Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistics

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistics, The evaluation took place in the framework of the project "Higher Education and Research for Innovation and Competitiveness" (HERIC)*,* implemented by the government of Montenegro with the overall objective to strengthen the quality and relevance of higher education and research in Montenegro.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of the project, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:
- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistics profile

The Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistics (FSKL) was the first accredited faculty in the north of Montenegro and the only faculty in this field in the country. FSKL was established as a higher education institution in 2008 via a public-private partnership consisting of four private individuals and the Municipality of Berane. As a legal entity, FSKL has all rights and duties in accordance with the Law on higher education of Montenegro; it represents itself in legal matters and has full responsibility for all its activities. FSKL is located in Berane and Budva. FSKL has autonomy in forming and proposing study programmes, changing up to 30% of ECTS of accredited study programmes, planning and carrying out scientific research work, employing collaborators on the faculty as well as registering new students. Independent faculties, such as FSKL, have no right to award academic titles to staff and cannot organise PhD studies.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation report and appendices of FSKL was sent to the evaluation team in February 2014. The visits of the evaluation team to the Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistics took place from 11 to 13 March and from 9 to 11 April 2014, respectively. In between the visits the Faculty provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

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

- Prof. Lucija Cok, former Rector, University of Primorska, Slovenia, team chair
- Prof. Karol Izydor Wysokinski, former Vice-Rector, Marie-Curie Sklodowska University, Lublin, Poland
- Ms Eva Reka Fazekas, student, University of Szeged, Hungary
- Mr Andy Gibbs, Director of International Relations, Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom, team coordinator

The team thanks the Dean, Professor Vesovic for the invitation to the faculty, the warm hospitality and access to staff, students and information. Thanks to Natasa Gospic for her coordination, liaison and leading the preparations of the helpful SER. Thanks also to the staff and students for their time and openness.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The mission of the Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistics is described in the SER, outlining that:

> (it) develops study programs in accordance to Bologna, to educate students for professions of traffic, communication, logistics engineers, by applying highly set quality standards and in accordance to the educational trends in Europe and the world, contemporary faculties from this field in the country and in the surrounding ones, as well as by needs for education of engineers in transport, communication and logistics. By realisation of accredited study programs, competitive engineers are educated, ready to participate actively in regional development, which will be ready to participate actively in regional development, and who will be responsible for involvement and realisation of important role of Montenegro in economic, traffic, and communicational system.

Based on this, and in meetings with the founders and managers, the team discerned that the mission is threefold: to provide programmes in transport communication and logistics; to provide research and consultancy related to the development of transport communication and logistics in Montenegro; and to contribute to the region of north Montenegro by providing higher education. Each of these missions is considered separately.

The faculty provides programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in transport communication and logistics. According to the mission, graduates from the programmes "will be able to find a job in all the branches of trade and where knowledge from the fields of road, railway, air and postal traffic, communication and logistics is applied". The SER provided an analysis of the labour market to support the provision of such programmes. The analysis asserted that there are no unemployed graduated traffic engineers and went on to provide the numbers of employed graduated traffic engineers in various organisations as a percentage of the total number of employees. The team could not agree that this analysis demonstrated a demand for such graduates. The analysis demonstrated that there were limited numbers of traffic engineers in the workforce; however, the analysis did not demonstrate that there was a need for these numbers to be increased. As such, the provision of programmes is based on a perceived need for future professionals and expertise; however, the team was introduced to little evidence, which supported the need for such positions.

The team concluded that this component of the mission is predicated on a market analysis, which does not include contingency to adjust to the actual market situation. The team recommends development of a market analysis based on actual rather than perceived needs. Subsequently the existing business plan needs revision to ensure sustainability and to avoid financial exposure; it would benefit from external intervention in the short term. The faculty should revisit the business plan and develop a new one

based on current and projected market needs to take account of at least the threat mentioned in the SER, of the impact of the economic crisis in Montenegro on the number of registered students, scientific-research work and the overall functioning of the faculty.

The second mission — to provide research and consultancy related to the development of transport communication and logistics in Montenegro — appeared to be separate from the teaching and learning activities. A number of projects had been undertaken and several were planned, with a reliance on the anticipated income from these projects contributing to financial sustainability.

As it concerns the third component of the mission — to contribute to the region of north Montenegro by providing higher education — the team was provided with information that reflected a regional decline in terms of population, employment and regional industry. The SER outlines the extent of population decline stating that net migration in the northern region of Montenegro is negative and amounts in 2010- 1470 persons in 2011 - 1407 persons and in 2012 -1254 people, with the largest negative balance recorded in Berane - 322 people.

