reviewers were under the impression that the members of the KTPU are very much attentive in regard to this. 2. Another area is the strategy development with regard to the respectively larger entities, such as the university or (in future) the faculty as a whole. Since the rector and the dean are the moderating, or

rather executive bodies of any decisions made by committees, care should be taken that matters, which concern the overall development/governance of the institution, are not neglected. Thus, particularly the institution's image as a whole, for example, should be adequately looked over and enhanced (cf. development plan).

Furthermore, the organizational structure faces the challenge of the developing of two faculties, since, with it, a new level is created and the personnel of the dean and the rector are no longer identical. Naturally, the development, which leads away from a structure that involved only one faculty, poses new questions regarding unity and diversity: what exactly is uniformly and jointly established throughout the entire university and what are the necessary differences? As it now stands, another level (faculty) has been put into place. For this reason, it may be that, de facto, three levels (institute, faculty, university) are formed, thus, requiring decisions to be passed through even more committees. At any rate, the current newly defined and determined structure should be seen as a test run, which, in the foreseeable future, will be evaluated in terms of the regulations' effectiveness.

This organizational structure is specified in form of a statute. The present statute was recently revised and aligned with the two-faculties-structure. This statute regulates the responsibilities and jurisdictions of the private university.

The statutes of the KTPU delegate various functions to the Magnus Cancellarius (= diocesan bishop of Linz), who is, ultimately, the one person completely responsible for the private university. These functions relate to the external representation of the private university (especially with respect to the Holy See), tasks, which deal with the supervision of the KTPU (the highest personnel authority, oversight regarding faithfulness to Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium), but also decisions in other areas, especially regarding personnel. The authority of the ecclesiastical entity in charge exceeds that of state universities (e.g. *placet*: obtaining ecclesiastical approval for persons, who have been appointed to teach; *venia docendi*: for postdoctoral qualification; *nihil obstat*: for appointments) by far, since, in these cases, the diocese is directly responsible for the function of the establishment (including responsibilities for finances, the role of employer, etc.). Whether or not there are individual areas, in which individual decisions (p.r.n. through a delegation) can be made by the rector, as well, is an issue that should be discussed between the diocese and the KTPU.

The rector is the president of the KTPU (statute, § 7) and chairperson of the university senate. It is his or her responsibility to oversee, promote, and coordinate all activities of the academic community. He or she is elected by the senate (previously: faculty council) and, after obtaining consent from the Congregation for Catholic Education, appointed by the Magnus Cancellarius. Likewise, the faculty deans of the KTPU are appointed based on the recommendation of the faculty councils. Statute § 10 defines the duties of the highest collegial administrative body, the university senate.

Furthermore, the duties of the academic dean and the rules of the curricular committee are specifically defined in application of the statute. As a matter of principle, it would be desirable that, after a certain time of experience with the two faculties, this statute be examined in terms of its functionality and, in this context, also be reviewed.

The responsibilities of the student representation are stipulated in statute § 42 of the KTPU. The execution of their duties occurs pursuant to their rules, which are approved by

the university senate and the regulations stipulated by the state. The student representation at the KTPU is, thus, represented in all relevant committees of the KTPU.

C. SWOT Analysis

> *List the university's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.*
> *Consider the full range of factors relevant to you: teaching and learning; research; management and organisation; community related activities; internationalisation; finance; human resources; external issues etc.*
> *On what evidence do you base your judgements? If this evidence is not strong or useful, how should you get the evidence you need on an ongoing basis?*
> *Does the university have a strategic plan based on this SWOT analysis? If yes, describe it, if no, develop an outline of such a plan, indicating the principal priorities of the university for the next four years. Please cross-reference with Section 2.*

The SWOT analysis of the University is spread over different parts of the Self-Evaluation Report ("Antrag auf Reakkreditierung"). Part I and II contain special SWOT analyses (pp. 1-10, 116-120, 124-135, 195f., 202f., 135-237); and Part II C. contains a SWOT analysis of the Faculty in general (pp. 230-233). There is no need, to repeat the complete lists of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the present report. It may suffice to mention some keywords here:

