

REPORT of the Expert Panel on the

RE-ACCREDITATION OF the University of Zadar, Department of Geography

Date of the site visit: April 16, 2015

May, 2015

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INTRODUCTION

This report on the re-accreditation of the University of Zadar, Department of Geography 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.

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 ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) full member, 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 programs.

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 within 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:

- Frank Witlox, PhD, Ghent University, chair
- Martina Jakovčić, PhD, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb
- Darko Kanjuh, XV.gimnazija, Zagreb (XV Grammer School in Zagreb)
- Meta Dobnikar, PhD, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, University of Ljubljana
- Domagoj Vugić, Faculty of Science, University of Split

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

• Marina Matešić, coordinator

During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups:

The management (rector, chair and vice-chair of department);

- The working group that compiled the Self-Evaluation;
- The students:
- The teachers/researchers and teaching assistants.

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, IT rooms, student register desk, and the classrooms at the Department of Geography, where they held a brief question and answer session with the students who were present.

Upon completion of re-accreditation procedure, the Accreditation Council renders its opinion on the basis of the Re-accreditation Report, an Assessment of Quality of the higher education institution and the Report of Fulfilment of Quantitative Criteria which is acquired by 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** to the higher education institution, which confirms that the higher education institution meets the requirements for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities, in case the Accreditation Recommendation is positive,
- 2. **deny a license** for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities to the higher education institution, in case the Accreditation Recommendation is negative, or
- 3. **issue a letter of recommendation** for the period up to three (3) years in which period the higher education institution should remove its deficiencies. For the higher education institution the letter of recommendation may include the suspension of student enrolment for the 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 of Zadar, Department of Geography

ADDRESS: Ulica dr. Franje Tuđmana 24i, 23 000 ZADAR

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: rector prof. dr. sc. Ante Uglešić

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE: university department

LIST OF STUDY PROGRAMMES:

Single-major Undergraduate Applied Geography

Double-major Undergraduate *Geography* (Teaching Program)

Single-major Graduate *Applied Geography*

Double-major Graduate *Geography* (Teaching Program)

Postgraduate Doctoral Program The Adriatic - A Link Between Continents

NUMBER OF STUDENTS (full-time): 252 (out of which 30 doctoral students)

NUMBER OF TEACHERS: 14 full-time academic staff, 4 full-time teaching assistants, 1 part-time lecturer and 1 external associate

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS (doctors of science, elected to grades, full-time): 14

TOTAL BUDGET: University in 2013: 160,715,103.00 Kuna (department: about 330,000.00 Kuna per year)

MSES FUNDING (percentage): 68.48 %

OWN FUNDING (percentage): 33.92 %

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

Department of Geography was established in 1994 within the Faculty of Philosophy in Zadar, University of Split. In 2003 it was integrated in the newly founded (renewed) University of Zadar.

In the past the Department offered a dual study program (double major), which offered the possibility to combine the *Geography* with a number of study programs offered by the Faculty of Philosophy. Since 2005/2006 the Department offers two undergraduate and two graduate programs (a single study program of *Applied Geography*, and a double major teachers' study

program *Geography*). Since 2010/2011 the Department offers a postgraduate program titled *The Adriatic - A Link Between Continents* (jointly organized by the Department of History).

The Department is administered by a Head of the Department and His/Her Deputy, elected for a two-year period. The Department has organised its activities around five

sub-departments (chairs): Physical Geography; Social Geography; Applied Geography; Regional Geography and Regional and Geography Teaching Methodic; and Cartography and GIS. Each sub-department is administered by a chair, and consists of at least three teachers.

In early 2000, the Department moved to a new and much better equipped university building located in the New Campus where 12 offices for teachers, three classrooms and two computer laboratories are at their disposal.

