

Goce Delchev University (Shtip)

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of a follow-up evaluation of Goce Delchev University (Shtip) (UGD). European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) originally evaluated Goce Delchev University (Shtip) in 2014 with the report submitted to the University in July 2014.

This follow-up evaluation took place in the framework of the project "Skills Development and Innovation Support Project" (SDISP), implemented by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia¹ through the Ministry of Education and Science. The overall objective of the project is to improve transparency of resource allocation and promote accountability in higher education, enhance the relevance of secondary technical vocational education, and support innovation capacity in the country.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of the project, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme and follow-up evaluation process

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

In line with the IEP philosophy as a whole, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the institution itself to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the original evaluation. The institution is expected to submit its own Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which will describe the progress made, possibly indicating barriers to change.

The rationale is that the follow-up evaluation can assist the institution in evaluating the changes that have been made since the original evaluation: What was the impact of the original evaluation? What use has the institution made of the original evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up evaluation is also an opportunity for the institution to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

As for the original evaluation, the all aspects of the follow-up process are also guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?

¹ This designation is used for the purposes of this project only and does not represent any formal position of EUA or IEP regarding the name of the country.

- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Goce Delchev University (Shtip)'s profile

Goce Delcev University (Shtip) is a state university established by the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia on 27th March 2007. The first Constitutive Assembly of the University Senate was held on 28th June 2007. Initially, there were seven faculties and one higher school. In 2008/2009, the university added six new faculties. In 2014/2015 the Faculty of Music Art became Academy of Music Art and two new academies were opened (Art and Film). The university is based in Shtip. The 12 faculties and three academies are located on four campuses. During the initial IEP evaluation in 2014, it had been explained that a key strategic focus in higher education for the Macedonian government has been the implementation of dispersed study arrangements so that universities operate in most of the major towns in the country with the intention of increasing the number of graduates from rural areas. "Goce Delcev" University was founded as part of this strategy. In addition to the main location in Shtip, teaching activities are held in 11 other Macedonian cities: Strumica, Kocani, Radovis, Probistip, Vinica, Sveti Nikole, Gevgelija, Kavadarci, Prilep, Skopje and Berovo.

In both the initial and follow up evaluations, it was stated that the founding of Goce Delcev University in Shtip had transformed the economy and culture of the town and, in some respects, the wider region. The 2014 evaluation report noted that the decision to establish a new university in Shtip was viewed with some pride by the town, not least as the "St Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje had previously been responsible for the limited higher education provision in the town. In this context, the town's leadership thought that the decision to establish UGD was a courageous one. The university's leadership commented to the IEP team that, from the government's point of view, UGD was part of a strategy to prevent Macedonian students leaving the country to study in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia and also that it was intended to support poorer families in the area who could not afford to move away from home to study.

UGD is an institution founded to meet the need for higher education in an area much larger than the one denoted as the Eastern region of Macedonia. This area includes eastern, south-eastern and north-eastern Macedonia, where there are 35 large inhabited areas. The population in those parts of Macedonia that are close to Shtip could be expected to choose to study in Shtip or one of the nearby cities.

According to the SER, after completion of the first decade of its work, UGD has become a recognised university, nationally and internationally, that puts special emphasis on quality teaching and improvement in student life throughout new modern study programs and established quality systems at the highest institutional level.

The university functions as an integrated university and is headed by a rector.

The SER indicates that the university is an autonomous public institution for higher education, which provides uniformity in the performance and development of higher education, science, art and expertise. The freedom of scientific and artistic endeavour is guaranteed. The university is therefore responsible for its own self-government and for the implementation of its own strategies and development policies. However, the team were told repeatedly that the university is powerless and there is no autonomy from the government. This was the reason offered for the non-implementation of the previous team's recommendations. This lack of autonomy, it was claimed, belies the perceived staff shortages within the university. The team were subsequently advised that autonomy is limited with regard to creating new posts, elements of financial management and structure and governance of the university.

