

**FACULTY OF MEDIA**

***EVALUATION REPORT***

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Team:

Kirsten Noren, Chair

Simona Lache

Mateusz Celmer

Andy Gibbs, Team Coordinator

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of the evaluation of Faculty of Media. The evaluation took place between November 2014 and January 2015.

### **1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme**

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

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

### **1.2 Faculty of Media’s profile**

The Faculty of Media (hereafter FAM or the faculty) is a private higher education institution based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. It was established in 2008 and was formed by merging two existing organisations: a college in the field of media production and a social science faculty. The team was told that at that time there was no first cycle three-year professional higher education study programme in Slovenia that focused on the field of media production. FAM offers higher professional study programmes and master's study in media and journalism.

FAM aimed to maintain a total student enrolment of between 60 and 70 students. Until the academic year 2012-13 it achieved this objective, but, in 2013-14, the number fell drastically. The self-evaluation report (SER) explains that amongst the reasons for this is a change in founders. One of the founding members resigned from the FAM and set up his own higher education institution with partly comparable courses and programmes to the undergraduate studies at FAM. The SER speculates that this intensified a difficult situation for the faculty which was already suffering from the effects of a declining overall national population of students. It was also affected by the financial crisis which impacted on the ability of students' and employers' ability to pay fees for education, who instead preferred to study at state funded institutions which, unlike FAM, have no tuition fees.

### **1.3 The evaluation process**

The self-evaluation report of the FAM, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in November 2014. The team was impressed by the clarity of information that was provided. The SER provided the basis for the team to form an impression of the faculty and identify issues for discussion during the evaluation visits. The visits of the evaluation team to Ljubljana took place on 26-28 November 2014 and 26-28 January 2015. In between the visits the FAM provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation that they had requested.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) was composed of:

- Kirsten Noren, Rector, University West, Sweden, Chair
- Simona Lache, Vice Rector, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- Mateusz Celmer, student representative, Wroclaw University of Technology, Poland
- Andy Gibbs, Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom, Team Coordinator

The team thanks the Dean, Director, Associate Professor Mateja Rek, Ph.D, the self- evaluation team, staff, students and others who participated in the IEP, for the production of clear, prompt, informative documentation, openness during meetings and a warm welcome by all the individuals concerned.

## **2. Governance and institutional decision-making**

The self-evaluation report demonstrated that the faculty has a vision for its operations based on the successful development of teaching, scientific research and professional work. The SER states that “The vision of the Faculty of Media: Faculty of Media = the path to success in the world of media”. The vision is supported by a mission statement “To create and transfer cutting-edge expertise in the field of media studies and production”. According to the SER, the vision and mission are underpinned by an organisational culture characterised by the following values: excellence, truthfulness, responsibility, creativity, development, freedom, openness, trust, positive thinking, and activity. The SER stressed the distinctiveness of FAM in its delivery of education compared to most other higher education institutions in Slovenia. This distinctiveness was emphasised during the meetings that the team held with various groups of staff during the evaluation.

The team was interested to see how it worked in practice and found many distinctive aspects of FAM. These were characterised by the approaches to teaching and learning and the underpinning of these by robust methods of quality assurance. The team was impressed that, despite the relatively small number of students in the faculty, attention had been paid to establishing policies and procedures focused on student and employee satisfaction. Students are represented and active in all the governing bodies. The team was told that the formal governance of the university was established by law and that the structures within the faculty, which aimed to recruit around 20 students per year, were the same as those required by much larger universities. FAM told the team that the legal structure is not designed for smaller /private institutions and the team agreed with this view. Nevertheless the team was satisfied that decision making within the faculty took place within the formal structures.

Within these structures, the management of the faculty is undertaken by a Management Board (sometimes called the management team in the SER). Within the Management Board the principle management responsibilities is conducted by the dean and the director. The dean takes oversight and management of academic affairs, whilst the director manages finance and human resources. The team heard that the faculty exercises a form of collective leadership, wherein each member of the Management Board has individual responsibility for particular functions or aspects of FAM’s operations and contributes to collective leadership. Although leadership is described in the SER as a supporting process of FAM, the team was told that there is no overall leader of the institution. The team could not see who was taking overall leadership responsibility for setting the strategy and direction of the faculty and recommends **that the faculty identify a named individual to be responsible for leading the strategy.**

The relatively low student numbers was an issue that concerned the team throughout the evaluation. On one hand the low numbers provided the opportunity for the faculty to deliver programmes that offer a high level of individual attention, but on the other, there is no critical mass of academics, support staff or students to enable adoption of any key activities such as research or internationalisation for them to become self-sustaining and create further growth.

