Ss. Cyril and Methodius University

Evaluation Report

April 2015

Team:
Gülsün Sağlamer, Chair
Ingegerd Palmér
Ivan Leban
Erazem Bohinc
Raymond Smith, Team Coordinator

Contents

1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje which took place at the end of October 2014 and at the beginning of March 2015.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:
- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Ss. Cyril and Methodius University's profile

1.2.1 Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (UKIM) was founded in 1949 and is the oldest and largest of the universities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). There are five state and 18 private accredited universities in FYROM. The university is located on several sites in the capital city, Skopje, and while there is a strong sense of the corporate identity of the institution, there is also a long tradition of faculty empowerment in terms of devolved responsibilities and accountabilities. At the time of the evaluation there were 23 faculties, five scientific institutes and 12, what are known as, "joining member institutions". The faculties vary in size from the Faculty of

Economics with around 4 800 students to the Faculty of Forestry with just under 300 students. The subject range delivered by the university is wide-ranging with faculties that include a variety of programmes in the following areas: Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Technical and Technological Sciences, Medical Sciences and Health, Biotechnology, Social and Humanistic Sciences and Arts. Scientific institutes embrace areas such as Earthquake Engineering and Engineering Seismology, Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, Economics, Agriculture and Cattle-breeding. The "joining member institutions" include the Institute of Macedonian Language, the Institute of Macedonian Literature, the Institute of National History, the Institute of Folklore and the St Kliment Ohridski National and University Library.

1.2.2   In the self- evaluation report (SER) it is stated that in the academic year 2012-2013, the total number of active students[1] was 32,372, of which 29,444 were enrolled in first cycle studies, 2 415 in the second cycle and 513 in the third cycle of studies. In the same year the academic teaching staff at the university included 1 859 academic teaching staff and associate staff, 1 748 of whom worked in the faculties and 111 at the five scientific institutes that are permanent members of UKIM.

1.2.3   The impact of government legislation on higher education was most keenly felt by the university in 2008 when a new higher education act required all universities to implement an organisational framework described in the SER as "integrated autonomous university". In practice this meant that the university became the "legal entity" with faculties and other units of the university giving up their previously held separate legal statuses. The key body governing the university became the Senate. The university's senior management acknowledged that this was a very significant change after 65 years of operating in a different way but the team understood that the change had mostly been trouble free, with only some limited opposition from the faculties which had been used to complete autonomy in the region in financial affairs.

1.2.4   The university recruits around 10,000 new students across all cycles each academic year, and who come from all parts of the country. A small number of students are recruited from outside FYROM, mainly from Turkey, Bulgaria and Slovenia. When asked why they chose UKIM a number of students responded by saying that they felt it was the best and most respected institution in FYROM. The team heard from senior staff that there were a number of new universities in the country that claimed excellence. In their view, however, the real motivation of the new universities was profit. In contrast, at UKIM it was stated there was a palpable sense of social responsibility in that 90% of science teaching in FYROM took place at UKIM and 70% of EU funds allocated to higher education (HE) were received by the university. From all sections of the university there was a strongly expressed view that the reputation of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University

---

[1] As with other universities in FYROM, UKIM also refers to a total student population (around 60,000) but this includes "non-active" students who started their studies at the university and subsequently left without completing their degrees. Most of these have no intention of returning to study but it is a requirement of national law that they are kept "on the books".

was built entirely on the basis of the quality of its provision. Accordingly there was no need for the university to lower its admissions criteria or engage in expensive marketing/advertising campaigns to recruit students or engage with external partners.

1.2.5   In summary, there were clearly some very serious challenges and constraints in terms of the external environment. These challenges and constraints could be listed as follows: continuous change in higher education legislation with very detailed national regulations and legal instability; severe financial constraints together with limited financial autonomy and flexibility; limited institutional autonomy affecting management and administration; and restrictions in recruiting and promoting staff. The team was struck by the level of concern that this generated at all levels within the university and the extent to which this position had deteriorated between the two evaluation visits.

1.3 The evaluation process

1.3.1   The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the University's Self-evaluation Commission nominated by the University Senate and the Working Group nominated by the Rector, in accordance with the University Bylaws:

Self-evaluation Commission
Professor Sonja Alabakovska, Faculty of Medicine
Professor Dimitar Tashkovski, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technologies
Professor Mitko Mladenov, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics
Professor Zehra Hajrulai-Musliu, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
Professor Ganka Cvetanova, Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research
Professor Goran Trpchevski, Faculty of Dramatic Arts
Ms Simona Dimovska, student, 'Iustinianus Primus' Faculty of Law
Ms Marija Vasilevska, student, 'Iustinianus Primus' Faculty of Law
Ms Marija Rajchevska, student, Faculty of Economy

Working Group

Professor Velimir Stojkovski, Rector
Professor Vlatko Stoilkov, Vice-Rector for Teaching
Members of the Self-evaluation Commission
Rector's Office administrative staff:
Kostadina Mokrova
Marija Cenevska, MA
Katerina Petreska, MA
Maja Anastasova Hristova, MA
Zoran Kordoski
The overall evaluation process was co-ordinated by the Rector, Professor Velimir Stojkovski and the Vice-Rector for Teaching, Professor Vlatko Stoilkov.

1.3.2   The self-evaluation report of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in September 2014. The visits of the evaluation team to Ss. Cyril and Methodius took place from 28 to 31 October 2014 and from 1 to 4 March 2015, respectively. In between the two visits Ss. Cyril and Methodius University provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

1.3.3   The overall coverage of the documentation sent to the IEP team was comprehensive and well-organised. It included both qualitative and quantitative indicators and all documents had been translated into English.

