

**UNIVERSITY MEDITERRANEAN, PODGORICA, MONTENEGRO**  
***FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT***

June 2018

Team:

Professor Sokratis Katsikas, Chair

Professor Thierry Chevallier

Ms Arus Harutyunyan

Dr Raymond Smith, Team Coordinator

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## **1. Introduction**

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

This follow-up evaluation took place in the framework of the project "Higher Education and Research for Innovation and Competitiveness" (HERIC), implemented by the government of Montenegro with the overall objective to strengthen the quality and relevance of higher education and research in Montenegro.

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, 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, 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?
- 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 University Mediterranean's profile**

In the period since the initial IEP evaluation in 2014, the University Mediterranean (UM) has consolidated its position as one of the four accredited universities (one public and three private) in Montenegro<sup>1</sup>. Located in the capital, Podgorica, UM is one of the three private universities. Its founding faculty - tourism - was established in 2004 and its university title was awarded in 2006. Currently, it comprises six faculties specialising in business, foreign languages, law, information technologies, visual arts and tourism. This subject spread is felt to be appropriate to its mission and to the demands of the regional and national labour markets.

University Mediterranean offers programmes at all three study cycles - bachelors (9), masters (11) and doctorate (3). The university also offers one year programmes of specialist postgraduate studies (12) as part of a 3+1 HE model common to institutions in Montenegro. All programmes are formally accredited by the national authorities. The UM self-evaluation report (SER) states that 1461 students were enrolled in the 2017/18 academic year. This represents a slight reduction from the previous three years which averaged 1565 enrolments<sup>2</sup>. Staffing levels have remained largely constant since the 2014 evaluation.

The ownership of the university continues to rest with the Atlas Group<sup>3</sup> and is overseen by the Adriatic Fair, one of the members of the Group. The SER notes that "since 2013 it has been decided that the possible profit will be used for the development of the University and promotion of scientific and research work and strengthening of international cooperation". The university is showing clear signs of that commitment by way of an impressive new building, with the important benefit of all faculties now being located on a single site. The SER provides a brief outline of this development which took place in advance of the 2016/17 academic year.

As with other higher education institutions in Montenegro, the University Mediterranean is facing a fast moving external environment. This includes significant amendments to the higher education law, a new national quality assurance agency and the requirement to build 25% work/practical experience into the curriculum when new programmes are accredited under the 3+2 educational model, a key part of the government's higher education strategy for 2016-2020. In a relatively crowded higher education space, given the country's population size, the University Mediterranean intends to increase its student numbers and continue its wider development, particularly in relation to its research footprint.

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<sup>1</sup> There are also five private independent faculties on the list of accredited higher education institutions.

<sup>2</sup> SER Appendix 25.

<sup>3</sup> Details of the membership and activities of the Atlas Group can be found at <http://www.atlas-g.com/grupa.htm>

### **1.3 The evaluation process**

The self-evaluation process was overseen by a central self-evaluation group (SEG), appointed by the Rector, with a membership as follows:

Doc. dr Andela Jaksic Stojanovic, Chair

Prof. dr Adis Balota

Doc. dr Marija Jankovic

Mr Milica Kovacevic

Doc. dr Mladen Perazic

Vesna Mijatovic

Nina Lukovic

Tomislav Turanjanin

Nada Perovic

This central SEG worked alongside similar groups set up in each of the six faculties of the university. The team was told that the university wanted the evaluation process to be inclusive of both internal and external stakeholders and to allow for all perspectives to be considered as part of the process. The SEGs (central and faculty level) therefore included academic and administrative staff, management, and representatives from local businesses. The process was said to involve a considerable work commitment with almost daily meetings for about a month. The self-evaluation report (SER) was finalised following feedback from the faculties. The university is confident that this process was conducted without barriers and that this inclusivity applied as much to the student body as to the wider staffing establishment.

The university's approach to the SER was to reflect on the current position of the institution in the key areas under scrutiny by the IEP process: responses to the 2014 initial evaluation report and recommendations were therefore woven into the general narrative of the document. The university also took the opportunity to conduct a further SWOT analysis which is included at the end of the report. The self-evaluation report of the University Mediterranean was sent to the evaluation team in February 2018, together with a substantial volume of appendices which included comprehensive details of the university's programmes. The team found the SER to be well structured and reasonably balanced between description and analysis. The visit of the evaluation team to the University Mediterranean took place from 25 to 27 April.