The team also met with the newly elected mayor of the municipality. He outlined his agenda for regional regeneration and indicated that higher education was a key priority, although at the early stage of his tenure could not detail how this would be implemented, except to add that the municipality was committed to the faculty as one of the founders. The team appreciated the need for regional higher education and its role in regeneration, and the mission of the faculty was compatible with this. However, the team believes that this will not be achieved in isolation and it is *recommended that the faculty works with others to create a regional alliance with employers, municipalities, and other higher education providers in Berane to produce an alignment of regeneration priorities.*

The SER described a clear formal structure for governance in which some of the founders have overlapping roles as managers and members of the management board. The structure for academic governance provides clear lines of decision-making and planning, which clearly differentiates roles as founders and managers. Development is supported by written strategic plans. Overall the governance is well-organised and regulated, with clear lines of communication and transparent processes. Staff are represented in the teaching – scientific council, which is described as the professional organ of the faculty. Whilst management is centralised in terms of strategy, new programmes are proposed by departments and subsequently approved by the management board. Students are represented at all levels within the structure and have few complaints; however, some students feel underrepresented by the student parliament. Overall the team heard that student representation is perceived as passive and more focused on social rather than governance issues. The faculty should *strengthen the student parliament's role in governance* by more actively seeking out critically reflective and constructive feedback. The *student parliament itself could be strengthened* by building its national and then international networks.

At the request of the municipality, the faculty had commenced study programmes in Budva. The team did not visit the campus but heard of the arrangements for study and support for students. The team acknowledges that many facilities and processes have been put in place to support study for students in Budva but were concerned that studies in Budva appear comparatively isolated and that the student experience in Budva should be equivalent to that in Berane. The team recommends to *build greater coherence between Budva and Berane and structure a formal role of Budva in faculty governance* to ensure equity of the student experience.

2. Teaching and learning

The faculty action plan and SER mention, in general terms, improving teaching and ensuring European standards. Specifically, the increased use of multimedia methods for teaching and learning is mentioned. Teaching and learning approaches include many elements proposed by the European higher education reforms; however, there is no overall plan of what is to be improved and how. The management group has responsibility for overseeing teaching and learning and heads of department also have some responsibility for governance of teaching, learning and assessment. The *development of a clear plan* would help to ensure that heads of department are supported in their development of teaching, learning and assessment.

There has been an increase in the use of multimedia approaches for teaching and learning, in particular simulation. The faculty wishes to develop this further but is constrained by a lack of resources. From reading course outlines and talking with teachers and students, the team ascertained that the faculty embraces many components of a student-centred approach to learning insomuch as the focus for learning is on the student and the relationship with teachers is more facilitative and individualised. Although these elements of student-centred learning are present, there remains a reliance on lectures and the team recommends that *an overall plan for teaching and learning should outline ways to develop student-centred learning and move away from a teaching focus.*

A starting point for this activity could be a review of learning outcomes. These are in place for each unit/module of the four-year Bachelor level and are compliant with accreditation but they could be *developed further to enhance the focus on learning*. The team concluded that employability is a focus of curricula and that learning approaches support this. The faculty should *continue to ensure that employability skills, such as entrepreneurship are reflected in curriculum content.*

The first two cycles of the three-cycle system are in place at Bachelors (four years/ eight semesters first cycle) and Masters (one year/ two semesters second cycle) levels. The team was told that the faculty is not allowed to offer doctoral studies according to Montenegrin law, although it would like to do so. Cycles are compatible with Bologna Process reforms.

The diploma supplement is issued to all students and the team saw examples of this, which appeared compliant with European standards.

Staff student ratios are relatively high. According to the SER, in the academic year 2011/2012, the ratio of student to academic staff was 4.62. In the academic year 2012/2013, the ratio was 4.68 and in 2013/2014 5.85. Based on this data, the team saw that the lowest value of this ratio was in the academic year 2011/2012, the median in the 2012/2013 and the maximum value was the academic year 2013/2014. The team calculated the staff student ratio, on the basis of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) to be in the range 1:12/14. On the basis of available records (personnel files of students) of Student Services, the dropout rate of students from   study in the last three years was 5%.

