

Faculty of Administrative and European Studies

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Faculty of Administrative and European Studies, located in Podgorica, Montenegro. 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 of Administrative and European Studies' profile

The Faculty of Administrative and European Studies (FDES) is a non-profit higher education and scientific research institution founded in May 2005, through a public-private partnership. The founders of FDES are the Municipality of Montenegro, Podgorica, Faculty of Administrative and European Studies of Kranj, Slovenia, the Agency for Local Democracy and Partnership in Podgorica, as well as two individuals from Italy and Slovenia. The institution is a legal entity. The faculty is accredited by the Council for Higher Education and licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro. According to the Self Evaluation Report (SER), the faculty is an independent, interdisciplinary, educational and research institution for the fields of public administration, administrative law, human rights and freedom, theories of democracy, the rights of the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as public finance and financial law, and other organisational and IT disciplines. The programmes are intended to enable graduates to work in European Union (EU) institutions, public administration and local governments. Undergraduate and postgraduate studies at FDES are designed on the basis of needs to develop the administrative capacity of Montenegro in the perspective of EU accession. The vision of FDES is that in the near future it will become a leading regional, educational and research institution for future staff for Montenegrin public administration and institutions of the EU.

The faculty is located in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, which is also, according to the SER, the administrative and cultural centre of Montenegro.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation report of the Faculty of Administrative and European Studies was sent to the evaluation team in February 2014. The visits of the evaluation team to the faculty took place from 9 to 11 March and from 7 to 9 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 Professor Blazic for the invitation to the faculty and access to staff, students and information. Thanks also go to the staff and students for their time and openness in giving information to the team.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The SER advises that “the Faculty of Administrative and European Studies was founded with a goal to respond to the strategic orientation necessities of Montenegro, which is defined by two crucial things: confirmation and extension of legal and state subjectivity; and joining the European Union and other Euro-Atlantic institutions.”

According to the SER, the Faculty of Administrative and European Studies aims to be one of the strongest contributors in making reforms in public administration, toward both European and Euro-Atlantic integration and through training young people as the base of every society, to give its contribution towards the processes that Montenegro is involved with in this regard.

The team could discern from the SER and from discussions with various groups of managers, teachers, students and external partners that two forms of governance existed simultaneously and could be characterised as formal and informal.

The informal approach is described in the SER and is clearly and directly linked to achieving the goal of the faculty;

The Faculty indirectly involves students and other stakeholders in the management, encouraging dialogue, exchange of ideas, experiences and practices, all with the aim of making rational decisions and with desire to create an environment of cooperation and constant pursuit of innovation. Students on a daily basis have the opportunity at any time to talk to the Dean or Manager of the Faculty, and present their ideas and opinions.

Within the formal structure, the SER indicates that the supreme expert body is the Senate, which consists of the professors of the faculty. Administrative duties are performed by the manager, Department of Administrative Studies, Department of European Studies, secretary, and student services. The function of the administration is to ensure a quality framework for running a faculty. Administrative activities of the faculty are not extensive and flexibility in work exists, with staff taking on functions across different roles. The managing body is the Governing Board, the director of which is the dean of the faculty. The Board regulates issues that are necessary for the exercise of functions required through a memorandum of agreement, as well as on issues related to study programmes, the appointment of academic staff, funding the faculty etc.

The team was told that management of the faculty centred on the dean and that many achievements were based on his personal engagement, energy and networking. This is consistent with the SER, which indicated that the dean of the faculty, as well as the management body, represents the faculty, organises and controls the educational, scientific and research work carried out, determines individual engagement of teachers and experts in science and is responsible for the educational and scientific activities. Additionally, by prior approval of the Board of the Faculty, the dean appoints managers of internal organisational units of the faculty, and carries out the decisions adopted by the Senate and the Board of the

Faculty. The team met with the founders of the faculty and was informed that the founders have little control and direct input into the governance of the faculty.

The team attempted to clarify the operations of faculty governance and found that the formal structure is described in different ways, for example, in contrast to the SER which states that the Senate is the supreme expert body, the team was told that the Governing Board has the power in terms of governance. When the team questioned both teachers and students about the function of the Senate, they could only vaguely describe this. The team found it difficult to gain a clear view of the formal management and governance structure. Overall the team concluded that the role and activity of the Senate is not visible and that the decision-making processes are unclear. The team recommends that the *Senate should be more proactive and clearly independent* and that *the founders need to have an overview of and take an active role in the development of the infrastructure and fabric of the faculty.*

Within the governance structure, the team was interested to note the inclusion of student representation in all governance bodies and, in particular, the role of the student ombudsman, who in the team's opinion was unique. Upon further investigation, the team found that this role lacked both a description and a clear remit and had not dealt with any cases in the last year. The team recommend that to further strengthen the student voice within the faculty, *the role of the student ombudsman should be developed, together with a clear remit.*

Both in the SER, in subsequent meetings and additional information provided, the team noticed a lack of consistent data. The team considers that, without this, decision-making is problematic and quality systems are difficult to implement. The team *recommends that the faculty establish consistent data collection and improve data handling.* This would also help to ensure that decision making processes move to a more systems-based approach and are less reliant on one person. This would contribute to ensuring consistency and sustainability.

