

SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of South East European University (SEEU). The evaluation took place in the framework of the project “Skills Development and Innovation Support Project” (SDISP), implemented by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia¹ through the Ministry of Education and Science. The overall objective of the project is to improve transparency of resource allocation and promote accountability in higher education, enhance the relevance of secondary technical vocational education, and support innovation capacity in the country.

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. 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 IEP 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 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.

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

- What is the institution trying to do?

¹ This designation is used for the purposes of this project only and does not represent any formal position of EUA or IEP regarding the name of the country.

- 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 South Eastern European University's profile

SEEU was set up in 2001, initially as the first private higher education institution in the Republic of Macedonia to enable the use of the Albanian language in higher education, which at that time was not possible in Macedonian public higher education institutions. It is often referred to as a "peace-keeping institution", made possible by national and international efforts. The status of the university was later changed to be a public-private non-profit university, which means that SEEU can also receive state contributions. This particular set-up remains unique among Macedonian higher education institutions. Even though this change of status occurred relatively early in the history of the university, it has only received direct funding from the government since 2014. This funding now so far accounts for 9-9.5% of the university's yearly budget. SEEU's main source of income was and remains tuition fees (accounting for about 88% of income). Furthermore, the university site belongs to the government and is used on the basis of a long-term agreement (self-evaluation report (SER), p. 30). SEEU sees itself as committed to "a unique multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural education in the Republic of Macedonia and the wider region, based upon the leading tendencies of international higher education. It is a co-educational institution and accepts students of all ethnicities, genders, languages, religious affiliation, and political beliefs, on the basis of merit and ability." (SER, p. 4). Students can study in Albanian, Macedonian and in English. The strategy of the university states that SEEU has aimed to be a leading modern university in the Republic of Macedonia since its foundation in 2001, with a research focus on the socio-economic disciplines and delivering high quality education. SEEU's moto is "Bringing Knowledge to Life".

As outlined in the SER and mentioned repeatedly during the site visits, since the foundation of SEEU there have been significant changes in context in which the institution operates. These changes include:

- the legalisation of using Albanian as a language of instruction in other public higher education institution, which is applied in the nearby State University of Tetovo as well as in the Mother Teresa University, a newly established public university located in Skopje;
- the economic crisis, followed by a long period of recession leading to funding difficulties, as potential students and their families have less money;
- the general demographic decline accompanied by the opening of a number of new higher education institutions, including public institutions, which are therefore competing for a lower number of potential students, as well as for grants and projects (SER p. 5). Apart from SEEU, there are now six public and 15 private higher education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia, some of which were established only

recently, despite the demographic decline. As the team was told, the number of secondary school graduates in Macedonia has dropped from 92,848 to 77,625 students between 2010/11 and 2015/16 respectively. Due to the falling birth rate and the newly established public higher education institutions there are currently approximately 9,000 more available study places than potential students.

It should be noted that this evaluation took place at a time at which SEEU's previous strategy for 2013-2016 had come to an end, and at which the new strategy for 2017-2020 was under development. The new strategy was adopted in autumn 2017, shortly before the IEP team's second visit. Also at a more general level, the team felt that SEEU is currently in a period of transition, given many uncertainties due to the absence of a national Macedonian strategy for higher education, the institution's high dependence on tuition fees in light of the increased competition for students, in particular at undergraduate level. The new strategy for 2017-2020 highlights three priorities which can be summarised as follows: (1) to deepen external collaboration and to foster processes of digitalisation in teaching, learning and research; (2) to enable interdisciplinary research in novel areas, based on current disciplinary strengths; (3) to foster the use of new technologies in administration, in particular in areas where they can be carried out automatically, and to simplify layers of management at central and faculty level.

SEEU comprises five faculties: the Faculty of Business and Economics; the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies; the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication; the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Public Administration and Political Sciences. According to the data provided during the first visit, the total number of students is 3,756 (academic year 2015/2016).