1.3.4   The team noted that the university's SEG had been established for a dual purpose, namely (a) as part of the requirements of Higher Education law in FYROM to carry out a self-evaluation process and develop a report for the period 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 and (b) to meet the requirements of the EUA's IEP. The membership of the Self-Evaluation Group and its terms of reference had been endorsed by the Senate.

1.3.5   The SER states that the entire university community - teaching staff, administrative staff and students - were informed about the IEP process. Notification was provided through notice boards, faculty/institute web pages and on the UKIM website. The SEG commenced its work in January 2014 and members were divided into working groups that were "vested with tasks in accordance with the position and competencies of each member, in order to achieve as objective data analysis as possible". The team learnt from the meeting with the SEG that each faculty had its own self-evaluation committee and that the outcomes from these considerations were fed into the central group. The SWOT analysis, which took place towards the end of the SER, had been carried out by the central SEG but had been built on other SWOTs carried out in the faculties. The team felt that there was little evidence of significant student involvement in this evaluation process. The university acknowledged that students tended to focus on issues relating to employability although there were, of course, opportunities for their input through the Student Parliament and student representation in the Senate.

1.3.6   The self-evaluation report was reviewed and adopted by the rector, the Rector's Board and the university Senate.

1.3.7   The team understood the reasoning behind the university's decision to embrace the IEP process within the wider framework of the formal national legal requirements for self-evaluation. Clearly there were some synergies to be gained from this approach. However, it did result in an IEP SER which did not always address the principles of the IEP methodology, particularly in terms of self-reflection and "fitness for purpose" questions (see paragraph 1.1 above).

1.3.8   UKIM is an experienced institution in terms of the IEP process - this was the fourth occasion on which it had been evaluated. The university senior management was fully supportive of such external evaluations believing that they reinforced the university's ambition to create a "product" that could compete in a highly competitive European

market which no longer recognised educational borders. In this context such external scrutiny enabled more light to be shed on areas of university activity that would otherwise go unnoticed by straightforward internal monitoring. Ultimately the university felt that benchmarks for excellence had to be seen in the wider European context and that this was facilitated by the external view provided by the IEP.

1.3.9   The team was impressed by the university's belief in, and rationale for, the IEP process. However, it was not convinced that the IEP process had been as fully understood and engaged with by the whole of the university community in the way suggested in the SER. Equally, in conversations with staff and students there was some evidence that, while there was an awareness of the process, the actual engagement of mainstream staff and students was not as widespread as it might otherwise have been.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) was composed of:
- Professor Gülsün Sağlamer, former Rector, Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Turkey, team chair
- Professor Ingegerd Palmér, former Rector, Luleå University of Technology and Mälardalen University, Sweden
- Professor Ivan Leban, former Vice-Rector, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Mr Erazem Bohinc, ESU QA POOL member, Master of Laws student, European Faculty of Law, Slovenia
- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, UK, team coordinator.

2.   Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1   Ss. Cyril and Methodius University is a public higher educational institution and the first state university in the country.

2.2   The university is regulated by its Statute. The Statute has to be endorsed by the Parliament of FYROM. University units (faculties, research institutes etc.) have regulations that establish their internal arrangements and operations and these have to conform to the university statute.

2.3   In the SER the vision of the university is described as ‟to be [a] modern, dynamic, educational and research institution on the basis of … performance, competitiveness and quality, active and integrated locally, regionally and internationally, as well as in (…) the Single European Higher Education Area”.

The mission of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University is declared to be:

- an autonomous, scientific and higher educational university that provides teaching, scholarly and applied activities in the technical, natural sciences and mathematics, bio-technology, the arts, medical and social sciences;

- devoted to the cherishing as well as the international affirmation of the traditional features and values of the Macedonian people, such as the Macedonian language, history, literature and culture, including cherishing of the cultural values of other ethnic communities in the Republic of Macedonia;

- open for all students on the basis of equality and their results, regardless of their ideological, political, cultural, religious and social background;

- a university that concords its academic offer to the needs of its social surrounding, and has a continuously dynamic relation towards it;

- a university that creates a stimulating environment for its employees, providing them with the opportunity to develop their abilities in order to accomplish the university's mission;

- a university that develops long-life and continuous education;

- a university determined to achieve European norms and standards in all spheres of its activities.

2.4   The most senior management body of UKIM is the Senate (68 members), chaired by the rector, followed by the Rector's Board (34 members) and the Rector's Governing Body. The decision-making process at the university also involves the vice-rectors, deans/directors of the units, the scientific and teaching councils/scientific councils of the units, commissions and other bodies identified within the formal structure of UKIM.

2.5   Students are involved in the management of the university through Student Parliaments at both institutional and faculty levels. They are represented on the university Senate (10% of the overall membership) and the Rector's Board as well as on Faculty Management Boards/Institute Boards and teaching and research councils. They are included in the commissions for self-evaluation and the evaluation of units and the wider university. The team heard from members of the Student Parliament that the student body was also active in the national context through meetings arranged with senior members of government to ensure that student expectations of higher education were communicated clearly as part of that dialogue.

