



Report of the re-accreditation of the *VERN' University of Applied Sciences*

Zagreb

11/12 April 2011

Composition of the expert panel

Pursuant to Article 22 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education and Article 30 Paragraph 1 Item 4 of the Statute of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, the Accreditation Council of the Agency for Science and Higher Education at its 12th session on 11 January 2011 passed the decision to appoint a panel of experts for re-accreditation of VERN' University of Applied Sciences, as follows:

1. **Dr. iur. Kerstin Berberich** (FH Joanneum, University of Applied Sciences, Graz) – chair
2. **Prof. Rainer Stachuletz** (Berlin School of Economic and Law; State Bank of Vietnam) – member
3. **dr. sc. Vlado Brkanić** (RRiF College of Financial Management) – member
4. **dr. sc. Ambroz Čivljak** (American College of Management and Technology Dubrovnik) – member
5. **Đeni Paskojević**, student (American College of Management and Technology Dubrovnik) - member

Content

Introduction.....4

 Short description of the evaluated institution.....4

 Description of the expert panel's work.....6

Detailed analysis based on standards and criteria for the re-accreditation.....7

 Institutional Management and Quality Assurance.....7

 Study Programmes.....9

 Students.....11

 Teaching staff.....13

 Scientific and Professional Activity.....15

 International Cooperation and Mobility.....16

 Resources: Administration, Space, Equipment and Finances.....17

Final report and recommendations by the expert panel.....19

 Advantages.....19

 Disadvantages.....19

 Recommendations for improvement of quality20

INTRODUCTION

Short description of the evaluated institution

In 1990 VERN' was founded as a foreign schools agent in Croatia, in 1994 VERN' introduced one-year vocational programmes based on the accreditation for the former associate degree (5th degree according to the previous classification) and in 2000 VERN' d.o.o. founded the Accredited Entrepreneurial Economics College (predecessor in interest of today's VERN' University of Applied Sciences) on the basis of the accreditation granted by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia for a two-year vocational programme Entrepreneurial Economics (associate degree – 6th degree according to the previous classification). The curriculum was evaluated at the international level by the Finnish University of Vaasa expert team the same year.

In 2001 VERN' was one of the first institutions in Croatian higher education sector to introduce the Bologna model. In 2002 the Champions of Entrepreneurship Project was realized under Tempus Project in cooperation with the University of Vaasa, Finland, ISTUD, Italy, University of Zadar and Entrepreneurship Centre of the Zadar County in order to promote curriculum development and contribute to the entrepreneurial education in the region.

The year 2005 was marked by a significant “quantum leap” towards a new organizational level and curriculum development. Business IT, a new undergraduate study, was introduced together with three specialist graduate professional studies: Entrepreneurial Management, Business Communications Management and Accounting and Finance. The number of enrolled students was close to a thousand.

In 2007 the Accredited Entrepreneurial Economics College grew into the VERN' University of Applied Sciences, the first Croatian polytechnic oriented towards business education and strongly focused on the development of entrepreneurial mindset. New organizational standards were set simultaneously with teaching standards. VERN' opened new premises at Importanne Gallery with modern multimedia classrooms, library, staff room and student canteen.

In 2009 VERN' led the first successful concentration project in the higher education sector. Zagreb School of Management, dedicated to the education of managers in the tourism and hospitality industry, joined the VERN' Group. It thus contributed to VERN's

portfolio of strategically selected curricula (entrepreneurship, IT, communications, finance and tourism). Integration of the Zagreb School of Management was carried out in three phases within a three-year period. In spring of 2011 the Zagreb School of Management was fully integrated into the VERN' University of Applied Sciences and ceased to exist as a legal entity.

Today VERN' is a medium-sized higher education institution offering seven study programmes at two education levels – undergraduate and graduate along with an international MBA programme:

- Undergraduate study programmes: Entrepreneurial Economics, Business IT and Tourism and Hospitality Management (carried out by the Zagreb School of Management, member of the VERN' Group).
- Graduate study programmes: Entrepreneurial Management, Business Communications Management, Accounting and Finance and Sustainable Tourism Development (carried out by the Zagreb School of Management, member of the VERN' Group).
- Further academic advancement is offered in the form of an international MBA programme in cooperation with the United Business Institutes, Brussels,

There are 2200 students, 200 teachers and 1800 alumni. The University's premises comprising modern teaching and administrative units now stretch to over 6000 square metres in the Zagreb city centre.

