



**IEP**

EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

***THE FACULTY OF STATE AND EUROPEAN STUDIES, PODGORICA,  
MONTENEGRO***

***FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT***

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of a follow-up evaluation of The Faculty of Administrative and European Studies (FDES), Podgorica, Montenegro. The European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) originally evaluated FDES in 2014 with the report submitted to the institution in July 2014.

This follow-up 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 and follow-up evaluation process**

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

In line with the IEP philosophy as a whole, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the institution itself to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the original evaluation. The institution is expected to submit its own Self-Evaluation Report, which will describe the progress made, possibly indicating barriers to change.

The rationale is that the follow-up evaluation can assist the institution in evaluating the changes that have been made since the original evaluation: What was the impact of the original evaluation? What use has the institution made of the original evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up evaluation is also an opportunity for the institution to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

As for the original evaluation, the all aspects of the follow-up process are also 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 Podgorica, Montenegro, the 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 and 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, 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 (EU) 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 EU institutions, public administration and local governments. Undergraduate and postgraduate studies at FDES are designed on the basis of the need to develop the administrative capacity of Montenegro with 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 the administrative and cultural centre of Montenegro. The faculty offers two programmes (State Legal Studies and European Studies, each at the first, short and second cycles. It currently hosts 209 students, 97 of whom are enrolled on first cycle programmes, 55 on short cycle programmes and 57 on second cycle programmes. There are 24 professors and 20 assistant professors all of whom are engaged on a part time basis. There are three full time staff, comprised of the Dean and two administrative staff.

## **1.3 The evaluation process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the faculty through interviews with the staff, the teaching council, the Senate, students, and also reviewing semester evaluations. The analysis was based on the initial IEP evaluation report from 2014 as well as on the changes that have taken place in the higher education field in the meantime.

The self-evaluation report (SER) of the Faculty of Administrative and European Studies, was sent to the evaluation team in April 2018. The visit of the evaluation team to the faculty took place from 9 to 12 May 2018. The team also reviewed the report and recommendation from the initial evaluation that took place in 2014, as well as the university's progress report (2015).

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

- Krista Varantola, Former Rector, University of Tampere, Finland, Team chair
- Karol Izydor Wysokinski, Former Vice-Rector, Marie Curie – Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

- Will Stringer, student, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, UK
- Andy Gibbs, University of Malaya, Team Coordinator

The team thanks the Dean Dordije Blazic and Ljiljana Račić for the welcome to the faculty and the hospitality extended to the team, and the staff, students and other stakeholders for their open participation in meetings.

## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The team understood from the SER that FDES *“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, FDES aims to be one of the strongest contributors in making reforms in public administration, towards 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.

After reading the 2014 evaluation report, the team explored issues related to the formal governance processes, strategic planning and involvement of stakeholders, and how these issues impacted on sustainability and the capacity for change within the faculty.

With regard to the formal governance processes, the current team noted that the team of the initial evaluation had concerns regarding the operation of the formal governance structure, in particular the functioning of the founders and the Senate and Student Parliament and consequently looked at these points in more detail.

With regard to the Senate, the initial evaluation had concluded that the role and activity of the senate are not visible and that the decision-making processes are unclear. At that time the team recommended 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”*. The SER for the present evaluation responded to this recommendation, advising that *“the activities of the faculty are focused on the activation of the Senate. Here, there is a problem that there are few narrowly specialized professors for areas studied at the Faculty. Therefore, all professors are very busy, and they do not have much time for more active involvement, as many of them work on several university units”*.

The present team met with current representatives of the Senate, including the Chair. The team was assured that Senate meetings took place and had strong student representation. However, the representatives were unable to advise of any issues discussed at Senate or when the last Senate meeting took place and minutes of Senate meetings were requested but not provided. In a meeting with Student Parliament representatives, no awareness of the Senate nor participation in meetings was shown. The team concluded that the Senate did not have regular meetings as there was no evidence of this.

The present team met with the founders of the faculty. There were only two founders who played an active role in founders' meetings. The municipality of Podgorica was a founder but played no active role in the management of the faculty, despite other founders and staff of the faculty expressing that their involvement would be a positive benefit for the faculty. Founders mentioned that although issues regarding management were discussed, there was no action taken as a result of these discussions. The team was informed that the founders have little control and direct input into the governance of the faculty.