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

- Professor Sokratis Katsikas, Rector, Open University of Cyprus, Cyprus, team chair
- Professor Thierry Chevallier, former Vice-President for Resources, University of Burgundy, France
- Ms Arus Harutynyan, student, Armenian State University of Economics , Armenia

- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, UK, team coordinator

The team thanks the Rector, Prof. Dr. Radislav Jovović for his hospitality during the team's visit and our institutional liaison, Doc. dr Andela Jaksic Stojanovic, for her support in organising the various meetings and the general arrangements while the team visited the university.

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

- 2.1 During its twelve year history the university has remained constant to its founding guidelines articulated in 2006. The mission summarised in the SER is “to educate professionals in the fields of social sciences, law and economics, engineering and technology, arts and others, by applying international standards of teaching and learning to enable mobility to other universities, application and transfer of knowledge”. The vision is to make “a dynamic University that systematically and in [an] organised way stimulates mobility and development of research careers and allows research of talents and entrepreneurial energy of teaching staff and students”. These statements have, therefore, been sustained for some considerable time; and the SER acknowledges that one of the university’s immediate priorities is to respond to the continuous changes taking place in the external environment and ensure that the mission, vision and general strategic direction of the university continue to be regarded as fit for purpose.
- 2.2 What was most striking to the team in reading the SER, and then in discussion with members of the university, is the significant and positive step change that has taken place since the initial evaluation in 2014. This can be identified most obviously from the physical consolidation of the university in a new building located 20 minutes from the centre of Podgorica. Equally, it can be seen in the recent changes in governance structure that, in the view of the team, provide a more effective, collaborative and transparent basis for decision-making.
- 2.3 The move to new premises, purposely designed for higher education delivery, provides a direct response to one of the key recommendations from the 2014 initial evaluation. The tangible benefits for staff and students from such a development could be seen clearly in the tour of the building that the team undertook during its visit. The relatively brief period between the end of the 2014 evaluation and the opening of the new building also highlights to the team the university’s ability to plan and implement major change in an extremely efficient and effective manner. This is clearly built on an improved process of decision-making, in the first instance between the Managing Board and the university’s leadership, but also horizontally through the senior executive leadership team<sup>4</sup>. The team is fully supportive of the changes in staff roles within the rectorate. The two vice-rector posts provide broader and more direct support for the Rector and also allow for an appropriate focus on international co-operation and education, two key features of the university’s development agenda. The finance function has been appropriately redesigned to support these changes in the senior leadership team. In addition, this structure can easily be adapted to accommodate the intended progress in research management as and when that is realised in the near future. The team believes, however, that there is still scope for some further refinement and enhancement in the links between the Managing

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<sup>4</sup> The new organigram for the university is presented in appendix 12 to the SER.

Board and the university management team. Ideally, this would emerge from the Rector becoming a formal member of the Managing Board; however, the team understands that this is not possible under the current higher education law in Montenegro. Nevertheless, a closer connection between the Managing Board and the Rector would, in the view of the team, help reinforce the critical and on-going focus required with respect to financial sustainability and also the sustained engagement of the university's ownership in future investment initiatives.

- 2.4 The progress made in developing the university's infrastructure and the improved governance arrangements are amongst the most obvious indications of effective decision-making at UM. The team also believes that the systematic consideration and response to all the IEP recommendations from the 2014 evaluation present an important picture of positive leadership, effective consultative and deliberative systems and an ability, at the institutional level, to implement agreed change. In the view of the team a key element of this success is the very positive organisational culture that has developed right across the university, something that is often absent, either wholly or in part, in many higher education institutions.
- 2.5 The foundation stones that underpin this capacity to change are a shared understanding of vision and mission supported by well-developed strategic planning processes. The team understands from the senior leadership that consideration is now being given to plans covering a 5-10 year period. This is to include a doubling of student numbers by 2025 and the establishment of an American College, in all likelihood under the UM umbrella, delivering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in English and accredited in both Montenegro and the United States. As with other developments, these ambitious plans are said to be built on a shared view, including that of the Atlas Group, of the future direction of the university.
- 2.6 The team is impressed with the evident enthusiasm for, and commitment to, improving all aspects of the work of the university. Plans appeared to be well considered and capable of being driven forward by the university's leadership. This shared commitment to enhancement also emerged very strongly from the meetings that the team held with a wide group of staff and student representatives. The team does, however, feel the need to enter a cautionary note about the challenges that future growth and development could bring to the strong collegiate approach that is currently so much in evidence. It is often the experience in higher education, and indeed in other spheres of activity for that matter, that a "non-competitive" approach - in UM's case, equal funding for faculties, generally agreed staffing allocations, widely accepted decisions on research areas to be supported - has a limited longevity; this then raises the question as to what decision-making processes might emerge when a degree of internal competition starts to chip away at the positive organisational culture. The rectorate recognises these potential threats to the university's way of working; however, it is convinced that, given the extent of the internal sign-up to the current principles of collegiality and shared endeavour, there is no reason to doubt the robustness of this approach as the university moves

