

State University of Tetovo

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the State University of Tetovo, Macedonia. The 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

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. 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 IEP 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 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.

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

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.

- 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 State University of Tetovo's profile

The State University of Tetovo is a public university, and the first university in the Republic of Macedonia to offer education in the Albanian language. The State University of Tetovo was established in 1994 by the Albanian-speaking population of Republic of Macedonia, and operated for its first 10 years as a non-recognised institution without legal status or state funding, making use of private homes as venues for teaching. The university attained the status of a recognised public university in 2004.

Since then, the university has undergone a considerable process of maturation and consolidation, which is a remarkable achievement considering the difficult circumstances faced by the university, particularly in the initial period. The State University of Tetovo matches the local and regional cultural, social and economic concerns and makes a statement on behalf of its constituent community, the Albanian-speaking population in Macedonia. The university is supported by its stakeholders, staff and students, who are committed to the university and its goals. The team notes with appreciation the growing aspiration of the university to enhance its research orientation, while maintaining teaching as a core focus. The university endorses the concept of an integrated university which, the team was told, was the first of its kind in Macedonia.

The State University of Tetovo is a multidisciplinary university, oriented towards educating the teachers and professionals required by the Albanian-speaking population in the Republic of Macedonia, who previously had few avenues of education available to them in their own language. Many of the study programmes offered by the university have a teacher training specialisation and a professional specialisation. The university has 65 accredited programmes in the first cycle, 40 in the second cycle and seven in the third cycle. Some of the accredited programmes have not admitted students in the current year, due to insufficient interest. Of the first cycle programmes, 49 are currently functioning while 16 are not. In the second cycle, 27 programmes are functioning while 13 are not; and in the third cycle, four programmes are functioning, while three are currently not being offered. The university caters for over 10,000 students, of whom approximately 1 700 are studying in the university's dispersed study units in five locations around the country: Skopje, Kicevo, Struga, Debar and Kumanovo.

The team notes that the university is embedded in the changing higher education environment, which has profound implications for teaching and research in higher education institutions globally. Apart from wider trends such as globalisation and technological development, which all institutions have to manage, the State University of Tetovo faces specific external constraints in its operational environment. It contains elements of instability which, as the IEP team was led to understand, included the numerous changes in national

higher education practices, policies and laws in the past decade, often due to changes in the government.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the university's evaluation committee, chaired by the Vice-Rector for International Relations, Professor Arbër Çeliku from the Faculty of Philology, and comprising the following staff and student representatives:

- Dr. Shpresa Memishi, Faculty of Physical Education
- Dr. Fatbardha Ismaili, Faculty of Law
- Dr. Festim Halili, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics
- Dr. Sheherzada Murati, Faculty of Economics
- Ms. Sheruze Osmani Ballazhi, Faculty of Philosophy
- Ms. Bledina Isaku, student at the Faculty of Law
- Mr. Besmir Bexheti, student at the Faculty of Physical Education
- Mr. Agron Fazlija, student at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

The self-evaluation report and its appendices contained a large amount of information about various aspects of the university, including its goals, governance and organisational structures, quality assurance mechanisms, teaching and learning, internationalisation, as well as other activities.

The self-evaluation report of the State University of Tetovo, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team on 21 April 2017. The visits of the evaluation team to the university took place on 10-12 May 2017 and 2-5 October 2017, respectively. In between the visits, the university provided the evaluation team with some valuable additional documentation pertaining to the university organisation, programmes and quality assurance mechanisms.

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

- Jürgen Kohler, former Rector, Greifswald University, Germany, team chair
- Jean-Dominique Vassalli, former Rector, University of Geneva, Switzerland
- Simona Lache, Vice-Rector, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- Joosep Raudsepp, student, Tallinn University, Estonia (1st visit);
- Ian McCready, student, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland (2nd visit)
- Terhi Nokkala, senior researcher, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, team coordinator

During the two visits the team engaged in numerous useful and enlightening discussions with the university leadership, administrative professionals, academic staff and students, as well as external stakeholders, to gain an understanding of the goals, aspirations and practices of the university.

The team would like to express its wholehearted thanks to the Rector of the State University of Tetovo, Professor Dr. Vullnet Ameti and his team for the warm reception and candid discussions throughout the two visits and the entire evaluation process.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 What is the institution trying to do?

In the self-evaluation report, the university defines its vision and mission as follows:

“The vision of State University of Tetova is to realise the contemporary national ideals and values in education, science and culture for the development and prosperity of future generations.

The University mission is to create and advance learning, skills, knowledge, academic and professional competencies that will result in changes in society, both nationally and internationally.”

It is a fair description of a mission of a higher education institution. However, there is little in the formulation of the mission that could indicate any specific profile of the State University of Tetovo.

2.2 How is the institution trying to do it?

Decision-making bodies

The highest decision-making body of the university is the senate, chaired by the rector and comprising two elected representatives from each of the faculties, as well as three student representatives. Another significant decision-making body is the rectorate council which comprises vice-rectors, deans and the head of administration. The current rector, Professor Vullnet Ameti, was elected for his second four-year term in summer 2017. The rector’s selection is carried out in three stages. The faculties nominate candidates from whom the rectorate council elects the top two candidates, from whom the senate votes to elect the rector.