All of the programmes incorporate a period of practical work, frequently undertaken with employers or focused on a specific project. *The results of students' work, particularly those with the best potential for practical application, should be promoted by the faculty in workshops and mini congresses to give the faculty greater visibility and a higher national profile.* It could be part of a developed strategy aimed at raising awareness of the field of logistics and traffic communication locally and nationally. The team found that the practical placements are part of the curricula; however, overall the practical work remains unstructured with no formal evaluation. The team recommends that the faculty *provide a structure for work placements, which has clear aims and is evaluated.*

In meetings with students, they described good relations between students and professors, saying that they could ask professors anything and give feedback to them. Students confirm that visiting lecturers make a contribution according to expertise. Whilst it is positive that students enjoy good personal relationships with professors, the team would like to see *relationships governed by processes and policies* rather than personal relationships. The reason for this is that there is potential for students who, for whatever reason, may not have a good rapport with teachers and who may find it more difficult to make their voice heard.

3. Research

The faculty does not have a clear research strategy nor research infrastructure. Research appears to be an activity based on individuals, although the faculty does have a critical mass of research experience amongst its staff in transport, logistics and communications. There are many examples of regional publications and consultancy activities by staff. However, the faculty has not attracted funding from proposals it has submitted in response to national calls. In discussion with faculty members, they attributed this to unfair bias towards private faculties in the awarding of funding for projects, tenders and proposals. The team is unable to comment on whether this is the case but takes the view that this perception should not be a barrier to the faculty reflecting on how they can improve their potential for successful bids by *considering which expertise will enhance the bid writing process*, maybe internationally or through cooperation with other higher education institutions. To this end, the team suggests that it would be useful *to build research networks and relationships with other HEIs in Europe* and worldwide to enhance expertise and to maintain the existing research.

The team also heard that despite a wealth of expertise, doctoral studies are not offered because of legal restrictions. It was explained to the team that private faculties were not allowed to deliver doctoral studies. The team noted that this does not incentivise the faculty to develop a research strategy.

4. Service to society

The faculty provides higher education in the region and attempts to meet national needs for experts in transport and communications management. The staff and visiting lecturers of the faculty have good connections and networks on a national level.

The SER indicated that the faculty shows its social responsibility through the undertaking of different projects with partner organisations, whose activities are of high social importance. The SER also advises that the faculty closely collaborates with local communities in Berane, Budva, Cetinje, Herceg Novi, Andrijevica, and Plav as well as with organisations of civil society, although the team did not learn of the nature of these collaborations.

The faculty action plan includes engagement with society as an ongoing action and indicates a range of activities in terms of public appearance and debating, relates to educational policy, educational regulations, economic policy, traffic policy, safety policy in the field of traffic and so on. Past activities included a visit of the Minister of Science, publications in daily newspapers, radio interviews, TV appearances and hosting national and international conferences in Berane, Budva, Bar and Plav. Additionally, staff and students visited fairs for higher education and secondary schools. There are also ongoing projects regarding engagement in local and national society – e.g. Berane Virtual Town. Finally, students of the faculty have engaged in successful sports activities. Whilst the team could see the extent of the engagement with society, it could not see how feedback from various parts of society was gathered or used to develop the work of the faculty and suggests that establishing *more systematic involvement of stakeholders* would enable feedback to be gathered which increased the relevance to society of the faculty's work. This would link to the activity identified below in section 6 Quality Culture and enable the faculty to further *develop a marketing approach based on evidence rather than assertions.*

The faculty has provision for widening access such as scholarships for students with disabilities, scholarships in special circumstances arising during study and the facility to pay study fees by instalments. The team noted that no potential students had taken advantage of the available scholarships. The team recommends the faculty *to develop a policy for students with special needs.*

Section 2 discussed governance and the role of the faculty in providing regional higher education in north Montenegro. In this context, the team recommends the *creation of a regional alliance with other higher education providers* to cooperate in enhancing Berane's role as a future university centre that would contribute to the faculty's service to society.

5. Quality culture

There is extensive quality assurance documentation, operational procedures and action plans which have targets and are monitored. The faculty action plan highlights the purpose of quality assurance in the faculty as follows:

> Good quality assurance is essential to provide evidence of quality for external stakeholders providing better connection between mission, goals and activities of Faculty is possible with adequate financing, equal treatment in the field of high education and economy capacity strengthening in sense of employment of young cadres and opening of new projects.

The team agreed that this purpose is relevant to the faculty in terms of evidencing their activity and addressing their perception of a lack of parity with university-based or state-funded faculty.

Additionally, the SER acknowledged that

> (the) management of quality has significant role in keeping of advantages and chances of Faculty, avoiding of threats and weaknesses and recognising of strategic development, it is necessary to strength Faculty capacity for functioning of the management system with quality, its follow up, evaluation and integration in the entire activity of Faculty.