forward. The team, however, do not believe that this should be regarded as a “given”, particularly as, at the time of this evaluation, a relatively small number of key managers appear to be responsible for maintaining the momentum behind these valuable and relatively unique organisational dynamics. And while the team accepts that there are some signs that the enlargement of the leadership group is underway it, nonetheless, *recommends that the university looks at ways of protecting, and continuing to invest in, its very positive organisational culture so that it can be best placed to respond to those occasions when, in all likelihood, tangible differences of opinion emerge as a consequence of major change.*

2.7 The issue of the lack of student engagement in governance and decision-making is commented upon in the 2014 evaluation report. As part of the SER documentation for this follow-up evaluation, the team was able to consider a comprehensive statute relating to the establishment and functioning of the Student Parliament. This provides an appropriate regulatory structure for student representation, although quite clearly it requires updating given that the approval date shown is 2008. In many ways, however, the impetus for embedding and then extending the student voice needs to come from a greater sense of student ownership of these consultative mechanisms. So while the bureaucratic technicalities of a constitution are important, they are never likely to excite the majority of the students into participation or action; the student body articulating a greater sense of what it feels it needs from its university at institutional and programme level can, however, lead to greater involvement and engagement. The team believes that this could be done by the Student Parliament debating its own development strategy, including the core purpose of the Parliament and the priority activities to be discussed with the university authorities. In addition, *the team believes that there is a clear need for student representation to be shared with a larger group of officers than is currently the case and that this should be supported by enhanced training for those taking on such representative roles.* This might be achieved by designating a wider range of roles to work alongside the positions of President and Vice-President; such roles could include championing quality assurance, promoting sports and social activity and developing national and international links with other student bodies/unions. These roles could also be replicated at faculty level. While these developments should be initiated and owned by students the *team recommends that central university support should be provided to the Student Parliament in developing its role in accordance with the Bologna Process.*

2.8 The 2014 evaluation report commended the university for producing a wide-range of documents to underpin its governance and strategic planning. These policies and procedures have continued to guide the university in the intervening period. It is noted earlier in this report that the university has been considering its future both in terms of a response to the government’s higher education strategy and also in respect of its own development agenda, including student number growth, a research academy and a possible investment in establishing an American College. The senior leadership of the university indicated to the team that strategic documents articulating these initiatives

would be presented for discussion at the Senate in the very near future. The team can see that this change agenda is very much at the forefront of current thinking and discussion. It trusts, however, that this *discourse on future direction and development can now be drawn to a final conclusion and a strategy document published and promulgated so that all parts of the organisation can see and share in its central principles and help deliver its key targets. Alongside this all other policy documents should be appropriately updated.*

### 3. Quality culture

- 3.1 The key internal driver for quality culture remains the Strategy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement approved in 2008. More recently (in 2016) the university has established a central quality control and assurance centre (the Centre), augmented by equivalent committees based in the faculties, to provide more direct support and expertise in delivering the quality assurance and enhancement requirements set out in the strategy. The Centre also acts as a conduit for discussion and information sharing with the Ministries of Education and Science. The external check on the quality of academic provision is through the national quality agency which oversees the four yearly programme accreditation processes and carries out other external assessments of higher education institutions.
- 3.2 Faculty Councils, which include 2 student representatives, act as the principal deliberative forums for assuring the quality of programmes at the local level. The Vice- Deans play a critical role in this activity and are supported in this task by faculty quality control committees. This provides the focus for, *inter alia*, the analysis of results, enrolment trends, improvements in pedagogy and guidelines for e-learning. In addition, members of the Centre sit on the faculty committees to encourage the sharing of best practice. The team feels that these arrangements offer a robust basis for assuring and enhancing the university's academic provision. External scrutiny is supplemented by two year programme reviews that involve business and industry partners; and while the changes that are allowed to programmes between accreditation visits are limited by law there is some scope to innovate around areas such as assessment and pedagogy, including the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE). In this respect the results of the quality process appear to inform decision-making.
- 3.3 One of the recommendations from the 2014 evaluation urged the university to pay more attention to closing the feedback loop. The university operates a well-established system of student questionnaires, circulated at the end of each semester; students are asked about the performance of their professors and teaching assistants as well as more general questions on examinations, the availability of learning resources and group dynamics. It is made clear on the student questionnaire that the responses given are an important way of evaluating the quality of education provided by the university. The university's IT department helps with the analysis of results and these are considered in detail at the faculty level before institutional scrutiny at the Senate. The outcomes from these student questionnaires are supplemented by reports written by professors on the performance of their teaching assistants and, more recently (in the 2017/18 academic year), teaching assistants have been able to submit reports on the work of their subject professors. Following discussion at the Senate the general results from the student questionnaires are published on the respective faculty websites. The SER indicates that the university then "determines in which segments of activity the quality of teaching and exams is not at the proper