The Department also uses the facilities of the geography research centre (a building on the Square Prince Višeslav 9), the central university library, a large multipurpose

video-conference room, as well as maintenance and other services and offices at the university level.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL

ADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION

- 1. Department of Geography has good physical resources in terms of new and well equipped classrooms and a computer classroom, and a well-equipped library.
- 2. Department of Geography has well developed and planned career policy with well-balanced structure according to age and scientific status which will enable the future growth and development.
- 3. Department of Geography provides the students with a solid chance to find employment because enrolment quotas for study programmes are in line with market needs.
- 4. The study programmes conducted by the Department are similar to the programmes performed on related studies in the country and certain studies abroad. Therefore horizontal and vertical mobility of students and teaching staff can be provided.
- 5. Department of Geography has relatively small groups of students in classes which lead to higher, intensive quality of studying.
- 6. Department of Geography has a very good relation with the University.
- 7. The position of the city of Zadar and the University being relative new should attract students from Croatia and abroad.
- 8. Teaching staff are highly motivated, young and enthusiastic.
- 9. The students are highly motivated and organised.
- 10. All procedures and processes are fully covered with legislative documents either at university or departmental level.

11. The research strategy is very detailed and includes an action plan. Research staff is adequate for the implementation of the strategy.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION

- 1. Department of Geography does not have an official system of monitoring and enhancing teaching quality and scientific excellence.
- 2. Department of Geography does not participate in a large number of international and domestic scientific and professional projects.
- 3. Department of Geography does not have a laboratory for physical geography in which a variety of analyses could be performed, mainly needed for scientific work of teachers.
- 4. Department of Geography lacks the wider international mobility of students. The Department needs to attract students from abroad and try to keep its own students in its Master program.
- 5. Department's quality assurance committee needs to cooperate closely with the university's QA committee.

FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE

- 1. Department encourages life-long learning by financing necessary additional training (especially in GIS).
- 2. Department ensures availability of scientific literature by paying subscription to relevant databases and journals.
- 3. Department of Geography fosters collaboration with other departments and centres in joint organization of scientific conferences or collaborations on scientific projects and research papers.
- 4. Department of Geography has introduced a good practice of annual joint meeting of all students of Geography with the Departmental Administration where students are introduced to the work of the Department, the procedure of addressing ethical issues, international cooperation and mobility opportunities, but also the students are encouraged to present their opinions and the potential problems that they face during the study.
- 5. Really good practice of their own students willing to participate in Erasmus exchange or study abroad.
- 6. The Department's QA committee publishes its reports and minutes of the meetings on the web site. All suggestions for improvement from staff and students are discussed if relevant to implement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

- The Department's strategy is a part of the University strategy and it includes an operational plan but there is no plan for monitoring its implementation. The University orientation is to be a research university, addressing actual challenges with the emphasis on local specifics. Therefore we suggest developing a quality policy which would be in line with the strategic plan of the Department.
- There is an established committee for quality assurance, and relevant documents for QA rules and procedures are publicly available. Also available are the analysis and yearly reports of the committee. However we suggest extending the Quality committee with one representative of the Alumni club and one representative of the stakeholders.
- Communication to the University QA committee is considered feeble and can be improved.
- The Department should introduce procedures of monitoring quality of teaching through peer review of teaching materials, discussions on methods and examination techniques.
- The Department should install a real Alumni association/club to keep contact with graduated students in a systematic way.
- The geography test at state-matura is not a prerequisite for enrolment to Department's study programs. We suggest introducing this test. Once such a test has been installed we suggest analysing the results and linking this to the pass rate.
- The HEI should introduce a proper system of "committee exams" as described in the bylaw. All fourth exams must take place in front of such a committee. A note from the committee exams must be archived in the student's reports.
- The HEI should develop long-term employment strategies (career paths) in line with its strategic research and educational goals.
- GIS courses need more assistants, postdocs and teachers perhaps through projects and external funding.
- The Department should conduct yearly calculations of teaching workload and discuss the results at the Department meetings before the teaching plan for the next year is approved.
- The Department should try to develop the system of evaluation of other (non-teaching) staff obligations (participation/involvement in different committees, administrative tasks, etc.) and try to divide the workload more evenly among the teaching staff.