The largest faculties are Business and Economics, and Law with around 900 students per faculty; there are approximately 650 students in each of the other three faculties. The overall gender ratio among students is 43.53% female and 56.47% male students (all figures from 2015/2016). Apart from students from the Republic of Macedonia, recruitment of students, particularly at Master and doctoral level, is notably strong from neighbouring countries. For example, in 2015/2016, there were 1,065 applications from Macedonia, 259 from Kosovo and 21 from Serbia. According to the SER, the university has 278 employees of whom 158 are academic staff (108 full time and 50 part-time) and 120 administrative staff, most of whom are employed full-time (SER p. 5).

1.3 The evaluation process

SEEU has previous experience of the IEP methodology, having undergone an initial evaluation in 2004 and a follow-up evaluation in 2009. The self-evaluation process in the context of the current evaluation was undertaken by the Self-Evaluation Commission which included representatives of the university management, faculties, and administration. The team met this group during the first site visit.

The SER covered the academic year 2015/2016, but with the intention of reflecting also on the previous three years in order to feed into the development of the university's new strategy 2017-2020. It is based on the input from all faculties and units, submitted in the form of self-evaluation reports and SWOT analyses.

The SER was sent to the evaluation team early in February 2017. The visits of the evaluation team to the campuses in Tetovo and Skopje took place from 17 to 19 April 2017 and from 29 October to 1 November 2017. In between the visits, SEEU provided the evaluation team with additional documentation.

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

- Krista Varantola, former Rector, University of Tampere, Finland, team chair
- Cemal Talug, former Rector, Ankara University, Turkey
- David Vincent, former Vice-Rector, Open University, United Kingdom
- Rok Primožič, student, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Lil Reif, expert for European and International Research Funding, Austrian Research Promotion Agency, Austria, team coordinator

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Professor Dr. Zamir Dika, and his team for the warm welcome and hospitality during the site visits, as well as for the lively discussions about the university and the broader environment in which it operates. We would like to record special thanks to our contact person, Associate Professor Dr. Veronika Kareva, Executive Advisor for Performance Management and Quality, for the smooth and efficient organisation of the visits and her kind support throughout. Furthermore, the team would like to thank all staff and students involved in the evaluation for their preparation as well as for the time they gave and their openness during the meetings.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

SEEU states that it has aimed from the outset to be a leading modern university in the Republic of Macedonia. In its new strategy, SEEU has set as one of its strategic priorities the use, where appropriate, of new technologies in administration, as well as the removal of unnecessary layers of management, both centrally and in the faculties. The team found that governance and institutional decision-making processes are conceptualized, understood and practised at SEEU as a means of ensuring quality and institutional improvement.

The main governance bodies at SEEU are the University Board, the Senate and the Rector's Council. The University Board consists of nine members, of which six are external members (three from Macedonia and three international members). Four of the nine members of the Board form an Executive Committee, which meets twice a year, whereas the full University Board meets twice a year. The University Board is responsible for the overall mission of the university and draws up the strategic plan of the university in close cooperation with the rector and the Senate. The process of developing the strategic plan is described as a collective composition undertaken by the Board, where the Executive Committee members usually take the lead (SER, p. 10). Once ready, the strategy is presented to the staff of the university and via SEEU's website to the general public. The rector, who is appointed by the University Board from a shortlist drawn up by the Senate, is responsible for the effective working of SEEU and for the implementation of the strategy.

The rector is supported by the executive management team consisting of the provost, the secretary general, the pro-rector for academic issues, the pro-rector for international relations and the pro-rector for entrepreneurship and planning. The Senate is composed of the rector (chair), the pro-rectors, the deans and heads of other academic units, members from each faculty or other units, a student member from each faculty and one member from the administrative staff. The main responsibility of the Senate is to advise the rector and the University Board on the development of academic activities. Links and communication are ensured by the rector being able to attend all meetings of the University Board. Another mechanism to ensure communication between the Senate, the rector and the University Board and where, according to the SER, major decisions are taken (SER p. 9), is the Rector's Council which consists of the above-mentioned executive management team, all deans, and directors of centres and research institutes.