The team met with representatives of Student Parliament who advised that they could approach management at any time and their concerns would be listened to. This was

perceived as positive by the Student Parliament, however interventions were ad hoc and generally not concerned with governance of the faculty. The team also noted the similarity between issues raised by the students and those issues raised by the leadership and drew the conclusion that the Student Parliament has no engagement in governance and echoes the leadership views.

The initial evaluation observed that two forms of governance existed simultaneously and could be characterised as formal and informal. The present team concluded that this position had changed and that the informal management was now the sole decision making structure within the faculty, with formal governance procedures being weak and personal rather than institutional and professional.

That the management of the faculty centred on the Dean was noted in the 2014 evaluation report and acknowledged by all staff as well as by the Dean himself. The current team noted that leadership is ad hoc and personalised rather than based on stable structures. This personal approach is strongly evident. The team was repeatedly told that management of the faculty centred on the Dean and that many of its achievements were based on his personal engagement, energy and networking. This is consistent with the information provided in the SER, which indicated that the Dean, as one of the founders of the faculty, represents the faculty, organises and controls the educational, scientific and research work carried out, and determines individual engagement of teachers and experts in science.

Whilst the personal approach of the Dean brings direction and positive activity to the faculty, the SER highlighted that “one of the problems of the faculty is frequent Dean's public appearances”, going on to explain that these public appearances are perceived negatively by some members of the public and adversely impacted on the reputation of the faculty. This was echoed in discussions with all parties within the faculty, including the Dean.

The SER acknowledged that “there is a need for a (new)management approach and a great deal of consideration is being given to finding an appropriate solution that could bring about a shift in terms of introducing new energy and the like, whether through the process of involvement of external partners, recapitalization or other personnel changes”. The need for change in this regard was mentioned by all groups with which the team met. The difficulty was explained in the SER and also by the dean that the faculty since its founding has a problem in terms of impossibility of accrediting doctoral studies. Thus, their own staff points to doctoral studies abroad. Regarding the establishment of own management structures, the faculty has a pronounced autonomy, recognising the fact that it is a "small collective", measured by the number of permanent employees. The team summarises that is is the faculty's view that it is unable to offer doctoral studies and therefore unable to develop a critical mass of suitable qualified employees to participate in effective governance and furthermore the Dean is unable to step aside as there is no one qualified to take his place. The team could not agree with this analysis that the lack of legal competence to offer doctoral degrees was the sole impediment to development of the faculty and the recommendations in this report are intended to indicate alternative courses of action which may resolve the faculty's situation.

The team was concerned that the faculty only minimally and nominally meets the legal governance structures required in Montenegro and as a matter of urgency should address the lack of engagement of staff, students and other stakeholders in the governance of the faculty. Bearing in mind that the team was told that this was not possible, the faculty may wish to initially **reflect on the potential to implement a professional and institutionalised**

**governance structure in the absence of critical mass of staff, involvement of students and other stakeholders.**

If such potential cannot be identified the faculty is recommended to **consider sustainability taking into account succession planning and reviewing all possibilities including merger and closure.**

If the potential to implement a professional and institutionalised governance structure does exist, a strategic plan would help the faculty identify and meet its future needs. The team requested a copy of the strategic plan for the faculty and were provided with an activity plan. The team discussed with key personnel the challenges and major issues facing the faculty. These discussions were characterised by comments regarding legislation, which was perceived to discriminate against the faculty and observations about the lack of participation and engagement of external stakeholders, in particular the local municipality (who are one of the founders of the faculty). The team concluded that the mission of the faculty is specific and focused but unsupported by a realistic vision or a strategic plan, for example, the team could see that students are prepared to work in public administration, what was less evident was the possibility to reform the system.

The team noted that the faculty had remained relatively stable during the period since the initial evaluation in 2014 however there was a lack of strategic planning, contingency planning or risk management. The team recommend that the faculty **develop a strategic plan with SMART goals and which takes account of risks and contingencies.**



### 3. Quality culture

The SER described the quality culture in the following sentence: “Organizational culture is at a high level in terms of responsibility, accuracy, precision, compliance with obligations and an adequate organization”. No evidence or substantiation of this statement was provided in the 2018 SER. Further information was requested prior to the evaluation and the team was advised that “Evidence is student evaluation and student satisfaction with the relationship between the Faculty and the organization. Likewise, respecting a small number of students, it is possible to give them proper attention”.