2.6   The SER acknowledges, however, that, to date, students have largely failed to exercise "their rights to be involved in the discussions and decision making process when it comes to key and strategic affairs of UKIM". The team saw this to be confirmed during some of its discussions with students. The team also noted that there was no formal process for training students in their roles on the various bodies of the university. It appeared that students were simply expected to ask questions if they did not understand any aspect of their roles. In the view of the team *the university should support the formal training of student representatives to ensure that they play a full and effective part in the key decision making bodies of UKIM.*

2.7   The university highlights the importance of the student ombudsman as a mechanism for supporting student interests. This post is elected from students in the law faculty. The university felt this to be a better arrangement than an independent adjudicator as a current student was more likely to be familiar with the workings of the institution and bring more confidence to the wider student body in the integrity of the role. This view was endorsed by members of the Student Parliament that the team met. There also appeared to be good working relationships between the university and faculty student ombudsmen and the rector/deans. The number of cases at the central university level ranged from 6-8 in most months with a peak of around 15 cases during examination months. In meetings that the team held with the wider student body, the level of awareness of this role, and the extent to which it was seen as an effective mechanism for supporting students, was somewhat limited. The team understood that the university had made strenuous efforts to promote the scheme but nevertheless felt that, given the importance of the scheme, which the team supported, these efforts should be doubled. It recommended, therefore, *that the university's senior management continue to work actively with the Student Parliament to ensure better promotion of the student ombudsman scheme amongst students.*

2.8   The rector, who has been in office since 2008, has a further two years before his second (and final) term of office terminates. At the level of the Rectorate - and indeed more widely in the executive team - the financing of the university was seen as the most significant and pressing management challenge. In large part this was a problem of political volatility in national government; during the period the rector had been in office there had been six different ministers of education and 15 changes in the law

over a six-year period. Moreover, the changes in law (and the recently proposed changes in law) were of considerable substance that had major implications for the management of universities. One senior view was that the government should desist from such interventions through the law and follow through on its commitment to set up a funding council for the HE sector which could allocate funds on a per capita/per student basis with overall funding based on activity. The universities had strongly encouraged this to happen, but without success. As things were at present, government funds were insufficient for a university the size of UKIM and, as a consequence, there were a wide range of activities that the university had to fund through its own earned income. For example, the costs of visiting professors had to be met fully by the university. Ultimately, the university was very confident in its vision and mission but matters such as these were being seriously challenged by the realities of the political environment.

2.9   The importance of solidarity as a feature of the integrated university was stressed to the team. In effect this meant a degree of cross-subsidising as larger and more prosperous faculties helped support those that were less well equipped to generate their own funds. 5% of earned income from the faculties went into a central fund to sustain all areas of the universities and there was, it was stated to the team, absolute transparency in the way the fund was disbursed. In looking forward, the university's senior management was relatively circumspect about any significant developments in terms of integration. Stress was also placed on the role of financially responsible and accountable faculties, particularly as a way of encouraging local enterprise, and the need for give and take in the relationships between "centre" and "faculty/units".

2.10   In discussions with deans and vice-deans there was a broad level of support for the way in which the "integrated university" worked. The team noted that the integration of the university, in line with government requirements, had been managed as a Tempus project with support from European partners in Belgium and Austria. This involvement of external European partners was to be applauded and appeared to have helped with the "buy-in" of the wider academic community. In discussion with members of Senate the team found general confirmation of the success of integration with an acknowledgement that the previous arrangements had seen units as "independent islands". However, the team also heard the view that integration had made little difference to the ways in which the university worked. There was indeed some evidence that the larger and more powerful faculties continued to operate without any undue interference from the university executive. In practical terms integration signified that the Senate approved the budget, i.e. the funds allocated to science, investment, publishing, special student needs, etc. with each faculty bidding for funds and being required to demonstrate how income had been spent. Equally in terms of bids to the EU and similar funds, these were now viewed as joint enterprises which required the approval of the rector to avoid duplication of bids from the faculties. It was stated to the team that this type of co-ordination had led to a significant increase

in the number of successful project bids (86). In this respect integration could be seen as a "win-win2 outcome with an increased positive profile for the university and better control over the budget.

2.11   Clearly, the university had spent much time, energy and resources unifying internal processes and procedures, establishing central units serving all faculties such as a doctoral school, international office, students' ombudsman, university-wide information systems and so on.   At the university level it appeared to the team that decision making processes had been well integrated. In other words, integration had been successful in achieving vertical integration with greater power vested in the executive.   Integration had also produced greater uniformity in the application of regulations across the university and an end to different decisions being made in different faculties. However, the team also observed insufficient horizontal integration between faculties relating to study programmes and research projects. *The team believed that the university would benefit from increasing the interaction of its faculties and units by cross-faculty research activities; the redesign of curricula to include common courses as a way of enhancing interaction between faculties; extending double major and minor degrees across the university; sharing best practice*.

2.12   The university has a strategic plan for the period 2012-2016. The key challenges set out in the plan, as highlighted in the SER, are university organisation; lack of junior academic staff; modernisation of the teaching process in line with the Bologna Process; improvements in the quality of learning and teaching and student achievement; improved staff and student mobility; improved quality management; higher levels of research activity; flexibility in the delivery of postgraduate and doctoral studies; IT infrastructure; financial sustainability.