According to the SER, since its establishment UGD is subjected to constant flow of academic staff as the university attempts to balance growth and capacity. The academic staff in the academic year 2013/2014 consisted of 290 full-time employed and 164 part-time associates, and in 2014/2015 that number was reduced to 280 full-time employed and 154 part-time associates.

The academic staff comprises 74 full-time professors, 99 associate professors, 130 assistant professors, and the part-time staff is composed of one senior lecturer, two senior research associates, three scientific collaborators, two senior lecturers, six lecturers 26 doctoral assistants, 52 assistants and 39 junior assistants.

1.3 The evaluation process

The evaluation process was undertaken by reviewing the report and recommendations from the initial evaluation, analysis of the self-evaluation report for this follow-up evaluation and a site visit.

In addition, the team reviewed the progress report submitted by UGD in January 2016 to provide an update on actions taken since the initial evaluation, and the reply provided by the initial evaluation team. The report noted that progress on implementing some of the team's key recommendations had been hampered by changes in the university's management and the forthcoming national re-accreditation process for study programmes. The reply to this report urged that the response to some of the key recommendations is accelerated with clear action plans and greater emphasis of specific outputs.

The SER for this follow-up evaluation together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in August 2017. Although SER was prepared in the summer of 2017 it contained no information related to 2016 or 2017. The visit of the evaluation team to the university took place from 25 to 29 September 2017.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Prof. Öktem Vardar, former rector, TED University, Turkey, Chair
- Dr. Benoît Lesaffre, former Senior Vice President, Université Paris-Est, France,
- Assoc. Prof Lučka Lorber, Vice-Rector for Quality Development, University of Maribor, Slovenia

- Tijana Isoski, Student, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia
- Andy Gibbs former Director of International Relations, Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom, Team Coordinator

The team thanks Rector Professor Blazo Boev, Vice-Rectors Professors Mirakovski and Barbareev, Assistant Professor Misko Dzidrov for the warm welcome to the university and the hospitality extended to the team, and staff, students and other stakeholders for their open participation in meetings.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Three contextual issues weighed in the considerations of the team during the evaluation of UGD: the regional basis as a rationale for establishment; the relatively short period of establishment (ten years), and the perception of an integrated university.

Since the initial evaluation, there has been a change of rector. The team was told that continuity in the strategic approach is maintained as the current rector meets regularly with the previous rector.

The team that conducted the initial evaluation made a series of recommendations regarding the mission and vision of the university, the size and shape of the faculty structure, the centralised and top-down strategic and decision-making structure, and external stakeholder and student participation. The university reported that no progress had been made in addressing these recommendations. During the site visit, the team confirmed that the situation remained unchanged. There is still no indication of other committees (beyond the Senate) or of a strategic plan. The action plan shared in the SER is, reflecting a similar finding of the initial evaluation, very much a plan owned by the rector and did not exhibit key features of a strategic plan: for example it was not prioritised, there was no timeline and it did not include an implementation plan. No other strategies are articulated, such as for learning and teaching, research or internationalisation and there is a lack of coherence in the organisational/management structure.

With few exceptions, the management and administrative personnel that the team met during meetings were inclined to cite limitations to change. The team noted, as did some of the university management team, a lack of suitably experienced and qualified personnel with the capacity to drive change. The team suggests that some effort may be devoted to attract more academics to university management issues and to train them by, for example, supporting attendance of relevant conferences, courses, workshops in Europe, so that a larger group is available to discuss and develop longer term strategies of the university.

Alongside this, as mentioned above, there were two pages in the SER devoted to autonomy and the academics the team met complained heavily about how little autonomy they have. Autonomy and accountability are like the two faces of the same coin, therefore the team advises that the university should further consider how to introduce accountability measures in those areas in which they can exercise autonomy.