2. Study Programmes

- There should be more difference between the single and double major programmes, and between the teacher training track and the *Applied Geography* (in intensity and extensity, the number and proportion between compulsory and optional courses and seminars etc.).
- There is a lack of participation of different stakeholders in implementing the strategy and preparing improvements of the department's work, e.g., no professional cooperation through which stakeholders would be included. In that respect some skills are missing, e.g. spatial planning course, only one GIS course etc.). Hence, stakeholders need to be included more in creating and monitoring the programmes.
- English language literature should be better represented in student learning materials to improve knowledge and encourage them to participate more frequently in student exchange programmes, e.g. Erasmus exchange.
- Not all courses are in line with the mission or taught by teachers that have sufficient expertise stemming from research in that domain (e.g. Medical geography).
- Continue putting efforts into further motivating students to do research work.
- The Department should introduce an introductory course "How to do scientific research and academic writing". It could be organized either as a separate course or even better as an obligatory "first session" of every course. It could also be organised as an extracurricular activity making use of the Library.
- Based on the analyses of pass rates of subjects at the first year of the study programmes
 we suggest the introduction of bridge courses before the first semester or at the
 beginning of the first semester. Bridge courses should fill gaps in knowledge and at the
 end contribute to the rise of pass rates after the first year of study.
- The Department should raise the number of mid-term exams and continuous examination, and also increase the importance of practical work, seminars and mid-term exams in the final grade.
- In designing a future programme more emphasis should be given to the research work and learning of new methodological approaches and techniques.
- We recommend the Department to continue with the good practice of education in GIS and other programmes for the employees.
- The Department should examine the potential of e-learning (massive open online course, so-called MOOCs), and platforms for distance learning.

3. Students

- There is an abundance of regulations and procedures but it seems they are unknown to students.
- The Department should engage in direct communication with high schools in order to raise interest in studying geography. It is obvious form the Self-evaluation that the average grade of students applying for the study in geography is relatively low. Direct

- contact and presentations in schools with well explained possibilities of employment could attract better students.
- The Department should participate in student festivals (Smotra Sveučilišta) not just in Zadar but in other cities.

4. Teachers

- The Department should install formalized discussions at Department meetings on new courses, peer-review of course materials and discussion of methods of teaching and examination techniques.
- The Department should introduce a reward system for teachers based on their work i.e. for publishing teaching materials (peer-reviewed), for developing web sites for their courses etc.
- The Department should encourage more formal communication between teachers to better coordinate and further improve study programmes.
- The Department should on yearly basis discuss study programmes and allocation of workload.
- The Department should engage more in teacher mobility schemes through Erasmus and other international collaborations.
- The Department should employ or educate more personnel responsible for carrying out GIS courses and strengthening application of GIS technologies in other courses.

5. Scientific and Professional Activity

- The Department should introduce monitoring of scientific work through introduction of measures such as annual analysis of published papers (number of papers, where were they published, number of participations in international conferences etc.)
- The Department should introduce a reward system (e.g., money to cover proof-reading/translation costs) for teachers. This reward can be given to teachers who have published their teaching materials (peer-reviewed), published in high impact-factor journals, or developed web sites for their courses.
- The Department should organize a "career day" on which Department could invite potential employers and inform them about study programmes and qualifications.
- The Department should develop a strategy and associated mechanisms for transfer of knowledge in cooperation with e.g. national or international industry.
- Researchers should focus even more on publishing in CC, Web-of-Science and Scopus type of publications.
- Researchers should engage more in international projects/networks (through conference participation, sabbatical leaves).
- Researchers should engage in professional projects.

6. International Cooperation and Mobility

- The HEI should put all information needed to attract students outside the Zadar region (and outside Croatia) on its website to make the Department more visible.
- Although there are more strategies for improving the research work at the University level that include also geography research work, the research of the Department is very locally oriented and poorly integrated at regional and international levels. Researchers should expand their work field.
- Research excellence should be fostered by monitoring and encouraging high profile publications and international projects. Some funding should be found for encouraging researchers to go abroad to network and form consortia for project applications and joint publications.
- The HEI or the Department should evaluate whether a "project hunter", who can scan the market for potential projects and collaborations (professional/commercial and also scientific), can be installed (either by asking existing staff to take on this additional task, or to see for external funding).
- Researchers should register as potential reviewers of EU projects.

7. Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance

- Head of Department and University should plan procurement of laboratory equipment in a reasonable timeframe according to the financial abilities. For the time being the Department should secure a certain amount of funds for research in other facilities outside the Department.
- The HEI should install a physical geography laboratory.