2.13   The team found this to be a sensible range of strategic priorities for the university, but was concerned that the associated action plan (Appendix 27) was lacking in precision and, as a consequence, it was difficult to understand who exactly was accountable for meeting the goals and how achievements to meet goals would be monitored and measured. In the view of the team there was a real need for an action plan to set out quantifiable data on timeframes and the measurement of achievements. Moreover, there was some feeling amongst the team that the strategic plan was a somewhat static document. For example, the team learned of no real clarity about how the strategic plan was iterated in response to the evaluation process. *Given the current national constraints and uncertainties, the team advises the university to focus only on the highest priorities as part of its strategic planning process whilst retaining sufficient flexibility to adapt to further changes in the external environment. This should include scenario planning and contingency plans.*

2.14   It was also very apparent to the team that, while there was a list of priorities set out in the strategic plan, the overwhelming discussion point concerned financial sustainability and the difficulties faced as a result of government policy in the area of

funding and changes in the legal framework for HE. This had been highlighted by the university's senior management and this concern extended into a belief that the university's autonomy was being compromised by the current funding methodology. More widely, the financial imperative was seen to be a real pre-occupation for both staff and students. During the meeting with the SEG, the general mood seemed to be summed up by a view that the implementation of many of the recommendations/goals set out in the SER and the strategic plan were dependent on the government and therefore outside the control of the university. The team accepted that effective strategic planning in these circumstances was highly problematic and that a more pragmatic approach was probably inevitable. *However, while the team acknowledged that national regulations were a clear constraint on the autonomy and the decision making processes of the university, it felt that there was still scope for fora such as the Senate to play a greater role in initiating debate on the key issues, such as the funding of research, which the university was facing. This would reflect the democratic traditions of the university and help ensure the broadest ownership of policy.*

3. Teaching and learning

3.1   First, second and third cycles of study are delivered at UKIM. The teaching activity for 192 first cycle study programmes is delivered through the faculties. Of these programmes, 21 are of three years' duration, 166 are of four years' duration and five are of five or six years' duration. First cycle studies are available in full-time and part-time modes (full-time for all 192 programmes and part-time for 118 study programmes). In 2012-13 there were 242 study programmes in the second cycle and 40 in the third cycle.

3.2   The total number of first cycle students enrolled in 2012-13 was 29,444. Given the size of the university the number of postgraduate and doctoral students enrolled on programmes is relatively small – 1 840 and 513 respectively. The trend in first cycle numbers is largely static. Second cycle numbers have fallen significantly in 2012-2013 while third cycle numbers have grown.

3.3   In all study programmes, except for the regulated professions, the number of compulsory subjects does not exceed 60% of the total number of subjects, 30% are optional subjects selected by the students from a list of options within the faculty and 10% are optional subjects that students select from the common university list of optional subjects. The SER notes that, in an attempt to improve employability, the university intends to change all study programmes so that 10% of the compulsory subjects and 10% of the optional subjects in each year of study have to be delivered through teaching by prominent experts with practical experience in the relevant area. However, the team formed a strong view from discussion with students that although they were content with the theoretical knowledge in their programmes there was a greater need to develop more practically based courses. *The team therefore urged the university to respond to student demands relating to more practically oriented programmes/courses*.

3.4   In the SER it is stated that the reasons for the negative trend of enrolment in the second-cycle studies are three-fold: (a) congruence of the candidates who graduated in accordance with ECTS and before ECTS was introduced in the academic year 2010-2011; (b) economic factors as second-cycle students are self-financing; and (c) the large number of four-year study programmes that complete the profile of the students. Furthermore, integrated teaching in first and second cycle studies (300-360 credits) is delivered at some faculties and the students have the right to direct entry into third cycle studies. The university plans to restructure second-cycle study programmes and propose fewer but stronger study programmes that are relevant to the labour market and especially compatible with similar programmes delivered in other European universities. In this regard, units are more focused on proposing joint study programmes so that quality can be improved by maximising resources across the

university. The team agreed that action needed to be taken to s*implify the number of educational programmes, particularly in the 1st and 2nd* cycles.

3.5   On the whole, programmes conform to Bologna requirements, including ECTS, although the university's senior management noted that the transition had been a significant burden and, as a consequence, the workload of academic staff had multiplied fivefold. The team found some evidence of inconsistencies across faculties in the ways that the Bologna principles had been implemented and it was also apparent that those principles could be better or more fully understood within some units of the university. In discussion with members of the Student Parliament the team was of the general view that Bologna principles needed to be implemented more effectively and that faculty practice was inconsistent. The team also noted that only a small number of programmes were taught in English.

3.6   The SER refers to the Bologna Process as a way for the university to focus on the development and efficiency of the teaching and learning process, with continuous improvement and modernisation of study programmes in line with national and international standards. UKIM units are apparently guided by the Bologna principle that students should be at the centre of the educational experience, with teaching, learning and assessment framed by specific learning outcomes and competencies. In addition, a process of teaching modernisation has started with the introduction of new IT technologies, e-learning and electronic tools for knowledge transfer. The team explored the concept of student centred learning with both staff and students. Students acknowledged that there had been some improvements in this respect although some also believed that a minority of academic staff still approached learning and teaching in an "old-fashioned way". It was also the case that in meetings that the team held some staff and students appeared unfamiliar with the term "student centred learning". This might have been due to terminology as in further discussions it transpired that examples given by staff and students indicated that a range of activities relating to student centred learning were being implemented.

3.7   The university supports faculties in the delivery of student centred learning. Faculties adopt a range of modern didactical tools such as ICT technology, simulators and educational software, team working, projects, problem based learning, or on-line presentations, as part of this approach. It is stated in the SER that study programmes are continuously updated by lecturers, practical training is included in the curriculum and students are informed in a timely manner about changes. Currently, a number of faculties use an electronic system for the support of learning. This allows students to access learning materials on-line such as references, lecture notes, presentations and assessment tasks. This system is also used for communication between students and lecturers. The SER states that this online material is continuously updated and improved and that the university is actively working on the introduction of this e-learning system in all faculties. However, the team felt that there was still considerable scope for the university to accelerate the position of student centred learning in its

delivery of the curriculum. It recommended that academic staff should *redesign curricula to reflect developments in learning technologies so that the students could be given more opportunity to become independent learners. This should include the university's stated aim of introducing e-learning into all its faculties.* The team also received feedback from many students that large class sizes was one of their key concerns. Students were looking for more discussion and sharing of ideas in smaller learning sets. *The university should therefore look to improve student-academic staff ratios, particularly as a way of enabling small group learning, although the team recognised that the recruitment of new academic staff was wholly dependent on such permission being given by government.* Again the team encouraged the university to continue vigorously presenting this need to the relevant ministries as a key support to improving quality for its students in the area of learning and teaching.