There has been de facto progression in absolute terms in teaching and learning, research, quality, internationalisation and service to society. The university has directed considerable collective effort to developing external relationships, partnerships and outward facing activity. The university reports a steadily increasing share of budget from self-generated income. In 2016, they raised 6 million Euros with a 5 million Euros state budget in 2016. However, the policy of supplementing salaries in absolute terms (i.e. for every Euro of the salary adding 0.40 Euro from the self-generated fund) is not sustainable. There is a risk of allocating all self funding for salaries rather than having any funding for strategic priorities.

The well utilised e-services, general satisfaction of students and teachers and the appreciation of the university by local business and enterprises with whom the team met signalled this progression. However, the high level of activity in the absence of a formal strategic plan with targets and monitoring, has created a portfolio which is unfocused, diverse and individually led. This is stretching resources, creating imbalances and a leadership imperative on operational rather than strategic issues. To maximise and operationalise key components of an integrated university structure, activity should be institutionalised in formal processes, policies and procedures, rather than being located with individuals. A key action in achieving this would be to **expand the ownership and external validity of the work programme by converting it into a strategic plan (containing a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), targets, priorities, resources, and timescales) against which progress can be measured and monitored in a transparent manner and supported by internal self-evaluation.**

The current situation is challenging the regional *raison d'être* of the university. Teaching centres are located across 10 regional centres plus Shtip and Skopje. In general terms, each centre is associated with a faculty and or one or more programmes. Enrolment in the centres in 2016/17 ranged from 0 to 1366 students, with seven centres enrolling less than 40 students. The proposed response to this, outlined by the Rector, is based on cost rather than demand or student experience, is to close a number of centres and relocate the activities to centres which have higher enrolment. Doing this, the team concluded, would fundamentally disrupt the regional character of the university. Comments from external stakeholders highlighted that the establishment of the university had brought life to the region and some students explained that they would not otherwise have studied if not for the regional nature. These comments suggest that whilst direct cost savings may be made, many benefits would be lost. Additionally, existing developments in e-learning delivery can contribute to alternative usage of learning centres. The university is recommended to **review the regionally distributed model, taking account of regional and national needs, social responsibility and student experience vs. direct cost savings.**

In reviewing the regionally distributed model, the university may wish to consider the comments of the team of the initial evaluation in 2014 that: "given the size of UGD, it is difficult to justify the existence of 12 faculties and 3 academies and these should be reduced in number. On the basis of the subject disposition in the university a number of faculties should be merged, leading to the development of departmental structures under the umbrella of fewer but larger faculties (for example, four or five in number)". The present team read the comments in the progress report submitted by UGD that justified a lack of change in this area: "following agreement in the university, it would require a change in national legislation to approve the title of the newly merged faculty". The team noted that the university had already effected a change in faculty structure in 2014/2015 when the Faculty of Music Art became Academy of Music Art. The university may draw on this experience of change **to streamline the academic structure.**

The team of the initial evaluation recommended that the university should review its mission and vision statements to ensure that they reflect, inter alia, the specific character and the

development direction of the university. The present team concluded that this recommendation should be expanded, to emphasise stakeholder participation and the link between mission, vision and strategy. **The mission and vision should be revised to be more specific, reflect distinctive features, engage the participation of all stakeholders of the university. The mission and vision should be reflected in all strategies and actions that flow from it.**

The team concluded, as the previous team did, that the Student Parliament was ineffective in involving students in university life and decision-making. To achieve the university aspiration to put the student at the centre **the university should support development of an independent, transparent and self-elected student governance body (Student Parliament).**

Similarly, to engage with the regional community and ensure that the university addresses local needs and delivers relevant curricula content **the university is recommended to activate the University Council or equivalent stakeholder participation in university governance.**

3. Quality culture

The SER states that the university recognises the importance of quality control and “since the beginning the university implements processes for providing and improving the quality of work and is setting them at the highest institutional level”. The SER goes on to advise that within these processes, a number of activities have been implemented to develop a quality culture in all aspects of the functioning of the university. These include standardisation of the overall operation of the university, which has been carried out in accordance with the ISO 9001 - Quality Management Standards, and which has been continuously implemented since 2013. The university is now in the phase of preparation for re-standardisation with the newest standards, and this is expected to be finished by the end of the year. The initiation evaluation in 2014 reported the introduction of a quality assurance centre and the completion of the second three-yearly self-evaluation.