3. Teaching and learning

The SER describes the aim of the Bachelor programme as preparing students to work in state authorities and local government, which are in the process of implementing European standards. Post-graduate and Master courses have a focus on improving administrative abilities. It is envisaged that the future profession of the students on post-graduate and Master courses will be within public authorities, and that students on these study programmes are prepared to work on challenging issues.

The team concluded that the first two cycles of a three-cycle system (for undergraduate, graduate and doctoral studies) based on the principles of the Bologna Process are in place. Apart from the Masters programme, the faculty offers a specialist postgraduate license which is not part of Bologna Process reforms. However, it was explained to the team that this is a peculiarity of the Montenegrin system and demanded by employers. Doctoral studies are not offered, and faculty members explained that this is due to Montenegrin legislation.

The SER indicates that “through the implementation of Bologna Process, using combination of modern and traditional methods of work, the Faculty strives to achieve the synergy of teaching, researching and component of civil mission”. This was evident through a number of distinctive features, which were highlighted to the team both in the SER and during meetings, as being in place to support the teaching and learning mission. These include: the model of employment of visiting professors, an emphasis on practical work, a period of internship, and the integration of these through methods of active teaching and learning.

The team learned from both the SER and from discussion with managers, teachers and students that although the numbers of full time employees are few, the academic staff/student ratio is estimated at 1 to 10, although the accuracy cannot be ascertained as slightly different student numbers were advised on different occasions.

Additionally, visiting professors to the faculty contribute to the programmes according to their expertise. The academic staff is composed of teachers from both Montenegro and abroad; for the most part, visiting professors from the region and who have a contract for a particular subject. Their number varies from semester to semester, but they are all equally available to students whilst they are on campus and subsequently by email. The team was told by students that this approach was valued and the diverse expertise appreciated.

The team heard that an emphasis is put on the practical work of the students and in this regard the team understood practical work to encompass active, goal directed activity, rather than lectures and described in the SER as more dominant than the theoretical (lecture-based) part. This practical work is characterised in the SER as the students being in constant interaction with professors and associate lecturers both on an individual and group basis and giving equal opportunities for all students to benefit from this. This interactive approach was confirmed in discussion with both teachers and students.

At the end of the third year of studies the faculty ensures practical application of academic knowledge in the form of an internship of two to three months in a state authority body, with the goal of preparing the students for the job market before ending the studies. At the end of the internship the mentoring institutions give students a letter of recommendation confirming their satisfaction with the students' performances. But the team suggests that this could be further strengthened in two ways. Firstly, the internship is unstructured and has no formal evaluation. *Giving a structure which has aims that can be evaluated using clear criteria* would assist in making the learning more focused and purposeful. Secondly, *making employability skills more explicit* will increase the possibility of identifying transferable skills applicable to other sectors, thereby enhancing employment prospects.

The team reviewed both the programme and course learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are in place and clear for each programme and course. A variety of assessment methods are offered which reflect a constructive alignment between outcomes, learning methods and assessment approaches. The team noted the satisfaction of teachers, students and employers with these approaches. The team was shown several testimonials from employers which highlighted the level of skills and high motivation of students. The team also met a number of alumni who had secured positions in government administration and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The team concluded that the faculty embraces many components of a student-centred approach to learning and the relationship with teachers is facilitative and individualised. Students construct their own meaning through proactive learning, which the SER describes as "independence and autonomy and the freedom to decide on their own issues without the influence of external factors." The mission of the faculty, the integration of learning methods and engagement with extra curricula activity combine with a focus of equipping all learners with the education and skills they need for their professional and personal development and their role as citizens.

