

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED SOCIAL STUDIES IN NOVA GORICA

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica. The evaluation took place during two visits: 21-23 October 2014 and 2-4 February 2015.-

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 Profile of the School of Advanced Social Studies

The School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica (SASS) was established in 2006 by members of a private research institute, the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research (INTEA). It began as a private non-profit higher education institution in the academic year 2007-2008 when the school enrolled its first student cohorts. Its “not for profit” status is a requirement of national law pertaining to private higher education. Three of its original four founder members remain active as teachers and researchers at the school. The school is located in

the Goriška region of western Slovenia, near to the Italian border. Although the prime location of SASS is in Nova Gorica, a town with a population of around 13,000 inhabitants, it also has study programmes in Ljubljana and in Novo Mesto, though new enrolments for undergraduates in Novo Mesto was discontinued for the 2014-15 academic year. Enrolments for Masters level may be retained if there is sufficient demand.

According to Slovenian higher education law, as a private non-profit higher education institution, SASS is independent and has full autonomy in financial matters and human resource management affairs, and also for its teaching and research profiles. The school is also able to set its own governance and management structures. It is therefore responsible for its own self-government and for the implementation of its own strategies, policies, and development plans. All study programmes are required to be accredited by the national Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency (SQAA), though for funding purposes only two programmes (the BA Applied Social Studies and the MA Intercultural Management) are state-funded under state concession arrangements, with the remainder being delivered on a tuition fees-only basis. Doctoral programmes cannot be funded by the state in private HEIs.

At a national level, Slovenia has been a signatory to the Bologna Declaration since 1999. This prompted the higher education reforms of 2004 which introduced new requirements for higher education studies to conform with Bologna guidelines for a three-cycle structure. This provides the framework under which all higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to function. Today, there are four public HEIs in Slovenia (three universities and one faculty), one private university and 51 independent private faculties, of which one is the School of Advanced Social Studies. This number of HEIs increases the level of competition for students and places pressure on the viability of private HEIs.

1.3 The evaluation process

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the first visit, a 23-page self-evaluation report (SER) of the school was sent to the evaluation team. The SER provided information on the school's institutional context, mission and vision, academic profile, and governance and management arrangements. It made reference to the four key IEP questions. The SER included a SWOT analysis and was accompanied by 12 pages of appendices which included institutional data, an organisation chart, information on funding, an executive summary of the school's current strategic plan (2011-2015), and information on student and staff numbers. The SER, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in September 2014. This was followed at the time of the visit by an updated (language corrected) version of the SER of similar length to the previous version. The team also received a revised organogram together with a diagram showing all senior administrative and academic leadership positions and functions. For its second visit, the IEP team requested some clarifications, and additional information and documentation regarding governance and strategic planning, learning and teaching, research, quality assurance, service to society, and internationalisation. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were not fully reflected in the SER. This additional information was provided six weeks in

advance of the second visit and covered the issues identified by the IEP team in a helpful manner.

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a five-person self-evaluation team appointed by the dean. The team was chaired by the Secretary General of SASS, Dr Tamara Besednjak Valič, and included representation from amongst academic and administrative staff and the student body. The SER was principally the product of collaboration amongst the members of the self-evaluation team itself. This was supplemented by consultation with the Commission for Quality and Evaluation, the Students' Council and some limited discussion across the institution. The IEP team greatly appreciated the work carried out on preparing the SER and the accompanying documentation, and found them to be of great assistance in enabling them to carry out their mission. The team members were warmly and openly received at all levels of the academic community. However, from meetings with staff and students it became apparent that while there was a reasonable awareness of the broad nature and purposes of the IEP team's visit to the school, there was scope for wider involvement in and engagement with the self-evaluation process, particularly from the academic departments of SASS.

In its review of the SER the team formed the view that good progress had been made by the self-evaluation team in working towards a self-critical assessment of the various areas covered in the report, including the identification of weaknesses. However, while it provided a helpful basis for the IEP team to undertake their review activities, and contained useful information and data, some details and information required by the team on key areas of SASS structures, policies, procedures and operation remained absent from the SER, or was unclear, and this formed the basis of the team's request for further clarification or additional information. This being said, receipt of the additional information and the helpful discussions and open dialogue with the school during the two visits greatly assisted the IEP team in their deliberations.

1.4 The evaluation team

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

- Tatjana Volkova, former Rector, BA School of Business and Finance, Latvia, team chair
- Georg Schulz, former Rector, University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz, Austria
- Anca Margineanu, ESU Student Experts Pool, Romania
- Jethro Newton, Professor Emeritus, University of Chester, UK, team coordinator.

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the SASS Dean, Professor Matej Makarovič, for the welcome and hospitality provided during their two visits. Special thanks are also offered by the IEP team to the SASS IEP liaison person and Secretary General, Dr Tamara Besednjak Valič, for her work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process and for her kind support throughout.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Vision, mission, and general context

The SASS vision is to attain a position as the best social science research institute in Slovenia and, within ten years, to be one of the leading European centres in selected social science fields, with sought-after graduates in these fields of expertise. The team noted that, in accordance with this vision, the school's mission is to be an innovative centre for social science expertise and to encourage the transfer of intellectual knowledge to regional, national, European, and global contexts. Linked to this is the desire to contribute to conditions necessary for the development of a society based on openness, freedom, and prosperity. The values underpinning the school's organisational culture are identified in the SER and other institutional documentation as truth, freedom, autonomy, responsibility, excellence, creativity, and trust.

During discussions with senior managers and with SASS founders, the team took the opportunity to explore further a number of matters relating to vision and mission. The team learned that the senior management and governing bodies of SASS are determined to enhance teaching quality and to attract the best students, and also to achieve the best possible outcomes nationally in research ratings and published outputs. Here, the IEP team formed the view that, in future, SASS will need to give careful consideration to its identity as a higher education institution, particularly with reference to achieving the optimum balance between the emphasis placed on teaching, and that placed on research. The team learned from senior managers that prevailing financial circumstances had, in recent times, led to a greater emphasis on research, in relation to that placed on the enhancement of teaching, and that there was a determination to place greater emphasis on attracting more fee-paying students on non-state funded study programmes. Here, the team noted the challenge to growth in student numbers represented by demographic factors, with a projected national population decline in the 15-24 age group. Moreover, it was evident that there is fierce and growing competition regionally for a relatively small pool of potential applicants.

Other factors considered by the IEP team, and discussed later in this report, included an overall weakness, as reported to the team by various stakeholders, in the school's regional and local focus and impact, its branding, and in its public relations. The picture that emerged is of a school that does not fully exploit its potential for projecting its external profile through developing a strong regional focus which is valued by external stakeholders. However, the team noted that, as a small higher education institution, SASS faces a number of constraints, including financial challenges, and also uncertainties associated with the economic crisis of recent years, not least political instability and the unpredictability of state funding. As a relatively recent "not for profit" private institution, SASS faces very real resource and funding challenges. The team formed the view that though its small size and degree of independence and autonomy might provide some flexibility for SASS, other moderating factors, such as limited human resources and work overload, and limited opportunities to seek external project funding, might prevent SASS from taking advantage of these. The team was also

informed that the reputation of private higher education institutions was not as high as that of public providers.

