

EUA (European University Association)
Institutional Evaluation Programme

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR
EUA EVALUATION FOLLOW-UP REPORT

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Foreword

During 1997 the University of Maribor requested an institutional evaluation by the CRE (now EUA). The preliminary, and main, visits took place in February and May 1998 respectively. The report of the review was presented in October 1998. The University requested EUA for a follow-up visit, and this took place from 24 to 26 November 2004. The 1998 team consisted of Professors Dirk Bresters and Leon De Meyer. Unfortunately, neither was available in 2004, and so the team for the follow up visit consisted of Professor Virgilio Soares (former Rector of the University of Lisbon) and Professor Ferdinand Devinsky (former Rector of Comenius University, Bratislava). Professor Malcolm Frazer (former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Anglia) was secretary of the 1998 and the follow-up teams.

The Follow-up Process

Since 1998 EUA has offered, as an extension to its institutional evaluation programme, the possibility of a follow-up visit. The rationale is that a second visit can assist the university to evaluate the progress it has made since the original review. What was the impact of the original visit? What use has the university made of the evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up visit also is an opportunity for the university to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

To summarise, the follow-up visit to the University of Maribor was about change, and barriers to change, between 1998 and 2004. It was not intended to be an evaluation of the current situation (November 2004) at the University. Readers are advised to bear this in mind when studying this report.

In line with the EUA institutional evaluation programme as a whole, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the university to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the review. The university submits its own self-evaluation report which describes the progress made, possibly indicating barriers to change. The university also indicates the issues it wishes to discuss with the follow-up team.

The University's self-evaluation report was prepared by a small team within the Rectorate of the University and sent to the follow-up team in advance of the visit. At

the team's request four additional papers were sent before the visit and several papers were made available during the visit.

The following terms are used throughout this report:

"1998 Report" is the report sent by the CRE to the University in 1998;

"Short Report" is the self-evaluation report of the University in 2004;

"The team" is the EUA team for the follow-up visit in 2004;

"The University" is The University of Maribor and means the whole University including the faculties and all its members. It should not be confused with the Rectorate;

"Management Board" is the term used in the University Statutes. In the Short Report it is referred to as the Administrative Board.

During the two day visit, the team had meetings with the Rector, three pro-rectors, deans, the Short Report team, the quality assurance commission, central management and administrative staff, the Student Council and the European Student Network. The team also visited the Faculties of Education and Mechanical Engineering and held separate meetings with senior staff and students. During the two day visit, the team met over 175 academic, non-academic staff and students. The visit concluded with an oral report on the preliminary findings of the team to the Rector alone; and subsequently to an Open Forum attended by about one hundred academic and non-academic staff and students.

University of Maribor

University of Maribor is the second largest of the three universities in Slovenia. It currently has 24 575 undergraduate and 2 000 postgraduate students studying in twelve faculties and a College of Nursing. Most of the University is located in Maribor, although some faculties have bases in other cities: Celje, Kranj, Krško and Ptuj.

Introduction

The team was pleased that the University requested the follow-up visit, but was disappointed to discover during the visit that the 1998 Report had apparently not been

widely distributed when it was received in 1998. However, one result of the follow-up visit was that a copy of the 1998 Report was circulated in November 2004 to all those due to take part in the visit. The team was pleased to receive the Short Report, but was surprised and disappointed that it had been prepared by a small group within the Rectorate and that faculties had not been consulted about its content and conclusions.

Developments between the 1998 Review and the 2004 Follow-up Visit

Overview

The 1998 Report contained several suggestions for the University to consider. The team was interested to identify any changes which had been implemented as a result of these suggestions and to learn about their impact. The University was particularly interested to have an evaluation of the organisational function and management processes related to quality assurance.

The team and the University recognise that not all of the changes which have occurred during the last six years were initiated internally. Change also occurs as a result of external pressures.