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

1. Institutional management and quality assurance

- 1.1. The strategic plan of the Department is integrated in the Strategy of the University and its appendix, as well as in the University's strategy for research development. The strategy of the University is well focused and in line with the mission of the higher education institution to contribute to the development of the society through research and education addressing challenges of particular local and regional interest. The operational plan is prepared within the strategy with specific goals and timelines, but no indicators are specified and no monitoring and/or improvement of the implementation plan is prepared. Also input from stakeholders (particularly from local community representatives) in the strategy preparation is missing. Therefore one of the goals within the strategy is to strengthen the cooperation with the society at local level. The panel concludes that there is no specific strategy for the Department of Geography and also no annual operational plans or monitoring, and recommends that such a strategy and plans are formulated.
- 1.2. The organisational structure of the Department is in line with the University's regulations and is adequate regarding the size of the department. The majority of legislative documents are at the university level, though all the processes and procedures are covered by the documents. The legislative documents are numerous and although they are available publicly, students and sometimes staff as well are not always aware of their content, which diminishes their efficiency.
- 1.3. This criterion is not applicable for university departments.
- 1.4. The content and structure of the study programmes and their learning outcomes reflect the institutional mission and goals, and generally meet the standards for awarding the qualifications. There should be some study outcomes' improvements in implementing GIS skills. There is only one GIS course, which is not sufficient. The study programmes should be completed with the courses that are missing, e.g. a spatial planning course. Study programmes mostly meet the standards of comparable study programmes at renowned European institutions.
- 1.5. The Department of Geography has a Quality Committee which consists of members of the teaching staff, student representative, representative of administrative staff and external member. However, there is no internal document regulating the work of the Quality Committee. There is no long-term quality policy which would be based on the analysis of all relevant data collected from current and former students, market analysis, etc. Despite the

fact that the Department has an Alumni club it does not have any active part in development of the quality policy. For the time being there is no quality policy on rising the quality and productiveness of scientific work at the Department. Hence, there is no reward and improvement system based on formalized procedures of monitoring quality of research. There is monitoring of the quality of teaching which is based on the student survey.

- 1.6. Monitoring is conducted through analysis of the student's survey. However there are no formalized discussions at departmental meetings about quality of teaching methods or peer-reviews of courses and course materials.
- 1.7. Quality assurance systems are in place, and will continue to be further developed. Here the need to produce a self-evaluation report has contributed to better monitoring of the research output. Scientific production (papers, conference participation, etc.) needs to be systematically kept up-to-date, and preferably also be accessible through the Department's website. An award system to stimulate scientific excellence might be helpful. The management acknowledges these important issues, and stresses that the Department is now moving towards a more science-orientated position.
- 1.8. The Code of Ethics for staff is established only at the University level, so is the ethical committee that decides on written application of unethical behaviour. Staff and students are aware of the procedure. At the department level written applications of unethical behaviour are presented to the chair (or vice chair) of the Department.

2. Study programmes

- 2.1. Mechanisms for monitoring and improving study programmes and inclusion of students and all the stakeholders are mostly implemented. As a result the new programme is being prepared, and is waiting for accreditation. The panel learned from the Head of the Department of Geography that there will be more GIS courses in the new programme, starting from the 2^{nd} year.
- 2.2. and 2.3. Enrolment quotas for undergraduate study programmes are in line with market needs and there is no need for a substantial change. Enrolment quotas for graduate study programmes are not filled and there is quite a large variation in the number of students enrolled per year. Also there is a substantial offset of students to the Department of Geography in Zagreb. However we do not recommend changing quotas. We recommend continuous analysis of market needs and re-evaluation of enrolment quotas after five years.
- 2.4. Actual descriptions of study programmes/courses only poorly define some of the most important competences gained in specific courses. But the Department is in the final phase of the preparation of renewed study programmes that were designed on the basis of learning outcomes. The panel was able to take note of these new study programmes (separate mails were sent after the site visit). These new (renewed) study programmes were

also improved on the basis of the analysis of student's opinions and in dialogue with stakeholders (possible employers). The new/renewed programmes need to be defined together with the methods of learning (teaching process) and aligned with assessment content and techniques. Also improvements can be made in making clearer and publicly known what the competences of each programme/course are, and how specific they are, and what employment can the students hope for.

2.5. Learning outcomes stated for the study programme, module and course level are mostly based on regular assessments of student learning during the whole course of study. Competences of the professionals who complete the study do not significantly differ from the competencies of students from renowned universities in Europe and other parts of the world, although some differences can be noted in respect to methodological courses.