level” and seeks to find “solutions and measures to overcome any weaknesses...as well as to improve the teaching and learning process”. The university views these overall arrangements as offering a sound basis not just for quality assurance but also for promoting a culture of continuous improvement.

- 3.4 The team judges that, to a considerable degree, the feedback loop has been closed in line with the previous IEP recommendation. It also notes a great strength in informal quality assurance arrangements that complement formal processes, particularly around the student voice; and this was confirmed by staff and students alike. However, there are some elements of the quality process that are perhaps worthy of further consideration. For example, *the student questionnaire provided as part of the SER documentation could be expanded and answers offered at a greater level of granularity.* And, as suggested in 2014, *the forms of student feedback might be added to by themed focus groups around topics such as e-learning and student mobility.* In terms of the outcomes from student and other feedback mechanisms, *the university might find it beneficial to highlight through “you said, we did” publicity campaigns the improvements being made to the student learning experience and the wider university environment.* Ultimately, these efforts in relation to improved student feedback should be regarded as *part of a wider university initiative to support the student body in its understanding of quality assurance as a continuous process leading to a strong quality culture.* In this respect, the team points to a wealth of external material available through organisations such as the European Students’ Union (ESU).
- 3.5 The importance of finalising the new quality assurance strategy has been highlighted earlier in this report. The team notes, nonetheless, that the university has an effective track record to date in terms of external programme accreditation; and the team sees no reason why, if that rigour is maintained, the core quality systems should not be equally effective when approaching programme accreditation under the new 3+2 model. What is less evident to the team is how much thought has been given to extending quality processes in a systemic way to the other pillars of the university’s work, for example, research, service to society and professional service activity. Understandably, there has been an emphasis on the mechanisms for assuring and enhancing taught undergraduate and postgraduate education. The team believes, however, that *the university’s ambitions to expand its research profile and further develop other areas of activity will require appropriate levels of internal scrutiny and it is clearly important for rigorous and systemic quality assurance mechanisms to be implemented hand-in-hand with the growth of those activities.*

## 4. Teaching and learning

- 4.1 At the time of the 2014 evaluation, the university had already established, to a large degree, the Bologna three cycle system of higher education. The anomaly was the existence of a number of one year postgraduate specialist study programmes. This anomaly still exists at UM but, as is noted elsewhere in this report, the external environment has moved on and these specialist programmes will now be phased out as part of a national decision to move towards the 3+2+3 model by 2020. In many respects, the existing practice at UM of offering programmes at bachelors, masters and doctoral level leaves the university well-placed for this national transition. Equally, senior leadership figures were keen to stress to the team that the university's position within the Atlas Group and its existing practice orientation offered a sound platform for expanding programme work experience elements to the 25% level required by law when new programmes go forward for accreditation. This optimism concerning the accreditation of new programmes also emerged in discussions that the team had with faculty leaders and academic staff although there is a recognition that some subject areas are better placed than others to adapt to the significantly increased practice requirement. The team finds clear evidence that planning for 3+2+3 is well underway and that new programmes should be ready for accreditation and subsequent academic delivery on schedule.
- 4.2 There is a strong emphasis in the SER on the integration of practice into the curriculum. Study programmes are said to be designed to enable students to "acquire practical knowledge, skills and competences in order to provide graduated students with adequate preparation for the needs of [the] modern labour market". This focus on employability is reinforced by an emphasis on foreign language skills, IT literacy and the development of soft skills. Students that the team met were particularly keen to highlight the benefits that they felt they gained from the balance between theory and practice in their programmes; and this appears to be emerging as something of a brand advantage for the university. However, in the view of some academic leaders and teaching staff, there is still some passivity amongst many students in taking advantage of the opportunities to build up their practical experience. In the modern labour market the ability to present evidence of work experience and associated use of soft skills can often be a key feature of a CV and a persuasive point when being interviewed by employers. *The team, therefore, endorses the university's intention to open a Career Development Centre that provides students with support in finding internship opportunities during their studies and in preparing for, and facilitating, employment following graduation.*
- 4.3 The team believes that the focus on practice learning is well complemented by the university's deliberate and systematic approach to delivering student-centred learning, including the articulation of learning outcomes. The university does much to keep the importance of learning outcomes at the forefront of its educational approach for both current and prospective students. The university website prominently