It was clear that the small number of students in the faculty raised the potential for closer, more personally tailored relationships and educational interventions, however the team believes that being a small faculty is not, in itself, an indicator of high quality teaching and learning.

Nevertheless the team discerned a strong focus on quality and an institutional culture focused on delivering quality education in line with the faculty mission. The 2014 evaluation report had noted the genuine and sincere attempts of the staff to achieve this mission. The present 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 found that a good culture of quality existed within the faculty and were impressed by the efforts made by two full time administrative staff to maintain this. However, the team observed that systems and processes are often informal and, echoing the 2014 evaluation report, found that 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 formal quality processes and executive awareness of recommendations from the initial evaluation was not demonstrated.

The team recommends **that the faculty implement a systematic internal quality assurance structure**, which would provide effective collection, management and review of information that could enhance external perception of the faculty and enable internal issues, *inter alia* sustainability, to be resolved.

The SER prepared for the 2014 evaluation had made a clear statement on quality improvement, which was summarised in the report of the initial evaluation as: 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 of the initial evaluation believed that this was 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, however the present team suggests that external input may be helpful to facilitate discussion and implementation of an internal quality assurance system and recommend that the faculty **provide training for staff in internal quality assurance processes**. This could take the form of exchange with other institutions. An outcome of the training should be to **use Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area as a basis for planning internal quality assurance**.

#### **4. Teaching and learning**

The team noted a distinctive approach to teaching and learning which was evident through a number of 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 employing visiting professors, an emphasis on practical work, a period of internship, and the integration of these through methods of active teaching and learning. A commitment to linking theory and practice was also emphasised and this was confirmed by students with whom the team met.

The 2014 evaluation team had noted that programmes and approaches were compliant with contemporary European approaches in terms of structure, length, use of learning outcomes and allocation of ECTS.

The initial evaluation had also concluded that the faculty embraces many components of a student-centred approach to learning and the relationship with teachers was facilitative and individualised. Students construct their own meaning through proactive learning, which the 2018 SER describes as “independence and autonomy and the freedom to decide on their own issues without the influence of external factors”. Similarly the team learned that teachers have autonomy to select and apply teaching and learning methods. The team heard a number of examples of student-centred, interactive approaches. In particular the embedding of diversity issues within the English language course was noted by the team as innovative.

The teaching and learning approach was appreciated by students who unconditionally said that their teaching was excellent. This was reflected in positive student evaluations. Teaching, learning and assessment approaches were clearly based on personal relationships and personal preferences of the teaching staff. The team learned that new teachers were chosen on the basis of their subject expertise and that there was no formal induction, training or mentorship. On examining student evaluations of teaching, the team found that the outcomes were positive but focused on performance of teacher rather than student learning. Taking these issues into account the team concluded that there is no formal governance of or strategy for, teaching and learning and recommend, as the initial evaluation did, that the faculty may consider to **improve governance of and introduce a strategy for teaching and learning in terms of measuring effectiveness objectively and further enhancing approaches.**

The 2014 evaluation had recommended that, “there should be clear, externally verifiable evidence particularly in the assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes”. Improvements in formal assessment processes were noted by the present team. Additionally the team learned that course learning outcomes could be achieved in different ways depending on the employment status of the student. This was viewed as a positive approach which took into account learning which had occurred in the workplace.

The initial evaluation had also noted that there was a lack of continuation and completion rate, which the faculty attributed to the inability of students to pay fees. The current team felt, as the previous team did, that **there should be a more thorough analysis of data to ensure that the reasons for student non-completion were fully understood in order to develop a strategy to manage this.**

## **5. Research**

The team learned that the faculty has its own research institute, but information about the institute was not provided in the SER and the head of the research institute was unavailable during the evaluation site visit. The team of the initial evaluation had observed that research activities are carried out on an individual basis and the present team concluded that this continues to be the case. The SER reported a regional research network, within which the faculty participated in several bilateral projects through which researchers were exchanged between institutions. Although the team could discern some pockets of research activity, it did not appear coordinated and the relationship to the faculty mission was unclear. The team concluded that the faculty does not have a research strategy or a research infrastructure, well developed vision, capacity nor critical mass for research within a global and regional context.

