



**REPORT
of the Expert Panel
on the
RE-ACCREDITATION OF
University North**

Date of the site visit:
28th – 29th April

May, 2015

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATED INSTITUTION	6
ADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION.....	9
DISADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION	9
FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE	9
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT.....	10
1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance	10
2. Study Programmes	10
3. Students.....	10
4. Teachers.....	11
5. Scientific and Professional Activity	11
6. International Cooperation and Mobility.....	11
7. Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance	11
DETAILED ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE TO THE STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION	13
1. <i>Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance</i>	13
2. <i>Study programmes</i>	16
3. <i>Students</i>	18
4. <i>Teachers</i>	19
5. <i>Scientific and professional activity</i>	21
6. <i>International cooperation and mobility</i>	23
7. <i>Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances</i>	25

INTRODUCTION

This report on the re-accreditation of the University North was written by the Expert Panel appointed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education, on the basis of the self-evaluation of the institution and supporting documentation and a visit to the institution.

The re-accreditation procedure performed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), a public body listed in EQAR (*European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education*) and a full member of ENQA (*European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*), is obligatory once in five years for all higher education institutions working in the Republic of Croatia, in line with the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Expert Panel is appointed by the ASHE Accreditation Council, an independent expert body, to perform an independent peer-review-based evaluation of the institution and their study programmes.

The report contains:

- a brief analysis of the institutional advantages and disadvantages,
- a list of good practices found at the institution,
- recommendations for institutional improvement and measures to be implemented in the following period (and checked during a follow-up procedure), and
- detailed analysis of the compliance to the Standards and Criteria for Re-Accreditation.

The members of the expert panel were:

- Professor Richard Collins, Department of Journalism and Centre for Law Justice and Journalism, City University London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – panel chair
- Professor William Ireland Milne, Department of Engineering, Cambridge University, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Professor Leena Salminen, Department of Nursing, University of Turku, Republic of Finland
- Professor Zarina M. Charlesworth, University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland and MIDA Institute, Swiss Confederation
- Professor Diana Car-Pušić, Faculty of Civil Engineering, University of Rijeka, Republic of Croatia
- Ivan Sesar, student, Faculty of Economics and Business University of Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

In the analysis of the documentation, site visit and writing of the report the Panel was supported by:

- Ivana Borošić, coordinator, ASHE
- Davor Jurić, support to the coordinator, ASHE

- Đurđica Dragojević, interpreter and report translator, ASHE

During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups at the University North (University Centre Varaždin and University Centre Koprivnica):

- The Management;
- The Working Group that compiled the Self-Evaluation and the representatives of the Quality Assurance Committee;
- The Heads of departments;
- Teaching assistants and PhD candidates;
- Students;
- Teachers;
- External stakeholders (teachers, representatives of professional practice);
- The Vice-rector for teaching and student affairs;
- The Office for Quality assurance and Committee for student questionnaires;
- The research project leaders, professional project leaders and art project leaders;
- The Vice-rector for scientific-artistic work and international co-operation;

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, IT rooms, student register desk, classrooms, departments, laboratories and teaching premises for practical classes.

Upon completion of the re-accreditation procedure, the Accreditation Council renders its opinion on the basis of this Re-accreditation Report, the Assessment of the Quality of the higher education institution and the Report of Fulfilment of Quantitative Criteria acquired from the Agency's information system.

Once the Accreditation Council renders its opinion, the Agency issues an Accreditation Recommendation by which the Agency recommends to the Minister of Science, Education and Sports to:

1. **issue a confirmation on compliance** with the requirements for performing higher education activities or parts of activities (renew the licence),
2. **deny the license** for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities to the higher education institution, or
3. **issue a letter of recommendation** for the period up to three (3) years in which period the higher education institution should make the necessary improvements. The letter of recommendation may include suspension of student enrolment for a defined period.

The Accreditation Recommendation also includes an Assessment of Quality of the higher education institution as well as recommendations for quality development.

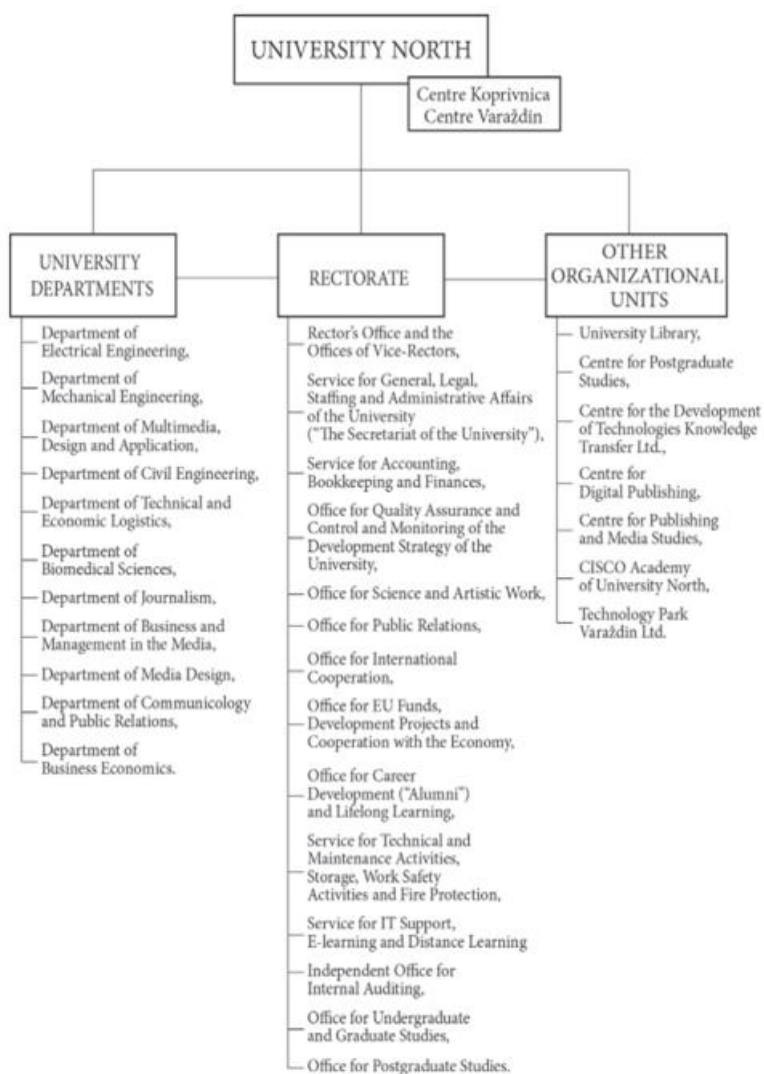
SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATED INSTITUTION

NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: University North

ADDRESS: University Centre Varaždin, 104. Brigade 3, Varaždin and University Centre Koprivnica, Trg dr. Žarka Dolinara 1, Koprivnica

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Rector Marin Milković, PhD

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE: (from page 12 of the Self-evaluation report)



STUDY PROGRAMMES:

Undergraduate professional studies:

- Electrical Engineering (Automation and Biomedical Electronics)
- Multimedia, Design and Application
- Mechanical Engineering
- Technical and Economic Logistics
- Civil Engineering (Construction Engineering and Civil Engineering)
- Nursing
- Business and Management in the Media

Undergraduate university studies:

- Journalism
- Media Design

Graduate university studies:

- Public Relations
- Business Economics (International Trade and Tourism)

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 659 (full-time students), 1976 (part-time students), 449 (senior undergraduate students, absolvents) – Table 3.1., page 11, Self-evaluation report (supplement)

NUMBER OF TEACHERS: 70 (full time), 87 (external associates) – Table 4.1., page 12, Self-evaluation report (supplement)

TOTAL BUDGET: 30,790,764 KN (2013 calendar year) – Table 7.11.a and table 7.11.b. Financial evaluation, Self-evaluation report

MSES FUNDS: 8,884,350 KN (2013 calendar year) – Table 7.11.a, Financial evaluation, Self-evaluation report

OWN FUNDS: 15,352,805 KN (2013 calendar year) - Table 7.11.a and table 7.11.b. Financial evaluation, Self-evaluation report

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (excerpt from the institution's self-evaluation report):

University North is the regional university of north-western Croatia which carries out scientific-research, professional and artistic work and conducts 11 study programmes in three scientific and one artistic study field. The City Councils of Varaždin and Koprivnica passed a decision on 18 March 2013 in Koprivnica and on 21 March 2013 in Varaždin, on the integration of the institutions of the Polytechnic of Varaždin and the Media University. The Senate of the Media University, during its session on 19 December 2013, decided that beginning with the day of the integration, the new institution would operate under the name of University North. Based on the decision of the Commercial Court of Varaždin issued on 22 January 2014, the process of the integration of the two mentioned institutions into a new institution of University North organized as an integrated university was finalized. The University decides independently on its organization and activities in compliance with the Statute and the legal regulations of the Republic of Croatia. University North is organized as an integrated organizational structure based on two equally important university centres, University Centre Koprivnica and University Centre Varaždin.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL

ADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION

1. Excellent young staff as evidenced by meeting with teaching assistants and PhD candidates.
2. Excellent links to local business, public institutions and community.
3. Excellent new/refurbished buildings and capital stock.
4. Generally very well provided with sufficient quantities of high quality and up to date equipment and teaching aids.
5. Evident good relationship between teaching staff and students and capacity to work with students in small groups.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION

1. Inconsistencies in evidence (particularly quantitative) provided to panel and inability of university staff to resolve these difficulties.
2. Poor record of scholarly publication – both in terms of quality and reputation of journals/publishers used and in number of outputs.
3. No clear policy and prioritisation of measures to develop and improve research and post-graduate culture and achievements of the university.
4. High student wastage rates.
5. Lack of openness, institutional self-awareness and self-critical culture.
6. Apparently highly centralised and top down management likely to inhibit development of new initiatives, entrepreneurial practice, and development of responsibility for development and achievement throughout the university's staff and particularly in fostering growth of nodes of scholarly/research excellence.

FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. Encouragement and facilitation of academic staff-development (e.g. study for PhD).
2. Small size of the university facilitates informal contacts and ad hoc resolution of problems.
3. High level of successful engagement with northern Croatia community.
4. Strong and successful orientation of the curriculum to skill development.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

- Consider delegating financial and budgetary responsibility to lower e.g. to departmental and centre level.
- Consider introducing systems to ensure consistency and comparability in assessment within and across programmes.
- Consider developing established management practices, which seem very process oriented, towards a greater emphasis on management by objectives.
- Consider giving a higher priority to research and publication in high quality outlets.
- So as to facilitate mobility, consider increasing proportion of university activities (including teaching), documentation and public orientation conducted in languages other than Croatian (e.g. English and/or German and/or Russian).

2. Study Programmes

- As the dropout rates were quite high, the analysis of pass rates should be deeper.
- The curricula and course descriptions of every study programme should be available in English or another major European language.
- Library opening hours should be extended.

3. Students

- The University should ensure that resources increase in proportion to the growing number of students on study programmes, especially the graduate programmes.
- The University should encourage enrolment of more exchange students from other countries.
- The creation of bonds with former students and their involvement in the work on the University should be continued
- The University should consider raising admissions standards and better assessing students' competencies before admission.
- The University should press for improved transport infrastructure between Varaždin and Koprivnica to ease student travel and daily commuting.

4. Teachers

- Establish a clear programme of future staff development in line with the strategic goals of the University.
- Increase full time appointments in some of the core disciplines such as civil engineering.