While formally the senate is the highest decision-making body, it seems to the team that the rector has a very significant role in steering the direction of the university. Formally his authority is executed through his role as the chair of the senate, but also through the rectorate council.

The university is currently in the process of drafting and approving a strategy document. In addition to the strategy document, to be approved by the senate, the team understood that another important document steering the strategic direction of the university is the rector’s programme, drawn up by the rectoral candidates when standing for election. The team was told that the programme drawn up by the current rector for his first term in office was fully implemented. The programme can therefore be seen to inform the strategic direction of the university, at least until a strategy document is formally approved.

Organisational structure

The university currently comprises 13 faculties: Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Faculty of Philosophy; Faculty of Pedagogy; Faculty of Philology; Faculty of Arts; Faculty of Physical Culture; Faculty of Law; Faculty of Economics; Faculty of Applied Sciences; Faculty of Food Technology and Nutrition; Faculty of Medical Sciences; Faculty of Business Administration; and Faculty of Agriculture and Biotechnology. Two of these, the Faculty of Pedagogy and the Faculty of Agriculture and Biotechnology, have only been in existence since the academic year 2016-2017, and they are still in the process of organising themselves. This current structure represents a significant increase compared to the situation in 2004, when the university was first accredited with four faculties (Mathematics and Natural Sciences; Human Sciences and Arts, Economics; and Law), as well as the Centre for Polytechnic Studies. The team understood that the university is planning to introduce another two faculties. Additionally, the university has an Institute of Ecology and Technology, a collaborative venture with the Universities of Tirana and Prishtina, focusing on providing training and conducting research on the ecology of the Sharr Mountain. Furthermore, there is an International Seminar of Albanology.

Finances

The university receives approximately 50% of its funding through the state budget, while the remaining 50% comes from student fees. Only a small proportion of funding is generated from other sources, such as research grants or services provided for businesses. The team understands that the Republic of Macedonia does not have significant national competitive research funding schemes. The university has acquired some small-scale research funding through sources such as the Erasmus+ programme.

The team learned that the part of the budget that comes from the state is tightly regulated, while the university has more autonomy in deciding how to use the self-generated funds. The state decides on quotas for both state-funded study places as well as for the number of students that the university can accept overall. All students pay fees, but the students on state-funded quotas pay less as part of their fee is subsidised by the state. The high school graduates with better grades can enrol in the state funded quota, whereas students who have not achieved such high marks in high school are self-funded.

Staff salaries constitute the greatest expenditure for the university. The university uses self-generated funds to both supplement the salaries for state-funded academic staff, as well as to hire additional academic staff to improve the student-staff ratio.

The faculties do not have an independent budget; all funding allocation is decided upon at central level by the senate.

Human resources

The team understood that the university has limited capacity to decide on the number of their state-funded staff. The process of opening new posts is as follows: when a faculty wants to establish a new position, the decision is debated by the rectorate council and the senate; if approved by the senate, it is passed on to the Ministry of Education and Science. After approval of the new position by the Ministry of Education and Science, the final decision on allocating the necessary funds for the position is made by the Ministry of Finance.

The team understands that the university has an overall shortage of teaching staff, especially full professors. The team was told that the university receives only 60% of the salary for state-funded staff from the state budget, and uses self-generated funds to provide the remaining 40%. The university considers this to be a major obstacle, as it means that they use a significant amount of self-generated funds to cover basic teaching needs, instead of being able to invest in research and other activities. In cases where the ministries do not approve establishing a position, the university may have to hire contract staff to take on the teaching load. Contract staff are called part-time staff, although they may be contracted to teach a course on an hourly basis or may work full days. The university covers their costs entirely from self-generated funds. The part-time staff may also work in several institutions at the same time.

Full time academic staff members are appointed for a five-year term; after this, the position is declared open again and anyone who qualifies may apply. The team understood, however, that typically the staff members retain their posts in the reselection.

Academic staff spend their time primarily on teaching, with the teaching time varying between 8 and 12 hours per week, and additionally teachers have compulsory consultation hours for students. Research output is expected in order to be reselected for a post, or to advance in their career. To be able to teach in second and third cycles, academic staff must be personally accredited by the national authorities. The team was not able to establish a clear understanding about the real possibility of staff to engage in research and to advance in their academic career.

2.3 How does the institution know it works?

The university has conducted one round of self-evaluation covering elements such as student satisfaction surveys on teacher performance, communication and functioning of administrative services. The university has established a self-evaluation guide to help the faculties assess their own work and activities. The university is obliged by law to evaluate its own activities every three years. The university also collects data on research performance through a database in which staff are expected to report on their research output.

2.4 How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team would like to highlight the following strengths regarding governance and management at the university:

- The team observes that the staff seem to be very committed to the university, many having chosen to return after completing their doctoral degree at other universities in the Republic of Macedonia and abroad. They have a very strong sense of community and responsibility towards the university, as they feel the need to provide education and research in the Albanian language.
- The university has a scholarship scheme by which they give their best graduates a scholarship to complete a Master's or doctoral degree at a foreign university, with the expectation that they will then return to work at the State University of Tetovo upon completing their degree abroad.
- The university strives to cater towards the strengths of the region, such as agriculture and construction industries. It has, for example, tailored some analysis services, which it provides for companies operating in these fields in the region.