details programme learning outcomes via its home page and there are additional printed publications for some faculties showing learning outcomes at the course level. The Faculty of Visual Arts has been a pioneer within the university, and also nationally, for the development of learning outcomes; and the university has used this experience, supported by the EU's Tempus Programme, to embed the practice across the institution. It is clearly a strong feature of the general approach to teaching and learning. However, in the view of the team, it would be wrong to see this as an isolated initiative; it can also be said to form part of a wider dynamic and thriving learning environment. Pedagogy is innovative and uses a number of approaches, including e-learning via a Moodle platform, problem-based learning, service learning and the use of external expertise for practical learning.

- 4.4 The team was told that e-learning had been established at an early stage in the development of the university and the SER comments that teaching staff received in-house training to support the implementation of these technologies. On the whole academic staff have adapted to the demands of interactive learning although there is general acknowledgment that some professors are still resistant to this change in pedagogy. On occasion teaching assistants are able to act as a bridge between students and their professors in making best use of the virtual learning environment. Students confirmed to the team that the use of Moodle was widespread and that group interaction also took place on social media applications such as Facebook.
- 4.5 On the evidence of the meetings that the team held with students from the faculties of tourism and business, satisfaction levels with their learning experience is high and particular praise was given to the close interaction with their professors. In part, this might be attributable to the good staff:student ratios (an average of 1:15). Professors were said to listen to their students and regard their views as important; while responses to email correspondence on programme or course matters were said to be provided within 24 hours. *These aspects of academic and organisational culture form a critical part of the student learning experience and the team regards it as imperative that this approach is sustained as the university grows in size and complexity.*
- 4.6 It is clear that the investment in new premises has had a significant impact on the quality of the learning environment. Classrooms and lecture theatres are well-equipped and students now have two dedicated rooms for their own activities. Academic co-operation across faculties is growing and this is encouraging inter-disciplinarity and providing a stimulus to learning in relation to all three study cycles. The team was also able to visit the learning space for the Faculty of Visual Arts and see and hear at first hand the benefits that had accrued from the government's decision to invest in two study programmes, Visual Communications Design and Audio-Visual Production. In particular, the purchase of specialist IT equipment would not have been possible but for this government intervention. The team, therefore, gained a positive impression of the learning environment at UM while noting that, as ever, there is some scope for improvement in, for example, resources relating to library provision and access to educational databases.

## 5. Research

- 5.1 In the period since the 2014 evaluation the university has taken an understandably pragmatic approach to the development of its research profile. This has been largely framed by the country's EU accession process and the fact that there has been no national research strategy to act as a point of reference. The university's Research Centre has therefore supported a focus on EU sponsored activity in relation to Tempus, Erasmus+ and FP7 projects<sup>5</sup>. This has provided opportunities for UM researchers to work with higher education institutions in a range of countries including Italy, Sweden, France and Greece. It has also allowed the university to improve the research infrastructure with three staff in each of the faculties supporting the preparation of project bids.
- 5.2 The team understands that a state level research strategy is to be published in the near future and this will allow the university to develop its own priorities in the context of national policy. It is timely, therefore, that UM is currently in the process of establishing a central Research Institute that will carry forward project bids and implementation and also cover areas such as market intelligence. The Research Institute, which will have a more strategic brief than the current Centre, is due for approval by the Senate in May 2018 and the team was advised that its key immediate priority will be the production of an institutional research strategy. The team notes that the writing of a research strategy was a recommendation from the 2014 evaluation; and while it has an understanding of why that has not happened to date, it is now clearly an urgent task. *The team hopes that the production of UM's research strategy can be expedited and, once agreed, can be shared widely across the academic community. The team also emphasises the need for research goals to be guided by SMART principles.*
- 5.2 In terms of future research direction, the university has already determined that it will focus on applied research and the team believes that this is a sensible decision with potential outputs that can be exploited both internally and externally. This concentration on applied research is also reinforced by the nature of the UM research infrastructure; there are no specialist laboratories which might support pure research although there is the possibility of using facilities, such as supercomputer capacity, at other universities. Faculties such as business and tourism are well placed to work with local businesses and engage in public private partnerships; and both disciplines are likely to feature prominently in the national research strategy. Tourism, for example, is a key dynamic for Montenegro and the industry is beginning to embrace the concepts such as the sharing and experience economies. This offers the university significant opportunities in research and consultancy, using staff expertise to promote areas such as digital innovation in the hospitality industry and the sustainable development of tourism. This type of research activity can also have international applications. More broadly, the university's position

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<sup>5</sup> The details of the projects are listed in appendix 10 to the SER.

within the Atlas Group provides it with an excellent channel for business related applied research.