3.8   The content of all study programmes and confirmation of national accreditation is publicly available via faculty/research institute websites. The content of the teaching programmes, the quality of teaching, the fairness of the assessment process and the attitude of professors towards students are all evaluated at the end of each semester by students attending all three study cycles. The results from the survey questionnaire and evaluation reports are published. Within the context of the learning and teaching infrastructure the team asked students for their opinions on their learning environment. There were mixed views expressed but, in general, library facilities were felt to be in need of improvement. The team had some opportunity to see some parts of the library environment and found that there was scope for improving the extent and currency of book stocks. The team was also aware, however, of the financial constraints placed on the university in accommodating significant improvements in this respect. It felt that it was extremely important that the *upgrading of the teaching and learning infrastructure was taken forward but it recognised that this was almost entirely dependent on increased state funding for which the university should continue to press with the relevant ministries.*

3.9   All faculties publish orientation guides for new students which provide information about the nature, requirements and regulations governing their studies, as well as details about faculty infrastructure and the wider workings of the university. A student tutoring/mentoring system exists in most of the faculties. Mentors assist new students in adapting to the learning and teaching methods of the university which are significantly different to their experience in secondary education. The main support provided by mentors is in the area of optional subject selection. This type of mentoring is said to facilitate the progress of students through their studies.

3.10   In order to encourage excellence and improve student standards, the university awards 240 annual scholarships for first-year students. Each faculty awards the scholarships to their top 10 candidates. The university and faculties also support students in obtaining scholarships from the local business community. Most of the companies fund students during their studies with the possibility of employment after they graduate.

4.   Research

4.1   The state does not provide direct funding for research although it requires the university to allocate 40% of the income it receives from student participation towards fundamental and applied research. In the SER, research is described as being 'very relevant' for the university and carried out by all units of UKIM. Research activity is carried out by both teaching staff and students. Teaching staff are said to be actively involved in research projects and in obtaining research grants. The research work of UKIM is based on the principles established in the National Programme on Scientific and Research Activity of the Republic of Macedonia. On this basis, the university has decided that it did not require its own institutional research strategy *per se* with research policy initiated by the units themselves and a requirement that projects align with national priorities. The university supports research activities with developments in the area of education and also the initiatives of individual academic staff and scholars.

4.2   As with other areas of activity the team noted the government restrictions on the recruitment of research staff and the broader constraints resulting from the lack of government funds. While this had clearly had a very negative impact on the development of research activities the team found admirable evidence of good practice amongst academic staff in acquiring external funding from, amongst others, the EU, NATO, GIZ, UNESCO and Tempus. There were also clearly some units such as the Faculty of Law that were at the forefront of initiatives to build international relationships in research activity. However, in the longer term there was a real concern from both senior staff and research active professors that the research infrastructure would deteriorate to such an extent that the university's capacity to compete for research funds in the wider European/international area would be put seriously at risk. This was exacerbated by a number of factors: (a) the relative lack of partners with sufficient economic capacity and operating at an adequate scientific level; (b) the need for government to approve financial plans which was not easily understood by prospective partners; and (c) a perception that researchers in FYROM had to perform better than their European peers in order to be considered for future projects. It was acknowledged that the government had provided funds for the establishment of laboratories in the past but this had not been sustained. As a consequence there was little or no budget for the maintenance or upgrading of equipment. Researchers would therefore work with equipment until it was no longer viable and afterwards go abroad - to Serbia or Slovenia - to finish their work. Nevertheless the team felt that it was of some importance for those involved in research to persevere in a variety of ways to enhance the university's research profile. In this context the team suggests that t*he university should enhance the possibilities of academic staff accessing external/international funding by sharing good practice; increasing training for academics to write research proposals; providing a small fund to support the preparation of proposals; improving networking; considering ways in which state*

bureaucracy could be reduced in relation to the accounting and management of research projects.

4.3   Third-cycle studies are all based in UKIM's School of Doctoral Studies and include 40 study programmes from all of the six scientific-research areas. The study programmes are taught in the Macedonian language but there is also the possibility of teaching in English, depending on the number of candidates interested. Two doctoral study programmes are delivered in English only.

4.4   The establishment of the School of Doctoral Studies - the first in the FYROM and the wider Balkans - was seen as one way of supporting the development of research experience for staff, especially in terms of the development of young teaching staff. It was also seen as a very visible indication of the operation of an integrated university. In addition, one part of the human resource policy of UKIM includes doctoral studies students working as associates at the university. This was important as there was a tendency for the best students to go abroad for their doctoral studies. The team found the development of the doctoral school to be a promising initiative which, in its view, should receive continuing support. As part of this initiative the team recommended that *research groups broaden their inclusion of students, especially PhD students.*

4.5   A further example of resourcefulness in the face of limited funding related to the number of scientific publications by academic staff. The team noted that these were continuing to rise as were the numbers of research projects established by the various units in the university. However, there seemed to be a trend for some units, particularly in the sciences, to aim automatically for publication in leading international journals while others, namely, in the social sciences and humanities, seemed content to see articles published in national or regional journals. This latter approach by some subject areas seemed to restrict academic horizons in an unnecessary way and *in the view of the team all units or subject areas should seek publication in the widest international arena.*

5. Service to society

5.1   The SER sets out in some detail the national economic context within which the university has to operate. There are very significant challenges facing the economy of FYROM and these are said to be characterised by low economic growth, an inefficiently organised private sector and structural changes in business and industry. Figures quoted in the SER show national employment as low (40.9%) and unemployment as high (28.6%), with the issue of unemployment being "dominant among young people up to 27 years of age".