At the same time, however, the team feels that the university governance has certain weaknesses:

- It was unclear to the team how the university objectives translate into organisational strategy and actual management practices. Action plans which are sufficiently concrete following the SMART principle (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, time-bound) need to be developed and communicated.
- The team sees that there is a risk of compartmentalisation, both in view of the extensive number of faculties currently and more so when considering the university's desire to introduce further faculties. In effect, there is a risk of limited practice of cross-faculty collaboration.
- The university's development seems to be characterised by a short-term strategy aiming at managing day-to-day challenges and taking up activities which promise short-term return. The university, therefore in practice follows an opportunity and necessity driven approach.

In order to help the university improve its governance and management capacity, the team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university's consideration:

- Elaborate a distinct profile for the university, and communicate it via the university's statements on vision and mission, which will help the institution to become recognised in the region and beyond. The team therefore recommends that the university defines strategic objectives for itself, and puts in place a tangible, specific, measurable action plan and requisite resources to implement the strategy.
- In view of the faculty structure, the team recommends that the university avoids compartmentalisation and enhances transversal collaboration between faculties.

The team recommends the university to reconsider its organisational setup in order to support, from an organisational perspective, its endeavours to identify, define, and implement its future goals and to present a clearer picture as to what defines the core competencies of the university. The university might also consider reducing the number of faculties to enhance collaboration and reduce the level of organisational complexity. In that context, the university may, in particular, need to reflect on the most suitable organisational mode for running teacher training programmes.

- The team also encourages the university to further embed its strategy and activities in the region, not only as the region is now, but as it will develop in the future. The university could and should, for example, take initiative to bring together different stakeholders to kick-start a discussion on the strategic development of the region, and how to best position and - as a consequence - brand the institution vis-à-vis the regional needs. This should also encompass discussions with other higher education institutions in the region on how to improve cooperation, be it in terms of active collaboration or other approaches such as job-sharing.
- In the long term, and within the remit of existing regulations, the university should consider whether the internal decision-making bodies and their responsibilities are in line with the requirements of institutional governance and management, and are fit-for purpose for addressing change.
- In the short term, the team recommends that the university improve the capacity for strategic thinking in the rectorate council.
- Finally, the team recommends that the university strengthen the professionalism of the administration and secure both the administration's de facto capacity and its inclusion in the university's planning, decision-making, and quality processes.

3. Quality culture

3.1 What is the institution trying to do?

According to national legislation, the university's study programmes need to be accredited every four years. The process of accreditation requires the university to submit extensive paperwork regarding the curriculum as well as numerical input indicators to the national accreditation and evaluation council. The council appoints a specific commission to check the material circumstances and assess whether it seems feasible for the university to provide the given programme. Based on this assessment and the paperwork, the accreditation is granted. In case accreditation is denied, the team understood that there is no specific appeal process but that the university can reapply for accreditation.

The team understands that the national quality assurance system is by nature summative rather than formative and there was minimal communication of the reasons for decisions.

In addition, the university is required to conduct a self-evaluation exercise every three years. The university's self-evaluation report notes its intentions in terms of internal quality assurance, stating that the "continuous evaluation of the teaching process, implementation of curricula and goals of the study programs" is one of the university's goals.

3.2 How is the institution trying to do it?

The university has established a quality office to oversee the assessment and enhancement of quality at the institutional level. The university also has a quality assurance committee, chaired by the vice-rector for international affairs, and comprising representatives from the different faculties as well as of the students. Similarly, each faculty has its own quality assurance committee comprising staff and students. The university has also developed guidelines for self-evaluation to be carried out by the faculties, which cover the mission of the faculties, study programmes, academic staff, teaching and research activities as well as the structure and functions of the administrative services.

3.3 How does the institution know it works?

The university has conducted a university-wide self-evaluation, including a widely distributed student survey pertaining to teacher performance, communication and administrative services in 2013-2014. As a result of this questionnaire, the university decided to implement a more focused teacher performance questionnaire, which has also been completed by the students once, though the university intends to make it an annual exercise. The university is currently in the process of revising a more comprehensive survey to cover other activities. Teachers' performance is also evaluated when members of staff seek re-election or promotion.

3.4 How does the institution change in order to improve?

While the university has strengths regarding its quality culture, the team also identified some weaknesses.

Strengths

- Continuous evaluation and improvement of quality are recognised as strategic aims of the university.
- The university has put in place the necessary structures to monitor and develop its quality, namely the quality assurance office and the institutional and faculty quality assurance committees.
- The university has conducted the self-evaluation process once, analysed the results and made a decision to implement some changes for the next self-evaluation round.

Weaknesses

- It seems to the team that the university's quality concept focuses on trying to match given standards for curricula or professional requirements. In that respect, it can be said that the university's quality concept is benchmark-driven. While this is a valid approach, there is, however, little awareness of a 'fitness-of/for purpose' concept. This concept first defines and validates the programme objectives comprehensively, i.e. (1) the overarching educational, (2) the (Bologna) system-related, and (3) the institutional-profile related aspects of the programme in question. Subsequently, this concept seeks to identify and validate teaching and learning tools (i.e. admission, curricula and competences/learning outcomes, teaching/learning modes and assessment, staff and material resources) with regard to their aptness to accomplish the afore-mentioned programme-related objectives.
- The institutional quality concept appears to be lacking a tool to evaluate the study programme as a holistic experience over the student life cycle, i.e. by assessing admission, programme articulation and progression, tutoring, student support in all its facets (e.g. advisory, social, psychological, career-oriented), examination practices.
- The team was not able to identify a clear ex-ante approach to quality in terms of the curriculum planning and programme offer, i.e. an approach which sees quality not predominantly as a matter of checking whilst a study programme is being run, but rather as a process used to define and implement quality features at the stage of programme planning and programme launch.
- With regards to student surveys, students were not always aware of the changes resulting from the feedback they had given.