The faculty action plan has two actions, which the team understood as addressing both quality assurance and quality culture, the first of which is:

1. Establishment and maintenance of clear procedures of controlling and providing quality in all key parts

A quality assurance working group is established to develop quality assurance activities. However, an internal organisation unit for providing and controlling quality is not yet formed. Despite this, the faculty has produced a number of operational procedures and rulebooks to provide a framework for quality assurance. Additionally, measures are in place, which provide a system to analyse the faculty structure and functioning across a range of activities.

The team commends the faculty on its prioritisation of quality assurance, the rationale for doing so and the work undertaken to date. The team acknowledges that with limited resources, the faculty has made considerable progress. The *team recommends the faculty to build on existing practice to fully implement an internal quality system.*

In discussion with students, two issues were raised which, if addressed, will contribute to further improving quality assurance. Firstly, the team saw that a student's evaluation questionnaire exists but heard that some students are unclear about the results. Secondly, in a meeting with students it was suggested that information to students on employment prospects, prior to enrolment should include factual information on employment of

graduates. The team agrees and recommends *that information to students on employment prospects should include factual information on employment of graduates.*

The second item in the faculty action plan is:

2. To care and continuously improve the quality culture and to strengthen consciousness on need for its development and improvement

The team agreed that this is a relevant action and observed that staff seem to share a common goal and approach to student education and that this may provide a good foundation for building a quality culture. The team commends the faculty for the progress in this area and recommend the group to *continue to raise awareness of quality culture within the faculty.*

6. Internationalisation

The team read in the SER about some international cooperation in the region based on bilateral agreements and some cross-border developments, particularly around joint projects. The team noted that there was no strategy to provide mobility or to internationalise the curriculum.

The team noted that the programmes are principally focused on the Montenegrin market; however, the team was told that the employment market in transport, logistics and communications is international, starting with the neighbouring countries. The team felt that students may be disadvantaged by not having an international experience and recommends that the faculty *reviews the role and purpose of internationalisation* for programmes offered in the faculty. The team suggests the possibility of *developing joint programmes with similar faculties outside Montenegro a*s a way of introducing internationalisation.

The SER highlighted as a weakness of the programme that there is impeded student mobility. The team recommends that rather than continuing to develop a series of agreements the faculty could *develop a structured teacher mobility plan* as a precursor to student mobility and future joint degrees studies.

7. Conclusion

The faculty offers regional higher education in an area that is experiencing decline. It has a well-developed mission and vision, committed leadership and staff but is not flourishing as anticipated. There is an opportunity to review the business plan and partnerships in order to face the current challenges. The recommendations within this report are intended to offer support to the faculty, which contributes to the regional economy and whose presence is valued by local authority and its students.

Summary of the recommendations

Revise current business plan to ensure sustainability profiting from external intervention in the short term

Build greater coherence between Budva and Berane to ensure equity of student experience

Develop a market analysis based on actual rather than perceived needs

Create a regional alliance with employers, municipalities, other higher education providers to produce alignment of regeneration priorities

Strengthen the student parliament's role in governance by seeking out critically reflective and constructive feedback

The student parliament could be strengthened by building its national and then international networks

Revisit the business plan and develop a new one based on current and projected market needs

Continue to ensure that employability skills are reflected in curriculum content

Ensure that heads of departments are supported in their development of teaching learning and assessment

The results of students' work, particularly those with the best potential for practical application, should be promoted by the faculty in workshops and mini congresses to give the faculty greater visibility and a higher national profile

Develop a plan to support student-centred learning and move away from a teaching focus

Provide a structure for work placements, which has aims and is evaluated

Improve facilities so that students can benefit

Build research networks and relationships with other HEIs in Europe and worldwide to build expertise

Reflect on which kind of expertise would improve the bid writing process, maybe internationally or through cooperation with other HEIs

Create a regional alliance with other higher education providers to cooperate in enhancing Berane's role as a future university centre

Establish more systematic involvement of stakeholders

Further develop marketing approach based on evidence and not assertions

Develop a policy for students with special needs

Continue to raise awareness of quality culture within the faculty

Build on existing practice to implement an internal quality system

Information to students on employment prospects should include factual information on employment of graduates

Review the role and purpose of internationalisation for programmes offered in the faculty

Develop a structured teacher mobility plan as a precursor to student mobility

Consider possibility of joint programmes with similar faculties as a way of introducing internationalisation