The team found the institution's mechanisms of governance and communication to be convincing and effective. Having met with external and international members of the University Board, the team found that they are committed and well-integrated in the work of the Board. In the team's opinion, the general set-up of the Board with its external and international members is a good format which combines local, regional and international input and viewpoints on the strategic development of the institution.

From the information given in the SER and during the site visits, the team concludes that students are well represented in the governance of the university. The Senate includes one

student representative per faculty. Faculty councils have a student representative for each year of study. It should also be noted that the president of the Students' Union can attend both the University Board meetings as well as the meetings of the Rector's Council. Although they do not have voting rights, they can participate in discussions, which the team finds a commendable approach. Furthermore, students are also part of the quality assurance teams at faculty level. All in all, the team had the impression that students in general feel well represented and well heard.

However, the team also learned that there are cases where the student representatives do not execute their duties, namely participating in the meetings, which was also raised as a concern by senior management of SEEU. There appears to be no mechanism for substituting a student representative if they are not able to participate in meetings. In order to ensure commitment of student representatives, the team recommends a *review of the rules for electing students and the work of students in the university's bodies*. This could include introducing a mechanism to pass the duty on to another representative in case of absence. Furthermore, the team recommends *organising training in cooperation with the Student Parliament for elected students representatives – for example, on governance, quality assurance, etc.*

The central steering document for SEEU's institutional development is the Strategic Plan outlining the main development areas for the period 2017-2020. The reason for opting for a rather short period was explained by the university as a "practical outside limit", due to the unpredictable and sometimes abrupt changes in the national Law on Higher Education, which makes longer-term planning exceptionally imprecise (SER, p. 10). Once adopted, the implementation of the strategy is largely left to the university management and the faculties (SER, p. 10).

The team learned that at the faculty level (as for other units), yearly action plans are developed based on the strategy and followed up by yearly self-evaluation reports feeding into an institutional self-evaluation report, which includes recommendations for improvement. These reports inform the new round of planning at the level of the faculty or unit. In the third year, the yearly self-evaluation report takes a broader view and feeds into the development of the new strategy of the university. With the strategy text in mind and the yearly planning documents at its disposal, the team found that there could be a closer connection between strategy and planning, and recommends that SEEU *set up a prioritised action plan for three years with clear and realistic targets at a general level, based on the strategy*, to guide the yearly action plans at the level of faculties and units. Such an action plan could still be monitored on a yearly basis, but the team thinks that such an approach would be more productive and efficient, given the size of the institution and the short overall period of three years for the strategy.

As a general impression, the team observed some frustration and fatigue among staff related to missing government decisions on higher education in general, as this makes long-term planning difficult. However, the team would like to remind SEEU about its unique legal status, which grants it a higher level of autonomy than the public universities, which can also be seen

as an opportunity. Therefore the team thinks that SEEU should *be proactive, when possible, instead of waiting for government decisions.*

The team learned that all academic staff members have a contractual obligation to be engaged in teaching and research, with the hours of teaching depending on whether academic staff are full-time or part-time, and whether or not they have an academic title. Full-time academic staff teach between eight and 12 hours per week, with a maximum of four courses per semester. Full-time staff must be available at least four hours a week for student consultation. Academic staff without academic titles teach 12 to 16 hours per semester, and in some cases up to 18 hours. Part-time academic staff teach on an as-needed basis. If such staff are full-time employees of another institution, a formal agreement between the rector of SEEU and the rector of the full-time employing institution is needed (SER, p. 15).

The team was pleased to read and see that SEEU is committed to providing support and training for its staff. Twice a year, at the beginning of the new semester, the institution organises formal training sessions, run by the Quality Office. These events are provided both for academic and administrative staff, which the team found commendable. The training is usually carried out by staff members. The content depends on the current priorities in the university's development and training topics derive from recommendations by the deans, from proposals by staff members or from the results of the teaching observation reports, a central tool of quality assessment and development (see further in chapter 3). Previous training courses have been, for example, on assessment methodologies, digitalisation of the classroom and technology in teaching (SER, p. 15).