These and other matters led the IEP team to examine in some detail the following issues: the effectiveness of current organisational structures; systems for strategic planning; the level of resources available, and the nature and extent of external funding; and the school's activities and aspirations in key areas such as teaching and learning, research, internationalisation, and service to society. In addressing future challenges, the team identified six strategic priority areas for the school:

- Governance, decision-making, and planning
- Learning and teaching
- Research
- Service to society
- Quality culture
- Internationalization.

2.1 Governance, management

The SER and additional documentation made available to the IEP team provided a helpful picture of the governance, organisational management, and strategic planning arrangements at SASS. In broad terms, the organisational portrait presented reflects the school's relatively recent origins as a higher education provider. The team has been able to explore the use made of these institutional arrangements in a series of helpful meetings with SASS senior managers, its staff and students, and external stakeholders. The IEP team formed the view that the governance and management structures and the governance culture of the school reflect a blend, on the one hand, of the historical evolution of SASS as a private provider, in which the founders continue to play an active role in governance, executive, management and academic activity and, on the other hand, the requirements associated with national higher education policy.

The team was also interested in the school's own assessment of the effectiveness of its governance and management structures, and its organisational processes. Here, the team wished to explore the school's perceptions of main future challenges, and its change management capability in managing aspirations in areas such as research, regional impact, and internationalisation. The SER contained some helpful pointers in this direction. For example, it acknowledged the need to ensure that strategic planning targets are realistic and achievable, and that better coordination and cooperation is needed on matters such as the management and oversight of projects.

The SER and evidence from various meetings pointed to an organisation characterised by the strong central presence of the dean, one of the four original founders of SASS, who plays an active role in all the decision-making. The team noted that the dean, through his executive management and decision-making as well as general performance, is accountable to several

governance bodies. For the purposes of academic accountability, the key bodies are the Senate and Academic Assembly. With regard to business and operational matters, the dean reports to the SASS Management Board, chaired by one of the founders, and who is also a former dean of SASS. In his academic leadership role, the dean is supported by two vice-deans, for scientific research and study and student affairs, respectively. There is no vice-dean responsible for quality assurance, as this responsibility is held by the chair of the Senate quality and an evaluation commission. On the administrative side of the organisation, the dean is supported by the secretary general. The IEP team noted that that post-holder also takes operational and administrative responsibility for quality matters. The dean is also supported on the operational side of the organisation through the dekanat, which consists of six administrative functions: finance and accounting; the students' office; a careers centre; a project coordinator; the library; and ICT, which is outsourced. Operational management of these functions is undertaken by the secretary general.

The responsibilities of the principal governance bodies are such that, for academic and deliberative purposes, the highest body is the Senate, which has nine academic staff members and three students, and is chaired by the dean. It has four commissions, which act as working bodies: studies and student affairs; scientific research; quality and evaluation; and human resources. Following discussion at the Academic Assembly, the Senate takes all important academic decisions, including the initiation of new study programmes. Approval for new study programmes is also required from the national accreditation agency, SQAA. On the management side of the committee structure, the principal authority is the Management Board. This body appoints the dean and other senior post-holders on the recommendation of the Academic Assembly, and makes all major financial decisions having received proposals from the dean. This board has six members, four of whom are founders, one an employee representative, and one a student representative. The Academic Assembly is the largest body and includes all teaching staff and student representatives. It has an essentially advisory role, although it also discusses the annual reports, planning documents, and self-evaluation reports. There is also a Students' Council, which discusses matters relating to student affairs and the student experience.

In their consideration of all these governance and management arrangements, the team wished to assess their effectiveness and contribution to overall organisational coherence, and to form a view of their fitness for purpose in enabling SASS to successfully implement change. To assist them, the team took the opportunity to explore the dynamics of the relationship and interface between Senate, the dekanat, the Management Board, and the Academic Assembly, and between the "academic" and "administrative" sides of the organisation. The extent of academic debate and level of engagement with strategic priorities at the level of academic department and study programme was also of interest to the IEP team. In reflecting on these matters, the team's findings led them to the view that there are appropriate checks and balances in governance structures, and that there are opportunities for decisions to be scrutinised. This provides confidence that decision-making structures provide a good basis for seeking to achieve institutional aspirations.

However, from their enquiries during meetings and through reading the SER, it was apparent that SASS itself recognises that some processes can be improved. This includes horizontal communication and cooperation between departments in areas such as project applications and management and oversight of projects. While there is generally a good degree of openness in both formal and informal working relations across the institution, opportunities for strengthening communication and organisational effectiveness have not always been maximised. For example, the IEP team learned that until very recently, important organisational units such as schools and research institutes did not hold regular and formally recorded meetings. In the view of the team, not only should this be standard practice, but minutes should be made widely available through a dedicated space on the SASS intranet. A further issue identified by the IEP team related to the level of engagement and involvement of all staff in deliberations on important matters. The team noted from the SER that there had been insufficient engagement with the self-evaluation process.

The IEP team's attention was also drawn to issues relating to the extent of involvement of external stakeholders and students in institutional governance. With regard to the former, the team took a close interest in progress being made in reconstituting and re-establishing a Board of Trustees. Though established in 2009, the team noted that the level of interest of former trustees in the annual self-evaluation prepared by the school had been poor, and that active interest in strategic matters had been variable. At the time of the team's visits, the school's Management Board was in the process of re-establishing the Board, with six members to be drawn from the municipality, the regional business sector, and alumni. In the view of the IEP team this is an essential requirement for governance purposes, and the team wishes to encourage the successful development of the Board as an advisory and consultative body on strategic matters. The team was encouraged by its meeting with a newly appointed Board member.

On the second of these governance matters, student involvement, the IEP team noted the opportunities made available to students for representation on commissions and deliberative bodies and the school's desire to encourage student engagement and to see students showing more initiative. Students' Council members are represented on all organs of institutional governance. However, from meetings with students, including student representatives, the team heard that student involvement in matters such as the re-design of study programmes was lacking, and also that some students felt that membership of bodies such as the Senate was at best a token involvement. The IEP team does not draw any firm conclusions here, but for some students there is a perception that the student voice is not sufficiently valued. In view of this, the team **recommends** that to support student engagement with institutional matters, training should be provided for student representatives on governance bodies and commissions and that written guidance is given on what is expected of students in contributing to the work of these bodies.