5.2   Senior management at the university clearly understands the pressures that this places on the university to align its programmes and its engagement with employers to the imperatives of the labour market. In part this has been stimulated by changes in national higher education law but there is also, in the university, a palpable sense of social responsibility in wanting to do more to support the development of the country. The SER discusses the modernisation of the teaching curriculum to embrace entrepreneurship, the study of foreign languages, an emphasis on communications skills and the promotion of lifelong learning.

5.3   The team met with external stakeholders during its two visits so that it could understand more about the role of the university from the external perspective. Stakeholders included the Economic Chamber of Macedonia and the construction, pharmaceutical and power industries.

5.4   The view of the Economic Chamber was that the university was fully aware of the importance of strong ties with industry and that the senior management of the university had been significantly involved in the successful bidding for EU funds with the support of the Economic Chamber. A third part of EU support was now in place until 2022. In addition, in 2008 the university and the Economic Chamber signed a Memorandum of Cooperation which provided a fuller articulation of the collaboration between the two organisations. This related, in particular, to internships made available to students at the Economic Chamber and intern opportunities at the member organisations of the chamber. A further innovation was the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Student Parliament to establish a joint project "Entrepreneurship is the Future of Students" involving around 100 students. Many of these students were continuing with training at the chamber, in areas such as SME development, the writing of business plans, or product development.

5.5   The opinions of the local employers were generally very positive and the team was given a number of examples of links with the university including faculties using equipment at companies, joint ventures with professors, scholarships and prizes, and internships including opportunities outside FYROM. Local businesses had also entered into a significant number of formal co-operation agreements.

5.6   During meetings external stakeholders agreed that, on the whole, the university produced graduates with degrees that were appropriate to the current state of the Macedonian economy. Indeed UKIM had been able to respond to increased foreign investment in the country's automotive industry by producing better qualified graduates for this industry. However, there was still a shortfall in highly educated technical graduates. And on the negative side, most companies needed to spend far too much time adding specialist knowledge to the basic knowledge that graduates had gained from their degrees. There was also concern about the capabilities of humanities graduates who often seemed to lack the sophisticated communication skills that were expected in the world of work. In the wider HE environment a point made very clearly by the external stakeholders was that the growing number of private universities were not able to produce graduates of the required quality. Most companies now started their selection process by establishing whether a graduate had studied at a public or private university.

5.7   In 2013 almost all the units of UKIM established careers centres, which are regarded as a direct link between students and companies. They exist to facilitate the transition from education to the labour market. In addition, these centres also support students on better self-presentation in the job market by running training sessions on how to apply for jobs, write a CV, prepare for interviews, and so on. Some of the students that the team met confirmed that their faculties helped with the search for employment through contacts with local employers and the distribution of information on work opportunities. These students acknowledged that the level of support could be more effective but, on the whole, they were satisfied with the service provided by the careers centres. However, in discussion with the faculty, a somewhat different perspective emerged regarding academic staff who took on the role of careers coordinators. These roles were undertaken by full-time teaching staff on a voluntary basis and without any support infrastructure. Although the commitment and dedication of the coordinators might be able to sustain the role in the short-term it was not, in the view of the team, a viable long-term option. One coordinator stressed that good ideas often failed to reach their full potential due to lack of resources. And while faculties could put forward requests for extra funding for careers centres, these requests were inevitably competing with many other priorities with regard to the budget. Given the importance of the employability agenda in universities, the team believed that the university should *provide better support for careers centres at both faculty and central university levels, including the introduction of professional careers staff and specific funding for the activities in this area.*

5.8   Direct contact between academic staff and local companies seemed to be healthy and productive, and external stakeholders believed there to be mutual learning from such collaborations with some company staff giving lectures in the more specialist areas of their industries. Some scientific articles had been published through university-industry collaboration. It was also clear that the faculties related to public health, such

as medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine, were providing an important service to society both locally and nationally. *The team recommends to increase further the collaboration between external stakeholders and UKIM by sharing good practice amongst faculties.*

5.9   The team was interested to hear how far external stakeholders, particularly business, was able to support the university in terms of the well-known issue of lack of government funding. The team was advised that the Economic Chamber had tried to highlight this issue to the government. More recently, universities in the FYROM and the Economic Chamber had joined together in a joint programme to encourage better funding of universities. However, this was seen to be a long-term project and no significant results were expected in the next 10 years. In the short-term they would continue to urge the government to increase the speed of decision-making and to try and cease changing the law so often.

5.10   The team asked whether there was any tradition of donations from business to universities and was informed that there was only limited support of this kind. Sport was an obvious area for business involvement and there were opportunities for academic staff to receive financial aid to attend conferences. Alumni organisations function inconsistently among faculties with often only partial tracking and recording of final destinations/employment outcomes which limited the opportunities for drawing on the influence and support of alumni following graduation. Given these circumstances the team strongly believed that *the university should play an active role in restructuring alumni organisations to enhance the relationships between UKIM and its graduates.* This could be seen as another aspect of the effective functioning of the integrated university.