Strengths:

– very good supervisory relationship
– research and teaching, which emanate into society
– strong support from the diocese
– collegial atmosphere among the staff
– gender balance
– extensive library

Weaknesses:

– poor attractiveness of the study location
– financial infrastructure
– research coordination
– vague profile of some course offerings
– insufficient implementation of the Bologna Reform
– student mobility

Opportunities:

– a specific and particular profile in combination with three departments: theology, philosophy, art
– new study programs
– cooperation with other universities in Linz: inter-university course offerings
– cooperation with the State of Upper Austria

Threats:

- decline in the number of students
- drop-out rate
- adequate cadre of students of theology
- a long-term financial security
- restructuring brings with it certain risks
- frequent evaluations and (re)accreditations

D. Quality Assurance, Improvement, Strategic Plan and Follow-Up Procedures

Discuss
(i) the structures in place and the effectiveness of the university's processes for internal quality assurance and enhancement
(ii) the effectiveness of the university's response to the internal evaluations carried out up to now, and the ways in which lesson learned from these have been taken into account in the enhancement of institutional practice
(iii) the intended activities for quality assurance and enhancement over the next three years to further support the effectiveness of existing or proposed practices, and remedy any shortcomings identified in the quality assurance processes

The private university has a distinct process of evaluation concerning courses. In accordance with the statutes, a continual process for the internal teaching evaluation is being implemented by the respective curricular committee. A separate intercurially compiled evaluation group has been set up for the Faculty of Theology (FTh), as well as for the Faculty of Philosophy and Art Sciences (FPhK). The documents record that the evaluation of courses takes place on a regular basis and that the results also have an influence upon the further development of teaching. The internal course evaluations, which take place every semester according to the KTPU's evaluation rules, reveal great satisfaction on behalf of the students, with the course offerings at the KTPU. A dialogue with the students regarding the results also takes place. Furthermore, the feedback given to the evaluated teaching staff and the department heads in charge, offers valuable perspectives with regard to selective quality enhancement, of which the realization is made the topic of evaluation discussion in the following semesters.

On a positive note, it should also be emphasized that in the future, the intention is to make the examination methods subject to evaluation, as well. A possible suggestion might be to review the questionnaire, in particular the second part, in terms of its adequacy. According to the members of the review group, the use of the evaluation results seems to be rather vague. So, for example, lecturers have reported that they were able to view questionnaires, which had already been filled out. Who receives which data/questionnaire? (A guarantee of anonymity regarding feedback in a case of few cohorts). Are the aggregated data or questionnaires passed on? It is greatly encouraged that regulations be created in this area, or, if applicable, standardized.

A survey of all freshmen is given every semester, as well. In this way, their reasons for studying at the KTPU are ascertained, amongst other things; however, the survey is also

intended to provide information about the conditions under which the students conduct their studies (e.g. occupation, family duties, …). Furthermore, the students are asked to give suggestions for improvement. An analysis of the studies given by graduates is found in the second part of the KTPU's evaluation order and an extensive analysis of the drop-out-rate is done within the framework of the annually stipulated report.

A research documentation for teaching staff employed at the KTPU has been set up in the rectory. The areas administration and personnel development also come under the diocesan controlling-measures and the revision department of the KUL's financial holder. This guarantees a steady efficiency control.

However, quality development is an extensive task. By implementing a university-wide quality management system, universities assume institutional responsibility for quality assurance and quality development in research, teaching, and organization. For this reason, other core tasks, along with the courses, should also undergo a quality loop. Questions such as "in the near future, which areas should be the specific focus of quality development?", "how can the quality assurance in the field of research be guaranteed?", and "how so the curricular development?" remained open.

Especially in this area the orientation towards those methods, which are determined externally, seems to be quite strong within the framework of reaccreditation. This is generally understandable, due to the short time frames in which the reaccreditation must take place. However, it would be desirable that the implementation of quality development in certain core areas should be the result of an inner motivation and that the results be used externally in the course of the reaccreditation procedure.