2.3 Academic organisation

Taking into account its modest size, the academic organisation of SASS is relatively uncomplicated. The school delivers four undergraduate (BA) programmes, three postgraduate (Masters) programmes in social science fields, and one PhD programme in sociology. Academic fields are each organised under the direction of a head of school with responsibility for the study programmes in that academic area. These are the schools of applied social studies, psychotherapy, and the doctoral school. SASS also has four research units, designated as research institutes, three of which are under the responsibility of a given professor.

Students are permitted to attend lectures at premises in Ljubljana and Novo Mesto, as well as at the main campus in Nova Gorica. Total student numbers have varied from 369 in 2011 to 366 in 2013 and 375 in 2014. At the time of the team's visits, six undergraduate students were formally enrolled in Novo Mesto and 25 in Ljubljana, with the remainder (344) enrolled in Nova Gorica. Similarly, 296 students attended lectures at Nova Gorica (154 and 142 for BA and Masters respectively), while at Novo Mesto the figures for students attending additional lectures at that site were 10 and 17 respectively, and at Ljubljana the numbers attending additional lectures were 71 at Bachelor level and 62 at Masters level. Student numbers are determined by the SASS Senate, and are confirmed and ratified by the Ministry, with entry being considered on the basis of high school performance. The team was informed that the mean student-staff ratio (SSR) for the school was 15.6.

The IEP team noted that the most recent figures show that academic staff appointed to full-time and part-time positions were, respectively, as follows: full professor (3 and 11); associate professor (1 and 10); assistant professor (3 and 11); and teaching assistant (7 and 11). A number of the part-time employees are guest lecturers engaged for teaching and research supervision purposes.

2.4 Strategic planning and organisational development

During their enquiries, the team was provided with helpful information relating to the strategic aims and supporting activities of SASS. The team considered several high-level planning documents. Firstly, the current SASS strategic plan (2009-2014), which is required by the Ministry for Education, Science, and Sport, and by SQAA. The former requires the goals on student enrolment and student satisfaction. Secondly, the annual work plan (2014), which is informed by the strategic plan, and which is also sent to the Ministry. It is also used for internal purposes to assist management in the monitoring and implementation of the plan. A follow-up report is also prepared. The third document seen by the team was the annual self-evaluation report (2013), which draws selectively on the strategic plan for reporting purposes and for monitoring progress against targets each year, and which also informs the annual work planning document. This self-evaluation is required by SQAA.

The team noted that the outgoing strategic plan, which was revised in 2011, sets out six strategic directions for SASS in scientific research, study excellence, student satisfaction, external client satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and service to society. These strategic goals, which are the basis of annual work planning, are assessed and monitored through measurable performance indicators. That strategic plan also contains a SWOT analysis and a PEST analysis. It also identifies a timetable for reporting on progress and reviewing progress against the strategic plan throughout the year, under the responsibility of the dean and Management Board.

The IEP team noted that the outgoing strategic plan (2009-2014) had been discussed at the development stage by the Academic Assembly, before approval by Senate and the Management Board. It had been a product of the school's strategic conference, an important forum for discussing matters of strategy and future direction. In the view of the team, this forum, which is open to all staff and to student representatives, provides a significant opportunity for the academic community to engage in debate and discussion.

Though the IEP team recognises that SASS has to meet external requirements in respect of the various strategic planning and monitoring documents it has to prepare, and can see logical connections between these documents, in the view of the team this can lead to duplication, repetition, and overlap, thus placing a heavy burden on the institution. Even so, in reflecting on all of these matters, the IEP team welcomed the openness and frankness shown by the SASS, in its SER and in discussions with the team, including the acknowledgement that in its outgoing strategic plan it had set some targets and timescales that had been unrealistic, or over-ambitious and unachievable. For example, it was recognised that research targets had been set too high, and that the emphasis placed on teaching and attracting students had been insufficient. In contrast to the strategic plan, the team learned that the preparation of the annual work plan, completed on behalf of the dean by the secretary general, was lacking in engagement from senior academic managers and members of the broader academic community, and this suggested to the team a lack of accountability on the part of some senior staff.

The IEP Team took a close interest in the preparation of the new SASS strategic plan (2015-2020). The team noted that discussions had been held with a wide cross-section of the SASS academic community, its students, and also external stakeholders, through participation in the strategic conference in January and December 2014. In the view of the team, this brainstorming activity, along with discussions at the Academic Assembly, provided an important opportunity for all staff to give their input into the new plan and regarding the strategic choices being made. This was a view endorsed by teaching staff with whom the IEP team met.

In examining these preparations from the evidence available, the team endorses the school's process for preparing its new strategic plan. At the time of the team's second visit this had very recently been finalised and approved by Senate. Nevertheless, from the IEP team's perspective, in future, this planning activity will need to be accompanied at the

implementation stage by good decision-making and also agility in responding to unforeseen circumstances. By the school's own admission, more effective use should also be made of all of the data that is collected in areas such as student satisfaction, teacher evaluation, and graduate employability so as to improve performance monitoring. Lessons learned from the outgoing planning period (some of which have been referred to in the preceding paragraphs), have informed the recent planning process and should be of assistance to the school's senior managers in implementing the new plan.

The dean indicated to the IEP team that there are no major changes from the outgoing strategy, but that it was more streamlined than the previous plan, and has fewer key performance indicators. The team noted that the new planning period might involve making important strategic choices relating to a number of matters. These include the balance between the school's profile as a teaching or research institution; the need for a robust financial management strategy to deal with funding uncertainties; the importance of a more systematic approach to research; plans to deliver study programmes in English; and the desirability of improving regional impact through a raised profile. In respect of these matters, the IEP team wishes the school well in its determination to implement the new strategic plan in a way that will carry SASS forward successfully into its next phase of development.

2.5 Finance and resourcing

The team's enquiries in the areas of governance, management, and planning led them to consider arrangements for finance and resourcing, financial planning, and budget allocation arrangements. As a backdrop to their enquiries the team noted the challenges faced by SASS in the area of finance. As noted earlier, this included an uncertain external environment, including the impact of the economic crisis, and also the instability and short term nature of the school's contract for student funding with the Ministry of Education and Sport. The team observed that these circumstances, along with the challenge of funding academic activities such as research through short-term external project income, pose a threat to the financial well-being and viability of SASS.

The team noted that the main sources of income are from government for state-funded student places and from student tuition fees for fees-only study programmes. There is some additional funding from the Slovenian Research Agency which is guaranteed until 2016, much of which is ear-marked. Of 375 students, some 180 students following the Bachelor programme in applied social studies and Bachelor programme in intercultural studies are state funded. Fee levels vary from 1 710 euros to 3 000 euros for undergraduate, Masters, and doctoral study programmes. Doctoral study programmes cannot be funded by the state in private HEIs. These income sources are supplemented by income generated from external projects and collaborative arrangements, including industry and European sources. Under the state concession contract (for state-funded places) there is an element of fluctuation, which introduces added uncertainty from a financial planning point of view. The total budget for the school, including that for staffing, is in the region of 1.3 million euros. In terms of proportions, some 49% of income is drawn from the Ministry, 15% from the national research agency, 20%

from fees, with only 1% from EU sources. In addition, around 14% is generated through market research activities.