These actions illustrate the university commitment to quality, however as the initial evaluation found, the actions are not in themselves improving quality or developing a quality culture. They observed too much emphasis on reporting and insufficient time spent on meaningful analysis.

The three-yearly cycle of self-evaluation is well established, with the university having conducted three evaluations. These are undertaken by a self-evaluation group, with individuals taking responsibility for leading on issues such as quality of academic staff, academic programmes and the achievements of scientific research projects. The group remains permanently constituted and meets regularly in preparation for the next self-evaluation. A report is prepared following the self-evaluation and presented to the Senate. It appeared to the team that the Senate does little more than receive and note the report. The report was available only in Macedonian language. Extracts were translated by team members and it could be seen that the report provided substantial content for the SER for this IEP follow-up evaluation. The report contained the recommendations of the previous IEP evaluation, without comment.

Whilst the establishment of a self-evaluation function is acknowledged as a component part of creating a quality culture, the team concluded that the collection of information was seen as an end in itself, rather than providing support for decision-making and enhancing quality. This was also reflected in the lack of analytical and reflective approach to the SER for this follow-up evaluation. **The team would encourage continuous development of the quality system and recommend that the university ensures that its scope, structure and content make it an integral part of strategic and operational management.**

The team recognised that the self-evaluation process had unrealised potential to contribute to strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and decision making, and noted that there was a useful SWOT analysis in the university’s SER. The rector’s plan and the SWOT analysis together provide a strong starting point for implementing change and improvement, supported by quality assurance. However, the three-year cycle is too long and as the initial IEP evaluation concluded there continues to be too much emphasis on reporting and

insufficient time spent on meaningful analysis. **A self-evaluation process should be undertaken annually and inform the progress of the strategic plan and the further development of the university.**

Alongside this, the disconnectedness of the self-evaluation process (and other evaluation processes, such as student questionnaires) reflected an incomplete quality cycle in which the quality loop was never closed. The initial evaluation recommended that the university should use the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) on a systematic basis to help develop performance indicators for quality assurance and enhancement of the work and activities in UGD. In particular, the team felt that these guidelines could support the university in making better use of the analysis of data to drive improvements rather than the current tendency to rely on straightforward reporting mechanisms. **The university should create a cyclical internal quality development system (Plan-Do-Check-Act) and implement the ESG.**

Finally, to build a quality culture, involvement by all and an appreciation by all staff of how they may contribute is necessary. **All staff should participate, be trained and contribute to quality processes.**

4. Teaching and learning

The SER asserts that “the university puts special emphasis on quality teaching and improvement in student life”. However, the work programme has no specific actions related to teaching and learning and the SER did not have a section on teaching and learning nor any plans to develop teaching and learning.

The initial IEP evaluation urged the university to consider more innovative approaches to curriculum development to reflect the university’s dynamic character and to support the learning experience of its students. It went on to suggest that a Centre for Teaching Innovation (CTI) should be established and systematic training opportunities be offered to academic staff. Such a centre has been established and the response provided to the Progress Report in 2016 suggested that “the upcoming reaccreditation process would have been an ideal opportunity for a newly formed CTI to support academic staff in their programme development”. In terms of Implementation of study programmes (types and methods of delivery), each programme has demonstrated conformity with national requirements through the cyclical external accreditation process conducted in 2016. The current team found, as did the team of the initial evaluation, that **curriculum development should go beyond reaccreditation requirements and be based on international practice taking account of the needs of all interested parties.**