- 5.3 The commitment to individual research is embedded in statute and academic and professional staff are obliged to spend at least 30% of their work time on research. The team found staff to be largely satisfied with the time available to them to undertake research and it appears that this is partly due to the satisfactory average staff:student ratio. However, the team is also impressed by the senior leadership's wider belief and commitment to research; and one ambition from that quarter is for professors to engage with research to an even greater degree. This top level endorsement is critical; because while it can be useful to enshrine the principle of time for research into statute the development of a positive research culture relies rather more on a range of other factors, many of which can only be determined and promoted at the institutional level. *The team, therefore, encourages the university to reflect carefully on the policies and environmental factors that might lead to a thriving research culture and place these close to the centre of the soon to be realised UM research strategy.*
- 5.4 The university views the progress made with its existing doctoral programmes in business and tourism as relatively satisfactory. Doctoral student numbers average around ten and it is not expected that this will increase significantly in the short term. However, the application process for the accreditation of additional doctoral programmes in IT and Visual Arts, a process that was started almost a year ago, is now close to completion and there is potential for further expansion in other faculties. The team was informed that there is, however, a general problem in Montenegro in attracting doctoral candidates. This is predominantly an issue of funding, something that the government is now said to recognise; and it is anticipated that the Ministry of Science will, as part of its research agenda, be introducing 50 country-wide PhD scholarships with funding levels equivalent to those found in other EU universities. The university obviously hopes that this will provide a boost to recruitment to its own doctoral programmes. In the meantime the university tries to support staff doctoral education enrolments by paying 50% of their fees. The potential growth in doctoral education programmes is an encouraging sign for the development of UM's wider research strategy. In the view of the team, however, such growth needs to be underpinned by common rules in doctoral education processes, for example, the embedding of team mentoring and external input in examining. This, in turn, should be informed by international best practice and there are many examples that can be used for this purpose such as those set out in the Salzburg principles and through the work of the EUA's Council for Doctoral Education.
- 5.5 The relationships between doctoral candidates and their supervising professors were said to be largely positive. Importantly, supervisors were expected to support their students in obtaining access to electronic databases and other published sources. The team understands that doctoral candidates tend to work in isolation from each other and especially from those based in another faculty. In the view of the team, *it is critical that the university supports the development of a shared doctoral education culture, especially*

with the anticipated introduction of doctoral programmes in two more faculties. A wider research degree culture can, most immediately, be *supported by common events and the sharing of experience across faculties through, for example, an annual PhD conference and regular research degree seminars.*

## 6. Service to society

- 6.1 In the SER the university describes its approach to social responsibility and civil mission as being framed by activity on human rights, labour rights, the environment and the fight against corruption. It highlights, in particular, the work of students and staff in the Faculty of Visual Arts. This activity is often linked to course level elements of the curriculum and can involve “various land/street/eco projects that aim to stimulate social responsibility [and] raise awareness about the importance of environmental protection”. As is noted earlier in this report, the team applauds this degree of curriculum innovation; it is also clear to the team that this is not an isolated initiative. Again through the Faculty of Visual Arts, the university has introduced, on a pilot basis, the concept of service learning. This form of experiential learning is designed to address community needs and is structured in a way to promote student learning and development. The example provided in the SER relates to second and third year students undertaking projects that are designed to improve the position of Romani groups and asylum seekers in Montenegro with a view to “raising the awareness of the population about the problems that these groups are facing”. This also highlights the extent to which reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service learning.
- 6.2 This type of experiential learning can be challenging and involve both logistical and methodological tensions. It is sensible, therefore, that service learning is being explored on a pilot basis and the team believes that this offers the university a valuable opportunity to evaluate precisely how it supports student learning and personal development, the potential for translating it to other subject disciplines and also how far it is possible to measure the benefits to the local and wider community. This pilot might also feed into the university’s response to new national requirements for 25% work experience/practice learning in programmes. The team also notes other tangible examples of service to society such as student-led legal advice centres which, as well as providing a source of expertise to the local community, are also a valuable support mechanism for students in terms of practice and the use of soft skills. And, perhaps understandably, the example of visual arts students painting/illustrating an area of 400 square metres in the Children’s Hospital is regarded by the university as a demonstration of the “true orientation of the institution towards social responsibility”. *The team agrees that this is a powerful symbol of the work being undertaken with local communities; and, as such, it should be regarded as an exemplar for other faculties.*
- 6.3 The university’s record of engagement with the local community and local organisations and businesses is clearly a matter of considerable pride within the university. And there is good evidence of a wide range of collaborations with external partners on mutually beneficial development projects. Stakeholders met by the team had a very positive view of the university and the competences of its current students and graduates. In the view of the team, there are real opportunities to make more of this activity with external audiences and the *UM website, regularly updated, should be used as an important tool for promulgating the wide variety work of the university; this should include research*