External changes, since 1998, impacting on the University have been:

- a single Ministry of Education, Science and Sport was created;
- the 1994 Higher Education Act was modified in 1999 and 2004;
- the ambiguity about the legal status of faculties has been resolved – they are members of a university and not legal entities in their own right;
- funding for teaching now comes to the University as a “lump sum” and is no longer negotiated between the Ministry and individual faculties (the impact of this is discussed later);
- Slovenia has established a Quality Assessment Commission for Higher Education (as a result of the 2004 changes to the HE Act this will become Public Agency for Higher Education including a Council for Evaluation in Higher Education);
- a third university (University of Primorska) has been created;
- the Bologna Process was initiated, and has been accepted by Slovenia.

Internal changes at the University since 1998 are:

- there is a new Rector and team of four vice-rectors;
- the number of students has grown from *ca.* 16K to *ca.* 26K;
- three new faculties have been established:
 - Faculty of Criminal Justice (2002),
 - Faculty of Medicine (2003),
 - Faculty of Logistics (2004);
- considerable improvement and development of the information systems have been made.

New funding arrangements

Shortly after the 1998 visit, new arrangements for funding teaching were introduced in Slovenia. A system whereby faculties negotiated separately with the Ministry was replaced by one in which the universities received a “lump sum” for education from the Ministry. The 1998 review team strongly supported the proposed change, and in its report listed several advantages. In particular, it was pointed out that the concept of cost-centres being as low down as possible in an organisational structure is now well established practice in most EU countries and works well; and also that a university can hardly be described as autonomous unless it has control over the distribution of the funds available to it. The team suggests that as most staff have only recently seen the 1998 Report, there should now be a university wide study of the advantages of “lump sum” funding set out in that report.

The new funding arrangements were not applied to the University until 2003. They are undoubtedly a step forward, but the team was disappointed that the University is not using its autonomy to take full advantage of it including the opportunity to make forward financial plans. The team was also disappointed that the Government has limited the sums which can be redistributed between “study groups” (*i.e.* discipline areas) to 3%.

The team also suggests that the University should review its policy concerning the use of its premises and facilities. Realistic overhead charges should be made.

Quality assurance

In 1998, arrangements for quality assurance, nationally and at the University, were in the very early stages. The team was pleased to learn about the considerable progress which has been made since then. In January 2000, a Commission for Quality Evaluation at the University was established, which reports directly to the Senate. As suggested in the 1998 Report, the Rector is no longer the Chairperson of this Commission. The Commission has clearly been active, but its members realise that there is much more to be done. There are also commissions for quality evaluation in each faculty. The team was surprised to learn that the first ever meeting between the University Commission and the faculty commissions occurred during its visit. More such meetings should now be planned so that experience and good practice can be exchanged. It appears that the faculty quality assurance commissions do not meet regularly. The team suggest that there should be an annual timetable for such meeting possibly linked to the timetable for faculty senate meetings.

There is a need for guidelines on quality assurance and improvement to be prepared by the Commission for Quality Evaluation and disseminated to faculties. Senate should approve and publish a concise statement on the purposes of quality evaluation. Self-evaluation is now used as part of the quality assurance process. The team was not certain how much these newly introduced procedures were being used to make improvements to teaching and learning, research, and management. The team was unable to obtain much clear evidence about corrective actions resulting from evaluation. It is understood that the faculty self-evaluation reports were sent to the Quality Assessment Commission of Slovenia, who published them without any external scrutiny. This is not a practice that the team can endorse.

The main method of quality assurance appears to be the use of student questionnaires. However, the team met many students who had not been offered, or had not used these questionnaires. There is much more to self-evaluation than obtaining the views of students. It is essential that the information gathered by evaluation is converted into corrective actions, and that feed-back on self-evaluation results is disseminated.

The team noted that the Office for Quality consists of one person and there is no administrative support. There is clearly a need for the appointment of some permanent staff dedicated to quality assurance and improvement.

There is little staff training for quality assurance and improvement activities, and the team suggests that the Commission for Quality Evaluation should introduce and coordinate a programme of activities.

Finally, the team notes the high priority accorded to quality assurance and improvement in the Bologna process, and urges the University to further develop this area of its activities.