In addition to these regular training sessions, the university is also making use of training opportunities that arise from guest speakers. Furthermore SEEU reported that staff provide training among themselves if there is a particular expertise worth sharing. The team would like to highlight that it was impressed with the well-conceptualised and implemented training in support of the strategic priority of digitalisation in teaching and learning via Google Classroom, with a training concept that the team found sound, realistic and implemented in a supportive and inclusive manner.

Another mechanism SEEU has introduced for staff development is financial support for publications (conference attendances and journal publications), currently worth 700 EUR per year for each academic staff member. As the institution acknowledges, there is no such support for administrative staff members, and the SEEU self-evaluation group recommends considering additional courses for the professional development of its administrative staff.

In order to align individual interests with plans for development within the overall strategic aims of the institution, staff members have yearly bilateral meetings with their line managers. As noted in the SER, during these meetings the dean or director reads "a summary of the individual's accomplishments, and sets challenges for improvement." (SER, p. 11). SEEU observed a need for improvement in this process, to "develop more effective, and more

enforceable, targets for improvement, particularly in ways that may be objectively measured” (SER, p. 11).

The team, however, found this suggested approach somewhat discouraging and not likely to lead to a fruitful dialogue. The team therefore recommends that SEEU *look into the general concept of the annual talks and supporting materials, redesigning them towards annual staff appraisal between the staff member and their superior colleague in the framework of the collective aims of the unit.* The team would like to emphasise the concept of staff appraisal based on two principles: first, the dialogic and bi-directional sense on an equal footing, instead of the leadership only being in the evaluative and target-setting position; second, the responsibility of staff in leadership positions to be interested in learning about ways of providing favourable and motivating working conditions for the individual staff member.

3. Quality culture

SEEU describes itself as “a regional leader in internal quality assurance and institutional improvement” (SER p. 9). During the site visits, the team observed a high awareness of quality as well as a sense of joint ownership across the institution. Apart from the senior management, high quality standards and responsibility for them were often mentioned by staff and students as a distinctive trait of SEEU, in particular in the sense that the institution is committed to high quality standards not only on paper, but also in practice. The team could see that SEEU has developed a sound approach to quality and that it has developed a quality culture.

SEEU has quality assurance mechanisms and support structures in place for all aspects of institutional activity, whether teaching and learning, research or administration. The team found quality assurance well integrated in the overall governance mechanisms and strategic management of the institution. SEEU has a Quality Office and an Executive Quality Advisor, who is also part of the rector's executive management team. At faculty level, quality teams are in place, which include student members as well as external stakeholders. These small teams meet regularly to discuss areas of improvement, mainly regarding the development of faculty policy, action plans and curriculum design (SER p. 11). With regard to the quality teams at faculty level, the university notes that this had traditionally been a "weak area", but has substantially improved since the beginning of 2016.

SEEU applies several mechanisms of external quality assurance. As mentioned earlier, SEEU has previously made use of IEP evaluations. Furthermore, study programmes have to be accredited by the Macedonian Board of Accreditation (the last accreditation of all programmes was undertaken in 2016/2017, see SER p. 11). The team was told that the process is rather slow and overregulated, with too little autonomy for the institution. The accreditation process is seen as time-consuming, with slow and unhelpful responses from the government and often delayed decisions.