As the learning outcomes for programmes are subject based, this means that generic skills and competences such as teamwork, leadership and entrepreneurship are not routinely taught nor assessed but may be acquired as a consequence of active teaching or during practical placements. One way to address this was identified in the initial evaluation: “Assessment methodologies for generic competencies should be spelled out clearly in documentation. This might lead those in charge of individual study programmes to reconsider their curriculum or introduce co-curricular activities since the curricula support only the attainment of the subject competences”. Furthermore, students reported a reliance on formal examinations often supported by other forms of assessment, which indicated that assessment techniques are not always the most relevant. This is particularly highlighted as students report that they gain excellent experience during internships, practical placements and work experience. The present team therefore expands the 2014 recommendation that **generic competences, transversal skills and soft skills should be incorporated in all study programmes, with special attention to constructive alignment.**

Beyond this, individual teachers reported that they have, at their own discretion introduced participative, active and student-centered methods. Similarly, some faculties have focused approaches to developing the quality of teaching and learning, whilst others have none. This results in a somewhat patchy delivery with both students and staff reporting pockets of innovative teaching and more widespread traditional approaches. The team observed that good practice in teaching and learning is dependent on individual teacher contributions and their motivation and that active governance of programmes is more likely to take place at faculty rather than university level, although this also depends on the dean. The team concluded that the dependence on individuals to choose their approaches resulted in

inconsistency of delivery and a demonstrable absence of innovation which may be addressed by governance of teaching and learning at university level.

The impact of these differing approaches is unclear as the team only saw aggregated rather than individual programme information. A consistent approach to quality assurance arrangements at programme level could not be identified by the team during interviews with staff. Students consistently reported that they appreciated the highly motivated teachers and that they were always available to provide support. Some faculties have introduced their own student questionnaires and programme evaluation approaches with positive results but these are unavailable at university level. There is a university wide student questionnaire available to be completed at the end of each semester, however the outcomes are not published and according to some deans, not made available to them. Students receive no feedback. The completion rate is only 8% and the university had no plans to improve the response rate. Currently the questionnaire does not inform any systematic improvement in either the quality of individual teachers nor teaching and learning overall. The enhancement of teaching and learning should form part of a **cyclical internal quality development system (Plan-Do-Check-Act) and the implementation of the ESG would inform programme development**, as already recommended in the previous chapter.

Students in all faculties report that they can contact the dean directly to discuss issues of concern and they report that this system works well. However, the team were concerned that the effectiveness of this may rely, as in the instances above, on personal initiative and motivation and consider that these informal mechanisms should be replaced by formal, institutional, systematic quality assured mechanisms.

The university has rolled out e-learning and other electronic information resources and databases to support learning. Students and teachers report that usage is inconsistent, with some teachers more active and innovative than others. Nevertheless, in all cases e-learning is a supplement to face-to-face learning rather than a replacement. Similarly, the university has compelled teachers to use e-learning in each study programme and provided training in this. The team welcomes the systematic approach to staff training in e-learning but would encourage the development of a wider programme in relation to innovation in pedagogy. **The development of the CTI should focus on offering pedagogical training and support to all of the academic staff, building on the positive experience from the digital skills training.**

The current team were presented with a number of charts which broke down student numbers according to faculty, location, gender, part-time/full-time and graduating students. The SER provided this information for the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 therefore it was not possible to identify developing trends. The rector provided the team with alternative figures and up-to-date student numbers. It appeared that overall student numbers have been steadily decreasing from a peak in 2009/2010, and the numbers of students enrolled compared to those graduating suggested an overly excessive time to graduation, high dropout rates and high numbers of inactive students. For example, one chart indicated that between 2009 and 2016 there were 683 graduations from 2386 enrolled students, which suggests a low completion rate. A figure of 10,859 active students was used by the rector to

calculate an overall student:staff ratio of 1:29.5. The SER indicated a total figure of 9,559 students in 2015 with an overall staff:student ratio of 1:22. Overall the team were unable to discern key information regarding student numbers and staff ratio and concluded that there is no clear approach to the management of the numbers of students and consequently issues such as management of prolonged studies and attrition. Furthermore, the student:staff ratio cannot be clearly identified. The team confirmed the observation of the initial evaluation that there is a lack of a careful planning and monitoring of student numbers. Therefore, the recommendation from the previous evaluation that **more careful attention should be paid to recording student enrolment, achievement, completion and retention** is repeated.