Description of the expert panel's work

The expert panel has, in line with the document Procedure for Re-accreditation of higher education institutions, analysed the self-analysis document drafted by VERN' University of Applied Sciences, and visited the institution on 11th and 12th April 2011.

During the site-visit the members of the panel had separate meetings with the management, teachers, assistants, students, representatives of various committees and other staff and students as well as the panel did a tour of facilities (e.g. lecture rooms, libraries) in line with the previously defined Visit Protocol. These meetings gave the panel members a direct insight into activities and work conditions at VERN'.

During the site-visit, the experts were also presented with additional sources of information:

Sources of additional information

- *'VERN' 2020 – Strategic Framework for Development 2010 – 2020'*
- *Documents regulating VERN's acquisition of ZSM*
- *Statutes of both institutions (VERN' and ZSM)*
- *VERN' Rules of procedure*
- *Regulation on professional and scientific education and training of VERN' teachers*
- *The Code of Ethics + the Code of conduct (House Rules)*
- *Regulation on undergraduate professional studies (VERN)*
- *Regulation on professional studies (ZSM)*
- *Regulation of study at specialist graduate professional studies*
- *Instructions for writing seminar works*
- *Instructions for writing graduation thesis*
- *Instructions for writing specialist graduate professional thesis*
- *Regulation of studying/study draft*
- *Guidelines for writing professional practice report*
- *Confirmation on completed professional practice*
- *Agreement on the confidentiality of data*
- *Acceptance of a student for professional practice form*
- *Guidelines for writing the final report*
- *Decision on establishment of VERN' Council*
- *Rules of Procedure of the VERN' Council*

- *University of Applied Sciences VERN' - Quality Policy*
- *Quality manual according to ISO 9001-2008*
- *Work plan of the Office for QA*
- *Work plan of VERN' Academy*
- *Plan of activities for research and development*
- *Tempus project 'Champions of Entrepreneurship' documentation*
- *Striver project documentation*
- *Promotional materials*
- *Study programmes and licences for conducting study programmes*
- *International evaluation of study programmes*
- *The Extended ERASMUS University Charter*
- *Agreements on academic cooperation*

DETAILED ANALYSIS BASED ON STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR THE RE-ACCREDITATION

1. Institutional Management and Quality Assurance

- 1.1. The institution did not put emphasis on systematic strategic planning in the past. However, in year 2010, the document for strategic development "*VERN' 2020 – Strategic Framework for Development 2010 – 2020*" was finalized. It is not publically published and for internal use only. However, it does not contain specified timetable of activities per year. Recent appointment of the Vice-dean for Research and the Vice-dean for International Relations and Lifelong Learning is in line with the institution's current strategic thinking.

The strategic goal of becoming a university in 2020 (cp. "*VERN' 2020 – Strategic Framework for Development 2010 – 2020*", p12) was discussed in the final session with management and owner. The discussion revealed some possible misunderstandings of the management of preconditions and possibilities of realizing that goal and of existing possibilities by having reached it.

- 1.2. The institution has developed effective organizational structures and processes in two separate sub-systems, academic and operational. It has formalized them in its legal documents. This is mostly implemented.

The management structure comprises three constituent parts: administrative, business and academic. The students participate in the academic segment through their representatives with the Academic Council and are actively dealing with the issues related to extra-curricular activities through the operational sub-system, i.e. Communications Department. Cooperation with employers is

organized e.g. through the Advisory Board (strategy, social environment) (cf. self-evaluation report pp8-9).

- 1.3. VERN' was one of the first institutions in Croatia that aligned its study programmes according to the Bologna principles. Study programmes offered by the institution are mostly in line with its mission (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report pp39-41, 54-55).

Room for improvement lies e.g. in further ameliorating the set-up of programmes, also in a formal sense, for international mobility.