Students expressed their wish for more colloquia (continuous examination), as well as for a diversity of examination forms per course (both oral and written exams – so that their presentation skills improve, and cheating on written exams is avoided). The HEI needs to implement an exam committee, which after three unsuccessful examination attempts, should ensure more transparency. There should also be a difference in examination content between the double and single major students. Seminar presentations, that are now not obligatory for teacher track students, should be introduced as students themselves expressed the need for seminar presentations as a way to improve their presentation and language skills.

- 2.6. Students are familiar with the workload required to achieve the expected learning outcomes. Students' workload is mostly assessed realistically and is based on standards defined to calculate hours necessary to perform all student activities. Also the ECTS are mostly allocated to each course and are based on an assessment of the student's workload. However there is no difference between the double and single major courses in the ECTS and in their workload and assessment. The students explained to the panel that the only difference was more seminars in the single major courses, and that exams and workload were actually the same. Students also stated that they would like to have more exams, especially oral exams to achieve all learning outcomes needed. For full implementation of the study outcomes more practical classes and projects are needed.
- 2.7. The content and the quality of study programs conform to internationally recognized standards. The Department should however assure that all study program contents -at the level of courses, modules, etc.- are aligned with international standards.
- 2.8. Regarding teaching methods, the teachers mostly make use of various teaching methods that are appropriate for the subject matter. The students stressed that more independent learning should be encouraged, and also more interaction and empowerment of students should be implemented in the teaching process and student research. More practical work should be introduced such as involvement of students in research work and assistantships. It

can be concluded that the institutional teaching and learning methods are mostly comparable to those of renowned European institutions.

- 2.9. The Department of Geography and the University of Zadar allocate substantial funds for acquiring scientific literature, databases etc. The department also has a reasonably well-equipped library which is opened form 8 a.m. till 8 p.m. However discussion with students revealed that students do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to search and use those databases. A basic academic orientation should therefore be a part of their education. Potentially e-learning and platforms for distance learning can be considered as well.
- 2.10. As appropriate to learning outcomes, students have opportunities to reinforce and apply their learning of practical applications through internships, business partnerships, community services, etc. Data on effectiveness is regularly collected by student and partner organisations and analysed. Cooperation with partner organisations is formalized and includes all relevant stakeholders. Practical learning, as expressed by students themselves, and practical work in internships should be made clearer in the sense of defined learning outcomes and how they are assessed.

3. Students

- 3.1. The quality structure of students who apply for enrolment at the Department of Geography was explained. However there are no analyses of the correlation of high-school success and state matura success with academic success after the first year of study. Available results also show low pass-rate after the first year of the study programme, especially at the double major study programme. Also this study programme is successfully completed by only 58 per cent of enrolled students. Such a low percentage raises the need for a self-evaluation of the study programme by the Department.
- 3.2. The institution fully supports all of their students in their extracurricular activities. The department, and also the University, is encouraging students to take part in sports and recreation. Student union and also the institution is informing and supporting students in participation in extracurricular activities. Students actively participate every year in organizing the "Geography Days", an event for popularising their field of study. Students are involved in some student's magazines. Such events as "Geography Days" need to spread outside of Zadar University to attract more potential students from Croatia and also abroad.
- 3.3. The institution does not have an official counselling and professional orientation centre, nor does the University. Students are not assigned a mentor at the beginning of their studies. There is also no career office where students could get information about their future plans. However due to the Department being very small, personal relations between students, professors and Department Head are very close, and students are given all information that they need. Still, the HEI needs to formalize this aspect of student support.

3.4. The assessment methods of learning outcomes are determined by the teacher for each course. The explanation of different methods of assessment of learning outcomes is available in the course syllabi. This is also explained in the introductory lesson of each course. The assessment procedure for the final exam and graduation thesis is published on the Department website. A table presented in the Self-evaluation report shows that 60 per cent of courses monitor the outcomes through seminar papers. However this cannot be the only way of assessing the learning outcomes. The table also shows that only 30 per cent of courses apply mid-term exams as a method of assessment. The plea for continuous examination and mid-term exams was also indicated during the discussion with students who stated that a lack of mid-term exams is one of the reasons contributing to the relatively low passing rate.

Also as stated in the Self-evaluation and by the students, committee exams are not held in an appropriate way. According to the University Bylaws on Study and Studying the fourth examination should be held in front of the committee. However at the Department, the exam committee is organized either at student request or at the request of the teacher. The students are informed on the results of the assessment through announcements and have the possibility for insight into exams and criteria.