Addressing issues of rigid curriculum structure and high drop-out or inactive student numbers can be addressed simultaneously by introducing flexibilities into the curricula and allowing easy transfers from one study programme to a another with no loss of credit.

The work programme 2015-2019 states that “at the university students are at the centre of the learning process and are also responsible for the success of the educational process”. The team agreed students have some responsibility for the success of the educational process and suggests that this notion should be supported by greater involvement of students in university life and decision-making. Students benefit from the use of ECTS, the issuance of the Diploma Supplement and clear criteria for mobility and the recognition of mobility. However, students reported that apart from the teaching and learning activities, the university lacked many of the features and social aspects of university life. The team were not able to identify any shared social facilities for students. **Student support services should be provided, including those that facilitate the development of student life (including library, common rooms, canteen, extracurricular activities).**

The team heard that the number of contact hours per teacher is on average 8 hours a week for professors and 16 hours a week maximum for assistants. Beyond this, the team were told, teachers and professors can organise their research activities. The team saw a number of tables detailing staff allocation according to title and could see that distribution between each faculty was uneven. However, firm conclusions could not be draw due to the aforementioned out of date and inconsistent information.

5. Research

The SER identifies ten strategic goals related to research. Research is promoted across the university through two principal measures. Firstly, research activity is a key criterion for promotion and secondly a university scientific fund is available to bid for small grants to kick start research. To this extent research, and especially international co-operation, is encouraged by the university,.

The SER indicates that the next stage of UGD development must be focused on creating a much better environment for research and EU project integration. This has to be done with a consistent strategy for supporting project development and research that is supported by EU funds. The university has created an e-repository which contains all research outcomes reflecting the annual research performance of the university. Visibility within the e-repository appeared to be a driver to undertake research. The e-repository has a classification system which, amongst other things, identifies international and national projects. However the classification system is not explicit and does not invite comparison with metrics used elsewhere to classify research. ISI publications have been cited however, based on this classification, and the SER contains a table giving the number of projects and total publications in the 2013-15 period. While indicators of this kind are certainly important, their trends, distribution among researchers, outlier behaviours together with an emphasis on social/economic outcomes, expertise build-up, eminence in specific fields, all of which may also inform the formation of research centres (possibly centers of excellence), were not available for analysis. Furthermore, social sciences and humanities appear not to have prominence as the metrics used are weighted towards science and engineering. Research performance indicators for social sciences and humanities should be revisited and include benchmarking with similar disciplines in the wider region. This would help UGD to consider and explore where the relative research advantage of UGD lies, in science and engineering or in social sciences and humanities.

The availability of the established internal competition for project granting and the rewards for excellence of research are appreciated by staff as good tools for research stimulation and certainly they have to be accompanied with other motivation tools. The SWOT analysis contained within the SER indicates (as it did in the previous evaluation) “Mediocre scientific production (scientific articles published in high impact journals, research grants won by competition).” The team heard that research activity was largely a matter of personal preference and that links with the international research community was on a personal basis. In a few faculties there was sophisticated laboratory equipment and those faculties which had international co-operation projects had access to international databases. The personal nature of the activity resulted in no structured opportunities for young researchers. The team saw no evidence of patents nor the formation of new businesses.