- 1.4. The institution is dedicated to development of the quality culture and the effective mechanisms of quality assurance, such as student questionnaires and the assessment of teachers by mentors/evaluators (peer-review) that are regularly implemented (cf. self-evaluation report pp14-17). Room for improvement lies e.g. within the quality assurance circle as far as the involvement of the organizational side and of the employer's and alumni feedback is concerned as well as within the enforcement of research and development projects according to its programmes offered.
- 1.5. For the past six years the University has conducted internal and external audits aimed at determining possible non-compliance with quality management standards in accordance with ISO 9001. There is an electronic quality assurance manual (cf. self-evaluation report pp14-17). Probably the type and quality of teaching materials can be involved in a quality circle in the future (cf. self-evaluation report p141).
- 1.6. Formal rules for the high level of ethical conduct have been established in the VERN' Code of Ethics (House Rules, defining the rights and responsibilities of the students, teaching staff, employees and associates and determining inappropriate types of behaviour) and in the Study Agreement that each student gets at the beginning of his/her studies. The institution takes care, that all relevant groups adhere to it. Besides, the course Business Ethics is part of the obligatory curriculum for most of the study programmes (cf. self-evaluation report pp159-160).

2. Study Programmes

- 2.1. Although the proposed enrolment quotas seem to be very high (90% of overall number of applicants enrol), the pass rate with the entrance examination required for admission (before the state graduation exam was introduced), was 77%. The average pass rate in the first year of undergraduate studies is around 80%, with small variations with regard to different studies and student generations, the target lies with a pass rate of 95%, reached by means of additional support (cf. self-evaluation report pp44-45). Work in small groups assures the quality of teaching. Having in mind the high employability of graduates (cf. self-evaluation report "Table 3.2 VERN' Alumni Employability", p130, and pp40-43) the quotas seem to be justified by the needs of society. The institution has excellent resources. However, as far as teaching is concerned, more theory in teaching may be helpful for qualifying for more and better problem solving in professional life.
- 2.2. The institution has regulations for review and recognition of prior learning and qualifications fully established (e.g. type of exams in the syllabi, survey of regular attendance).
- 2.3. Referring to the self-analysis report such learning outcomes are defined at the level of a study programme (cf. self-evaluation report pp42-47, 98). The evaluation process and content quality could be improved. The same is for the level of the courses within the course syllabi.
- 2.4. The full range of learning is being assessed according to the information obtained and the syllabi regarded. Written exams are normally in two parts. The students with low attendance (below 50%) are automatically banned from taking the first part of the exam, and those whose attendance is below cannot sit for final exam (cf. self-evaluation report pp42-47, 98).
- 2.5. The modular ECTS grading scale has been introduced, although the allocation of ECTS does not reflect the realistic estimate of student workload, due to the fact that all courses have the same number of ECTS (cf. self-evaluation report pp66, 69-70, 98).
- 2.6. Teachers use case studies from international business practice in teaching. Student reading lists include foreign titles, and a number of foreign textbooks have been translated into Croatian. Four study programmes (two undergraduate and two graduates) have been evaluated by the University of Vaasa. The "Entrepreneurial Economics Programme" made part in a TEMPUS project, 2003-2005 (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report pp35-37, 41).
- 2.7. Teaching in small groups with active involvement of students. Interactive and practice based classes. Methodology workshops (didactic-methodological content, psychological, i.e. communicational) are organized once a year for the new teachers. Internal-use Guideline for Interactive Classes is provided for all teachers.
Teachers provide large amount of materials to their students, such as case

studies, student readers, etc. which is appropriate to the nature of the material being learned. Feed-back from students regarding teaching strategies in student surveys. There are practical and field classes including an “academic” mentor (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report pp41, 54, 72). Room for improvement lies e.g. in empirical scientific methods for bachelor and master thesis as well as in e-learning.