- 3.5. The HEI has no organised/formal way to maintain contacts with its former students. Students are also not that familiar with an Alumni organisation. There was no evidence of a database and other methods of tracking alumni, and the same goes for systematically collecting and analysing statistics on the alumni employment and their professional achievements. Due to lack of that data, this information cannot be used to improve study programmes or connect current students with graduated ones. Alumni contacts, when formalized, should help students in their further education or connect them with possible employers.
- 3.6. Descriptions of the study programmes are publicly available on the Department website. Students and the Department organize open days in which they promote study programmes and the Department among secondary school pupils. Also the Department is very active in self-promotion through organization of different lectures and activities both for teachers of geography and the wider public. However there is a need for more organized approach to popularization of the profession of the geographer. Learning outcomes and qualifications of geographers are still not very well recognized at the labour market and among stakeholders from public and private sectors. Therefore the majority of students who graduate at the Department find their first work in primary and secondary education. Different measures for approaching stakeholders and potential employers should be applied since we cannot expect that they will search the HEI's website.
- 3.7. Students can express their opinions and give suggestions on improvement through the Student Union. Students are familiar with the option of making decisions on issues that concern them. There are annual student surveys that are a good practice of communication

between students and teaching staff. Students are using this channel actively but there was a certain decline in participation when the student survey went online as a result of a University regulation. The HEI needs to find a way of making the students interested in filling in the survey. Students are encouraged to contact their student representative or one of the teaching staff when a problem occurs. The fact that the Department is not too big in size adds to creating effectiveness.

3.8. Due to the very close personal relations and communication with teaching staff, students receive feedback on the measures the HEI has taken on the basis of their opinion and suggestions for improvement of quality. The student representative is the main and a good channel of communication between students and teachers.

4. Teachers

- 4.1. A majority of teachers teach according to their qualifications and incorporate results of their scientific work into lectures, i.e. Historical Geography, Cartography etc. However some teachers teach courses which are not of their scientific interest, i.e. Medical Geography, Political Geography.
- 4.2. The Department of Geography should develop a long term strategy on employment and professional development of young scientists. In the Self-evaluation it is stated that the GIS study programme and implementation of GIS technology in other courses and research is one of the primary missions in the forthcoming period. In order to pursue that goal the Department management should pay more attention to this aspect in the employment policy.
- 4.3. According to the panel, the HEI takes into account the number of full-time teachers, maintaining the optimal ratio between students and full-time teachers.
- 4.4. According to the statements of both management and the teachers, professional development of teachers is conducted through financing different additional educations and trainings. Majority of trainings are financed by the Department, Also there is an organized teacher training at the university level.

However, at the moment there is no formalized mechanism for monitoring and improving teaching quality. Monitoring is conducted through analysis of student's survey but there are no formalized discussions at the Department meetings about quality of teaching methods or peer-reviews of courses and course materials.

4.5. In the Self-evaluation teachers' workload is not clearly stated. It is clear that some teachers have up to 50% more teaching hours than proscribed by the Collective agreement between the Union and the Ministry. On the other hand some teachers have only 50% of the norm. However, from the timetables and course descriptions it is clear that the calculation

is not always correct/possible. From the interviews with teachers it became clear that they did not know their own workloads or the workloads of their colleagues, as it was stated in the Self-evaluation report. It is also clear from the Self-evaluation that some teachers are participating in different (sometimes all) committees which are time-consuming and can affect their scientific work. The HEI needs to make sure that not the same people are in all of the committees whereas others are not involved in any committee work.

4.6. According to the panel, the HEI ensures that teaching and research activities of the employed teaching staff are not affected by their external commitments. This was confirmed by the teachers.