The challenge for the faculty is to **adopt a strategy which will enable sufficient critical mass and in doing so ensure that quality and distinctiveness are maintained.**

The team was told that addressing this issue is of particular urgency as recent student numbers have not reached the targets set, which means that there is a concurrent reduction in available funding for FAM which will render its current activities unsustainable. The SER contains a draft strategy for the period 2015 to 2020 which outlines in detail the uncertain financial climate and demonstrates FAM's real awareness of this. For reasons given below, the team felt that there has been some procrastination in implementing the strategy, whilst it is clear that some action is needed immediately to address the current situation. The team urges the faculty to **prioritise strategic actions, finalise and approve the strategic plan and implement the agreed plan without further delay.**

The team explored the issue of distinctiveness in its meetings with the Management Board, its individual members and Senate representatives and noted the frequency with which they were told that FAM is unique, distinctive and different. This difference was expressed in a number of ways, sometimes stressing that the difference enabled greater responsiveness than other Slovenian HEIs to student needs, provided higher quality of teaching and learning and frequently that all authorities and legislation were targeted to making private institutions ineffective.

The team considered these points and concluded that distinctiveness was an important focus for the identity of the faculty. However, the arguments supporting this were conflated. The team found that those points relating to student experience, teaching, learning and quality were persuasive whilst those that focused on external authorities and legislation were not. Based on what the team heard in discussion with all groups in FAM, they concluded that FAM had not sufficiently identified its distinctiveness. The issue of distinctiveness was one that the team urges the faculty to **consider more closely as analysis of this would help the faculty identify its unique selling point and focus on developing this as a strength.**

The team concluded that, based on the students they met, FAM offered individually tailored learning to groups of students who could be considered non-traditional in that they tended to already be employed, studied part time and generally had not proceeded to higher education directly from school. The team felt that this type of student profile, in which widening access to students who had not previously had the opportunity or who had been unsuccessful in their studies, or who were now employed, matched well with lifelong learning frameworks and this is discussed in section 3. The faculty anticipated such developments in the analysis of opportunities within the SER, highlighting that "the demographic trends represent a unique challenge to university education (declining birth rate, an aging population), where one of the opportunities for faculty is the orientation in life-long education." In discussion with the Management Board, however, views were expressed about the type of student they would be willing to accept and the many exclusions highlighted made it difficult to ascertain a profile for the group. To this extent the target student market for the faculty is not clearly defined. Clearly

the faculty is aiming at a niche market but it has not sufficiently identified this in a way in which it could capitalise on this and communicate its niche.

During their discussions, the team found that the Management Board had differing individual perspectives according to their responsibilities within the faculty and that the vision and mission is not clearly shared. The target activity of the faculty was not clear, for example there were differing views as to whether teaching or research should be the main focus for the faculty and even that in the short term consultancy may be the main activity. **The team recommends that the faculty develop its vision and mission to define and sharpen focus on distinctiveness and the identification of its niche activity.**

In doing this, the team noted that although the faculty was surrounded by a number of other organisations, had strong links with commissioners of media work and engaged with a number of employers, this was not conducted in a way which focused on identifying a market need. The team felt that a different type of engagement with these groups, perhaps forming an advisory group, would enable the faculty to **engage external stakeholders in order to maximise potential markets, undertake an analysis of employers' needs and develop its unique selling point.**

### **3. Teaching and learning**

Two courses have been accredited at FAM, these are higher professional study programmes (which equate to first cycle studies) and master's study programme, both in media and journalism. The SER outlined a number of key features with regard to the organisation of the teaching and learning process: interdisciplinarity, connection with the market, focus on digital production, work in small groups and adaptation of the study process in terms of lifelong learning. The SER stressed the distinctiveness of the approach to teaching and learning compared to many programmes available in Slovenia.

The team read outcomes of student evaluations and also met with students. The team found that students were happy to be studying at FAM, were satisfied with the standards of teaching and learning and felt that their studies enhanced their skills and abilities within their workplace and made them more employable. Students told the team that they value the diverse teaching and learning methods and access to state-of-the-art professional equipment.

The team considered that by all objective evaluation this distinctive approach appeared to be successful, although two aspects could be further developed: connection with the market and the adaptation of the study process in terms of lifelong learning.