5. Scientific and Professional Activity

- Better define aims and target numbers for how the university intends to recruit/train more PhDs in order to consolidate University status.
- Decide on priorities between building up one particular area of research, including via sponsoring of sufficient staff to read for PhDs, or gradually increasing numbers across a broad swath of subject areas.
- Increase publication in internationally recognised SCI Journals.
- Encourage /facilitate more staff to attend and present their work at prestigious international meetings etc.

6. International Cooperation and Mobility

- The University's web-site needs to be presented in English and/or another widely-used foreign language.
- Both inward and outward mobility of students and staff needs to be further developed.
- The internationalization of the University needs to happen at the course level as well as the research and project levels.
- An international profile is yet to be developed.

7. Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance

- Develop an annual plan for professional training of non-teaching staff and written policies and procedures to monitor their efficiency (e.g. annual appraisal).
- Develop written policies and procedures for quality control,
- Conduct an annual survey of users (students).
- Ensure that laboratories are appropriately and adequately equipped in accordance with enrolment quotas and for all study programmes equally, establish written protocols and procedures for the use of laboratory equipment and its maintenance, and certify the laboratories where appropriate.

- Increase the number of titles in the library, especially foreign journals, extend opening hours (given that the current opening hours are fairly restrictive for students especially part time students) and consider increasing the number of members of the Library Board, which in addition to the librarian only has two members and extend the Board's powers to approve orders of titles of the library.
- Maintain successful management efforts to secure public and other funding sources so as to maintain high academic standards and the independence of the University.

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE TO THE STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

The University's achievements are already considerable, however it faces significant challenges. The panel believes the University will be able to meet these if it changes its management style and adopts less top-down and more devolved practices, and becomes less process and more outcome oriented. Further, the panel proposes adoption of better quality assurance practices, particularly in student assessment; that the University develop an increasingly international (and multi-lingual) dimension to its activities and that research and publication in high quality outlets be further prioritised.

1.1. The management of University North has a record of very significant achievement: the university has developed from its initial status as a private university and is now to be congratulated on having achieved the status of a public university; new and refurbished buildings provide an impressive and effective infrastructure within which student learning can take place; mutually beneficial relationships have been established with local and regional business and commerce and the university is well endowed with modern equipment and teaching aids. Perhaps most important, the university has succeeded in attracting an impressive body of young academic staff committed to innovation and development. All this is admirable and very worthy of praise. Regarding the strategic documents, the University adopted the Development Strategy 2015-2020 and the Scientific-Research Strategy 2014-2019. Although the objectives and tasks were defined, they lack clear, consistent and assessable indicators – target values and financial indicators e.g. the Budget. Additionally, there are no annual plans, i.e. 2015 action plan. Overall the panel was favourably impressed by the achievements of the management and staff of the University North in establishing the university as a public university in a relatively short time; in providing what appeared to be good learning experiences for students and in establishing an impressive infrastructure and obviously good relationships with local stakeholders. All this will provide an excellent basis on which the university can develop. However, the panel believes that attention can, with profit, be given to the management style and practices current in the university; to ensuring that assessment procedures emulate best practice in other European universities; and to making the university more accessible to non-Croatian speaking staff and students (who may, in turn, enable the university to better meet the challenges posed by a rapidly changing European higher education environment).

1.2. The University North is a very young institution. But what has served it well in its short life (and the longer lives of the vocationally oriented institutions on which it is built) and as a small scale institution may not serve it as well in a period of growth, change of scale and development of a capacity for higher level scientific (research and scholarship) work. To face such challenges

successfully, albeit recognising that these are the challenges posed by the University's past successes, the university management may wish to consider empowering (and thus being able to hold accountable) staff below the level of the most senior management in the University's organisational hierarchy. The panel was struck by the centralisation and top down character of the university's organisational and financial structure. The panel acknowledges that this may, at least in part, be conditioned by legal considerations. However this organisational style may not serve the university well as it grows and develops. The panel also considered that the university's organisational style and practice was very process, rather than outcome, oriented. It proved hard to secure answers to the panel's questions about priorities; deadlines; deliverables and management of change. Accordingly the panel suggests that the university's management consider fostering a change in university culture and organisational style of the kind indicated by the term "management by objectives".

1.3. Not applicable.

1.4. The university faces significant challenges. It has to scale up its activities and this is likely to mean that the informal contacts that make relatively small institutions readily able to address and solve problems will no longer be sufficient. Further, it (like many other universities) will face increasing levels of competition from other European and international alternatives. This competition may outcompete the University North in attracting and retaining staff and students, in securing funding for research and in building relationships with external bodies such as business and commerce. Already the university experiences what in terms of many international comparisons (though not necessarily in terms of comparison with other Croatian universities) appear to be very high student wastage rates. To develop the university in such a way as to ensure it will be able to take its place among well reputed European universities (with consequential benefits in attracting and retaining staff and students and in improving scientific outputs, necessary for a positive impact on income generation) the panel believed the university should recognise that it is in a European (and international) market for staff, students and research funding and thus develop an increasingly international (and multi-lingual) dimension to its activities.

1.5. The emphasis on process was evident in the university's quality assurance practices. These have some important successes and elements of good practice to their credit. The panel was favourably impressed by the feedback given to students (though the panel saw only a small sample of assessed work and do not know how generalised good practice is throughout the university); the customary definition of clear learning outcomes for students and by the apparent linking of assessment criteria to these. Albeit the evidence base on which the panel has made this favourable assessment is meagre: the panel had to request examples of curriculum descriptions; examples of assessed student work and so on and (for understandable reasons) relatively few examples were provided and could be considered. The absence of formalised and routine measures to ensure consistency in assessment standards within courses and programmes and across course and programmes surprised some panel members. Samples of

student work were not double marked; there did not appear to be marking schedules (defining the characteristics of student work that would secure particular grading levels); there did not appear to be a standardised form of feedback linking assessors' comments and judgements to expected learning outcomes and there appeared to be no programme of meetings to ensure comparability and consistency of marking standards within programmes and courses and between them. Of course, many highly renowned European universities have not adopted such practices and the panel has been informed that they are not general practice in Croatian universities. However, the panel believed it appropriate to reference the University North's work against the best, not the worst, of established practices.