- 2.8. Students have access to electronic databases (e.g. Web of Science) and journals. However, library sources are quite poor (small number of books in the own library for an institution of such size).
- 2.9. According to the self-evaluation report (cp. pp61/62) the matrices of all study programmes comprise, as a compulsory subject, professional or specialist practice taking place at the practice providing companies. The practice duration depends on the study programme and the estimates of the study programme authors; it varies from one to three months. The students are partly helped to find an internship. The possibilities offered to go abroad for internship could be improved.
- 2.10. The Programme Evaluation Committee, chaired by the head of studies, is responsible for implementing the mechanisms for reviewing and monitoring all aspects of study programme activities. Comparisons with similar foreign studies and professional associations are other sources of suggestions for modifications to the programmes. A four-step formal procedure (cp. self-evaluation report, pp53,72). However, the owner has large influence regarding the question of study programmes. “New study programmes will be introduced in the course of our own development, through partnerships or acquisitions of other higher education institutions” (cf. self-evaluation report, p68).

3. Students

- 3.1. A Communications Office is responsible for providing information to potential students about study programmes: It is distributed e.g. via advertising campaigns in the media, on-site information, design and distribution of printed materials, participation in fairs intended for target groups, open days, internet (websites, Facebook...), and intranet (EduNeta). On the web-site some information in English language is missing, like syllabus content for the majority of programmes. Information on possibilities on further employment and education could be expanded (cf. self-evaluation report, pp110-115).
- 3.2. There are three ways of admission: 1) own entrance examination, that encompasses several tests, an interview and high-school GPA (before state matura was introduced), 2) the state matura exam, and 3) switching from another institution. In the last five years 77% of candidates on average have passed the entrance examination. The percentage of students from other institutions has significantly increased in 2010/11 up to 20%. Yet, the impression is that the admission process is not fully transparent, at least the information on it could be more precise (cf. self-evaluation report, pp44, 108-109).
- 3.3. The competencies of applicants are evaluated in the admission process by the general competency test (all undergraduate studies), the general knowledge (all undergraduate studies) and the motivation interview (all undergraduate studies), in addition, there are more specific tests for specific programmes and the high school GPA is calculated (cf. self-evaluation report, p108). There is a low drop-out rate (expectation is 15%, cf. self-evaluation report, p110) and high rate of employability as indicators.
- 3.4. The institution supports students in extra-curricular activities, particularly in sports (both recreational and competitive level), cultural activities mainly are "outsourced" (cf. self-evaluation report, p103).
- 3.5. Mentorship is offered to students in writing their thesis. Two mentors are involved in an internship/practice in specific programmes: a teacher from the ZSM (academic mentor), and an employee working at the organization providing the practice. Other mentorships for supporting the students in their studies are mentioned. As far as professional orientation is concerned, VERN' has started using the Strengths Finder System of the Gallup Institute (cf. self-evaluation report, pp62-63, 125-127). Room for improvement is expected to be found with offering additional possibilities for personal development.
- 3.6. There are regular exams and electronically offered feed-back for each course at the end of a semester, after the first written exam. The participation of the students is about 50%. Complaints can be made (cf. self-evaluation report, pp 116-120; 127). Room for improvement lies within reducing the number of examination sessions (cf. self-evaluation report, p117).

- 3.7. The institution maintains the contact with their alumni by inviting them to business events, lectures and other gatherings. In 2005 VERN' started an alumni portal on which they can communicate and exchange information. VERN' made its own survey regarding the employability of their alumni, and gets statistics from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics. The unemployment rate of alumni is very low (cf. self-evaluation report, pp123, 127-128, 130). This may be due to the fact that many students come from a family entrepreneurial environment and that many of them do return there after their studies (cf. self-evaluation report, pp44, 175).

The possibilities for networking between 'finished' and 'current' students should be broadened (e.g. although some contact details of the alumni can be found at the portal, along with information on their career development, they are not complete, and the search can be done only if you already know the name of an alumnus).

- 3.8. The students participate in its decision-making processes by having three student representatives in the Academic Council. There is at least one spokesman in each "class".

Different opinions regarding the student involvement in the decision-making were voiced during the site-visit (e.g. some students complained about not being informed in time for the changes in size of study groups, which is different from what was written in their study agreements). Room for improvement is expected to be found in offering a more transparent system for the input and the result in transforming ideas of students in specific actions.

- 3.9. The institution regularly organizes conferences, media campaigns (e.g. public promotion of the professional title of Bachelor), open door days three times per year, etc (cf. self-evaluation report, pp110-115) and runs a communication office.
- 3.10. The students can express their opinions for improvements, but it is not very transparent if/what measures are being implemented (also cf. no 3.8).