The IEP team considered information on external project funding, including details of funded projects and infrastructure funding over the past three years, and noted that only a limited amount of activity remains. At the time of the team's visits senior research staff were actively seeking further external funding opportunities for research and it was noted that this is a very time-consuming activity. At the present time there is a hiatus period between the out-going 7th Framework Programme, and the Horizon 2020 programme which will replace it. The IEP team wishes SASS and its research staff well in its efforts to be successful under the new dispensation. The team noted that most projects require co-financing and that the school normally has to meet costs in advance, often necessitating a bank loan, with expenditure being claimed back from the funding body at a later date. This, together with the time and effort required in preparing project bids, places a significant additional resource pressure on SASS.

As has been noted, the key financial decisions are taken by the Management Board, normally on the recommendation of the dean. The IEP team noted that, in accordance with the SASS Statutes, the Management Board adopts the annual financial plan, as proposed by the dean, while the dean reports on financial performance at the end of each year. Matters such as salaries, taxation, and other payments, are considered by the Board through regular financial reports prepared by the finance and accounting office, which also prepares the annual budget plan for consideration by the Board in February of each year. Here, the IEP team noted a further constraint placed upon SASS by the lack of information from external sources at that point regarding national funding for scientific research and also for scholarships. Moreover, throughout the year, while students are permitted to pay fees in instalments, often the instalments are delayed or, in the case of student drop-out, not paid at all. The team noted that resource allocation is a relatively straightforward matter since no allocation is made to schools and institutes as financial matters are controlled centrally and under the authority of the Management Board.

In reflecting on the above, notwithstanding the constraints described, the IEP team formed the view that the financial governance arrangements and the general processes for finance and resourcing are fit for purpose. That being said, and as already mentioned, the uncertainties in the financial profile of SASS make both strategic planning to meet strategic priorities and financial planning to ensure a stable operational environment, along with their execution, quite challenging.

3. Learning and teaching

As noted in section 2 (page 6), in their deliberations, the IEP team's attention was drawn to the balance in the emphasis placed by SASS on teaching, on the one hand, and research on the other. The team learned that, historically, for the founders, research was the primary activity and that this reflected their backgrounds as young researchers. The founders had taken the view that high quality research attracts high quality students, and that research should inform teaching and could also be transferred to business. However, even though these principles remain, the matter is being revisited at the highest level in SASS, not least to ensure that student recruitment levels on undergraduate study programmes can be sustained and even increased. Accordingly, the team noted that the SER highlighted a need to enhance teaching in order to attract the best students, and also a need to take steps to manage the research undertaken by teachers to enable more time for teaching preparation.

These matters were also raised in the IEP team's discussions with senior managers, staff, and students, regarding the types of study programmes offered by SASS, their attractiveness to potential students, and also the challenges of a private institution competing with other HEIs, both public and private. The team noted that while study programmes offered electives, the introduction of applied and practical elements into study programmes, such as the Bachelor programme in social management and Bachelor programme in psycho-social counselling, is relatively recent. The team also learned that the Bachelor programme in applied social studies are being redesigned and reaccredited in order to make the programme more attractive to potential students. The IEP team welcomes this development. However, from discussions with students and other stakeholders, the team notes that it may be to the benefit of SASS to consider whether the titles of some study programmes assist or hinder student recruitment.

The IEP team also paid attention to the employability dimension of learning and teaching, including the attractiveness of SASS students and study programmes to employers in various sectors, including NGOs and the private sector. The team noted that some undergraduate students on some (though not all) study programmes are able to benefit from internship opportunities with local and regional employers. The team was also alerted by students and external stakeholders to the accreditation status of the psycho-social counselling study programme. While this programme is accredited and registered for academic purposes through the accreditation processes of the national Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency, it does not hold accreditation status with any recognised professional body. In the view of the IEP team, and as expressed by students, this may have implications for graduate employment prospects. Further, while the team noted that most course descriptions placed some emphasis on employability skills and competences, such as entrepreneurship and communication skills, the degree of emphasis varies between courses and study programmes. This suggested to the IEP team that there is scope for the school and its study programmes to place greater emphasis on the "soft skills" that are valued by employers, and also to include this in assessment, alongside the assessment of "knowledge".

Considering matters relating to employability and the range and type of study programmes currently offered by SASS, the team took account of developments elsewhere in Europe. Here, team members drew on their own professional experience and on discussion with external stakeholders. It was apparent that, in future, SASS could consider building on its current social science focus by exploring areas such as social entrepreneurship and project management at graduate level, including teaching in the English language. This may well be a matter for discussion with the newly constituted Board of Trustees. In view of this, the team **recommends** that opportunities should be explored for introducing greater diversification in the types of study programmes offered, to enhance employability in areas such as social entrepreneurship, and to meet changing requirements in the wider European context.

During their enquiries on learning and teaching, the IEP team considered various aspects of the use made of “Bologna principles”, and the extent of engagement with the Bologna Process. The team noted that SASS has adopted the three-cycle model, and course descriptions made available to the team indicated that some use is being made of a learning outcomes approach. However, from discussions with staff, the team formed the view that familiarity with and awareness of these issues varied between teachers. As a consequence, the team was unable to fully judge the extent to which a learning outcomes approach was completely embedded across all study programmes and courses. Moreover, from the evidence made available, the use of learning outcomes in course design appeared to focus more on knowledge and understanding, and less on skills and competences. The link to assessment was also unclear.

In considering matters relating to assessment, the IEP team noted that it was not clear from documentation or from discussions with staff and students whether all learning outcomes were being assessed on a consistent basis. Moreover, the team learned that the school’s general assessment criteria and rules on examination only required examination and assessment of a student’s knowledge (Article 22, “Rules on the examination of a student’s knowledge”); no expectation was placed on teachers being able to assess other matters, for example, student competences in such areas as “soft skills”.

The team extended their enquiries on assessment in order to explore with students and staff the issue of feedback on assessed student work. Here, the team learned from discussions with students that the level of detail of feedback varied between teachers. The team was told that, in some cases, while professors might set the work, the responsibility for providing feedback was being left to teaching assistants. The IEP team was interested to hear that there had been a suggestion within the school in 2014 that teachers should cooperate and share practice on assessment strategies. The team fully supports such an arrangement. Indeed, in the view of the IEP team, the culture on assessment and assessment feedback needs to be improved. With this in mind, the team **advises** that steps should be taken to ensure that for each course and each study programme, all learning outcomes should be clearly integrated, aligned to assessment strategies and appropriate in type and number. They should be assessed, and be transparent to all students. In addition, students should be provided with effective feedback on all assessed work in line with commonly agreed guidelines.