The current team found that no progress had been made on the recommendations made in the initial evaluation. The team observed that in a few faculties, research has developed to international standards with international co-operation. There is evidence of some inter-faculty/interdisciplinary co-operation. There are increasing funds from industry-based

projects and regional employers utilised research and consultancy from the university. However, all of these activities arise from individual motivation and personal commitment. Research and other staff highlighted that one positive reason for working in the university is that individual research interests can be pursued. The need for focused actions at university level was recommended in the initial evaluation: “clear priority areas for research should be established, with stronger specialised research groups and multidisciplinary teams. Institutional support should be provided to these targeted research activities.”. Currently the research activity is led by a less than 0.5 whole time equivalent vice-rector, which the team considers insufficient to achieve the university goals. **To make progress towards growth and increased quality in research the team recommends that, within the strategic plan, the university should set clear directions by prioritising and by agreeing a set of realistic, achievable and measurable targets for the next three to five years, managed within a team led by a vice-rector on a full-time basis.**

Currently there are few doctoral students and many doctoral programmes. The 2014 initial evaluation report recommended that “The university should consider ways in which to improve the sense of a doctoral studies culture, e.g. joint seminars, social gatherings, guest speakers”. An event for doctoral students, which is anticipated to take place annually, was held in 2016 to try and bring some cohesion to the student body. The current team welcomed this as a step forward and considered that further action was needed both to join some of the programmes together and for those remaining separate, to bring students together for physical contact, joint coursework, and joint seminars so that they start thinking of joint research possibilities. **In view of the present low number of doctoral candidates, consideration should be given to joining doctoral programmes at campus level based on the existing accredited doctoral programmes and joint services with the aim to develop common seminars, training offer, social gatherings, guest speakers, and a coordinated joint supervision policy.**

6. Service to society

The previous team recommended that: “the relationship between the university and industry/business/local economy could be better supported by platforms where external stakeholders could contribute to the longer-term development strategy of UGD and, particularly, to policy development for technology transfer and continuing education/university extension”.

The university has an extensive programme of social and cultural activities. Some faculties have developed regular contacts and contracts with external partners and stakeholders, such as local and regional authorities, public and private companies, users’ representatives. It is clear that the university contributes to the social, health and well-being, economic and cultural life of the region, not least in engaging students who would not otherwise enter higher education.

Whilst this activity is commendable, the societal links could be strengthened and more focused to meet local and regional needs to the benefit of both the university, the community and through informing more relevant curricula content. **The team recommends that, within the strategic plan, the university should elaborate an integrated strategy defining the priority national and foreign partners. At faculty level, public and private stakeholders should be given the opportunity to express their needs for skills, expertise and improve their support to the university (internships, scholarships, joint projects, international perspective).**

7. Internationalisation

A strategic goal of the university is to achieve *active involvement in the international higher education and science, with larger mobility of students and teaching staff.*

The team of the initial evaluation recommended that “target figures for outgoing and incoming Erasmus+ exchanges should be introduced together with formal selection processes and monitoring of the Erasmus+ programme”, both of which have been implemented.

The current team noted a large expansion in the number of agreements with other universities. This represents a huge collective effort and reflects a university decision to increase international activity. Examples of international research projects were given. Also, there had been some success in attracting EU funding such as Erasmus+ Key Action 2 and Jean Monet. The university plans to increase mobility (mostly of students) over the next four years and has been successful in securing Erasmus+ funding to do this. Good examples exist where the exchange/mobility experience of students was evaluated and used in improvement efforts of the faculty or department. However, the team understood that these are individual actions rather than systematic and uniform university practices.

The improved possibilities for mobility of students are welcomed by the team. Student mobility also provides opportunities to improve and embed an international perspective within the university, which can be used to benefit students in attaining inter-cultural competences. Mobility can achieve this for individual students however this can be expanded to include internationalisation at home, joint projects, benchmarking curriculum development, joint programmes (in research and other areas), staff mobility and incoming mobility. The expansion of student mobility has taken place without an overarching strategy or plan and consideration should be given to maximising the opportunities arising from mobility.

As well as providing opportunities, expanded mobility poses risks which have not been considered by the university. There include: capacity outstripping demand, wide geographic spread leading to lack of focus and impact, lack of curriculum integration, students not returning, managing EU bureaucracy, and reputation.