The team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university to consider with regards to quality culture:

- The team recommends that the university consider quality not only in terms of reaching set standards by means of benchmarking, but also in terms of addressing fitness of and for purpose, and design its quality concept to match this (additional) approach. This includes using quality assurance as an ex-ante element in designing future study programmes, not only as an ex-post measure to assess performance when the programmes are already running, as pointed out above.
- Furthermore, the team recommends that the university consider streamlining the multiple questionnaires into one system, repeated at relevant intervals, and covering the entire programme cycle, including viability, admission policy, curriculum validity, assessment operations as well as graduate and employer satisfaction.
- The university is, furthermore, encouraged to enhance the communication of improvements resulting from student surveys.
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4. Teaching and learning

4.1 What is the institution trying to do?

From the documentation received and the discussions with university representatives, the team concludes that offering high quality education geared towards the needs of the Albanian-speaking community in the Republic of Macedonia and beyond is the university's most important aspiration. This is further expanded by the elaboration of the educational mission in the self-evaluation report, which states the following goals pertaining to teaching and learning:

- “establishment and development of necessary study programs for the society and the market in the country and beyond;
- development of infrastructure in accordance with the aims and nature of study programs;
- stimulation and fostering academic, teaching and scientific achievements and freedom of students and professors;
- cultivation of ethical values, equality, integrity, tolerance and social responsibility, with the aim of training students to be active participating citizens in a multicultural society.”

The team understands that the university feels it needs to offer a broad spectrum of study programmes because the Albanian community needs professionals such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and so forth. At the same time, many study programmes have two specialisations: an educational specialisation which prepares teachers, and a professional specialisation, which is orientated to the rest of the labour market.

4.2 How is the institution trying to do it?

The educational offer at the State University of Tetovo focuses specifically on first cycle degrees. The student numbers in second and third cycle programmes are low, partially due to having a limited number of staff that are accredited to teach in second cycle degree programmes or who supervise doctoral theses.

As previously noted, the overall quota of study places for each programme is set by the Ministry of Education and Science. The team was told that the university is sometimes given a bigger quota than it would like to have on the account of teacher resources which the university is obliged to fill, or vice versa, leading to a mismatch of planning and resources.

The quality of high school graduates causes some concern for the university. The team learned that all high school graduates have a right to enrol in higher education and universities may not select its entrants. However, the dropout rates are low (only about 2.7% during the academic years 2013/14 and 2015/16). The team was also told that the university graduates are in great demand in the labour market. Due to the need to serve the Albanian-speaking community and labour markets in the Republic of Macedonia, the university has to

some extent tailored its courses to meet the local labour market demands. The university has also established a career service for students.

The university places a lot of emphasis on providing the students with education that offers practical application and employability in the labour market. Research, as an educational objective, is mainly considered to be of relevance only for the highest achieving students, who are integrated into research projects.

The team was told that the students can choose 10% of their courses as electives from other faculties, but the team was not able to ascertain the extent to which advantage is taken of this option. Some cross-faculty cooperation is in evidence, for example, the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics provides compulsory teaching in basic sciences for programmes in medicine, applied sciences or economics.

Part of the university's approach to providing education to the Albanian-speaking population in the Republic of Macedonia is to offer dispersed studies in five locations around Macedonia: Skopje, Kicevo, Struga, Debar, Kumanovo. However, the number of students in these dispersed study programmes has declined from nearly 3300 in 2014-2015 to a little over 1700 in 2016-2017, which has led the university to reduce the offer of dispersed studies.

The university has made significant investments in its teaching and learning infrastructure in recent years by, for example, building a new sports hall, laboratory and information technology facilities, and a new main building with wireless internet connection available. The university has made plans to build a central library, student cafeteria and a dormitory.

4.3 How does the institution know it works?

The university monitors the students' satisfaction of teacher performance through feedback questionnaires. These have so far been implemented once, but the team understands that this is intended to be implemented as a biannual questionnaire in the future.

4.4 How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team observed the following strengths pertaining to teaching and learning activities of the university.

- The university's educational offer is geared towards the labour market needs of the Albanian-speaking community, and it contains a strong commitment to offering programmes that are relevant for society and the market, and emphasises the employability of its graduates by focusing on practical skills and hands-on experience.
- The university's mission with regards to teaching and learning also emphasises the development of active citizenship in a multicultural society, which the university supports, for example, by encouraging students' outreach activities and participation in the region's cultural life, and by inviting international scholars to give lectures at the university.

- The team observed close and supportive relations between students and staff in the university. This enables an easy, fast route for students and staff to communicate and address any cause for concern regarding teaching and learning.