*and commercial activity and their related outcomes as well as examples of service to society.* The team was also advised of the plan to introduce a university journal and this should also aid the external understanding and visibility of the university.

- 6.5 The 2014 evaluation report notes that opportunities for lifelong learning were available in some faculties but that the potential arising from these opportunities was not being fully exploited by the university. There are some signs of progress in this area and the team notes that UM is licensed by the Ministry for Education for the delivery of adult education. This has seen particular benefits in relation to the tourism and hospitality industries, with the university undertaking the training of tourist guides, agency and tourist officials and hospitality related roles such as sommelier. This practical training has also supported those registered as unemployed in developing knowledge and skills that might support their transition back into work. *The team believes, however, that there is still considerable scope for further development in this area of life-long learning, perhaps supported by investment in a dedicated central co-ordinating office, and that it offers an important opportunity for income diversification.*

## 7. Internationalisation

- 7.1 In the university's international strategy 2017-2020, approved at the end of 2016, there is a section on the (then) existing state of internationalisation at UM and it is relatively self-critical. Amongst other things it concludes that international projects were dominated by education rather than research, that mobility, both incoming and outgoing, was less than satisfactory, that only one masters programme was being offered in English and that many of the established co-operation agreements with other universities were lacking in concrete activity. In many ways the goals set for internationalisation in the following three years are designed to make a significant adjustment to that position.
- 7.2 It perhaps took this strategy document to act as something of a mirror to the university community and for it to be openly acknowledged that there were many key areas of activity that required improvement. In some ways, this has been a challenge involving leadership and resources. The SER stresses the importance that was placed on establishing a clear and dedicated focus for international relations and this can be seen in the development of a Vice-Rector role for international co-operation. The creation of a team of three staff to manage the various practical aspects of internationalisation is part of the wider human resource response to the challenge. In addition, the Vice-Deans fulfil a bridging role between the faculties and the centre.
- 7.3 UM's international strategy is firmly rooted in its desire to be recognised in the European higher education and research area. It does, however, look to extend its links to countries outside that area and relationships with institutions in China, Russia and Turkey also feature prominently in UM's international activities. The university now has 30 signed bilateral international agreements, all of which are said to be active in terms of conferences, mobility agreements or educational workshops and seminars. The current international strategy presents one of the goals for the period 2017-2020 as "building larger partnership networks through cooperation with more universities from [the] Shanghai ranking list, but also with the universities from [the] region". However, the team is unclear as to how "larger partnership networks" is being calibrated; and, in a similar vein, what is the focus and decision-making process that results in the selection of an institution from the Shanghai list. The team recognises the university's desire to extend its international reach and it does not want to discourage this ambition; but it also believes that *such developments need a greater degree of specificity and prioritisation together with robust arrangements for the systemic monitoring of their effectiveness and likely future viability.*
- 7.4 Over recent years the university has made significant efforts to progress student and staff mobility - both outgoing and incoming. In discussion with the team, senior leaders indicated that the previous lack of success in this objective was partly due to a lack of familiarity at the university with the inner workings of the various mobility schemes available in the European space; and training sessions, organised by the Ministry of Education, were held at the university to support better staff understanding of mobility.

There is evidence that more students are taking advantage of study opportunities outside Montenegro; but interest across faculties is variable and there remains a need to promote the benefits of such experience in a more effective way. In the view of the team, *one way of achieving greater student buy-in to the concept of mobility might come from the university supporting the Student Parliament in developing links with like-minded organisations outside the country.* More broadly, the team endorses UM's plans to increase mobility numbers. This should include a better balance between incoming and outgoing staff and students and be framed by realistic targets.