1.6. The University implements surveys aimed at improving the teaching process, which the Panel considers a positive element of the quality assurance system. The teaching staff assess the surveys favourably and claim that they take the comments from the surveys into account when they are well founded. There are separate surveys for teachers and students, which is a good thing. The teachers with best grades get a small financial award and recognition. The cumulative results are available online. The panel has the impression that there is room for improving the effectiveness of the survey system through introducing more concrete rather than formal impact of the stakeholders (students, alumni, external stakeholders) on the basis of their comments and suggestions for improvement, and the same is true of documenting the procedure, as the panel did not receive such documents during the visit. The panel also suggest introducing at least a general annual plan of staff development. The University invests significant funds and efforts into training teaching staff, acquiring the necessary books and journals and teaching aids which are of a very high level, as well as the IT equipment, which all support the quality of the teaching process.

1.7. The University invests efforts into improving the quality of scientific and research activities, including funding the tuition fees for doctoral studies of junior researchers. However, the level achieved is not satisfactory. This is visible from e.g. the quality of journals in which the staff publish, as well as the quantitative indicators of scientific productivity. The present results can only be considered as a foundation on which to build on, and significant efforts will be required in scientific work and research (to publish in the best outlets).

The data from the strategies (concrete plans and tasks which lack target values and budgets although some target values are provided in the descriptions of the activities), tasks, action plans and control mechanism are not sufficiently operative and effective and there is room for necessary improvements.

1.8. The University adopted regulations providing for the ethical behaviour of students and staff (Regulations on Disciplinary Responsibility, Code of Ethics...) but the impression is that their implementation is not fully defined or documented, that is, the panel did not receive documented evidence such as minutes etc. of the meetings of the competent bodies. These regulations are available at the University website. There is no doubt that it is necessary to establish the competent bodies, define the relevant procedures and introduce the staff and the students to the regulations and the procedures.

2. Study programmes

There are eleven study programmes in the University North, most of them at bachelor level. The overall assessment shows a need for more master studies programmes and at doctoral level if the university is to achieve its goal of becoming equivalent to the best universities in Croatia. The study programmes, in all, were well organized and the learning environments well equipped.

2.1. Effective procedures for monitoring and improving teaching and learning quality have been partly implemented in the study programmes of the University. There is no special unit for monitoring but it is carried out by the academic board of each department. The teaching staff is able to update and change the content of study programmes when needed (but only to a limit of 20%).

2.2. Local companies testified as to how well the University has listened to their needs. These, and the needs of society as a whole, have been taken into account. But unfortunately, the documentation of the realization of this process was not available to the panel.

2.3. Proposed enrolment quotas seem justified and are mostly in line with the institutional resources for quality teaching and pass rate analysis. The dropout rates are high, with a consequential waste of public resources and of students' time, though the panel learned that the University North's student wastage rates are not exceptional when compared to other universities in Croatia. However, student wastage is, in comparison to universities outside Croatia, very high and the University should examine its admission procedures; student support and counselling and curriculum to understand and remedy the high dropout rates.

2.4. Defined learning outcomes mainly do describe the knowledge and skills students obtain upon the completion of study programme. The learning outcomes contain both general skills and specific professional skills. In the master's degree programme, the learning outcomes contain specific scientific skills, e.g. research skills. However, it was not very clear on what bases the learning outcomes were set. The University should ensure that learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the qualification (bachelor, master, doctor) that the university offers.

2.5. The study programmes mostly ensure that the assessment of student learning is in line with the defined learning outcomes, that the full range of learning is being assessed, and that the assessment is appropriate to the qualification level. The academic staff has discussed the learning outcomes in each department and they have tried to use the European qualification framework to describe the learning outcomes as required competencies. Furthermore, the course descriptions are detailed and explicit.

2.6. Allocation of ECTS, the realistic estimate of the student workload is totally implemented. The course descriptions in the curriculum explain very clearly the division of teaching between lectures, seminars, homework, independent learning and so on. However, students themselves have stated their studies are often not too demanding and the University should ensure that courses are genuinely challenging and extending students' competencies and that course content and assessment enable the best students to demonstrate their capabilities and differentiate their performance from that of less competent students.

2.7. The content and quality of each study programme conform to internationally recognized standards for the most part and teaching, for the most part, is based on the latest scientific discoveries. The study programme consists of compulsory and optional courses. Quite a lot of international learning material, mostly in English, is used. Students must use the latest research results in their papers and other tasks. A special mention must be given to the nursing education programme, which has developed its education according to the European Union Directives. In order to create more cooperation that is international e.g. through exchange programmes, all study programmes should have the curriculum and course descriptions in English (or another major European language such as German or Russian).

2.8. Teachers mostly use teaching methods that are appropriate for subject matter and different ways of learning, and encourage independent student learning, in some programmes all the time. Teachers told the panel examples of what kind of methods they use, e.g. project based learning. The students were quite satisfied with the teaching methods, but they hope for even more active teaching practices. The quality of communication between teachers and students is very good. The University North has excellent, modern learning environments, especially the IT classrooms, laboratories for engineering and simulation equipment for nursing.

2.9. Appropriate supplemental resources, including electronic journal databases, scientific literature and other sources that aid in the acquisition of knowledge, are in most cases made available by the teachers. The libraries are open daily, but only for working hours. For the students it would be best if they could be open also during the evenings and weekends – this development would be particularly beneficial for the University's high numbers of part-time students.