The team similarly observed some scope for further improvement:

- The approach to competence development used by the university focuses on imparting knowledge, while activating students in the transfer and transformation of knowledge seems less developed. The team was not clear to what extent creating an inquisitive mind (a 'research capacity/competence') through engaging in research-type activities was part of the university's teaching approach toward all students.
- In terms of teaching methods, there seems to be a preference for traditional lecturing with a tendency towards curriculum overload (at least in the three-year programmes), and the student-staff ratio is critical in some fields. The staffing situation is also otherwise unstable, and the proportion of part-time contract staff is high.
- According to students' comments, the team understands – while not having had the opportunity to verify – that curricula may be overloaded in some cases through a higher number of contact hours. However, the team suggests that the move to four-year programmes is taken by the university as an opportunity to address the balance between contact hours and self-study periods.
- The shortage of up-to-date laboratory facilities is a cause for concern in some fields. Internships may help mitigate this, but they are not in themselves a sufficient or substitute for providing adequate in-house facilities.
- The team understands that the students perceive some deficiencies in the quality assurance of internships.
- The team was not able to ascertain whether the assessment practices are robust nor whether they are subject to bias.
- While students may consult teachers with their concerns related to particular courses, there is a limited counselling and consultation system in place to meet students' overall counselling needs. The university used to have a tutoring system in place, but the team learned that it had been discontinued due to lack of funding.
- There is no pedagogical training available for staff at the university.

To remedy these weaknesses, the team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university to consider:

- Reflect on the definition of educational objectives against the broader European debates (e.g. in addition to societal relevance/employability and entrepreneurship, other elements such as creating a research mind, making provision for personal development, education for democratic citizenship). This would enable the university to make an informed judgement on the direction of programme learning

outcomes and student competencies, thus addressing the “quality question” more holistically.

- Reconsider the educational process not so much from an input perspective but instead focus on outcome perspectives, augmenting the competence approach currently focused on transmission of knowledge from teacher to students with an approach that also pays attention to students’ capacity to gain, transfer and transform knowledge. This can be done both in class and through internships. Similarly, the team recommends that the university implements a teaching philosophy that values the personal growth of students, such as transferable skills, self-esteem, respect of others, and enables students to continue a self-learning process throughout life (enhancing personal development, education for democratic citizenship).
- Reconsider teaching methods to integrate the targeted development of a “research mind” into the teaching/learning experience right from the start (e.g. by strengthening the Socratic method and problem-based learning - see below).
- Implement more student-centred methods such as blended learning, flipped classroom, e-learning and problem-based learning, as well as embedding student-led initiatives to education, which would help students to develop a more holistic set of competencies.
- Encourage modularity and interdisciplinarity in studies, both in order to open up study experience to cross-sectoral issues and as a means for saving resources.
- Tune the university’s educational offer to the available resources, which may help the university to make the most of its limited resources. In doing so, it is worth developing a regular valid exchange and a robust process together with the labour market, with the aim of exploring what constitutes employability.
- Consider introducing bridging courses to close the skills gap among high school graduates and to ensure that they have the prerequisite skills to study at the university.
- Furthermore, the team suggests that the university considers the quality provision of internships from the perspective of the learning processes. Internships should be integrated into the learning outcomes concept and should be covered by a robust quality assurance system.
- The team proposes that the university explores ways to make use of information technology to simulate some of the laboratory experiences.
- To remedy the lack of holistic counselling and consultation services, the university might consider introducing a “buddy” system, whereby older students help and support younger students, and receive credits for this. This could be a cost-effective way to impart some of the tacit knowledge inherent in studying at the university. It also fosters team spirit and provides a learning experience for older and younger students alike.

- The team invites the university to implement a scheme to provide university pedagogical training to teachers, especially with a view towards enhancing student-centred, competence-oriented learning and blended learning.

5. Research

5.1 What is the institution trying to do?

Increasing the research activity, improving the essential facilities for conducting research and producing research that brings added value to the region and companies that operate within it are some of the strategic priorities of the university. This notion is supported by the university's self-evaluation report, in which the university states "stimulation of scientific teachers and students research activity (by supporting the publication of scientific journals, conferences, books and various scientific projects)" as one of its essential goals.

5.2 How is the institution trying to do it?

The University of Tetovo is largely a teaching oriented institution, which is gradually expanding its research activities. There is a sense of growing research aspiration, which – as the team heard – was akin to a "new spirit emanating from the rectorate".

The most significant research activities are related to organising large disciplinary research conferences and publishing their proceedings in journals coordinated in-house. The team understands that individuals are largely free to determine their own research interests, but are limited by the lack of research facilities. Therefore, theoretical topics are favoured over empirical research, at least in infrastructure-intensive fields. The research task is further complicated by large teaching loads and by limited time or budget available for research. However, providing research outputs is a precondition for advancing in one's academic career. The academic staff have largely completed their own doctoral degrees abroad, for example at the universities of Prishtina and Tirana.

The team understands that the ability of the university to offer third cycle degrees is limited by the shortage of staff members who are accredited to supervise doctoral students. The team also understands that there is a national quality policy impacting on the third cycle degrees, whereby only those universities that are ranked amongst the top five institutions in the country, in a ranking conducted by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University on the request of the Macedonian government, are allowed to confer third cycle degrees. The State University of Tetovo is not amongst these top five institutions. The university perceives the ranking process to be non-transparent and as being based on criteria not fit to assess research capacity in a fair way in the Macedonian context.