Research Policy

During the last six years, the University has increased its research activity, and enhanced its standing as a research university.

Following a suggestion in the 1998 Report, the University has introduced a system of research planning. Each faculty submits an annual plan for research to the Senate, which then sends a coordinated plan to the Management Board for approval.

Mission Statement

Every university needs to have a clear and agreed vision of where it is going and what it is trying to do. The vision of a university is often encapsulated in a mission statement, which is the starting point for strategic planning.

At the time of the 1998 review, the University had a mission statement, but the review team felt that it was overlong; and, more importantly, was not well known within the academic community even at the level of Senate.

The team was sent a revised mission statement (in English), which was different from the one seen in 1998. It was undated and the team could not discover whether it had been approved by Senate and how widely it had been circulated. The team considered that this was still too long to be useful. If a mission statement is to be of any value for bringing unity of purpose and for planning, it should be concise, possibly a single sentence. For example:

“The mission of the University of Cambridge is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.”

The team noted that the Rector is to present to Senate a revised mission statement to Senate. The team urges that this should be short and be sent to all faculties for

discussion and comment before it is finally adopted on behalf of the University by the Senate.

International Activities

The team was pleased to learn about the considerable development in international activities since the 1998 visit. A credit system has been successfully introduced, but advises that this should conform with ECTS the credit points should be related to learning not to teaching hours at a rate of one credit point for ten hours teaching. There have been an increased number of student exchanges since 1998. The team encourages the University to continue to promote this activity.

Interaction with the region

The team was pleased to learn that most faculties have increased their cooperation with the region.

Role of Senate

The team found that Senate is now a more cohesive body, taking a wider University view, and suggests that it should now be in a position to be more active in developing a University strategic plan (see below).

The team found it strange that students have not been elected to the Senate (and also the Management Board) for nearly two years.

Internal Communications

These have much improved since 1998.

Unresolved Issues from the 1998 Review

Integration

Perhaps the most contentious issue during the 1998 review was the issue of integration. The University was described by some as “disintegrated”. The argument was that the University could develop faster and further, if there were common goals and better cooperation *between* the centre and the faculties, and *among* the faculties themselves. Others held the opposite view and argued that traditionally and legally

the faculties were independent. They were suspicious of central control. The 1998 Report presented the case for more integration and tried to allay the fears of the opponents. It was hoped that the new system of funding and the legal decision about the status of faculties would help the University to become better integrated. The team was disappointed to read in the Short Report for the follow up visit:

'The relationship between the Rectorate and the faculties is still not defined or better realised in real life. There is still a pattern of thinking in terms of "you" and "us" and seldom "we" – the UM as a whole – one institution'.

As a result of the follow-up visit the team was forced to conclude that this statement is largely correct, and that integration is still far from being achieved. It is clear that there is a climate of mistrust. The team suggests that this climate cannot be changed by a single action; and that it will take time and effort by everyone to improve the prevailing attitudes. The first step should be to analyse openly the reasons for this mistrust. Only when there is a diagnosis can a sustainable cure be achieved.

One way of starting to change the climate of mistrust is to build confidence through common activities. Although there is some cooperation between faculties, much greater effort needs to be made. There is some mobility of students between faculties and this should be further encouraged. There are also opportunities for sharing facilities and resources between faculties for mutual benefit. There could be more common research projects. There could be common staff development activities (see later) and joint approaches to quality assurance. There could be regular meetings of professors from different faculties who are teaching in the same subject areas (*e.g.* because of tradition and the geographical distribution of faculties, there are mathematics professors in several different faculties).

It was noted in 1998 that the Secretary-General had no regular and formal contact with faculty secretaries, whose only allegiance appeared to be their Deans. The team understands that that since the adoption of a new Statute in the year 2000, the Secretary-General has had legal responsibility for the secretaries of the faculties; and that the new Secretary-General has practised regular monthly meetings with them. The team commends this arrangement and noted that it was accepted positively at its meeting with administrative staff.

Finally, the team wishes to observe that universities which are not well integrated will have difficulties in the future as the European Higher Education Area develops.