The team noted with interest the arrangements whereby, to provide academic support for first year students, use is made of teacher tutors and student tutors, the former being a member of teaching staff or a PhD student, and the latter one of the third year students. This arrangement appears to be beneficial to student tutors in terms of the experience gained. However, through discussions with students and staff and from documentation made available to them, the IEP team formed the view that further progress is needed in improving the level of understanding of modern concepts of student-centred learning amongst all teaching staff. This should include more emphasis on learner-centred interactive teaching and on self-directed learning, but should also incorporate a review of the pedagogic role of professors and the nature of the responsibilities of professors and teaching assistants. While the team noted that at the third level greater emphasis is being placed by some teachers on individualised study, the team also heard from students that some professors are less accessible than others. This suggested to the IEP team that the level of engagement with students as learners is in need of improvement if approaches to teaching and learning are to shift from a traditional teacher-centred paradigm to a more student-oriented paradigm.

The team welcomed the emphasis now being placed on peer observation and noted that, from the start of this academic year, the dean and vice-dean for study and student affairs now require teachers to attend each other's lectures twice per year so as to share good practice. However, to date, this practice has been limited, and the team was disappointed to hear from some staff that they did not have time for this activity. Linked to this, the IEP team's enquiries also pointed to a lack of systematic arrangements to support the enhancement of learning and teaching and academic practice. On the question of team work in pedagogic matters, while there are opportunities for study exchanges through the Erasmus scheme, and *ad hoc* meetings at the school where improvement in teaching and learning can be discussed, there is a recognition on the part of SASS senior managers that more should be done in the area of academic development and training in new pedagogy. To enable examples of good and innovative practice in the area of student-centred learning to be shared (such as problem-based learning and interactive learning), the IEP team **recommends** that a learning and teaching forum should be established that would meet on an occasional basis for the purpose of sharing and disseminating innovative ideas on student-centred learning.

The IEP team also considered a number of aspects of student support services and student facilities. Students and staff indicated that library and learning resources provision are appropriate to their needs. Furthermore, the team learned that students are able to apply at national level for scholarships of two kinds: one for high achieving students and another for economically disadvantaged students. The team also noted that arrangements are in place for student enrolment and the organisation of the study process through the Students' Office, and for careers advice through the Careers Centre. However, in relation to the latter, students told the IEP team that they wished to have more advice on employment opportunities.

The IEP team also took the opportunity to explore matters relating to the student drop-out rate, an issue noted in the SASS SER. Here, the team observed that a distinction should be drawn between drop-out, where a student applies to terminate studies, and non-progression, where a student does not progress to the next level and year of study. The latter may mean that the student is taking a break from studies (in Slovenian, “Pavzerji”, or “those who take a pause”). The category “suspension of studies” is also referred to in the SASS Statutes where it is stated that a student’s study status may be terminated after two years of prolonged absence, or non-participation. Though the IEP team acknowledges that drop-out and non-progression rates vary between study programmes and between levels, it was also noted that student drop-out had been one of the factors prompting the revisions being made to the Bachelor programme in applied social studies. The team learned that drop-out does not affect state funding. Nevertheless, from the team’s perspective, as a learning and teaching issue, and from the point of view of student engagement, it is a matter of academic concern. The team learned from discussions with staff and students that there may be various contributory factors. For example, as is the case elsewhere in Europe, students may combine study with employment. The team was told that in Slovenia, those in the 18-30 age group normally work full-time, making attendance and consistent engagement with academic study difficult. However, from their enquiries it was evident that while some informal monitoring of various kinds takes place, there is no systematic initiative to address this problem. The team **recommends** that a systematic and formal procedure is put in place to address the problem of student drop-out, and to record and make use of student views and experiences at the point of exiting a study programme.

In concluding their enquiries on learning and teaching matters, the IEP team notes the loyalty of students to SASS, and students’ appreciation of a generally positive learning experience in the subjects they studied, and which enables them to apply their learning in the world of work. The team heard that staff are generally friendly, accessible and supportive.

4. Research

On account of the origins and founding principles of SASS, the IEP team recognised the importance to the school of its research profile and capabilities. The team noted that the organisation and implementation of research activity is guided by the school's "Rules on Scientific Research". These describe the relevant governance arrangements, research units, bodies, and underlying principles. SASS senior managers identified the need to continue to improve the profile and impact of research, but drew attention to the strong commitment to research amongst the school's faculty, including a determination to improve the international positioning of SASS in research rankings. The team noted that research activity features prominently in institutional planning documents, such as the annual work plan (2014). Research staff with whom the team met indicated that they had developed good links through the EU's 7th Framework Programme, and viewed SASS as being well placed to develop research partnerships under the Horizon 2020 programme. Nevertheless, they also pointed to their shared view that SASS should do more to increase outputs in social science journals.

Despite the limited size and capacity of SASS, and the difficulties of competing for peer-reviewed projects, the IEP team formed the view that the school had developed strengths in some areas of its research activity, such as externally commissioned longitudinal research at national level, and the publication of two in-house, peer reviewed journals. However, the team also noted that due to staff turnover and insecure sources of funding, there was an on-going vulnerability to the loss of key expertise, with a resulting loss of momentum and focus. The IEP team was interested to note from the SER that while it was felt that research activity was in line with strategic goals, a number of issues required attention and action. This included a perceived need for better cooperation between older and more experienced researchers and their younger counterparts. It was also recognised in the SER that more guidance for research institutes was required, together with a more strategic approach to their activities, and for research more broadly. These and other research-related matters that are recognised by the school, and which require attention and action, were also confirmed in the IEP team's own findings.

The IEP team explored in detail a number of matters relating to strategy, infrastructure, and management of research activity, and activities designed to stimulate and encourage research. The team was surprised to learn that while the Commission for Scientific Research has the status of a sub-committee of Senate (the highest academic body in the school), its business appears to be restricted to consideration of doctoral topics and doctoral proposals and related administrative matters. It does not therefore exercise any oversight of the broader direction of research or of the operation or strategic direction of the SASS doctoral school. Furthermore, though senior management responsibility for research is held by the vice-dean for scientific research, the position of head of the school's interdisciplinary Social Science Research Centre (SSRC), which has four sub-units or research institutes, is held by the dean of SASS. Each of the four institutes (the Institute for Social and Political Research, the

Institute for Research into Social Risks, the National Institute for Psychotherapy and the Institute for Global and Regional Development) is headed by a given professor or assistant professor. Each functions as a means of attracting external project funding and as a mechanism for fulfilling the research interests of the respective professors. The team was unable to find evidence of involvement of undergraduate students in research projects, but did note that this was something in which some students are interested.