In regard to the connection with the market, FAM has designed learning in a way that lecturers present a theoretical focus in their lectures, followed by practical tasks. This takes the form of work experience within the study course. The SER advises that the assumption is that this will facilitate students' integration into the world of work after their graduation. During their meetings the team heard that students from FAM are regularly involved in commercial projects which are commissioned by partners of FAM. The projects are wide-ranging both in the markets they address and the media used to complete the projects. This activity exposed the students to commercial and industry standards of production, quality and deadlines and students described this as a good learning experience. The team welcomed this approach to students gaining employability skills. The SER advised that the faculty had undertaken an analysis of the employers' needs, but it was not apparent that this was undertaken regularly or systematically. The team saw student involvement in projects as an opportunity to further strengthen the programmes and links to civil society and recommends extending the activity to **systematically involve external stakeholders in programme development and renewal.**

The team found that the programmes were well orientated towards Bologna reforms and the adaptation of the study process in terms of lifelong learning, and suggest involving external stakeholders in programme renewal which would present opportunities to strengthen these aspects. Bearing in mind that many of FAM's students are employed, the potential to develop work-based learning and approaches based on the recognition of prior learning are apparent. FAM advises that legislation prevents the utilisation of these approaches. However, these approaches have an increasingly high profile at the European level and it can be anticipated that steps to encourage these further are imminent. Preparation for this would place FAM in an advantageous position and would benefit the students. The team suggests that the faculty

might **consider how work-based and recognition of prior learning approaches could be adopted.**

In meetings with teachers, they described themselves as having a passion for their teaching and enjoy working in this environment. They value the autonomy they enjoy in their teaching and this is shown in formal evaluations of the organisation. Each year, the students carry out a survey on the quality of the work of individual lecturers for each subject. The results of this survey are not publicly available, but they are subject to annual exchanges between the dean and the lecturers where they reflect upon the assessment and possible improvements are discussed. Whilst some students said they were informed of actions and improvements following their feedback, others said they were not. The team highlights the importance of **clearly informing students about changes/improvements that have been made based on feedback from students' questionnaires**, for example in the form of "You said - we did" posters. This would further support closure of the quality loop.

The team noted that there was no requirement for formal preparation of teachers which may limit awareness of and access to developing pedagogical methods, which in turn will limit the faculty's ability to implement new methods of teaching and learning. For example, the potential to use distance learning is discussed in the draft strategic plan, but there is no overall plan that is outlined for teaching and learning development. The team believes that such a plan would not only help the faculty achieve its developing goals but also create a situation whereby it could be proactive rather than responsive and recommend that it **implement clear governance of teaching and learning with an associated strategy for development of methods and human resource.**

#### **4. Research**

The team observed an imbalance between the research aspirations of the faculty and the research profile of teachers employed by the faculty. The strategic review identified an opportunity related to increasing demand for applied research, thus offering the possibility to increase the volume of scientific research, increasing the efficiency of basic research and adding new dimensions to the pedagogic work. Whilst this may be so, overall the team concluded that the small numbers of staff engaged within the faculty was limiting the development of a critical mass of focused research.

Research was identified as a key function of the faculty by the Management Board. The vision of the faculty in the SER describes clear development based on the successful development of teaching, scientific research and professional work. Conducting applied research is identified as a source of income for the faculty and accounts for 20 % of the costs incurred by the faculty. Together, these are indicators that research is intended to be one of the key activities of the faculty, and indeed the SER states that “creating high-quality teaching and research experience, and creating and transferring cutting-edge expertise in the field of media and communication was seen as a necessity to survive on the market”.

The faculty is able to demonstrate in the SER that teachers engaged within the faculty have a high level of involvement in research across a range of interests. However, this research is not attributed to the faculty but is undertaken in the framework of their interests, habilitation debentures and also in collaboration with other higher education institutions in Slovenia. The reason given for this in the SER is that other institutions which have a longer history and reputation than FAM can more successfully and easily compete in tenders. This means that the faculty has no income or research profile in terms of hosting and securing funded projects. This is illustrated in the SER which shows that whilst the strategic goals for the research performance of teachers were met, those relating to projects carried out within the faculty were not.