Teaching, learning and assessment approaches are clearly based on personal relationships and whilst this is seen as beneficial in delivering a student-centred approach, the team was concerned that *there should be clear, externally verifiable evidence particularly in the assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes*. Students mentioned that even if information cannot be recalled at the time of assessment, teachers know the students enough to be satisfied that the student can achieve assessment outcomes. The faculty should ensure that assessment rules are followed and can be externally verified. Furthermore, as student support is critical to the success of this approach, the faculty should *establish a framework for continuity of student support* which may be lacking due to the visiting professor system. Additionally, the team concluded that *the system of visiting professors could be strengthened to enhance scientific/research cooperation* between the faculty and other HEIs. For example, if the lecturing visit was extended and combined with a focus on scientific or research projects, this would not only build relationships and research activity but also in the case of foreign professors, create a foundation for internationalisation of the curricula and the faculty.

The team concluded that employability is a focus of curricula and that learning approaches support this. Whilst testimonials and employment in targeted organisations is one measure of success, the team were unclear on the governance of teaching and learning in terms of measuring effectiveness objectively and further enhancing approaches. The team noted that there is a lack of continuation and completion rate, which the faculty attributed to the inability of students to pay fees. The team felt that there should be a *greater analysis of data* to ensure that the reasons for this were fully understood in order to develop a strategy to manage this. The team recommends *clearer governance for Teaching Learning and Assessment*, which would include the gathering of evidence to support the credibility of teaching and learning approaches.

The team was told by both staff and students that the faculty is not perceived as having the academic rigour associated with university education, in part due to the teaching and learning methods deployed within the faculty. Consequently staff and students believed that the faculty was held in low esteem by society. The team believes that providing evidence to support the credibility of teaching and learning approaches will help to counter criticism and boost esteem in society.

The SER noted and the team observed the poor infrastructure and facilities of the faculty which impacted on the numbers of students that could be admitted to programmes. There are no arrangements for students who have disabilities, and therefore access to the building would be problematic. The team recommends that *the faculty should make arrangements for special needs students*. The library was limited in stock; however, students indicated that teachers were helpful in obtaining and loaning books to students.

4. Research

The SER advises that the faculty was forbidden, according to the Law on Higher Education, to organise doctoral studies. Therefore research activities are more focused on the interests of students and academic staff on an individual basis. The team observed that research is not a priority for the faculty and that research activities are carried out on an individual basis. The faculty does not have a research strategy or a research infrastructure. No plans to develop research capacity were evident in the SER or in discussion with managers of the faculty.

The team noted that there are a number of regional publications by staff and students and the team suggests *that the faculty review the publishing activity to make sure effort is justified and builds towards future work.*

As mentioned above, if lecturer visits were extended and combined with a focus on scientific or research projects, this would not only build relationships and research activity but also in the case of foreign professors, create a foundation for the internationalisation of the curricula and the faculty. This would contribute to the recommendation that the faculty *build research networks and relationships with other HEIs in Europe and worldwide to build expertise.*

5. Service to society

The SER stated a clear mission in relation to the faculty's service to society. "As an Institution of higher education the faculty has an obligation, both to students and general public, to get involved in the process and give its own opinion about issues that are found necessary to get involved into."

The SER contained information regarding a number of organised public debates, scientific meetings and roundtables especially in the area of public administration, legislation and the EU and NATO accession processes. These activities were seen as a way of engaging with the public and civil sector and ensuring its participation.

In discussion with various groups, it was clear that both faculty members and students are involved in society on a number of levels. The capacity to facilitate internships in government administration reflects the faculty's good connections and networks nationally. Discussions with external partners and employers reveal that the students are highly valued by employers.

During various meetings, the team met with alumni, many of whom were actively contributing to the work of the faculty and some were employed in various government and other organisations. It was suggested by an alumnus that the faculty should establish a formal alumni association which can contribute to the faculty in a variety of ways including promotion, networking and development. The team agreed with this suggestion.

A frequently stated opinion by managers, teachers, students and employers was the perception that private faculties are generally held in low esteem across many levels of society and this was coupled with a belief that this led to disadvantage in terms of student recruitment, funding and potential employment. The faculty engaged in a number of promotional and marketing activities, which, in part, were intended to dispel some of these perceptions. The team noted that this approach was based on assertions regarding external perceptions and statements on the uniqueness of programmes. The team considered that *a more evidence-based approach could be adopted to promote the public perception of the faculty*. This could be achieved through *more robust internal quality processes and more systematic involvement of stakeholders*.

6. Quality culture

The SER included a clear statement on quality improvement, which is reproduced in full, as it reflects many components that the team agree are essential for the faculty:

Year after year the Faculty strives to improve its functioning. As a college graduate who enrolled a small number of students, each new generation brings new quality, a new recommendation, a new chance and a new motive for improving the functioning. Faculty will continue to be involved in all processes that will work and make a better offer to the Faculty, adopting best practices, as well as elements of a global benchmarking. In addition, special attention will be paid on project activities from which to provide funds for further development of the functioning of the Faculty. Faculty through the connection with former students and an incentive to stay at the Faculty will make an effort towards bridging problems of its own staff, but also the success of the graduates of the Faculty, and build their public image. The programs of the Faculty, will be created in a way to monitor the process of the reform of public administration in our country, and in the best way correspond with what should a modern state in terms of human and scientific capacity.