The team was informed that, until recently, the proceedings of the meetings of research institutes have not been minuted. Moreover, even now, while there are occasional meetings, it appears that the four research institutes do not meet together on a sufficiently regular basis in any formally constituted deliberative forum. On reflection, while the researchers are working towards progress and have used a recent winter camp to assist them, it was not clear to the IEP team that strategic oversight and executive responsibility for the management and direction of research were sufficiently effective. Moreover, from the perspective of the IEP team, considering matters such as taking forward the sustainability and strategic position of the research institutes, there does not appear to be a transparent school-wide strategy whereby the activities of the four institutes and, more broadly, research activity might be subject to clear central direction and oversight. This need for a more coherent and cohesive approach to research is acknowledged in the SASS SER, as is a lack of team work across research activities, including joint publications, and also the need to make the activities of the research institutes clearer and more accessible to the wider SASS academic community. To address these matters, the IEP Team **recommends** that the responsibilities of the Commission for Scientific Research should be extended to include oversight of all matters relating to research development, including externally funded projects applications and monitoring.

The IEP team drew similar findings from their enquiries into the oversight, management, and coordination of externally funded project activity. The team noted the information that had been made available on external funding for projects over the past three years, the income received through the Slovenian Research Agency, and several project applications currently being prepared. However, the SER pointed to difficulties in terms of coordination and co-working between the research institutes on research matters, and between the academic and administrative sides of the school. This appears to be particularly problematic in the area of project development and project coordination, due perhaps to arrangements that are too decentralised. The IEP team learned that in some cases applications for external project funding were made by individuals within individual research areas without formal central approval by a body such as the Commission for Scientific Research. From the team's perspective, this pointed to a lack of transparency and oversight, and to a lack of full economic costing of research activity. In the view of the IEP team this lack of cohesion and coordination again signalled the need for clear planning and a well-implemented research strategy. The team concluded that the vice-dean for research is well placed to advise on these matters and to identify the best way forward for clarifying defined responsibilities and transparent approval mechanisms for project applications and project coordination and management.

Finally, the IEP team considered whether the school could make more progress in applying the outcomes and outputs of research undertaken by staff in the wider society. The team acknowledges that several individuals in each of the institutes have a track record of some form of knowledge transfer and of exploring such opportunities over recent years. The team members recognise that knowledge transfer opportunities are normally more readily available in the fields of science, technology, and business. Nevertheless, the IEP team took the view that as research strategy is developed and refined, further efforts should be made to explore opportunities for new types of external income generating knowledge transfer activities and applied research links. Therefore, the IEP Team **recommends** that further attention should be paid to identifying potential opportunities for new types of income generating knowledge transfer activities and applied research links with regional enterprises, the municipality, NGOs, and, more broadly, civil society.

5. Service to society

The IEP team made enquiries on engagement with the wider society, and the added value role of SASS locally and regionally. The team noted that various events are arranged that are aimed at local, regional, and international audiences, including conferences and summer schools, public debates, and monthly press conferences. Such activities are supported through use of a public relations website.

While SASS wishes to focus some of its efforts at the national level, the importance of its regional and local focus is recognised at a senior level. However, from meetings with students, staff, and external stakeholders, it was apparent that there is work to be done in raising the SASS profile in the regional and sub-regional contexts with business, commerce, employers, and high schools. As noted in section 2 (page 6), the team therefore judged that the school's regional impact, and its projection of the SASS "brand", are not as strong as they could be. This was a message conveyed consistently by various stakeholders, including students. It is also recognised in the school's SER, where the need for better recognition of the school in the local, regional, and national environment, and the need for more effective communication, is fully acknowledged. The team heard various suggestions from SASS students for improving the school's profile and visibility, such as improved use of social media, more extensive contact with high schools, and also for using the ideas and enthusiasm of students themselves in marketing and promotional activities.

The team's findings concur with the view of internal and external stakeholders that promotion of the SASS "corporate identity" and "brand" is an area where the school can be made more professional and commercial. The team noted that the school's managers are beginning to make some progress in this area, and believe that, as a relatively young higher education institution, this is a critical factor in the future success and sustainability of SASS. In reflecting on these matters, the team strongly endorses the school's decision to use a professional agency to develop a marketing and promotion strategy to help improve the external profile and impact of SASS at local, regional, and national levels.

The IEP team noted that an important aspect of the school's local and regional profile, and its community contribution, is the extent to which it is viewed as being attractive to employers, whether in the private sector, NGOs, commerce, or the service sector. In the view of the team there are several aspects to this. It is important that SASS continues to emphasise employability skills, such as communication, team work, and entrepreneurship in its curricula. It should also take full advantage of opportunities to highlight what is special or distinctive about the SASS graduate, thereby making the school attractive both to employers and to potential students. In their deliberations on these matters, the team formed the view that there is scope for the school to reflect the needs of external partners and stakeholders more effectively in SASS structures and operations. For example, in relative terms, there is a lack of engagement of external stakeholders (such as employers and internship supervisors) in

curriculum design and delivery, in formal feedback arrangements, and in the assessment of labour market needs.

The team also noted an apparent lack of exploitation by the school of the potential contribution of an active alumni association. The IEP team was informed of meetings that take place amongst a small group of alumni, and that operational rules have been developed that will govern their activities. Nevertheless, the team believes that SASS should take early steps to support a fully constituted alumni association to assist in the broader task of promoting the school's reputation, thus helping to attract students and additional funding. In noting that SASS is still a relatively young institution, the IEP team **recommends** that the school should speed up the process of establishing an "SASS Alumni Association" to help promote the SASS reputation and "brand", and to take advantage of the potential benefits this could bring.

Taking into account the above issues, the IEP team concludes that the newly constituted Board of Trustees, when fully functioning, should take an active role in advising SASS senior managers on all matters relating to service to society and the promotion and impact of SASS locally, regionally, and nationally.

6. Quality culture

The team assessed progress being made in quality assurance and quality management and used this assessment as a basis for judging the extent to which a quality culture was being developed. The IEP team noted that the senior level responsibility for quality assurance, and for supervising the annual self-evaluation prepared for the national quality agency (SQAA), is shared between the dean and the chair of the Commission for Quality and Evaluation. However, the team formed the view that in practice much of the operational work on self-evaluation and on quality monitoring and progress chasing is undertaken by the secretary general, acting on behalf of Senate.