In cases where the university's own laboratory resources are insufficient, staff make use of laboratories in other universities. They may have to compensate those universities by paying a fee or by including researchers from those universities as co-authors of research papers. The team was also informed of some instances where international research collaborations had enabled staff to access research facilities in other universities without cost.

5.3 How does the institution know it works?

The university has recently established a database in which academic staff members are expected, twice a year, to report their research outcomes and ongoing research projects. The team was not informed as to how the university uses the collected information in an extensive way, i.e. beyond using it as basic evidence for activities in the context of defining labour contract prolongation and terms by, for instance, using it to inform staff development or research support schemes.

5.4 How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team perceives that the university exhibits the following strengths in terms of research.

- Research has been recognised as a strategic priority for the university, and the university aims to expand its research activities in the future.
- The university has started to provide the necessary laboratories for advancing research activity.
- The university has established an office for research support. It is currently engaged primarily with helping faculties organise conferences, publish journals and translate research papers into English, but its mandate could be expanded to other research support functions.
- Some international research collaborations have enabled university staff to make use of facilities in other institutions or gain their doctoral degrees abroad as part of the collaborative project.
- The collaborative venture of the Institute for Ecology and Technology represents a good example of research that makes sound use of the regional strengths and helps increase the profile of the university in the region and beyond.

The team would like to point out, however, also some weaknesses in terms of the university's research function and activities.

- It seems to the team that research activity in the university is primarily individually driven rather than by a strategic choice of the university or its faculties. The university does not have an expressed institution-wide concept of what the university's key research areas are, and on which areas the university could focus in enhancing the research orientation.
- The limited availability of sufficient infrastructure is a challenge especially for natural and applied sciences as well as medicine, both in terms of teaching and research functions.
- The team did not find significant evidence of in-house interdisciplinary cooperation in research, although there are some areas where this might be relevant and feasible.

The team would like to present the following considerations for the university.

- Consider adopting an institutional strategy for identifying potential centres of excellence and research focuses, and for allocating the required resources for them, while preserving the freedom of individually driven research.
- In order to support research activity, the team advises the university to strengthen strategic networks with companies, as well as domestic and international universities.
- Similarly, the university could consider making a conscious effort to support the emergence of interdisciplinary research efforts to enable bigger gains in scientific activity.

6. Service to society

6.1 What is the institution trying to do?

The team concludes from the many helpful and enlightening conversations during the two visits that service to society underpins most of the university's strategy, both in terms of teaching and learning activities as well as research activities. In the self-evaluation report, the university states that "supporting highly successful students to develop their academic and professional careers" is one of the university's key goals.

6.2 How is the institution trying to do it?

The university has recently established two central administration offices that pertain to service to society. The career centre helps the university graduates to find jobs after graduation, while the business centre liaises with the local employers to facilitate funding of student internships, to organise joint events and gather funding for research conferences.

The team understands that the university is in the process of putting in place a commission to chart the labour market needs in terms of outreach and lifelong learning. The team was told that the establishment of lifelong learning programmes has been slowed down by the national drive to provide lifelong education to the unemployed through Bachelor degree programmes.

The university's technology transfer and outreach focus on providing analysis services to local and regional companies in the field of construction, food technology and biomechanics. This also generates some income for the university.

6.3 How does the institution know it works?

The business centre and the career centre act as links between the university and society, conveying information from the business community to the university and thus enabling it to develop its educational, research and service offer to better meet the regional needs.

6.4 How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team would like to point out the following strengths and weaknesses in terms of the university's outreach and service to society activities.

Strengths

- The university is clearly supported by the local community as well as the wider Albanian-speaking region.
- The university has taken steps to tailor its outreach and business services to the regional strength areas such as construction business and agriculture. The university, for example, offers analysis service to construction industry and the food processing

industry. Similarly, the biomechanics laboratory at the Faculty of Physical Culture has been used by local companies operating in related fields.

- The university has an aspiration to explore what “service to society” might entail in all its complexity. The university is in the process of establishing a committee to survey the local labour market needs and market for outreach activities.
- Students find internships in local organisations and are supported by the university’s career and business offices in establishing these links.

Weaknesses

- The university is not tracking its graduate employment or the employee satisfaction in a holistic, sustainable way.
- The university’s strategy pertaining to offering lifelong learning education is in an embryonic stage.
- The limited university facilities impinge on the university’s possibilities to expand on the analysis services directed at local companies.

In order to build on the university’s strengths and to remedy the weaknesses, the team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university’s consideration:

- Implement a survey to track the employment situation of university graduates, as well as employers’ perceptions on the quality of the graduates, which may help the university to establish a better picture of the needs of the local labour markets.
- The team urges the university to focus on adequate fact finding and market research to explore the needs of the market for service to society and lifelong learning.
- The university might also consider bringing the different society-facing offices such as the career centre and the business centre under one roof, to provide easy access to those interested in collaborating with the university.

7. Internationalisation

7.1 What is the institution trying to do?

In the self-evaluation report, the university's aspirations pertaining to internationalisation are voiced as follows: "International cooperation is one of the elements towards which the University is oriented for the purpose of pursuing European and global trends that will lead to academic cooperation, where the exchange of experiences will contribute to the development of science and innovation. [...] The University focuses on the internationalization of the teaching and research-scientific activities, the professionalization of administrative staff".