- 7.5 On the university's home web page one of the key messages from the senior leadership team to prospective students relates to internationalisation. International cooperation is said to be "the special advantage of University Mediterranean". There are indeed many examples of such co-operation and the team is pleased to note that there is a real desire across the university to build on the current momentum. For example, the development of a dual/joint degree with an external partner in Hungary offers a model for future growth and the planned accreditation of programmes for delivery in English would offer significant potential for improved student recruitment. And on the strategic level the university's ambition to establish an American College can be regarded as a significant statement of its desire to be recognised in the wider international arena. It can also offer a way of developing internationalisation at home. The current international strategy has obviously supported these developments. However, this might be an opportune moment to refresh that strategy and ensure that the core ambitions and associated targets are made more visible both internally and externally.

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1 In the period since the last IEP evaluation the University Mediterranean's ownership and senior leadership team have shown not only their commitment to change but also their capacity to deliver a wide range of improvements to the running of the university. The team regards the implementation of most of the recommendations from the IEP visit in 2014 as testimony to that drive and determination.
- 8.2 At a point when external challenges continue to grow, the university needs to ensure that the momentum behind this enhancement agenda is maintained over the coming years. This will be a significant challenge but one that the team believes the university is capable of meeting; and central to this belief is the dynamic and positive organisational culture that is so much a feature of UM. The team finds an academic community that is at ease with itself, content in the relationships between faculties and central authorities, prepared to embrace innovation in teaching and learning, looking to grow its research footprint and engage with the real world through its practical curriculum and its positive relationships with its local communities. As mentioned earlier in this report, the team does want to alert the university to the potential negative impact of change in the future. The university should be aware of, and plan for mitigating, the potential dis-benefits that can arise through growth and the increasing reliance on its ownership for the necessary investment to support that growth.

### **Summary of the team's recommendations to the university**

1. It recommends that the university looks at ways of protecting and continuing to invest in its very positive organisational culture so that it is best placed to respond to those occasions when tangible differences of opinion can emerge on the back of major change.
2. It believes that there is a clear need for student representation to be shared with a larger group of officers than is currently the case and that this should be supported by enhanced training for those taking on such representative roles.
3. It recommends that central university support should be provided to the Student Parliament in developing its role in accordance with the Bologna Process.
4. The discourse on future direction and development should now be drawn to a final conclusion and a strategy document published and promulgated so that all parts of the organisation could see and share in its central principles and help deliver its key targets. Alongside this all other policy documents should be appropriately updated.
5. The student questionnaire should be expanded and answers offered at a greater level of granularity.
6. The forms of student feedback used by the university might be augmented by themed focus groups around topics such as e-learning and student mobility.

7. The university should highlight through “you said, we did” publicity campaigns the improvements being made to the student learning experience and the wider university environment.
8. The university should support the student body in its understanding of quality assurance as a continuous process leading to a strong quality culture.
9. The ambitions to expand research profile and further develop other areas of activity will require appropriate levels of internal scrutiny and rigorous and systemic quality assurance mechanisms should be implemented hand-in-hand with the growth of those activities.
10. It endorses the university’s intention to open a Career Development Centre that provides students with support in finding internship opportunities during their studies and in preparing for, and facilitating, employment following graduation.
11. The very positive relationships established between students and professors form a critical part of the student learning experience and the team regards it as imperative that this aspect of academic and organisational culture is sustained as the university grows in size and complexity.
12. It hopes that the production of UM’s research strategy can be expedited and, once agreed, can be shared widely within the academic community. The team also emphasises the need for research goals to be guided by SMART principles.
13. It encourages the university to reflect carefully on the policies and environmental factors that might lead to a thriving research culture and place these close to the centre of the soon to be realised UM research strategy.
14. It is critical that the university supports the development of a shared doctoral education culture involving common events and the sharing of experience across faculties through, for example, an annual PhD conference and regular research degree seminars.
15. Initiatives by visual arts students are a powerful symbol of the type of contribution that can make a real difference to local communities; and, as such, this should be regarded as an exemplar for other faculties.
16. The UM website, regularly updated, should be used as an important tool for promulgating the wide variety work of the university; this should include research activity and results as well as examples of service to society.
17. It believes that there is still considerable scope for further development in the area of life-long learning, perhaps supported by investment in a dedicated central co-ordinating office, and that it offers an important opportunity for income diversification.

18. The goal of developing a larger number of international agreements requires a greater degree of specificity and prioritisation together with robust arrangements for the systemic monitoring of their effectiveness and likely future viability.
19. It recommends that the university supports the Student Parliament in developing links with like-minded organisations outside the country as a way of encouraging greater student buy-in to the concept of mobility.