The team noted that in its approach to quality evaluation SASS was influenced markedly by external requirements of the national quality agency, SQAA. It has also been involved in an EU-funded project with other partners, designed to improve the quality of organisational structures and processes, and to strengthen quality management. This project is due to end in June 2015. The institutional approach to quality assurance and quality management is guided by the "Quality Manual", which comprises a set of rules based on 26 articles. Despite its title, in the view of the IEP team, this document resembles a set of regulations rather than what might conventionally be regarded as a guidelines on procedures. Though it provides essential information and is clearly helpful to the academic community of staff and students, reference to important external sources of guidance on quality assurance, such as the European Standards and Guidelines, is absent. These "Rules of quality assurance" were endorsed by Senate as recently as February 2012. They cover both teaching and research, and describe arrangements and mechanisms for annual quality monitoring and annual self-evaluation, the process for developing a new study programme, the role of stakeholders, and also set out the responsibilities of various post-holders and commissions, including the Commission for Quality and Evaluation (the latter body had been established to oversee the EU-funded organisational improvement project).

The team also observed the importance attached by the institution to the annual staff interviews undertaken by the dean, whereby each member of staff meets with the dean to assess individual performance and to set personal targets for the year ahead. The team heard that this process is valued by all participants and is seen as collegial. As noted in section 2, page 9, opportunities are made available for student representation and for student involvement in quality assurance. SASS also attaches great importance to the use of procedures for obtaining formal feedback from students on matters such as their experience of the performance of their teachers in lectures and of the school's facilities. The team noted that while this enabled feedback on teaching, it did not require students to provide feedback on their learning. Results of the surveys are seen by heads of school and are considered by the Academic Assembly. They are also used by the dean during his annual interviews with individual members of staff. However, it was apparent to the IEP team that there is no consistently applied mechanism or procedure for ensuring that students are themselves provided with feedback at the end of the evaluation process on the issues they have raised

and on the actions that are being taken by the school to address these. While the team heard that some issues raised by students may be included in the annual institutional self-evaluation, the team noted that the outcomes of this student evaluation is not an agenda item in the proceedings of the Commission for Quality and Evaluation.

In the view of the team, given that the SER and discussions with various staff groups revealed an apparent lack of interest and engagement by students in the quality assurance of study programmes, this may be a matter upon which the school may wish to reflect. While it is acknowledged that other factors may be relevant, such as the demands placed upon student time by their external work commitments, if the school wishes to build a mature quality culture, the IEP team believes that responding to student feedback is an area where SASS should take appropriate action by using feedback transparently for improvement purposes. The IEP Team **advises** SASS to reflect on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place for informing students of actions taken to “close the loop” in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

The IEP team formed the view that SASS has some way to go if a quality culture is to grow. In such a culture, the principles of critical self-evaluation must be fully owned by all within the academic community, and all must engage proactively with quality procedures. For example, this also requires engagement with developments in quality in the broader European context. The team noted that while the SER makes reference to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and while senior administrators and senior managers are familiar with such guidelines, awareness amongst teaching staff is poor. Furthermore, the team noted that meetings held by professors and teaching assistants during each semester to discuss matters such as student performance, have the potential of becoming an important element of the quality assurance process. However, team members were surprised to learn that, while some study programme teams meet several times per year as a team, this practice is not consistent across all study teams.

The team’s view is that at present the school’s academic quality system is incomplete and underdeveloped, with insufficient use being made of critical self-evaluation, at all levels, and in both studies and research. In relation to this, the team observed that only one self-evaluation report is produced annually. As noted on page 10 (section 2), this is an external requirement and is completed in accordance with specifications on content from external bodies. It is completed largely by administrative staff and covers matters from an institutional level. Comment on the quality of study programmes and of research is provided only at a general level. While heads of school provide input into this annual institutional evaluation, there does not appear to be a separate requirement for self-evaluation or for formal reports at the level of academic department or study programme as part of a comprehensive academic quality cycle. At those levels, evaluation is focused primarily on student evaluation of teachers and on students’ examination performance. For the most part therefore, self-evaluation takes place at the higher level. In the view of the IEP team, a complete academic quality evaluation system requires that such reports are completed at all levels and that they are fit for purpose in terms of critical self-evaluation. The IEP team also believes that it would

be good practice for the main quality committee (the Commission for Quality and Evaluation), to call heads of academic areas (both teaching and research) and study programme leaders to account by considering annual self-evaluation and monitoring reports produced by them. The team noted that, at present, this does not take place.

In considering the above matters, the IEP team feels that the school's current quality assurance regulations contain a number of valuable components, and the SASS "rules on quality" provide a good basis for moving the quality agenda forward. For example, the team wishes to draw the school's attention to its own guidance for the completion of study programme evaluation reports, outlined in Article 25 of its Quality Manual (Article 25, "Content of programme evaluation report"). In the view of the team, if used in a self-critical manner, this guidance on report-writing provides a sound basis for a robust annual self-evaluation system to be implemented by all academic departments and study programmes. However, it would need to be supplemented with an action planning section whereby issues to be addressed as part of the annual monitoring cycle can be identified, and which can form the basis of in-year progress monitoring. All such reports, and updates on progress, would be considered at institutional level by the school's main quality committee, the Commission for Quality and Evaluation.

In view of this, to improve and encourage ownership of quality at the point of delivery, and as near as possible to the student experience, the team **advises** that each study programme leader, in conjunction with all members and the study programme team, should draw up an annual programme monitoring report, using all qualitative and quantitative information available to them, including student and stakeholder feedback. All such reports, and updates on progress, should be considered at institutional level by the Commission for Quality and Evaluation.

Finally, in support of such an annual quality cycle, the IEP team believes that it is essential that responsibilities are clearly identified for the implementation and monitoring of such quality improvement plans and that designated persons are fully accountable to the quality commission, acting on behalf of the SASS Senate. In putting forward this view, the IEP team has taken note that the school recognises in its SER that, until 2014, checking progress and follow-up of the implementation of the annual institutional level self-evaluation has not been robust or effective, and that responsibilities have not been identified with sufficient clarity. In the view of the IEP team, transparency in such matters is an essential ingredient of a quality culture and a long-term solution to this problem should be found. The success of such a system should not be dependent on periodic reminders from the central administration.

7. Internationalisation

The team noted the importance attached by SASS to the wider European and international dimension as a means of improving the school's profile and visibility. The team was informed that the school has been open to international cooperation and mobility since its establishment, and especially so amongst the school's research staff. There is a tradition of encouraging involvement in and hosting international conferences, and attracting guest lecturers and visiting professors. In examining the information and documentation made available to them, team members were able to identify a range of international links and partnerships from 2007-2008 onwards. Links covered staff and student mobility and exchanges, infrastructure activities, joint workshops, research collaboration, and enhancement of teaching and the curriculum. The team noted that, out of 16 international contracts, eight were related to Erasmus bilateral links. At the time of the team's visit, plans were being made to divide the role of the Erasmus coordinator into two separate parts: one for mobility and one for academic partnerships. The team believed this to be a positive step.