The team was told that the faculty takes care of integrating new knowledge into the learning process and in integrating projects and undergraduate and post-graduate students in the research process. The team agrees that this is beneficial to student learning. In discussion with teachers and students, the team observed that whilst there is, at the level of individual teachers, a satisfactory link between teaching, learning and research, there is a lack of systematic, co-ordinated focus and sharing across the staff. The team believe that this links with their earlier comments regarding governance and development of methods and human resource with regard to teaching and learning.

The faculty has signed contracts with business entities aimed at performing applied research, and have also developed a small number of projects in a way that takes advantage of diverse opportunities. Additionally the faculty has undertaken some consultancy project work. Whilst noting the benefit to FAM of generating funds through this activity the team suggests that there is an opportunity to **develop a focus of consultancy and knowledge transfer by identifying the**

**niche market addressed by these currently diverse activities and identifying research themes that fit with this niche activity.**

The team noted the limited number of people employed within the faculty offering all the activities that normally take place in a university and saw that there is no infrastructure to support proposal writing and support projects. The team saw an opportunity to link a solution to this with an issue raised in the SER, which identified a lack of systematic creation of an international network with a view to applying this to research and other professional projects. The team suggests that **identifying and working with networks (nationally and internationally) that have access to support infrastructures would help to incentivise researchers to write proposals with the faculty.**

## **5. Service to society**

The SER provided no evidence of service to society beyond stating that the faculty aims to be socially responsible. During its meetings, the team found that whilst the faculty is socially responsible in its consideration of student welfare and the student experience, service to society does not feature as a component of the FAM activities. The faculty could provide evidence of this by developing indicators of the impact of the institution on the region.

The team did note that the faculty is embedded and interwoven with a large number of organisations. The majority of teachers and researchers were employed within other institutions as well as FAM, facilities were shared with another educational institution, commercial projects were undertaken with media companies and staff and students contributed to commercial projects for government bodies, entertainment groups and charities. Whilst these were seen to be key contributors to the students' educational experience, the team felt that there was potential to develop these relationships further, not least as mentioned earlier in formulating a more systematic involvement of social partners in curriculum design and development. **The team recommends that development of an approach to this issue, including voluntary work, may enhance reputation, enhance curriculum development and provide an opportunity to market the faculty and its services.**

## **6. Quality culture**

The team was impressed by the policies, procedures and approaches, with regard to quality assurance, within the faculty that went beyond compliance with national requirements and had a genuine focus on enhancement. The team noted that formal requirements, processes and procedures were in place, the quality feedback loop for staff and students was generally completed, and there was good awareness of the need for development of quality culture. According to the SER, FAM pursues the quality assurance culture in accordance with the PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act). All interested parties at the faculty are included in the process of assessment and search for improvements. The employees and the partners at the institute are included both in the process of data collecting for self-evaluation and in the debate on the respective self-evaluation results. The team noted that this was apparent in the quality of information provided in the SER as well as in other supporting documents, and they also observed this in meetings with staff and students.

The SER advises that since its establishment FAM has assured constant quality and places this as a central concern. The SER explains that quality is an important facet of FAM's work and high quality is seen as essential so as to flourish in market conditions. The SER explains further that with the establishment of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education the system of assuring quality was redefined at the national level within the criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes. Since then FAM has been developing a quality system, following the instructions of these criteria, and the rules of procedure for academic standards and quality were adopted in compliance with these criteria.

The faculty has built on this work and in 2013 commenced a European Social Fund (ESF) project entitled "Upgrading the quality assurance system at the FAM". This project goes beyond national quality requirements to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of, among other matters, business processes, information and communication systems. The processes in place engage all staff and students both in collecting information across a range of indicators such as employability, organisational climate, individual performance and satisfaction and also in discussing responses to the information gathered. The overall aim in gathering this information is to plan the future of the organisation in a more strategic fashion by using the base information that will be collected as part of these processes.

FAM undertakes regular self-evaluation and publishes the results on a publicly available web site. The team read in the SER, and this was confirmed in meetings with students, that they are involved in the process of self-evaluation at all stages. Students are also represented in the quality commission which monitors how self-evaluation procedures are carried out. Students are also represented on the Academic Council and the Student Council. The team concluded that students are involved in faculty decision-making processes.