7.2 How is the institution trying to do it?

The internationalisation pertaining to the education function of the university manifests itself primarily in terms of student mobility. The university is engaged in two mobility programmes offering longer-term mobility options, the Erasmus+ programme and the Turkish exchange programme Mevlana. Jointly, these two programmes offer approximately 40 students per year the possibility to spend one or two semesters abroad. Additionally, the university has some bilateral agreements with universities in the Balkan region, Italy and outside Europe for example with Northern Illinois University in the USA, which facilitate short-term mobility of approximately two weeks. The team was told that there is a growing trend amongst students to pursue a mobility period abroad, and that the university's mobility opportunities are oversubscribed. The team understood, however, that the university is limited in terms of how many exchange places are allocated to the university by the national authorities.

The university's internationalisation at home activities are supported by the university receiving international degree students primarily from the other Albanian-speaking communities in Albania and Kosovo. Internationalisation at home is similarly facilitated by short-term visits of international scholars.

The university has an international office that coordinates exchange programmes and organises information events in the faculties to inform students about mobility opportunities.

In terms of a more strategic approach, the team was told of an emerging collaboration aiming at establishing a more strategic partnership between the Universities of Tetovo, Tirana and Prishtina.

The team understands that participating in some international projects, funded for example through Tempus and DAAD, has been significant for the university in that those projects have allowed the university to acquire some research infrastructure, use other universities' facilities at no cost, and to send some of their students to study for a second or third cycle degree abroad.

7.3 How does the institution know it works?

The international office compiles statistics about the scale of international incoming and outgoing mobility. Additionally, all faculties have an ECTS coordinator whose tasks include informing students about mobility opportunities and to approve credits completed during a mobility period.

7.4 How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team recognised the following strengths and weaknesses pertaining to internationalisation at the State University of Tetovo.

Strengths

- The university is engaged in emerging regional cooperation and has taken the first steps to institutionalise a more strategic approach.
- The university has established the basic structures that facilitate student mobility. It has signed a number of collaboration agreements, established an international office as well as assigned the faculty ECTS coordinators with the task of advising students and recognising credits completed abroad.
- The students met by the team spoke English well, and many were interested in studying abroad for a period.
- The university has introduced a scholarship scheme through which excellent graduates are supported to enrol in next cycle programmes in international universities, with the understanding that they must return to work at the State University of Tetovo after completing their studies. This team considers this a commendable practice and prudent staff development.

Weaknesses

- The university's internationalisation concept is oriented towards individual mobility, and the team finds the broader strategic approach to be largely missing. Furthermore, the mobility opportunities are limited, and the internationalisation at home is underdeveloped.
- It is the perception of the team that some students may be uncertain as to whether courses taken abroad are always recognised.
- There is a large variation in terms of staff members' skills in the English language.

Finally, the team would like to suggest the following recommendations for the university:

- The university might consider establishing a strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be measurable and achievable, and the

team invites the university to draft an action plan to chart the way for achieving such priorities.

- The team also encourages the university to ensure that adequate processes and guidelines – in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention – are in place to ensure smooth recognition of credits completed abroad, and inform students about these arrangements.
- Develop a teaching facility to support both students and staff in enhancing their language skills in a professional setting, which would support the university's internationalisation capacity.

8. Conclusion

The team appreciates the useful role which the State University of Tetovo has played, and is playing, for regional development in its area, and in particular for furthering higher educational opportunities for the Albanian-speaking community. The university is serving the community mainly by its role as an educator. However, it also strives to be a facilitator for advancing regional business and employment, especially by means of playing a supportive service role to the community and by moving forward, mainly and rightly so, in areas of applied research. All these positive developments have taken place in circumstances which have not always been seen as favourable for the university. Having succeeded in these roles more and more successfully over the last 25 years, the State University of Tetovo has come a long way. The team believes it has the capacity to continue along the aforesaid paths of teaching and regional development in the years to come.

Nonetheless there are a number of issues which the team believes could be developed further in order to enhance the quality of the learning processes and to increase effectiveness in areas of regional development through applied research and local cooperation. The team also believes that accomplishing these objectives requires the State University of Tetovo to sharpen and fine-tune its leadership and governance set-up and management processes, as well as its quality development and quality assurance policies and practices.

It is in this light that the team is making its recommendations as summarised below, drawing on the findings described in this report.

Finally, the team would like to take this opportunity to thank the State University of Tetovo once again for its welcoming, open, and constructive attitude during the evaluation, and to wish the university success in achieving its goals.

Summary of the recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

- Elaborate a distinct profile for the university, and communicate it via the university's statements on vision and mission, which will help the institution to become recognised in the region and beyond. The team therefore recommends that the university defines strategic objectives for itself, and puts in place a tangible, specific, measurable action plan and requisite resources to implement the strategy.
- In view of the faculty structure, the team recommends that the university avoids compartmentalisation and enhances transversal collaboration between faculties. The team recommends the university to reconsider its organisational setup in order to support, from an organisational perspective, its endeavours to identify, define, and implement its future goals and to present a clearer picture as to what defines the core competencies of the university. The university might consider reducing the

number of faculties to enhance collaboration and to reduce organisational complexity. In that context, the university may, in particular, need to reflect on the most suitable organisational mode for running teacher training programmes.