A key element of the school's internationalisation aspirations is the strategic aim to attract more international students. In this regard, the team learned that SASS acknowledges that, in view of its proximity to the Italian border, potential opportunities to attract students from nearby border towns have not been fully explored or exploited. It remains to be seen whether this potential market will form part of the SASS international strategy. The team noted that senior managers, staff and students, were all in agreement that the recruitment of more international students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, is an essential element for the school's future development.

Nevertheless, it was evident to the team that, to date, international mobility of incoming students remains at a low level. Although involvement in Erasmus exchanges (both staff and students) date back to 2007, it was not until the current academic year (2014-2015) that success has been achieved with incoming students, with four Masters and one doctoral student being hosted. The annual allocation to the school of the number of outgoing Erasmus student placements is determined by a national formula relating to overall student numbers at SASS, and for how many it applies. However, the IEP team learned that the current allocation to the school has not been fully taken up. An important factor here is that, despite the relevant grants, the cost to the student of a foreign placement can prove to be prohibitive. The team also heard from students that internal selection and feedback procedures were not, in their perception, fully transparent. Nor, in the view of students (especially incoming Erasmus students) are the support infrastructure and organisational arrangements for mobility as satisfactory as they could be. Some staff with whom the IEP team met reinforced this view. Furthermore, the team was told by Erasmus students that early communication from the school during the initial application and expression of interest phase was unsatisfactory. There are also a lack of social activities for incoming students, and no Erasmus student network. Such findings confirmed that the school's organisation of international

activity, both for students going abroad and for incoming students, was not yet at a sufficiently high standard.

In relation to the staff dimension of international mobility, the IEP team was told that the whole staff is encouraged to participate in Erasmus mobility opportunities, and that recent moves included administrative staff. The team noted that two staff places are financed annually at state level and that this allocation is easily filled on an annual basis. SASS is also keen to continue to bring in international staff for prolonged periods and more are now spending time at SASS. This includes international professors who supervise doctoral students. The IEP team noted that amongst the benefits this brings is an ability to increase the level of English language delivery at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, albeit at a modest level, and that this includes supervision of doctoral students.

In considering the school's mobility plans, the team paid close attention to the aspiration of the school to increase delivery of study programmes, or courses within programmes, in English. The team noted that this could form an important element of the broader aim to increase the number of international students, and especially Erasmus students. The team learned that, normally, incoming students are competent in the English language. Currently, one course (the perspectives of global interdependencies) is taught fully in English, and some parts of several other courses run by teaching assistants are also being taught in English. In terms of the broader question of the school's capacity and capability in this area, the team was told that some two-thirds of SASS staff would potentially be able to teach in English. However, the team was also advised that according to Slovenian higher education law, if a whole study programme were to be taught in a foreign language, then there must also be parallel delivery of that programme in the Slovenian language. Also, there is a legal requirement for courses to be delivered in Slovenian, unless the teacher is foreign, or if a specified percentage of students are non-Slovenian. The team understood that the same restriction does not apply to graduate study programmes, thus providing SASS with a development opportunity in this area.

Although the team acknowledges such constraints, and notes that SASS cannot easily increase its allocation of Erasmus students, team members heard from incoming Erasmus students that the terms and conditions of learning agreements had not always been fully met in respect of the provision of classes delivered in the English language and that they had found it difficult to join in classes that were being taught in English. The team wishes to encourage progress in this area and in the overall aspiration to improve mobility, especially for students. However, taking account of various constraints, the team believes that the school must be realistic regarding its internationalisation agenda and about what can be achieved. Taking into account all the matters raised above on internationalisation, the IEP team **recommends** that SASS should improve communication and information for Erasmus students, and also ensure that learning agreements are fulfilled in relation to delivery of lectures in the English language.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The recommendations of the IEP team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the school's future success and strategic development and are designed to encourage SASS to continue prioritising both teaching and research activities and to strengthen the institution's external profile. The team hopes that these recommendations will contribute to the school's efforts in building its research capacity and in delivering a quality learning experience, and also to the continuing sustainability of SASS.

Governance and institutional decision-making

- The team recommends that to support student engagement with institutional matters, training should be provided for student representatives on governance bodies and commissions and that written guidance is given on what is expected of students in contributing to the work of these bodies.

Learning and teaching

- The team recommends that opportunities should be explored for introducing greater diversification in the types of study programmes offered, to enhance employability in areas such as social entrepreneurship, and to meet changing requirements in the wider European context.
- The team advises that steps should be taken to ensure that for each course and each study programme all learning outcomes should be clearly integrated, aligned to assessment strategies and appropriate in type and number. They should be assessed and transparent to all students. Furthermore, students should be provided with effective feedback on all assessed work in line with commonly agreed guidelines.
- To enable examples of good and innovative practice in the area of student-centred learning to be shared (such as problem-based learning and interactive learning), the IEP team recommends that a learning and teaching forum should be established that would meet on an occasional basis for the purpose of sharing and disseminating innovative ideas on student-centred learning.
- The team recommends that a systematic and formal procedure is put in place to address the problem of student drop-out, and to record and make use of student views and experiences at the point of exiting a study programme.

Research and knowledge transfer

- The team recommends that the responsibilities of the Commission for Scientific Research should be extended to include oversight of all matters relating to research development, including externally funded project applications and monitoring.

- The team recommends that further attention should be paid to identifying potential opportunities for new types of income generating knowledge transfer activities and applied research links with regional enterprises, the municipality, NGOs, and civil society more broadly.

Service to society

- In noting that SASS is still a relatively young institution, the IEP team recommends that the school should speed up the process of establishing an “SASS Alumni Association” to help promote the SASS reputation and “brand”, and to take advantage of the potential benefits this could bring.

Quality culture

- The team advises SASS to reflect on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place for informing students of actions taken to “close the loop” in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.
- To improve and to encourage ownership of quality at the point of delivery, and as near as possible to the student experience, the IEP team advises that each study programme leader, in conjunction with all members of the study programme team, should draw up an annual programme monitoring report, using all qualitative and quantitative information available to them, including student and stakeholder feedback. All such reports, and updates on progress, should be considered at institutional level by the school’s main quality committee, the Commission for Quality and Evaluation.

Internationalisation

- The team recommends that SASS should improve communication and information for Erasmus students, and also ensure that learning agreements are fulfilled in relation to delivery of lectures in the English language.

9 Envoi

The IEP team has enjoyed learning about the progress made by SASS as a specialist social science higher education institution since its establishment in 2006. It has been an interesting experience to discuss with founders, staff, students, and external stakeholders the opportunities being pursued by SASS, but also its plans to address the challenges and constraints it faces in the future.

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the dean, Professor Matej Makarovič, for inviting the IEP team to SASS and for the welcome and hospitality provided during their two visits. Special thanks are also offered to Dr Tamara Besednjak Valič, the SASS IEP liaison person and secretary general, for her role as self-evaluation coordinator, and for her important work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process.

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