Improvement Measures Due to the Results of Internal and External Quality Reviews in the Past Years

The KTPU's main focus in this area still lies on the evaluations, which the reaccreditation process of 2010 gave on behalf of the Austrian Accreditation Council (accreditation body of Private Universities until March 2012). Those areas, which were in need of improvement, were forwarded to the respective committees and measures were taken:

1. The KTPU's equally represented structural committee was entrusted with the revision of the statutes, whereby, among others, essential points regarding the decision on reaccreditation were taken into consideration: the statuary anchoring of the Institute of Art Science and Philosophy (IKP) as an independent faculty (now: Faculty of Philosophy and Art Sciences), the increase of personnel (the creation of new professorships), the revision of regulations pertaining to habilitation, etc.

2. The implementation of a stringent research strategy:

– The definition of research foci within the single institutes and making this visible to the public.
– Interdisciplinary research foci: during the course of the development of a university research focus, a cooperation on the subject of "individual – institution – authenticity" was created at the KTPU, which integrates, bundles, and coordinates the interdisciplinary research activities to this innovative field of research. The disciplines of systematic theology (fundamental theology and dogmatics), New Testament, pastoral theology, and philosophy are participants in this research group.

- Empirical research project: within the framework of the three-year research project "Wissenschaftliche Begleitung des Arbeitsschwerpunktes 'LebensZEICHEN' der Diözese Linz", a research team of the KTPU is dealing with the program and method of the Second Vatican Council, addressing the "Zeichen der Zeit" (the "signs of the times"), interpreting them in a theological context, and as a result, is gaining impulses on how to be a Christian in today's societal conditions.

- In March of 2013 the decision was made to set up a department for the establishment and support of research projects. This part-time position is meant to proactively advise the staff members of the KTPU in regard to funding opportunities, render support in terms of applications, and provide support for their projects. For the time being, the position will be established as a three-year fixed term and will be concomitantly evaluated. Only after the three years will the decision be made whether or not to include the position definitely in the organizational chart of the KTPU. This position has been filled since March of 2014. An important part of the consultant's duties is the strategic planning of research.

- Student assistants have been employed for 4hrs/week per institute or department since December 1st, 2010. These positions are limited to one year and are filled by upper class students.

- The KTPU is represented in the Austrian Private University Conference (ÖPUK) and works intensively with other private universities within this field.

3. The implementation of personnel development measures concerning the rapid academic degree of the junior academic staff.

4. The further development of national and international networking:

- In future, a broader use of the mobility programs by students, on the one hand, and by scientific personnel, on the other hand, is to be the expected as a result of the occupied position of consultant for the establishment and support of research projects.

- The KTPU is an establishment of the Diocese of Linz. Naturally, there exist several and various collaborations with different diocesan institutions. However, there also exists a strong cooperation with other social protagonists. The cooperation with the research community "WiEGe" (Wirtschaft-Ethik-Gesellschaft), with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Federation of Austrian Industry (for example, the annually bestowed WER-Award – an award for the promotion of economical, ethical, and religious dialog) are important to mention here.

- Also important to mention is the networking and collaboration with other private universities through the Austrian Private University Conference (ÖPUK).

E. External Societal Contributions

Comment on the university's external societal contributions under the following headings:
Professional and other bodies
Community – participation in external community life and social projects
Lifelong Learning, Continuing Education
Contact with alumni
Consultancy/external advisory arrangements

The diocese as a supporting establishment has committed itself explicitly to this institution and would like to hold high and intensify the dialog with the people and with society through the fulfillment of the scientific tasks of this institution. The presence of theology in society, as well as the scientific reflection of pastoral practice, is a goal, which can be achieved with the help of the KTPU. Furthermore, the theological qualification for employees of the Church, pastoral care, and other social occupational fields is an important objective.

Also worth mentioning at this point are the many scientific events at the KTPU, which are addressed towards a broad audience. These are, for example, the Dies Academicus, the interdisciplinary lecture series in cooperation with other tertiary partners, and the Ecumenical Summer Academy in the Monastery of Kremsmünster.