The SER from the 2014 evaluation stated that the faculty was not permitted, according to the Law on Higher Education, to organise doctoral studies. In the present evaluation this topic was repeatedly cited as a reason for a lack of development of research and other activities and there was a belief among the leadership and staff that if the faculty could offer doctoral education many issues, including research capacity would be addressed. The team concluded that this focus on the legal restriction in offering doctoral studies provided an unrealistic vision and solution.

The team recommend that the faculty **review the role, purpose and utility of the research institute** and **focus on what can be achieved in the current context**. For example a vision for a knowledge exchange conference was mentioned in interviews which appears feasible and achievable, and some progress had been made in terms of research networks. The team recommend that the faculty encourage existing individual research activity and **continue to develop research networks and relationships with other higher education institutions in Europe and worldwide to build expertise**.

## **6. Service to society**

The 2014 evaluation report identified that 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”.

Although internships and placements continue, the esteem by which they were valued by society was not so apparent during the present evaluation. There may be good examples of service to society but none were described in the 2018 SER nor were external examples of this provided during the evaluation. The evaluation team did not meet anyone external to the faculty during the review.

The team noted that the approach towards promotion of the faculty 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.**

## 7. Internationalisation

The SER advised that “regarding the strategy of development of internationalization, it is the continuous development of contacts with EU partners, and the regular practice of students leaving for the third year in a several-day visit to the EU Institutions in Brussels is also held”. Beyond this, during meetings with staff and students, there was little consideration of what internationalisation in higher education means. The team found this somewhat surprising in that the faculty, in the 2014 SER had indicated that it “absolutely understands and recognises the need for cooperation with a number of institutions in the country and abroad” and that “in the future the focus will be on an international level.”

Regarding mobility, the SER for the present evaluation mentioned that “Although our students have and use opportunities to participate in student exchanges through numerous programs, as a higher education institution, we are not able to accommodate students from another speaking field.” The team were not presented with any information regarding outward student mobility and neither did they meet any students or staff who had participated in outward mobility. Although the team were told that numerous international agreements had been signed, there was a lack of Erasmus+ agreements and limited alternatives to Erasmus+ mobility.

In terms of internationalisation, the faculty organises an annual trip to the European Commission in Brussels which is highly valued by students and commended by the team. European studies is *de facto* an international subject, and additionally many faculty members do not come from Montenegro, so to some extent there is a degree of internationalisation within the faculty. However it is of some concern that the faculty does not consider internationalisation as a priority and or set itself within the higher education internationalisation agenda. The team notes that internationalisation is one of many competing priorities for limited faculty resources and recommends **its priority should be considered and located as a medium- to long-term goal.**

## **8. Conclusions and summary of the recommendations**

The faculty provides graduates that gain employment in public administration. The students and lecturers are content and many examples of good practices are evident. No external view of the faculty was presented and consequently there are limited challenges to the prevailing introspective faculty view. The leadership and governance of the faculty are personalised rather than professional and a lack of critical mass prevents development in many areas. Strategic planning is limited and does not provide reassurances about sustainability. The team advises that decision-making processes need to move to a more independent systems-based management approach and be less reliant on personalised views to ensure sustainability and avoid that problematic issues become externalised, which limits the capacity of the faculty to address them. The recommendations and reflections provided in this report aim to support the faculty in tackling some of these challenges.

### **The faculty is recommended to:**

Reflect on the potential to implement a professional and institutionalised governance structure in the absence of critical mass of staff, involvement of students and other stakeholders.

Consider sustainability taking into account succession planning and reviewing all possibilities including merger and closure.

Develop a strategic plan with SMART goals and which takes account of risks and contingencies.

Implement a systematic internal quality assurance structure.

Provide training for staff in internal quality assurance processes.

Use the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education area as a basis for planning internal quality assurance.

Improve governance of and introduce a strategy for teaching and learning in terms of measuring effectiveness objectively and further enhancing approaches.

There should be a more thorough analysis of data to ensure that the reasons for student non-completion were fully understood in order to develop a strategy to manage this.

Review the role, purpose and utility of the research institute.

Focus on what can be achieved in the current context in terms of research.

Continue to develop research networks and relationships with other higher education institutions in Europe and worldwide to build expertise.

Adopt a more evidence-based approach to service to society to promote the public perception of the faculty.

Consider the relative priority of internationalisation as a medium- to long-term goal in the context of the limited resources.