SEEU is an ISO certified institution and was also acknowledged in 2015 with the "HR Excellence in Research" award, which is given by the European Commission to institutions with a stimulating and favourable working environment for researchers, complying with the standards of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

In addition SEEU has developed and applies its own formats of external quality assurance using external experts, which the team found to be sound. One of these is the concept of Quality Champions, who are two senior experts in higher education from the UK appointed by SEEU. The Quality Champions visit the university twice a year to conduct an institutional review based upon a specific, pre-arranged subject - for example, a visit of one or two faculties, or a visit devoted to a specific topic such as research or assessment. Based on these visits SEEU receives external feedback for further improvements. Thus, SEEU seeks to "maintain basic minimum trends in European higher education" (SER p. 11). Another approach is the faculty level review carried out by external reviewers coming from SEEU's main international university partners:

the University of Indiana, the University of Zagreb and the University of Ljubljana. The main aim of these reviews is to help the university renew and improve its curricula from an international perspective.

SEEU runs regular student surveys on quality in teaching. The process is overseen by the Quality Office and administered at faculty level by student advisors. For each academic staff member at least one class per study cycle is assessed per year. The content of the survey is identical across the whole institution and is available in Albanian, Macedonian and English. Results are provided to the staff member in question and include for reference averages from the respective faculty as well as the overall average results from the university. The results of these surveys are also used for staff promotion. In addition to these surveys, SEEU has recently conducted teaching assessment polls in two of the five faculties.

Another central instrument for quality assurance and development is peer assessment via teaching observation, whereby a staff member is observed during class by two colleagues: one from the same faculty, and another from a different faculty. The team was informed that this instrument has been used since the founding of the institution, with the intention of learning about best teaching practice in general, as well as enabling collegial feedback. The process includes a pre-meeting with the staff member responsible for the class to inform the observers about the topics and activities planned; the class observation itself; and feedback and reporting to the staff member observed and to which they can add objections, if any. As with the results of the student surveys, these reports are later also used for staff promotion. SEEU has recently introduced a very detailed template with a variety of aspects to be covered during the teaching observations, serving as a structure for a more systematic feedback. There are currently two general ways the teaching observation is realised: a) via announced observations and b) via unannounced observations by the rector and the provost, which was introduced only recently. The rationale of the unannounced observations is to have a mechanism of control, which is different to the initial intention of providing a mechanism of feedback and learning.

Among the staff members and at the faculties visited, the team heard diverging views about the teaching observations, ranging from very positive to very critical. Critical points raised were related to: an observer coming from another faculty, and not from the subject being taught; the quality of explanations, and it not being clear to staff observed why one aspect was seen as excellent, and another one only as satisfactory; or that comments were often trivial. In general, the team believes that the approach of using peer feedback is a good way of raising quality in teaching and fostering communication among staff about teaching methodology. However, there are two aspects of the implementation that the team thinks SEEU should consider changing. The first relates to the template for the teaching observation, which the team found too detailed. The form covers approximately 50 items dedicated to planning and preparation ("from syllabus and lesson plan"), teaching, management, resources, student involvement and learning, checking understanding and progress plus a summary of good practice and advice for improvement. The second aspect relates to the underlying idea of the teaching observation, linking a format of communication and learning among staff with a mode of control, thus losing the potential to be inspiring. Furthermore, the team wondered how this

elaborated instrument reads together with the results from the student surveys, as both are used for staff promotion. The team poses this question also because of the size of the institution and is not convinced that this is fit for purpose. When discussing these observations with SEEU staff members and the senior management, the team learned that there is a widespread view that close control is needed, mainly given the larger context in which the institution operates. Nevertheless, the team finds the implementation of the teaching observation too control-oriented, multi-layered, and consuming too much time and paper. It also sees the threat of it becoming demotivating and counterproductive rather than inspiring. As stated earlier, the team observed among staff and students a clear and sound understanding of responsibility for and ownership of the high standards and the necessity to maintain these. Therefore, the team thinks that SEEU senior management can exercise greater trust towards its staff members, and should reconsider the original aim of using teaching observation as a way of learning from each other, rather than one of control.