5.11   The SER also highlights the university's significant contribution to the cultural life of the country through the funding and organisation of a series of cultural and artistic events. Concerts by the symphony orchestra and choir of the Faculty of Music, the exhibitions of the Faculty of Arts and the performances of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts are some of the activities supported by the university.

6.   Quality culture

6.1   At a national level all universities in FYROM are required to undergo external evaluation, self-evaluation and the assessment of the quality of academic staff. The external evaluation and the summary assessment of quality of the academic staff at the universities, together with their facilities, are carried out by the Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of the Higher Education (OAE) every five years. The process of self-evaluation of the university and its units is compulsory every three years (see also section 1.3 above - the Evaluation Process).

6.2   The SER indicates that self-evaluation at the unit level includes analysis of study programmes, the quality of the teaching process, research work, the applied research activity and financing. Monitoring includes mobility of the students per subjects, the quality of the teaching process, training of the staff for introduction of new approaches and methods in the delivery of the teaching process, changes and amendments to the subjects and study programmes. Student surveys, in which they assess both the quality of the teaching process and the academic staff, are also included in the self-evaluation reports. The self-evaluation reports of the units are submitted to the evaluation commission of UKIM which carries out the self-evaluation of the university. On the basis of these reports the Senate proposes corrective measures.

6.3   The SER also notes that one of the mechanisms for monitoring of the teaching quality is the introduction of the common electronic system (iKnow) which introduced control over educational administration - starting from the enrolment of students, electronic student support services and student file, to attendance registration for the students and teachers.

6.4   Semester-based student questionnaires form a key part of the quality culture of the university. This is emphasised in the SER and was also mentioned in a number of the meetings during the evaluation visits. It was also stressed to the team that these questionnaires were completed by students following the compulsory one month internships that were required by law. The results of these questionnaires, including grades for professors, were seen by academic staff and were published on the intranet, although it was at the discretion of each faculty to decide on the material that it published. This was seen as an important feature in measuring the performance of teaching staff. The results were also included in reports that were considered as part of the promotion process for professors. Students that the team met confirmed that questionnaires were embedded in the quality processes of the university, were anonymous and that students were involved in the evaluation of results at both the faculty and university levels.

6.5   The team noted that there were no comparisons of results across faculties although it was stated in the team's meeting with the SEG that informal discussions did take place amongst deans on the outcomes in different faculties.

6.6   It appeared to the team that there was a need to move from quality assurance to quality enhancement. This would provide opportunities for the university to look at quality in a more holistic way, especially as the very regulated national approach to quality assurance can inhibit individual ownership of quality development and enhancement.   *The team therefore encouraged the university to develop a wider approach for the enhancement of quality across the university. This should include the involvement of all staff, including administrative and support staff*; *the assessment of the academic infrastructure, for example, through extending the range of questions on the student questionnaires*; *and the systematic adoption of the Part I of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).*

7. Internationalisation

7.1   The team was impressed with the university's dedication to the development of bilateral and multilateral collaborations for both research and education.

7.2   A small number of study programmes were delivered completely in English and this encouraged the recruitment of foreign students, particularly from the families of Macedonians living overseas in the USA and Canada. There was evidence that some faculties looked to gain international accreditation for their programmes but it was also stated to the team that the process was expensive and the benefits of such accreditation, apart from some limited student mobility, were not always apparent.

7.2   The team was interested to hear that in some faculties, for example, dentistry, the basis for comparison in terms of excellence was the wider European setting rather than the purely national one. However, the lack of EU membership was a real problem in terms of working with patients outside of FYROM.

7.3   The SER places much emphasis on the ambitions for greater student and staff mobility and lists a number of strategic objectives for increasing outgoing numbers of staff and students. Currently, however, the overall numbers engaged in programmes such as Erasmus were small although the team noted that national restrictions applied to the overall numbers that could be involved in mobility programmes. Students whom the team met said that the incompatibility of study programmes limited opportunities and confirmed that government support for such exchanges was rather restricted. Staff indicated that they had little time to become in involved in exchanges.

7.4   The team was encouraged to hear that integration had been of benefit to the development of the university's international ambitions. The International Office now had information about activities in all faculties and regular meetings took place between the International Office and the faculty vice-deans responsible for international affairs, as well as contact between faculty Erasmus co-ordinators and the vice- rector for international affairs. It was also encouraging to hear that progress in the international arena covered an important part of the rector's annual report. The International Office closely scrutinised the details relating to international activity and developed an action plan to guide developments in the following year.   A good example of this type of planning was in the area of staff exchanges where faculties had arrangements in place to invite visiting professors to help enhance internationalisation at home and improve the learning experience of students. Over half the faculties had met their targets for these exchanges in the first semester and it was expected that the other faculties would meet their targets in the second semester. This struck the team as a very positive and visible sign of international co-operation.

7.5   There was a strong international presence on the university's web pages, particularly in relation to Erasmus documentation on mobility schemes. However, the team heard

a common complaint from students that arrangements for mobility schemes were not very well understood, that professors were often too busy to devote time to such discussions and that there would therefore be some benefit from having student co-ordinators involved in promoting Erasmus and other mobility schemes. The team also noted that students were keen to extend their study experiences in Western Europe but that such opportunities were restricted as the majority of the university's agreements were with institutions in the Balkan region.

7.6   There is evidence of good practice in some faculties with strong ties established with leading European universities but, in the view of the team, there were further opportunities for expanding links with Western European universities and, more generally, making internationalisation one of the key priorities of the university. This would be well positioned with the views expressed by both staff and students and help reinforce the university's status as a pre-eminent university not only in FYROM but in the wider European area. Accordingly the team urged that *UKIM should explore all ways and means to increase student and staff mobility by providing more opportunities for foreign language courses; increasing programmes taught in English as well as offering a range of elective courses in the English language; seeking funding for outgoing students*; *improving access to information on mobility programmes for both students and academic staff*; *adapting the university infrastructure so that it serves the needs of incoming students*.