4. Teaching staff

- 4.1. The University of Applied Sciences has 45 full-time teachers appointed into some of the teaching grades: one college professor, five senior lecturers, and 39 lecturers. In addition to them, some classes (seminars and exercises) are also held by 9 employed persons appointed to the associate grade of assistant. Permanently employed teachers currently hold over 60% of the total classes in all study programmes at VERN'. The remaining classes are held by external associates. Out of the total number (103), fifty-three of them hold some of the teaching grades, while the others participate in classes as visiting professors or teaching assistants. They are accountable for elective courses or highly specialised professional courses that require specific professional and practical knowledge, i.e. lecturers who have expertise and experience from practice. Based on the data/documents reviewed it can be concluded that the number and qualifications of the teachers are partly in line with strategic goals of the institution and adequately cover core disciplines.

To conclude, there is a sufficient number of teachers (permanently employed staff and external associates), but the number of permanently employed teachers with PhD is much below the standard (only two!), especially having in mind the strategic plan of the institution to become a university. Teacher/student ratio is within legal criteria.

- 4.2. Teacher Employment Dynamics from the table 4.4 shows that VERN' systematically invests in the development of its staff regarding the teaching component, but not regarding the scientific component (table 4.1 Staff Structure). Thus, more emphasis should be put on the development of human resources. The number of full-time teaching staff with doctorate is too low. Currently, in these difficult economic times, VERN' wants to hold the number of students. Therefore the expert panel considers that the institution partly carries out the policy of growth and development of human resources, especially taking into account potential retirements (table 4.4) and sustainability of the study programmes (table with the size of student groups, table showing lectures – exercises ratio, p130 – 131 of the self-analysis).
- 4.3. The number of full-time teachers is in accordance with the law (legal minimum is 30% of workload done by full-time teachers; the state of the art at VERN' is at least 50% (cf. self-evaluation report, pp 133).

During the site-visit there was a positive feedback concerning this issue given by both teachers and students of VERN. However, more teachers with higher scientific teaching grades would certainly affect teaching and learning quality.

- 4.4. Maintaining high teacher/student ratio and lectures mainly in small groups of students (around 20-25 students) is one of VERN's major competitive advantages (also cf. no. 4.2 and no. 4.3).
- 4.5. VERN' regularly offers professional support to its teachers and external associates in the form of workshops, seminars, and other activities. New teachers

must attend a workshop on teaching and didactic methods lasting 50 hours. Training of teacher mentors-evaluators is organised occasionally. They are also encouraged to attend conferences and seminars abroad, as well as to pursue their own studies at postgraduate level. In this regard, financial support from the institution and flexible timetable of teaching prove to be very stimulatory. As far as the non-teaching staff is concerned, a written policy was not existent. However, IT-staff, e.g. was assumed to be on the current state of the art. Room for improvement may be found in defining the correspondent policy for the non-teaching staff.

- 4.6. Although there is no clear procedure for teacher advancement (apart from following national legal framework regarding the appointment into teaching grades), the teachers are free to pursue their doctoral studies if/when they choose. The institution shows high level of flexibility in this regard.
- 4.7. Distribution of teachers' workload includes teaching, mentorship and student consultations. According to table 4.2 over 60% of the workload is carried out by permanently employed teachers, and a bit less than 40% by external associates. This ratio varies according to the respective study programme, and study programmes that have been 'added' to the institution's curriculum last are in least favourable position.

There is no further information on a defined policy of teacher's workload in the self-evaluation report. There are peer reviews twice a year.

- 4.8. Basically, external commitments of are considered positive, as long as they not challenge the meeting of the agreed upon obligations at VERN. For holding classes at another institution of higher education, consent has to be given by VERN' (cf. self-evaluation report, pp 133). Exempted from this procedure are external associates. Further the feedback by students in the form of student questionnaires is a valuable tool when considering whether the teachers are committed to their teaching tasks.