Having seen the portfolio of instruments and indicators applied to ensure quality and improve the institution, the team recommends that SEEU *reconsider its QA instruments and indicators: Is the institution measuring the right things? Is the yearly staff evaluation effective? Does it help the staff, is it inspiring? How do the different instruments for evaluation interconnect?* Linked to the process and the documentation of these instruments, the team recommends that the university *simplifies paper work and delegates responsibility, with a view to involving less paper and time*, in particular regarding the teaching observation and the yearly staff evaluation. The team also learned that SEEU plans to establish a Centre for Analytics to conduct institutional research in a way that will reflect better on trends and be used for the development of the university, which the team finds commendable.

4. Teaching and learning

As discussed earlier, SEEU aims at being leading university in the Republic of Macedonia, delivering high quality education with a focus on social sciences and humanities. The university strives to keep curricula of "international quality and relevance, with a high level of independent critical thought encouraged". SEEU's motto is "Bringing Knowledge to Life". Ideally, SEEU sees for its graduates two routes of progress: to find employment and enter the labour market or to continue their studies. What was repeatedly stressed by staff and students alike is SEEU's commitment to deliver degrees "with content", which also means implementing new legal requirements in the provision of study programmes in the best possible way, and not only on paper.

The university offers programmes in all three study cycles: 11 Bachelor programmes, 30 Master programmes and 12 doctoral programmes. According to the SER, all programmes comply with the legal requirement of 60% of the curriculum being mandatory, 30% electives in the field and 10% of free electives (from courses offered across the institution) (SER, p. 12). In addition to the faculties, other units involved in the delivery of study programmes include the eLearning Centre and the Language Centre, which provide language courses and training in using digital technology. Furthermore, the Business Development Centre and the Business Academy are fostering the development of tailored courses based on a strong cooperation between the university and the business community, which the team found commendable. SEEU has developed a flexible scheme of offering its students at undergraduate level both three- and four-year Bachelor programmes (180 and 240 ECTS), where the fourth year is seen as an extension. This is in particular relevant to students seeking employment in labour market contexts where a four-year Bachelor degree is a prerequisite. Within the second cycle, the university offers both one- and two-year Master programmes and has in recent years also developed specialisation studies. These are one-year non-degree programmes (60 ECTS), and as the team noted, it is first in this area that the university aims to implement interdisciplinary oriented programmes based on a high level of cross-faculty cooperation, which the team found commendable. Overall, the team observed that SEEU is very attentive and fast in developing new or existing study programmes in order to meet the needs of the labour market. However, the team found that SEEU is not taking full advantage of its small size and the opportunities deriving from its disciplinary profile, which means that it has the potential to explore closer cross-faculty cooperation and more interdisciplinary options in teaching and learning, in particular at the undergraduate level, than is the case so far. The team found that there are a number of overlapping courses that are taught separately in different programmes. Given the decrease of student numbers and higher competition for students at undergraduate level, SEEU could streamline its undergraduate programmes into bigger units, avoiding overlapping courses. Therefore, the team recommends to *review the volume of undergraduate courses by removing overlapping courses and consolidating existing programmes*. Regarding types and methods of delivery, the team observed that SEEU has a clear concept, differentiating roughly between theory and practice, and between methods applied at undergraduate, Master and doctoral levels. From discussions with staff and students, the team saw that SEEU staff have a

well-founded understanding of student-centred teaching and learning and apply a variety of approaches (training, evaluation, observation) to monitor and support staff in further development, as outlined in chapters 2 and 3. More particularly, the concept of the flipped classroom has been intensively promoted in the last three years, backed by several training sessions for staff. At Master and doctoral levels, the university puts more emphasis on "individual research autonomy", which means fewer classes than is the case at undergraduate level. Master courses take place every second weekend, from Friday evening to Saturday evening. The rationale for this approach is to make Master studies feasible for working students and for those with children. At doctoral level, students meet four times per semester, usually in the format of seminars and symposia (SER, p. 14). Based on a variety of sample course syllabuses from different faculties, the team saw that a variety of assessment forms are thoughtfully applied.