Strategic Planning

The team could find little evidence of any strategic planning at either University or faculty levels. This has to change if the University is to develop and fulfil its role in the European Higher Education Area.

Faculty of Education

In 1998, the review team discussed the proposal to split the Faculty of Education into three separate faculties, but cautioned against it. Since then no change has been made, but the Faculty still wishes to make a split into four faculties (Pedagogy, Humanities and Social Science, Fine Art and Music, and Science and Mathematics). The team discussed this proposal with the Dean and some colleagues in the present Faculty. It cannot comment on the proposal without much more information, but concluded that the proposal has been better developed than that presented in 1998. The team recommends that a fully worked out plan with detailed financial consequences needs to be presented and considered before any decision can be made.

Composition of the Management Board

A suggestion in the 1998 Report was that the Rector and the Secretary-General should be members of the Management Board. The team recognises that the Statutes of the universities in Slovenia do not permit this, and appreciates why no change has been made.

Staff development

The 1998 report devoted a paragraph to the need for a staff development programme (staff improvement) for academic and non-academic staff covering issues such as: general, resource, personnel and quality management; introduction of modular curricula and credit rating systems; new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment at university level; research student supervision; self-evaluation; strategic planning; student guidance and counselling; use of information and communication technologies. The team was disappointed to find that little progress has been made

and suggests that the Senate and the Management Board should address this important issue.

Summary of suggestions made by the EUA team

The suggestions in this report are not simply directed at the Rectorate, but for the whole University to consider. The suggestions are that the University should, with respect to:

Funding:

- study the advantages of “lump sum” funding;
- take full advantage of the “lump sum” funding (even though flexibility is limited by the present arrangements);
- make realistic overhead charges for the use of its premises and facilities.

Quality assurance:

- exchange experience and good practice by regular meetings between the Commission for Quality Evaluation and the faculty quality evaluation commissions;
- ensure that faculty quality evaluation commissions meet regularly to a timetable linked to the faculty senate meetings;
- prepare (by Commission for Quality Evaluation) and disseminate guidelines for quality assurance and improvement;
- approve (by Senate) and publish a concise statement of the purposes of quality evaluation;
- appoint permanent staff to the Office for Quality to assist with quality assurance and improvement activities;
- provide training in quality assurance and improvement activities for academic and non-academic staff.

Mission statement:

- prepare (Rector) a concise mission statement for wide consultation within the University before final approval by the Senate.

International activities:

- ensure that the credit system conforms with that of ECTS;
- continue to promote student exchanges.

Integration:

- analyse the reasons for the prevailing mistrust within the University;
- make greater efforts for inter-faculty cooperation (joint research projects, joint courses, sharing facilities, meetings between professors in the same subject area from different faculties);
- continue regular meetings between the Secretary-General and the faculty secretaries.

Strategic planning:

- ensure that strategic planning, based on an agreed vision for the University, becomes an on-going activity.

Faculty of Education:

- prepare a fully worked out plan, with an analysis of the financial consequences, as a basis for considering the splitting of this faculty.

Staff development (improvement):

- address (Senate and Management Board) the important issue of providing staff development for improvement for academic and non-academic staff throughout the University.

Conclusion

This report ends with the most important component of any university - its students. The team had useful meetings with representatives of the students. They were supportive of the education and facilities provided by the University, and it is clear that they have an opportunity to contribute to its future development. The team was impressed with the high level of spoken English of the students it met.

The Rector, Professor Dr. Ivan Rozman, and all his colleagues are thanked most sincerely for their warm reception and generous hospitality. Special thanks are due to Miha Pauko (contact person) and magister Hermina Radmilovič (liaison person). The open approach of all members of the University at the various meetings with the team was greatly appreciated, and helped to make the follow-up visit a positive experience for all concerned.

It was clear that considerable progress had been made since the initial visit in 1998, and the team is now certain that University will continue to develop, and adapt to changing circumstances, effectively and confidently.

It is hoped that this report along with the 1998 Report and the Short Report will be published on the University's website; and also disseminated and discussed widely throughout the University.