5. Scientific and Professional Activity

- 5.1. The institution has created a strategic document '*VERN' 2020 - Strategic Framework for Development 2010 - 2020*' (VERN' 2020). Research is mentioned there as a goal (cf. p17), although the level of scientific research is not elaborated more in depth. A Vice-dean for Science has recently been appointed. VERN' staff publishes their papers in international and domestic journals, but they publish mostly in non-cited, i.e. professional journals, collections of papers or international conference proceedings.

Within the self-evaluation report it is referred to some relevant projects (e.g. enhancement of the library premises as own logistic centre of professional and scientific and research work of the teachers, as well as further work on its qualitative and quantitative improvements; encouragement of international and national research projects (p.154)). A formally adopted policy towards scientific research activities is not visible.

As planned professional activities the organization of conferences, symposiums and other professional gatherings in cooperation with academic and business partners in Croatia and abroad can be mentioned. The implementation of an Advisory Council (cf. VERN' 2020 p28) enhances the contact to a high level professional field. Although this does not refer mainly to research goals it is in line with its vision and its mission (cf. VERN' 2020 p11).

- 5.2. People from business sector teach at the institution. The Advisory Council may enhance efficient operation of professional and research activities in the future.
- 5.3. There is no research agenda visible.
- 5.4. The study programmes of the institution comprise, as a compulsory subject, professional or specialist practice taking place at the practice providing companies. This practice is monitored. Also conferences, symposiums and other professional gatherings are organized in cooperation with business partners in Croatia and abroad.

6. International Cooperation and Mobility

- 6.1. Up to now only a very small number of students made their practice abroad. But supportive structure has been introduced (e.g. changes in the curricula) so that the new students will have an opportunity to spend their sixth semester of undergraduate studies abroad (cf. self-evaluation report pp173-174, 183, 191). Also the institution as has applied for the Extended Erasmus University Charter.
- 6.2. Although teachers participate in international conferences and use the acquired knowledge in practice, mobility of teachers at this time is at a low level. The Extended Erasmus University Charter will hopefully provide conditions to enhance international mobility of both staff and students.
- 6.3. In 2009 the University became a full member of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD). It is also member of EURHODIP – the Leading Hotel Schools in Europe and of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) (cf. self-evaluation report pp182-183).
- 6.4. The institution attracts mainly students from the region. At the moment, there are no courses in English offered, but the teachers attended a workshop organised by VERN' on how to teach in English which is a step in positive direction. Further the institution has as already mentioned - applied for the Extended Erasmus University Charter.
- 6.5. Teachers have already participated in smaller Grundtvig projects on individual basis (contact seminars, workshops, etc.). Prior to Croatia's participation in the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, VERN' was the initiator of the project 'Champions of Entrepreneurship' within the TEMPUS programme of the European Commission (cf. self-evaluation report pp183-184).
- 6.6. There are several bilateral agreements signed with international partners: E.g. an international MBA programme is offered in cooperation with the United Business Institutes, Brussels (UBI). VERN' also has formal cooperation with the Upper Austria University of Applied Sciences of Steyr as well as continuous cooperation with the University of Vaasa, Finland (cf. self-evaluation report pp173-182)

7. Resources: Administration, Space, Equipment and Finances

- 7.1. Conditions of studying in principle are good: This refers e.g. for classrooms and equipment (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report "Table Overview of Equipment per Classroom", pp196, 198-199). In only some cases these conditions are below students' expectations: This refers mainly to putting several student groups together, resulting in large number of students per group (which is opposite from what the students has been used to). Another area calling for improvement is insufficient library resources.
- 7.2. N/A
- 7.3. The institution provides the equipment and technical support for its students as well as for its administration (cf. also 7.1, self-evaluation report pp199-201).
- 7.4. The institution collects academic feedback about courses, but there is no organised procedure regarding feedback on these resources. Although students have intranet on their disposal, there is no mail-box and sometimes no reaction on student pledges (e.g. some students have not been informed about the merging process). In general students mentioned that they mainly indicate deficits directly to their teachers and they organize relevant support.
- 7.5. The institution itself has an inadequate library, but students have access to other libraries: e.g. the National Library, University library and the Institute for Tourism library (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report pp202-203, 210). The institution provides access to the Centre for Online Databases (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report p204).
- 7.6. According to the recent data, the institution has 32 permanent employees in administrative, technical and auxiliary services and it makes use of services of 156 external associates. Thus, the number of administrative, technical and auxiliary staff with other quantifiable parameters show the following ratios (cf. e.g. self-evaluation report pp195-198):
- In relation to the number of employed professors and associates 1: 1.75.
 - In relation to the number of students 1: 68.75.
 - In relation to the premises used for teaching 1: 125 m².
- As the regular strategic planning has only started recently there is no connexion regarding this aspect in it. But obviously, it meets the current requirements. Another explanation to explain this ratio is not given.
- 7.7. The management of the institution is very well aware and realistic of the current economic situation: Currently it focuses on maintaining the number of students. Expenses currently are covered mainly from scholarships. Financial stability depends on the VERN' Group, which owns all study programmes and the VERN' University of Applied Sciences.