2.10. As appropriate to learning outcomes, students often have opportunities to reinforce and apply their learning in the context of practical applications. The faculty has cooperation with industrial companies and they discuss the different ways of arranging the training periods. On what basis the cooperative companies have been chosen, should be explained in more detail. In the nursing programme, the clinical training periods that belong to nursing education have been organized very well. University organises education for the mentors, nurses at the hospital that are responsible for supervising students.

3. Students

The University North is investing a lot of effort and work to ensure that students can develop skills and further their education so as to enter employment successfully. Despite the youth of the University it has a well organised system and the panel is confident that the University is committed to continuous improvement of the quality of its study programmes and thus to the skills and competencies of graduating students.

3.1. The students enrolled in the University North had to satisfy certain criteria when they were enrolled. Through the selection of applicants, the university is trying to get the most competent students and to enrich their studies. It is visible that they are investing a lot of effort and work, in the accordance with the demands of the work market, so that they can provide their students with a better quality education in order for them to be more competent and educated when they arrive in the work place. However, there is still room for progress and improvement, especially considering the high drop-out rates, as discussed above.

3.2. Visiting the university, we noted that the students receive great support from the institution in their extracurricular activities, within limits posed by the existing facilities and resources. At the university there are a lot of different student associations that engage in the organisation of social, sport, charity and professional events and help enrich the lives of students. In addition to funding, the university provides its students with professional and advisory support in the realisation of their projects.

3.3. Great support is given to students in their professional development and orientation. The University is very well organised and provides counselling, mentorship and the resources necessary for the students' professional development, to which they attach great importance. The students have the possibility of going to other parts of the country or abroad in order to develop professionally, all with the financial and professional support of the University.

3.4. According to students, methods and knowledge assessment procedures cover all the areas and they are clearly defined so that the students are familiar with the assessment criteria. They state that they know the required level of knowledge they need to show for a specific grade. The knowledge assessment is done through written, oral and practical exams, which prompt the usage of practical knowledge with the objective of students' knowledge improvement. However, the panel holds that there is room for improvement in the assessment practices to make them comparable to the best European practices, as discussed above. If the students believe, based on their acquired and demonstrated knowledge, that they deserve a better grade than the one they got, they always have the possibility of appealing against the decision concerning their assessment.

3.5. Since the University North is a young university which has existed for only fifteen months, the number of graduated students from this university is not large. They do not have the possibility of keeping complete and comprehensive statistics of their former students and their employment.

3.6. The University North regularly informs the public about its study programs, learning outcomes, qualifications and employment opportunities. All the necessary information is easily accessible to the general public and to the other interested groups on the notice boards and the websites of the university units. The students regularly and on time receive all the necessary information about their obligations and rights. Through the insight into the website of the University North, we are convinced that the learning outcomes are clearly defined and accessible to the students and to the general public. It is praiseworthy that the students receive detailed and precise information about the learning outcomes at the beginning of every semester at their introductory lecture.

3.7. Through the existence of legal and legitimate student representative body at the University North, the Student Council, the involvement of students in the process of making decisions concerning all the important issues related to the University is guaranteed. The student representatives are present in the bodies of the University North such as the Senate and the University Council, and at the meetings of those bodies they can submit their own proposals and complaints, as well as influence the decision-making process through their votes. Besides the fact that this student right is guaranteed by the law, we were also convinced, when we visited the University North and spoke to the students, that this right is respected and applied. This is a positive example of the involvement of students in the process of making decisions for such a young university.

3.8. Students can also submit their own opinions and suggestions through polls, which are conducted at the end of every semester. In addition to the student representation this is another way for the students to put forward their opinions, proposals and provide a positive or negative critique. Based on the survey, the management of the University North rewards the best teachers, while those who received bad ratings are given a warning and encouragement for improvement. The students told us that they were familiar with that practice and that the university management takes their opinion into consideration and that, in accordance with their possibilities, they are doing their best to improve the quality of studying and to solve all the current issues.

4. Teachers

The University has an enthusiastic and motivated scientific teaching staff who are well supported in their endeavours. In order to reach and confirm the goals of being a well-recognized university, however, attention will need to be paid to future hires and the continual upgrading of staff as the number of study programmes and the size of the student body increase.

4.1. Overall, scientific teaching staff appear to be sufficient in number with the majority of disciplines reasonably well covered through a mixture of full-and part-time staff. Some disciplines, however show an inadequate number of full-time staff. The University seems to be aware of this issue as section 4a of the self-study highlights efforts being made to increase the proportion of full-time teaching staff throughout. It should be noted that the documents

provided were, however, not easy to decipher and a more transparent system of detailing the staff to student ratio should be devised.

Although the academic level of the scientific teaching staff with the necessary qualifications is progressing it is not currently fully compliant with university-level standards. The panel commends the University on the efforts being made to increase the level of staff qualification as made apparent with 36 teachers currently enrolled in PhD programs. The implementation of a long-term staff development plan is recommended to ensure the parallel development of the University and the level of qualification of the scientific teaching staff.

The strategic goals of the University North, which call for internationalization, are not being realized by the current staff members with a very low percentage of foreign staff and no visiting professors from abroad. In light of this, it is recommended that the University have visiting professors from foreign institutions, encourage further faculty Erasmus+ exchanges and look to hire international faculty.

4.2. The pedagogical certification that teachers have to go through every five years as well as provision of workshops on subjects including learning outcomes attest to a concern for ongoing development. Additionally a real programme of staff development with 36 teachers currently enrolled in PhD programmes, can only be commended. It is suggested that attention now be paid to including activities that will impact research and publication activities such as the creation of a journal club. Training is also offered to non-teaching members of staff through training courses and the upgrading of skills.