5. Scientific and professional activity

- 5.1. All the strategic documents for the Department of Geography are integrated within the strategic documents of the University of Zadar, as this is an integrated university. There are several documents dealing with research strategy: Strategy of the University (2011-2017), Appendix to the Strategy of the University (2011-2017), Strategy of the scientific development (2009-2014) and Strategic program of scientific investigation 2014-2018 (not available on university's web page). The strategy of the university has its implementation plan for research development with defined goals, indicators, timelines and responsible bodies, but there are neither monitoring mechanisms nor annual plans or evaluation procedures presented. The Strategic program of scientific investigation 2014-2018 is dedicated to specific research fields, including Geography. There are descriptions of different research themes (23 for Geography) with defined goals and researchers involved, including partners. Indicators of success are defined but there are no timelines and no monitoring mechanism of this strategy as well. Therefore monitoring of the implementation of all strategies is not made clear. Research monitoring should be included within the assignments of the QA Committee.
- 5.2. Linked to the assessment of 5.1, the panel concludes that the strategy for research does not really envision internationalisation and cooperation, and this need to be amended, especially if the University would like to follow its vision to be a research university. On page 83 of the Self-evaluation a long list of research topics is provided in which the HEI has "plans" to participate. The panel encourages the HEI to turn these plans into concrete actions. Besides internationalisation, stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the strategy to better follow the needs of society is also to be encouraged. This also implies that in terms of publishing the focus should be placed on trying to publish in international (non-Croatian) journals (in English).
- 5.3. There are 16 researchers with a PhD at the department and following the assignments of research themes within the Strategic program of scientific investigation 2014-2018, it seems that research staff is adequate for the implementation of the strategy. But the list of

priority areas (themes) listed in the strategy is too long and seems to be a list of individual interests rather than a common strategy.

- 5.4. As stated/listed in the Self-evaluation (Table 5.5) staff has published a total of 59 scientific articles in journals represented in CC, Web-of-Science and Scopus databases in the last 5 years. The ratio of the number of publications to the number of teachers which is 4.5 in total also reveals that for this category of publications each researcher publishes less than one publication a year. This number is rather limited and should be improved. What is positive is that compared to the other categories of publications, the number of papers in journals represented in CC, Web-of-Science and Scopus databases is the highest. Hence, the HEI is aware of the fact that publications in peer-reviewed, international journals are very important. A mere increase in the total number of publications should however not be interpreted as publishing in less relevant or lower IF-journals.
- 5.5. There is no system of encouraging and rewarding academic publishing. But some of the Department teachers whose research activity belongs to the field of natural sciences publish their work regularly in high ranking journals with high impact factors without any special encouragement. Some teachers do not understand the need for such encouragement since publishing their work in such journals is a natural aspiration of every serious scientist. However, incentives –such as a compensation for translation/proof-editing costs- are more than welcome. At the moment some teachers are paying this from their own salaries. We therefore encourage excellence in research and setting up a reward system for the more productive researchers.
- 5.6. As stated in 5.4. the panel acknowledges that staff is aware of the importance of publishing in high impact factor journals, but assesses the overall output as rather modest. We therefore strongly encourage the HEI to focus on this particular issue.
- 5.7. The HEI has an adequate number of domestic projects. The number of international projects could be substantially increased. This increase could be facilitated by the development of supporting structure for potential applicants and grant recipients.
- 5.8. Transfer of knowledge is limited in scope and depth. The HEI does not have a (long-term) strategy and associated mechanisms for transfer of knowledge that are developed in cooperation with e.g. national or international industry.
- 5.9. According to the Self-evaluation (p. 100) there were no professional projects undertaken by the HEI in the last five years.
- 5.10. Doctoral study programme *Adriatic–connection between continents* is carried out by the Department of Geography and the Department of History of the University of Zadar. It is the first multidisciplinary doctoral study programme at the university level. Doctoral programme lasts three years and students receive 180 ECTS in total. 20 % of credits are

gained through elective courses which is quite low. Also 60% of all ECTS credits are gained through lectures and seminars. 68 ECTS credits are gained for writing and defending synopses and writing and defending doctoral thesis. Besides courses and field trips students are obliged to write 2 scientific papers and participate in one scientific conference. However no ECTs credits are granted for those activities. Although doing research and application of new methodology are stated in the doctoral programme as learning outcomes it is not obvious from the teaching plan and is not evaluated by ECTS points.