- The team also encourages the university to further embed its strategy and activities in the region, not only as the region is now, but as it will develop in the future. The university could and should, for example, take initiative to bring different stakeholders together to kick-start a discussion on the strategic development of the region, and how to best position and, as a consequence, brand the institution vis-à-vis the regional needs. This should also encompass discussions with other higher education institutions in the region on how to improve cooperation, be it in terms of active collaboration or other approaches such as job-sharing.
- In the long term, and within the remit of existing regulations, the university should consider whether the internal decision-making bodies and their responsibilities are in line with the requirements of institutional governance and management, and are fit-for-purpose for addressing change.
- In the short term, the team recommends that the university improve the capacity for strategic thinking in the rectorate council.
- Finally, the team recommends that the university strengthen professionalism of the administration and secure both the administration's de facto capacity and its inclusion in the university's planning, decision-making, and quality processes.

Quality culture

- The team recommends that the university consider quality not only in terms of reaching set standards by means of benchmarking, but also in terms of addressing fitness of and for purpose, and design its quality concept to match this (additional) approach. This includes using quality assurance as an ex-ante element in designing future study programmes, not only as an ex-post measure to assess performance when the programmes are already running.
- Furthermore, the team recommends that the university consider streamlining the multiple questionnaires into one system, repeated at relevant intervals, and covering the entire programme cycle, including viability, admission policy, curriculum validity, assessment operations as well as graduate and employer satisfaction.
- The university is, furthermore, encouraged to enhance the communication of the improvements resulting from student surveys.

Teaching and learning

- Reflect on the definition of educational objectives against the broader European debates (e.g. in addition to societal relevance/employability and entrepreneurship, other elements such as creating a research mind, making provision for personal development, education for democratic citizenship). This would enable the university to make an informed judgement on the direction of programme learning

outcomes and student competencies, thus addressing the “quality question” more holistically.

- Reconsider the educational process not so much from an input perspective but instead focus on outcome perspectives, augmenting the competence approach currently focused on transmission of knowledge from teacher to students with an approach that also pays attention to students’ capacity to gain, transfer and transform knowledge. This can be done both in class and through internships. Similarly, the team recommends that the university implements a teaching philosophy that values the personal growth of students, such as transferable skills, self-esteem, respect of others, and enables students to carry on a self-learning process throughout life (enhancing personal development, education for democratic citizenship).
- Reconsider teaching methods to integrate the targeted development of a “research mind” into the teaching/learning experience right from the start (e.g. by strengthening the Socratic method and problem-based learning).
- Implementing more student-centred methods such as blended learning, flipped classroom, e-learning and problem-based learning, as well as embedding student-led initiatives to education, which would help students to develop a more holistic set of competencies.
- Encourage modularity and interdisciplinarity in studies, both in order to open up study experience to cross-sectoral issues and as a means for saving resources.
- Tune the university’s educational offer to the available resources may help the university to make the most of the limited resources. In doing so, it is worth developing a regular valid exchange and a robust process together with the labour market, with the aim of exploring what constitutes employability.
- Consider introducing bridging courses to close the skills gap among high school graduates and to ensure that they have the prerequisite skills to study at the university.
- Furthermore, the team suggests that the university considers the quality provision of internships from the perspective of the learning processes. Internships should be integrated into the learning outcomes concept and covered by a robust quality assurance system.
- The team proposes that the university explores ways to make use of information technology to simulate some of the laboratory experiences.
- To remedy the lack of holistic counselling and consultation services, the university might consider introducing a “buddy” system, whereby older students help and support younger students, and receive credits for this. This could be a cost-effective way to impart some of the tacit knowledge inherent in studying at the university. It also fosters team spirit and provides a learning experience for older and younger students alike.

- The team invites the university to implement a scheme to provide university pedagogical training to teachers, especially with a view towards enhancing student-centred, competence-oriented learning and blended learning.

Research

- Consider adopting an institutional strategy for identifying potential centres of excellence and research focuses, and for allocating the required resources for them, while preserving the freedom of individually driven research.
- In order to support research activity, the team advises the university to strengthen strategic networks with companies, as well as domestic and international universities.
- Similarly, the university could consider making a conscious effort to support the emergence of interdisciplinary research efforts to enable bigger gains in scientific activity.

Service to society

- Implement a survey to track the employment situation of university graduates, as well as their employers' perceptions on the quality of the graduates, which may help the university to establish a better picture of the needs of the local labour markets.
- The team urges the university to focus on adequate fact finding and market research to explore the needs of the market for service to society and lifelong learning.
- The university might also consider bringing the different society-facing offices such as the career centre and the business centre under one roof, to provide easy access to those interested in collaborating with the university.

Internationalisation

- The university might consider establishing a strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be measurable and achievable; and the team invites the university to also draft an action plan to chart the way for achieving such priorities.
- The team also encourages the university to ensure that adequate processes and guidelines – in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention – are in place to ensure smooth recognition of credits completed abroad, and inform students about these arrangements.
- Develop a teaching facility to support both students and staff in enhancing their language skills in a professional setting, which would support the university's internationalisation capacity.