It was not clear whether human resources development has been formalized in the strategic plan. As the University aspires to grow this should be reviewed and if not included at this time, added to the strategic plan and the budget.

4.3. The optimal ratio between full-time staff and students is not met at this time due to the number of part-time and outside lecturers. Additional full-time staff are needed, especially in some of the core disciplines, in order that this standard meets full compliance.

4.4. The link to the mission to become a full university is clear through the institution's current investment in staff development. The University North does not, however, seem to have a published staff development policy. The drawing up of such a document with clear guidelines so that all staff are aware of the possibilities open to them should be done. Such information should be easily available.

4.5. Staff are currently given enough time for both teaching and research activities however no clear workload documents were presented. The self-study does refer to compliance with the relevant regulations, however, these were not specified and it was not possible to make a comparison with international standards.

It was noted that teaching staff were very positive towards the time given for pursuit of academic and research activities. The large number of teaching preparing higher qualifications, doing research and working on industry projects, exhibitions and conferences suggests that the workload is indeed correct. It is important that the workload criteria be published and made available to staff.

4.6. Strong links to industry are evident and the faculty all seem to have enough time to teach and conduct consulting and other activities.

5. Scientific and professional activity

Research at the University North is one of the least developed areas of university activity and, given that the University North is such a young establishment, this is not surprising. It is currently sponsoring several members of staff to carry out PhD studies, which is to be applauded, but many more trained PhD staff are needed to enable the University to achieve excellence in research. Also there is little evidence in the engineering subjects of research activity although the multi-media and arts efforts seem to be further advanced. Our overall impression is that although the University has begun to develop research much more investment is needed in order to aid research particularly in the engineering areas.

5.1. The University has a strategic research plan but there are few hard numerical indicators for its objectives for the next 5 years. E.g. does it wish to build up one particular area of research, e.g. by sponsoring staff to read for PhDs or is it gradually going to increase activity across a broad swath of subject areas? There is no doubt that a nucleus of research activity has been created, especially in the multi-media area (government funding of order €160k and interaction with Montenegro TV) and in the Innotech project, but apart from these most efforts are just at the starting phase of implementation. Priorities need to be set and resources allocated accordingly.

5.2. Cooperation with other scientific organisations, both in Croatia and abroad, is one aspect of the research plan which does seem to be in place. The University sponsors a number of staff to read for PhDs with several universities in Croatia and has links with other institutions of higher education e.g. in Serbia and Ukraine. Moreover, although there are few examples of research within the university there is an increasing, and commendable, list of collaborations with local companies.

5.3. The University currently sponsors several members of staff to carry out PhD studies and the junior staff that we met were really most impressive- a great credit to the University North and a wonderful basis for the future of the University. BUT many more are needed to enable the University to fully achieve a status comparable to other universities in Croatia and elsewhere.

5.4. Staff members have authored/co-authored 1026 publications over a 5 year period but only approximately 160 of these are actually in quality International SCI journals. The list of journals

in which they have published is not impressive and most certainly is not comparable with other higher education institutions across Europe. The list of the 10 best publications for Biomedicine and Health are really not too bad but in the Technical Sciences and the Humanities and Social Sciences the lists are much less impressive. On the other hand for artistic work the list of exhibitions in various museums and other similar institutions is more encouraging but these are predominantly in Croatia and more work should be presented across Europe and further afield.

5.5. The University does have effective mechanisms for rewarding staff both for teaching and research. Examples mentioned during the interviews include financial rewards for significant publication records and for taking out patents. The actual promotion process appears to follow the guidelines provided by the government rather than being performance and excellence based. Clearly, there is limited scope for the University to introduce a different promotion system but the current policy and practice are not likely to serve the University well in improving its performance.

5.6. Overall, University North has some peer-reviewed scientific publications but here again Biomedical Sciences and Multi-media subjects stand out from the other areas. A significant increase in journal publication, and preferably in SCI journals, is needed.

5.7. The university has some excellent examples of interactions with local companies a good example of which is the Innotech project coordinated via Podravka, a local food producing company. There are also other examples of collaboration with Montenegro TV and 5 projects using internal university funding have also been initiated. This is forecast to increase year on year to encourage interaction with local companies. There is still much room for expansion of such activities but there is no doubt that this is a key strategy for the University. One way to further improve and augment such activities is to enable more staff to attend international conferences- we heard of a couple of examples but this needs to be increased as this is by far the best way to find out what leading scholars elsewhere are aiming to do going forward (rather than reading in journals what they did last year). Also meeting fellow researchers at such meetings provides opportunities for future collaborative work.

5.8. At present most of the interaction with local companies is via staff exchange and graduate employment but the only actual evidence of technology development/transfer was the security coding work using the IR camera that was demonstrated to the panel in Koprivnica. A start has been made but there is a long way to go. In order for a technological institute to be fully recognised as successful research university collaboration with the corporate sector is necessary and much more work in this area is needed.

5.9. There was little discussion on the subject of professional activities and consulting etc. but the work done in the Print department, where books and other publications are produced, provides a good example of ways to make additional income whilst still maintaining the core aims of the department. Also all external assignments have to be reported, and all teaching at

other HEIs needs written approval from Rector. None has been denied and the panel hopes this will continue.

5.10. There is no doctoral study programme at the University North although several staff have already been able to obtain their PhD degrees with other universities within and outside Croatia. The PhDs and younger teaching staff that are studying for their PhDs are a credit to the University and gave us confidence that the future of the institution is in good hands. However, the panel is concerned that for many of the technical subjects the quality of facilities will need significant expansion to enable yet more PhD uptake.