In addition the team felt that the university should actively *encourage academic staff to extend their international networks by organising more international events; raising funds for the participation of academic staff in international conferences and fora outside FYROM; and supporting new joint teaching and research activities*.

8. Conclusion

8.1   Ss. Cyril and Methodius University is a confident and self-aware institution that is used to external engagement and which has well developed systems and processes in place for governing and managing the institution.

8.2   It has faced a major change in its governance as a result of government legislation (2008) and appears to have taken that change in its stride. Indeed it gives the impression that the move to becoming an integrated university has taken place without undermining some of the basic beliefs of devolved faculty decision making.

8.3   The university describes in some detail the various mechanisms involved in the delivery and enhancement of a quality culture. However, much of this seems to be based on set piece reporting - sometimes at great length and with information/data that is difficult to digest – and as a consequence there is a tendency to underplay the need for measurement of outcomes and "loop closing".   This might be overcome, in part, by introducing a focus on quality <u>enhancement</u> alongside the current quality assurance policies and procedures.

8.4   The team gained the strong impression that students at the university were generally satisfied with their experience. The students whom the team met were motivated, enthusiastic and determined and were able to engage fully with the IEP process, not least because of their excellent English language skills. They had a clear sense of the university as an entity and saw benefits from integration as an impetus to greater faculty co-operation, more interdisciplinary activities and jointly sponsored conferences. They are a credit to the university.

8.5   In looking to enhance the experience of its students, however, the university was facing very significant challenges as a result of current or planned national government legislation and these placed clear limitations on the university's autonomy and its ability to fund and promote its activities.

8.6   In summary, the university is the leading institution of higher education in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and therefore has an important responsibility to be as visible as possible in the wider European area. This should reinforce the determination of all staff to compete and benchmark their performance in the wider European arena. The team was of the strong opinion that this should be acknowledged by the level of state support for the university.

Recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

1. While the team acknowledges that national regulations are a clear constraint on the autonomy and the decision making processes of the university there is still scope, in their view, for fora such as the Senate to play a greater role in initiating debate on the key issues facing the university. This would reflect the democratic traditions of the university and help ensure broad ownership of policy.

2. The team believes that the university would benefit from increasing the interaction of its faculties and units by cross-faculty research activities; the redesign of curricula to include common courses as a way of enhancing interaction between faculties; extending double major and minor degrees across the university; and sharing best practice.

3. Given the current national constraints and uncertainties the team advises the university to focus only on the highest priorities as part of its strategic planning process whilst retaining sufficient flexibility to adapt to further changes in the external environment. This should include scenario planning and contingency plans.

4. The university should support the formal training of student representatives to ensure that they play a full and effective part in the key decision making bodies of UKIM.

5. The university's senior management should work actively with the Student Parliament to ensure better promotion of the student ombudsman scheme amongst students.

Teaching and Learning

6. Simplify the number of educational programmes, particularly in the 1st and 2nd cycles.

7. Redesign curricula to reflect developments in learning technologies so that students are given more opportunity to become independent learners. This should include the university's stated aim of introducing e-learning into all its faculties.

8. Upgrade the teaching and learning infrastructure on the basis of increased state funding.

9. Improve student-academic staff ratios, particularly to enable small group learning by being allowed by the Ministry to recruit new academic staff.

10. Respond to student demands relating to more practically oriented programmes and courses.

Research

11.   In some subject areas, encourage the publication of articles in leading international journals.

12.   Encourage research groups to broaden the inclusion of students, especially PhD students.

13.   The university should enhance the possibilities of academic staff accessing external/international funding by sharing good practice; increasing training for academics to write research proposals; providing modest funding to support the preparation of proposals; improving networking; considering ways in which state bureaucracy can be reduced in relation to the accounting and management of research projects.

Service to Society

14.   Increase further the collaboration between external stakeholders and UKIM by sharing good practice amongst faculties.

15.   Provide better support for careers centres at both faculty and central university levels, including the introduction of professional careers staff and specific funding for the activities in this area.

16.   The university should play an active role in restructuring alumni organisations to enhance the relationships between UKIM and its graduates.

Quality Culture

17.   Develop a wider approach for the enhancement of quality across the university. This should include the involvement of all staff including administrative and support staff; the quality assessment of the academic infrastructure; the systematic adoption of ENQA's European Standards and Guidelines, Part 1.

Internationalisation

18.   UKIM should explore all ways and means of increasing student and staff mobility by providing more opportunities for foreign language courses; increasing programmes taught in English as well as offering a range of elective courses in the English language; seeking funding for outgoing students; improving access to information on mobility programmes for both students and academic staff; adapting the university infrastructure so it serves the needs of incoming students.

19.   Encourage academic staff to extend their international networks by organising more international events; raising funds for the participation of academic staff in international conferences and fora outside FYROM; supporting the new joint teaching and research activities.

Thanks

The team would like to express its gratitude to all participants in the evaluation process for their openness and willingness to discuss all issues concerning the university during the meetings held in October 2014 and March 2015.

We would like to record our special thanks to our institutional liaison, the Vice-Rector for Teaching, Professor Vlatko Stoilkov, for the efficient organisation of all the meetings and discussions.

Finally, the team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Professor Velimir Stojkovski, and to the UKIM for the friendly hospitality it received during its two visits to Skopje.