With this in mind the evaluation team makes three recommendations.

- **Develop an internationalisation strategy as part of the strategic plan which defines the focus, purpose and goals of internationalisation.**
- **Ensure that international agreements are made according to university strategy and well-defined criteria.**
- The initial evaluation report recommended that consideration should be given to additional staffing and training for the Centre for Inter-University Co-operation. At present, there is only one full time officer in post which appears insufficient for such an ambitious programme. Therefore the team recommends that that university

increase human resource in the international office, and identify responsible individuals within each faculty to link with the office and lead international activity.

8. Conclusions and summary of the recommendations

Goce Delchev University (Shtip) has made progress in delivering its mission over the last ten years and is now at the point of considering how to consolidate and further develop its mission. The regional contribution of the university is appreciated and acknowledged by stakeholders. E-services are well developed and utilised for both information and learning. It has managed to effect some internationally recognised research. The university has benefited from a high level of well-motivated individual staff and should now codify expectations, policies, quality system and procedures.

The team's recommendations are given along with the present report, after full consideration of the structures and processes which underpin the operation of the university, its plans for change, and its capacity for taking forward successful change. A summary of the recommendations is provided below.

Governance and institutional decision-making

- Expand the ownership and external validity of the work programme by converting it into a strategic plan (containing a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), targets, priorities, resources, and timescales) against which progress can be measured and monitored in a transparent manner and supported by internal self-evaluation.
- Review the regionally distributed model, taking account of regional and national needs, social responsibility and student experience vs. direct cost savings.
- Streamline the academic structure of the institution.
- Revise mission and vision to be more specific, reflect distinctive features, engage the participation of all stakeholders of the university. The mission and vision should be reflected in all strategies and actions that flow from it.
- Support development of an independent, transparent and self-elected student governance body (Student Parliament).
- Activate the University Council or equivalent stakeholder participation in university governance.

Quality culture

- Encourage continuous development of the quality system and ensure that its scope, structure and content make it an integral part of strategic and operational management.
- A self-evaluation process should be undertaken annually and inform the progress of the strategic plan and the further development of the university.

- Create a cyclical internal quality development system (Plan-Do-Check-Act) and implement the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area.
- All staff should participate, be trained and contribute to quality processes.

Learning and teaching

- Curriculum development should go beyond reaccreditation requirements and be based on international practice taking account of the needs of all interested parties.
- Generic competences, transversal skills and soft skills should be incorporated in all study programmes, with special attention to constructive alignment.
- The development of the CTI should focus on offering pedagogical training and support to all of the academic staff, building on the positive experience from the digital skills training.
- Pay more careful attention to recording student enrolment, achievement, completion and retention.
- Provide student support services, including those that facilitate the development of student life (including library, common rooms, canteen, extracurricular activities).

Research

- To make progress towards growth and increased quality in research, within the strategic plan, the University should set clear directions by prioritising and by agreeing a set of realistic, achievable and measurable targets for the next three to five years, managed within a team led by a vice rector on a full-time basis.
- In view of the present low number of doctoral students, consideration should be given to joining doctoral programmes at campus level based on the existing accredited doctoral programmes and joint services with the aim to develop common seminars, training offer, social gatherings, guest speakers, and a coordinated joint supervision policy.

Service to society

- The team recommends that, within the strategic plan, the University should elaborate an integrated strategy defining the priority national and foreign partners. At faculty level, public and private stakeholders should be given the opportunity to express their needs for skills, expertise and improve their support to the University (internships, scholarships, joint projects, international perspective).

Internationalisation

- Develop an internationalisation strategy as part of the strategic plan which defines the focus, purpose and goals.

- Ensure that international agreements are made according to university strategy and well-defined criteria.
- Increase human resource in the international office, and identify responsible individuals within each faculty to link with the office and lead international activity.