Further relationships between the VERN' Group and the VERN' University of Applied Sciences are not transparent, at least there is no information in the self-evaluation report. Thus, conditions related to financing are not transparent because of the private ownership. Information given in the self-evaluation report

does not give evidence of certainty that students will graduate from their programmes.

However, VERN' is supposed to be financially sustainable: VERN' is a brand, one of the leading universities in entrepreneurship in Croatia, and many students enrol each year. Nevertheless, running expenses are very high, and in case the income out of student fees is reduced, the institution may not be able to cover these expenses (equipment, space, maintenance, etc.). But the management sets activities for further income resources, e.g. the VERN' Academy has been founded.

FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXPERT PANEL FOR THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

Advantages

In the last 20 years the institution has made great qualitative progress in defining and conducting study programmes. High employability of graduates supports validity of VERN's mission. It is a leading university of applied sciences in Croatia.

Among its strengths the management and the clear and efficient organisational structure is to be mentioned: The management obviously takes care on modern buildings, sufficient space and modern equipment (resources).

Also the salary of teachers is clear above the average, especially compared to the situation at public institutions. And as the selection process for the employment of teachers is of a certain quality and external associates are offered methodology workshops, this combination of resources delivers high satisfaction of the students and obviously of the employers, too.

Disadvantages

Nevertheless, room for improvement is left:

- As far as research is concerned, there is relatively low activity. And against the future strategic plan of the institution becoming a university, this makes this circumstance even worse.
- As far as the existing teaching structure is concerned, there is only one per cent of doctors of science in teaching (only two doctors of science). However, the commission was told that 20 teachers are doing their PhDs at the moment (this was not verified by the commission).
- The scientific qualification of the teachers is in line with building more theoretical knowledge into study programmes besides working with case studies. This would enable students to improve their decision making quality: They could better analyse a situation and probably make more adequate decisions in business.

- More research of teachers and students in the future, also in international projects should be strived for.
- Consequently the research infrastructure should be improved: Current investments into the library have not been sufficient, and VERN' should make more effort in the future to equip the library that would match the institution's anticipated educational level.
- A higher international mobility of students and staff should be strived for.
- A more specific allocation of the ECTS in accordance with international standards for the different types of lectures is essential.
- Transparency on the implementation of students' proposals for improvements is missing.
- Alumni activities and the quality of the feed-back of alumni on their professional progress and on other branch relevant information could be enhanced as well as the networking between alumni and students.

Recommendations for improvement of quality

- To achieve a higher international mobility within staff and students, the following measures can be helpful:
 - More lectures in English, especially in the master programmes.
 - To allocate more specific the ECTS in accordance with international standards for the different types of lectures (this is essential anyway).
 - To apply for international research projects
 - To facilitate employed teaching staff to make their doctoral degree abroad.
 This also enhances the international research possibilities.
- Investments in the library and research infrastructure should be made. More research qualifications could be implemented into the lectures.
- A higher transparency of the implementation of students' proposals for improvements could be installed via intranet.
- A more regular, frequent feed-back of the alumni could be achieved by implementing relevant questionnaires in the intranet. There could be more events organized exclusively for students and alumni to enhance the networking.

Additional documents

1. Visit protocol of VERN' University of Applied Sciences, Zagreb
2. Filled in form for the estimation of quality