The team notes and recommends FAM to **maintain its good progress in this area**. It further recommends that the faculty uses the findings of the ESF project "Upgrading the quality

assurance system at the FAM” to **sustain the activity started within the framework of the project and to further develop internal quality assurance systems with FAM’s own standards.** Additionally the team agreed that the approach to quality in the faculty was a key contributor to its distinctiveness and was an example of good practice both in its application and in how the faculty explained its approach. **The team urges the faculty to externally disseminate the good practice carried out with regard to quality culture.**

## **7. Internationalisation**

The SER indicates that from the outset the FAM worked towards internationalisation of the study process and achieved an Erasmus University Charter in 2010. Prior to that, guest lecturers had been financed from the resources of the faculty. Being awarded the Charter has encouraged the exchange of lecturers and staff in recent years and there are some in-coming students, although the numbers remain low. A major challenge for the faculty, identified in the SER, is to encourage students to carry out a part of their studies abroad since they are already part-time students as they study and work at the same time. The fear of loss of employment or loss of business is a real barrier to outward mobility. The team noted that because of the students' situations, organising outward mobility was problematic but that the faculty was developing arrangements for exchanges to take place.

The team felt that for the faculty, **internationalisation needs to look beyond exchange programmes**. Although a number of ideas were mentioned, the team found no visible strategy for internationalisation. The faculty needs to decide where it would like to position itself internationally, for example teaching and learning is predominantly in the Slovenian language without any clear focus on the global labour market. **Teaching in a more globally understood language and creating a more outward looking perspective, taking account of global employment market needs** would not only extend the appeal of the faculty for Slovenian students but also increase attractiveness for potential students outside of Slovenia.

The faculty notes that future challenges will be participation in international research projects. The faculty has some success in using European funds to organise and deliver an international summer school entitled "Planning and Management of Media Production". The team sees an opportunity to **build European and international projects around the areas where the faculty is most successful, such as teaching and learning approaches and developing quality**.

## **8. Conclusion**

The Faculty of Media is a relatively new private institution which has made good progress in developing its infrastructure and distinctiveness. It can identify a number of areas of good practice, but it needs to further explore and define its distinctiveness and unique features as well as the market which will benefit from these. Students within the faculty express a high level of satisfaction with their experience of teaching and learning and are clear that study at the faculty improves their job performance and employment prospects. There is clear alignment with the Bologna Process and introducing elements such as work-based learning and recognition of prior learning would emphasise lifelong learning within the faculty. Good quality processes have been developed within the faculty and bring together a range of management information to assist in decision-making and enhancement of services. The low numbers of students will make it challenging for the faculty to achieve a critical mass to sustain activity across the range of areas normally associated with higher education institutions, in particular research and internationalisation. Nevertheless, the faculty demonstrates good practice in a number of areas and is highly appreciated by its students. Leadership with a sharp focus on identifying and implementing strategic goals is paramount to ensure sustainability.

### **Summary of the recommendations**

#### **Governance and institutional decision-making**

Identify a named individual to be responsible for leading the strategy.

Adopt a strategy which will enable sufficient critical mass and in doing so ensure that quality and distinctiveness are maintained.

Prioritise strategic actions, finalise and approve the strategic plan and implement the agreed plan without further delay.

Consider distinctiveness more closely, as an analysis of this would help the faculty identify its unique selling point and focus on developing this as a strength.

Develop its vision and mission to define and sharpen focus on distinctiveness and the identification of its niche activity.

Engage external stakeholders in order to maximise potential markets, undertake an analysis of employers' needs and develop its unique selling point.

#### **Teaching and learning**

Systematically involve external stakeholders in programme development and renewal.

Consider how work-based and recognition of prior learning approaches could be adopted.

Clearly inform students about changes/improvements that have been made based on feedback from students' questionnaires.

Implement clear governance of teaching and learning with an associated strategy for development of methods and human resource.

### **Research**

Develop a focus of consultancy and knowledge transfer by identifying the niche market addressed by these currently diverse activities and identifying research themes that fit with this niche activity.

Identify and work with networks (nationally and internationally) that have access to support infrastructures would help to incentivise researchers to write proposals with the faculty.

### **Service to Society**

Develop an approach to this issue, including voluntary work, to enhance reputation, enhance curriculum development and provide an opportunity to market the faculty and its services.

### **Quality Culture**

Maintain good progress in this area.

Sustain the activity started within the framework of the ESF project and further develop internal quality assurance systems with FAM's own standards.

Externally disseminate the good practice undertaken with regard to quality culture.

### **Internationalisation**

Look beyond exchange programmes in developing a strategy.

Teach in a more globally understood language and create a more outward looking perspective, taking account of global employment market needs.

Build European and international projects around the areas where the faculty is most successful, such as teaching and learning approaches and developing quality.