In summary these are: seeking year on year improvement, gathering feedback from students, benchmarking internationally, working with Alumni, building a public image and confidence and responding to contemporary needs of employers and society.

The team noted the genuine and sincere attempts of the staff to achieve this mission. The team also observed that a common purpose, goal and focus appeared to be shared by managers, teachers and students and that the organisational culture of the faculty was orientated towards the faculty mission. The team believes that this is a foundation on which to *build discussions about quality culture* and to explore how to link the existing shared culture to quality improvement activities and *generally raise awareness of quality culture within the faculty*.

Currently, quality assurance processes are not systematised nor logically organised to identify priorities and the quality cycle is incomplete. For example, a student questionnaire is in place but few students complete this evaluation questionnaire; the faculty stays in contact with alumni but does not systematically gather feedback and ideas for improvement. The founders play no role in controlling or directing quality.

Apart from some figures about students registered on the programmes, the SER contained no figures or statistics and the team noted that some further information requested following the first visit was either not provided or was incomplete. Other sections of this evaluation report (Governance, Teaching and learning, Service to society) already mention either the lack of consistent data or highlight the need for evidence to support activity. At the moment there are no guidelines for internal quality assurance even though some elements of quality improvement activity are evident. The team recommends that *the faculty build on existing*

practice to implement an internal quality system, initially by identifying and prioritising achievable tasks as part of developing a QA system.

7. Internationalisation

The SER acknowledges that “the faculty is relatively ‘new’ and focused on the national and regional markets, but in the future the focus will be on an international level.”

The SER also highlights that the faculty “absolutely understands and recognises the need for cooperation with a number of institutions in the country and abroad”. The SER goes on to explain that the faculty has already developed a network of institutions with which it cooperates — state authorities, local self-government, the Union of Faculty of Administrative and European Studies, Municipalities of Montenegro, diplomatic missions, other universities in the country and abroad, secondary schools, as well as a number of private companies. A large proportion of this type of institutional cooperation is undertaken by signing a memorandum of cooperation. In discussion with managers, the team could not ascertain the activity of this network with regard to international activities beyond having signed memoranda of cooperation.

The SER also recognises that the absence of a programme of study conducted in a foreign language is a limitation, which makes the faculty less attractive to foreign students because it is obligatory to speak Montenegrin. Students had not participated in mobility programmes to other countries and there was no Erasmus Charter for Higher Education in place. There is no inward or outward student mobility.

The team recommends that internationalisation is one of many competing priorities for limited faculty resources and its *priority should be considered and perhaps located as a medium- to long-term goal*. The team also highlights that other *recommendations within this report are compatible and complementary to developing an internationalisation strategy*.

8. Conclusion

The faculty demonstrates a national need for the programmes it offers. It is certain that it attempts to find a way for Montenegrin society to respond to European integration. The team was told that others in society are not so convinced of this need. The recommendations within this report are intended to help the faculty build evidence that demonstrates the usefulness and value of their unique programmes. Unless this is achieved the faculty will face further challenges.

Summary of the recommendations

Develop role of the student ombudsman with a clear remit

Founders need to have an overview of and take an active role in developing the faculty

Decision making processes need to move to a more systems-based management approach and be less reliant on one person to ensure sustainability

Senate should be more proactive and clearly independent

Make sure data is consistent and improve data handling

Gather evidence to support credibility of teaching and learning approaches to boost esteem in society

Establish continuity of student support which may be lacking due to the visiting professor system

Ensure that assessment rules are followed

Make employability skills more explicit

Provide a structure for placements which has aims and is evaluated

Students would benefit from improved facilities, and effort from the founders should be directed towards achieving this

Analyse data and produce strategy regarding drop out and completion rates etc.

Make infrastructure arrangements to accommodate special needs students

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

Review publishing activity to make sure effort is justified and builds towards future work

Build meaningful networks and links with European HEIs

More systematic involvement of stakeholders

Further develop a marketing approach based on evidence and not assertions or uniqueness of programmes

Raise awareness of quality culture within the faculty

Build on existing practice to implement internal quality system

Identify achievable tasks as part of developing a QA system

Internationalisation is one of many competing priorities for limited faculty resources and its priority should be considered

Previous recommendations are compatible and complementary to developing an internationalisation strategy