6. International cooperation and mobility

The University has taken steps in the right direction with a number of bilateral Erasmus+ agreements, the awarding of an Erasmus+ Charter and other agreements with foreign institutions. It will take time, however, before the fruit of these agreements can be seen and at present the number of exchanges remains limited and very short term. The panel encourages the University to focus on the development of this very important area for its future growth and expansion if it wishes to become recognized as a full-fledged university.

6.1. Internal mobility is possible for students coming from other higher education institutions within Croatia and entry exams are in place for those students coming from Croatian vocational schools. The requirements are apparently published on the University's web-site and the rules are clear.

This mobility is at present only relative to certain study programmes at the Bachelor level and should be increased to all study programmes. Future development of graduate programmes should encourage this type of mobility.

6.2. Due to the University's Erasmus+ status and current bilateral agreements with foreign institutions, students are able to complete part of their programme abroad. The recently established Office for International Cooperation is now in place to help with such exchanges. Access to foreign institutions seems to be somewhat limited, however, due to the language of instruction as almost all of the study programmes are conducted exclusively in Croatian (the Nursing programme being an exception). This does not allow the students to develop language skills which would enable them to apply for study abroad. The actual number of students participating in study abroad is very limited with a total of 8 outgoing in 2013/14 for both study visits and placements – no clear indication of whether either of these were equal to a full semester. It is assumed that now the University has the agreements in place to encourage such exchange that this will develop further.

6.3. There were clear examples of outward mobility amongst the teachers and researchers. The results of these experiences seem also to have been passed on through the teaching of those

involved. International experience is also being acquired by those following PhD programmes abroad and this is being brought back to the University through the organisation of conferences and also in the classroom. In addition to those teachers involved in doctoral studies abroad, full-time scientific teaching staff should be encouraged to participate in short-term mobility such as block teaching or visiting lectureships. It is suggested that future hires should have completed a part of their education or a postdoc abroad.

6.4. Although off to a very good start with a clear exchange with industry and exchanges starting at the scientific level, especially through those involved in PhD programmes, this exchange remains rather limited especially at the international level.

The University is not potentially attractive for international cooperation as there is no English or other major language version of the website. This language barrier also prevents the full published dissemination of project, exhibit and research results.

6.5. At this time the University does not provide adequate conditions to attract foreign students. Although the University North is indeed on the *Study in Croatia* website the teaching language is indicated as Croatian which limits the University's attractiveness for students coming from abroad.

Despite an effort to enter into Erasmus+ types of exchanges, there are too few courses offered in English or other major languages at the University to be of interest to international students. Furthermore, no clear strategy seems to have been thought out past the entering into of agreements with other higher education institutions. It is imperative that the web-site should be translated in English or another widely used language keeping in mind the geographic areas from which the University might potentially attract students. Courses need to be offered in languages other than Croatian. Specialized master programmes might provide a starting point for this. Finally, the development of international-student friendly programmes within the University as well as within student-run associations should be encouraged.

6.6. At this time the University does not provide adequate conditions to attract teachers from abroad. Even an Erasmus exchange would be quite difficult as the language of instruction is almost exclusively Croatian at this time. The international research and other projects currently underway should open the doors for the future development of this area.

The panel suggest that in order to have an international presence the University should have visiting professors or even seminars in languages other than Croatian and encourage Erasmus+ faculty exchanges. International research projects might try to include teaching components.

6.7. There are currently a number of collaborative projects: research, with industry, and artistic, underway and the faculty speak very enthusiastically about them. The contacts made through such ventures should be used to help internationalize the University.

In order to develop an international profile there should be an English version of the institutional website and publications, project reports, etc... should be available there in English or other major languages.

7. Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances

Generally speaking, the University resources deserve a very high mark. The management pays great attention to ensuring there are better than adequate conditions and work equipment. This has resulted in renovated buildings; clean, neat and very pleasant work spaces; and the modern equipment necessary for the educational process and scientific research. Laboratory and IT equipment must also be graded with a very high mark. However, there are differences in the level of equipment enjoyed by different study programmes and departmental laboratories. The management should endeavour to ensure that there is an equally high level of equipment for all.

7.1. The panel is very satisfied with spatial and learning resources of the University North. Two buildings were refurbished in 2014, and the facilities look well kept, clean and tidy. The classrooms, practical classrooms and laboratories are well equipped with up-to-date learning resources. Space is arranged according to study programmes, with each programme given an adequate number of practical classrooms and laboratories, in line with the content of the programme. The panel is particularly impressed by the equipment in the practical classrooms of the Nursing Department and the practical exercises we observed, as well as the classroom where small student groups were preparing for an exam with the assistance of a teacher.

The practical classrooms of the Nursing Department boast state of the art teaching equipment and resources, with a number of devices used to provide the experience of working in real-life conditions. Small student groups, active student participation and up to date equipment provide for a high quality of practical training. Teachers' offices are also equipped with state of the art IT equipment. A significant portion of practical training takes place in health institutions – hospitals, health centres, nursing homes etc. Practical classrooms and laboratories for technical courses are also reasonably well equipped for the needs of practical training. The panel was especially interested in seeing the excellent equipment in the Digital Publishing Centre where books, brochures, leaflets, etc. can be printed and bound to a professional standard. The recording (radio) studio was similarly well equipped.

The newly refurbished facilities in Koprivnica were decorated with paintings by a teacher on the Media Design programme. The centre also includes an atelier for practical classes. During the last two years 4 million euro have been invested in equipping the studio and atelier in Koprivnica. There are also ambitious plans to further equip the studio and the atelier (for creating scale models). Equipping the studio will also require changes to the building.

Teachers' offices are of a high standard (especially in the newly refurbished buildings, and especially in the Koprivnica centre) and well equipped with office and IT equipment suitable for teaching and research. They also have personalised access to network printers. The office capacities will be further increased after the newly acquired building in Varaždin, with 1345 m² of space, is refurbished. The building was given to the University by the City of Varaždin.