6. International cooperation and mobility

- 6.1. The institution is really good in establishing connections with other higher institutions. However, the institution does not fully enable international mobility. The institution needs to work on quality and improving content of programmes especially in increasing subjects in English or other language than Croatian. The institution needs to put all information needed on their website and also try to attract students outside the Zadar region.
- 6.2. Every student of the institution is given the possibility to complete a part of their programme abroad. If a student wants to go to an institution that has no contract with the HEI, then the HEI will try its best to establish one. There is no problem with ECTS and recognition of international programme when the student returns to HEI. Due to more students going abroad the students would like to have better/more language courses than provided by the University presently. Level of such courses is too low and not useful.
- 6.3. The ability of existing teachers/researchers to travel for research is hampered by sabbatical leave not entirely being made available, although some teachers state that "there is always a way to get a sabbatical". Clearly, a lot depends on the personal contacts or private networks teachers have to arrange for obtaining a sabbatical leave. Sabbatical leave should be arranged so that research is a priority activity (less so, in respect to teaching elsewhere or to just stay at home to write a book). Erasmus exchange programme exists, but no outbound teacher mobility within it was realised.
- 6.4. The HEI is a part of a number of relevant international associations, but lacks significant engagement with the large scientific projects which are starting to dominate much of science at European and international scale. Collaboration is often based on personal contact, so there is a lack of a systematic approach.
- 6.5. The HEI offers a wide range of courses taught in English (18 to be exact, see p. 117 of the Self-evaluation), but these courses are only effectively taught in English if more than 5 foreign (non-Croatian speaking) students have enrolled. At present there are only two foreign students registered, which means that actually no courses are being taught in English. Students are very much demanding more courses taught in English (also if all students are Croatian). They are convinced –and so is the panel- that this will help and

improve their foreign language abilities. The HEI also does not have international staff in its ranks (linked to 6.6).

- 6.6. By demanding Croatian language competence at the point of application for academic positions, rather than after some time in post (as is common elsewhere), HEI immediately strikes out the majority of the world's pool of suitable candidates.
- 6.7. Exchange programs and bilateral agreements exist, and could be extended. In general sabbaticals should be formalized and encouraged as it is used for international experience. Sabbatical teachers from abroad should be attracted (e.g. providing accommodation) to come to Zadar for a longer or shorter period of time and give lectures or courses compounded in few weeks.

7. Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances

- 7.1. The Department of Geography provides overall appropriate learning resources for all its enrolled students. The range of learning resources is very diverse, ranging from classrooms, laboratories and libraries, computer equipment and learning spaces. The panel had the opportunity during its visit to take a tour of the facilities to validate the status of a wide range of classrooms, the library, computers and other equipment. In all, and on average, the panel assessed the measures relating to the state of the resources (classrooms, computers, library) as well implemented, but because of the lack of physical geography laboratory (see 7.4.).
- 7.2. As a rule the ratio of teaching and non-teaching staff of 1:2 is considered as satisfactory. The idea is that emphasis should be placed on having enough teaching staff and that the HEI does not have an overload of non-teaching staff (technical staff, administrative staff, and support staff). In the case of the Geography Department, there is no risk of an overload, given that there is only one administrative staff member linked to the department. Obviously other non-teaching staff members are linked to the university (and not to the department) that also help the Department.
- 7.3. The HEI has policies that ensure professional development of non-teaching staff, and the HEI encourages its non-teaching staff to develop professionally by participating in trainings, courses and further education, but given that there is only one administrative staff member training is not given a high priority and the staff member is also not demanding this. Secretarial support is excellent but perhaps more training in project development and internationalisation (including English courses) should be provided to the staff in administration. Students complained that the University international office does not seem to be doing a good job.
- 7.4. At the moment there are no laboratory premises at the Department although this is needed since some of the researchers need a physical geography laboratory. For the time

being those researchers do their research outside the Department at other institutes and laboratories which presents a problem.

- 7.5. The Department has two computer classrooms equipped with new computers and software. There is GIS software, ERDAS software for remote sensing and SAS software (Statistical Analysis Software) available at all computers. Both teachers and students can use the computers, and are happy with it.
- 7.6. The size, usability and availability of the library are considered as satisfactory. The Self-evaluation is very clear on this: it is considered excellent.
- 7.7. HEI's funding is sufficient to cover all costs so that students can successfully complete their study programmes. The financial tables related to funding provided in the Self-evaluation are sufficiently transparent, and do not limit the institution's autonomy.
- 7.8. The Department of Geography only partly uses its own funds in rising the quality of teaching and research of their employees. Department has covered training in GIS for all employees interested. However the Department does not have a system of promoting or rewarding scientific and teaching excellence.