Each centre has its own, well equipped library with a reading room, and the University has a contract with city libraries in both cities enabling students to use these additional resources. Library resources are regularly updated and are probably adequate for the number of students currently enrolled on the University's various courses. However, opening hours are restricted

and space and book/journal holdings are likely to require increasing as the University grows and its research and scholarship activities increase and improve.

Overall, the panel found spatial and teaching resources to be excellent; that teachers/researchers' and students' needs are taken into account; that student and teaching standards and work conditions are on a very high level, with well-maintained facilities.

7.2. According to the Self Evaluation, there is one non-teaching staff member (i.e. in an administrative, technical or support role) per 11,6 active teachers (permanently employed teachers and external associates). With the total number of 348 active teachers, there are 30 non-teaching members of staff. According to the Self Evaluation, there were 85 teachers and assistants with permanent employment at the University in 2013/14. This ratio is not regulated at the state level. The need for additional non-teaching staff can be understood in the context of the increased needs for external teachers as well as the context of two university centres in two cities. The management informed the panel that currently there were 152 permanent members of staff, which means that 122 teachers would require 30,5 non-teaching members of staff, thus complying with the standard. Additional 4 to 5 temporary non-teaching staff are hired during the enrolment period to support the student offices.

In the panel's interviews with teachers and associates there were no complaints on the number or the availability of the teaching staff.

7.3. The non-teaching staff of the University North work in the Service for Technical and Maintenance Activities, Storage, Work Safety Activities and Fire Protection, Office for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, student office, University Library, Service for General, Legal, Staffing and Administrative Affairs ("Secretariat"), Service for Accounting, Bookkeeping and Finances, and the Service for IT Support, E-learning and Distance Learning. The current state of the facilities and the IT equipment demonstrate the quality of maintenance provided by the technical and IT service. Users have not complained on the maintenance. The non-teaching staff employed in these services have stated that they had opportunities for regular professional development in their fields. However, the Panel has not learned of surveys on the quality of work of the support services, or an annual plan for professional development of non-teaching staff. There are no policies or procedures for training of non-teaching staff or quality controls of their work.

7.4. The general assessment of the laboratories is that they are well equipped and maintained, and used often (during the panel's tour of the facilities, there were practical exercises taking place in most of them). Of course, not all laboratories are equally well equipped nor is all equipment state of the art and of equally high quality.

The Nursing Department boasts particularly good, up to date equipment (mannequins, IT devices, tablets for group work), as do the recording studio and Publishing Centre. Some other laboratories and practical classrooms are adequately, but not so well, equipped (e.g. the lab for electrical and civil engineering has only devices for geotechnical testing). The University management told the panel that the University plans to buy access to licenced laboratories for testing building materials from Varaždin IGH Institute. There are also ambitious plans to build a

laboratory for scale, 3D, modelling needed for the scenography course, as well as to develop studios for TV production, photography and scenography.

The panel was not able to see the usage protocols for lab equipment, and the list of documents provided to the panel did not include such protocols or ordinances.

7.5. The University is well on its way in securing modern technology and equipment for research and teaching. If the current trend continues, there is no doubt that in a reasonable time the standard will be comparable to renowned European institutions. The panel was generally pleased and impressed with what they saw (audio-visual equipment, recording studio, publishing centre) and some panel members compared favourably the quality of the resources to that at renowned European institutions. Regarding the IT equipment, it is obvious that full attention is given to the procurement, maintenance, usage in teaching and extracurricularly. According to the users, more than half of the computers are less than three years old.

The panel had the opportunity to observe students working in practical classrooms and laboratories using computers, as well as nursing students preparing themselves for an exam with the help of tablet computers. There is both wired and wireless access to the Internet. There is an ordinance for usage of the IT and AV equipment, which is commendable. The e-learning system is well developed and used, and it includes a system for student surveys.

The IT equipment was primarily acquired from the University's own funds and publicly procured. There is also an ordinance for procurements which do not require the full procedure of public procurement. Information on all procurements is available at the University website.

7.6. Both centres have libraries which are adequately equipped and have a reading space used by students. The libraries provide computers for library staff and students. Specialised software is used to find and borrow books. Users can search the library catalogue online (the system indicates the current availability of books). The libraries contain a number of Croatian and international bibliographical and citation databases, as well as full-text databases. The current deficiencies in the size, number of seats and titles are successfully mitigated through agreements with city libraries in Varaždin and Koprivnica.

A specific ordinance regulates the activities of the libraries in detail.

The panel can confirm that the number of compulsory textbooks acquired for the library is equal to the proscribed 20% of the number of students per course.

7.7. The panel holds that a large portion of funding is invested into facilities, teaching and research, as well as professional and scientific development of staff, which is commendable.

The University was established in 2014, and the financial data in the Self-Evaluation for 2012 and 2013 is separate for the Varaždin Polytechnic and the Media University. The funding sources are multiple – the Ministry of Science (primarily for the salaries of the Varaždin Polytechnic staff), EU funds (for the Varaždin Polytechnic only), own funds (primarily tuition fees) and donations. The Media University received donations in addition to its own funds. Such funding

with no public sources can present risks for regular operation. However, it is to be expected that this problem will be partly amended by integration into the University. The designation of the University as a public university is expected to improve the funding structure, increase the autonomy of the University and guarantee the stability of its operations.

7.8. It is obvious that the University invests significant funds and efforts to ensure high quality conditions for teaching, research and professional activities. So far most of the funds have come from the University's own funds, and also in part from EU funds. The funds appear to have been spent purposefully, efficiently and effectively. Employee satisfaction is taken into account: they receive small amounts in the form of awards for excellence (defined by an ordinance) and have opportunities for professional development. There is significant investment in developing young teachers and researchers, and a number of PhD students have their tuition fees paid by the University.