One central element of SEEU's concept of teaching and learning is tightly linked with the use of Macedonian, Albanian and English in teaching and learning. The team found the emphasis on multilingualism and multiculturalism, rather than either/or opportunities to study in one of the three languages, to be particularly convincing. In this regard, the team would like to comment on a note from the SER, which addresses the difficulty of providing adequate teaching materials in Albanian or Macedonian (SER, p. 12). Given the university's profile of having a flexible language policy, the team suggests that SEEU can be more confident in exposing students to sources in different languages instead of adhering to the idea that teaching material has to match the language of instruction in a course (or that all students must be equally able to read all teaching material). In a more general sense, the team recommends that SEEU *carefully expands the volume of courses taught in English at undergraduate level, while keeping the profile of Albanian and Macedonian*. Furthermore, the team recommends an *increase in the use of English at Master level, and giving a more prominent role for the Language Centre at this level*.

The students to whom the team talked were in general proud and enthusiastic about the university, and well-informed about course content and study regulations. Staff were described as open and very supportive. Information on study programmes down to the course level is provided in a systematic and elaborated manner, including the application of learning outcomes, assessment methodologies and even reference to ethical standards, which the team found commendable. One complaint students made and which was also noted by the Quality Champions is that SEEU's limited library space can also be used by students from the State University in Tetovo.

The university is making increasing use of digital means to support teaching and learning, covering student administration and course work. As already outlined, SEEU has placed the increased use of digital technology in teaching and learning among its strategic priorities for the years to come and the team observed that SEEU is already very committed to this. The team was told that SEEU has recently migrated from its previous learning management system to Google Classroom and it seemed to the team that this change was quite successful. The overall process of digitalisation in teaching and learning is driven by the eLearning Centre. The

eLearning Centre developed a concept to integrate technology in teaching and learning, with a well described system of different levels of use, which are now gradually being implemented. The team was told that so far all courses have reached level 1 (syllabus and resources available via Google Classroom) and that SEEU is currently working on moving on towards level 2, which means that assignments are included. As emphasised earlier, the team found the approach not only well elaborated, but convincing in particular due to the supportive and realistic manner of its implementation, complemented by staff training and very effective and efficient individual support whenever needed. The team thinks that the digitalisation strategy is working well in teaching and learning. Since the virtualisation of higher education will be even more important in the future, the team encourages SEEU to stay committed to the digitalisation of teaching and learning and recommends to *invest even more into the realisation of its strategy*.

As outlined in chapters 2 and 3, SEEU uses several means to address the quality of study programmes. Alongside these, SEEU conducts employability surveys of its recent graduates and has a clear picture regarding the employability of its students. According to the most recent survey results which were included in the SER, 44% of graduates from Bachelor programmes were employed and 30% unemployed; 10% were continuing their studies by choice and 11% because of unemployment (SER, p. 7). The high unemployment rates among graduates reflects a major general employment problem in the Republic of Macedonia rather than institutional failure to provide adequate study programmes. As the team had seen via the various mechanisms for including stakeholder perspectives and establishing good partnerships with companies, SEEU is very clear about the importance of study programmes corresponding with labour market needs.

At SEEU, the student-teacher ratio at institutional level is approximately 20-25 students per teacher. As the SER highlights, this ratio varies significantly between courses and programmes, depending *inter alia* on course type and mode of delivery (SER, p. 13). When talking to the institution's senior management, the team was informed that that student drop-out in general is around 30%. Given the situation of open entry, as well as the general economic and financial situation in the country, the team found this level of non-completion understandable. However, having observed the difficulty in providing the drop-out numbers, the team recommends that the institution *uses drop-out rate as a key performance indicator to follow up in a differentiated manner*. The team learned from staff and management that most often students drop out because of financial reasons, and in some areas because they would find a job even before graduation. The team particularly encourages SEEU to explore opportunities for *assisting those who drop out for financial reasons*.

It was stressed during the meetings with SEEU's staff and leadership that the university sees its mission to realise even the sometimes unrealistic legal requirements not only on paper, but also in practice, and to be well-integrated in the overall aims of the study programmes. The university reports that it applies the legal requirements on course content, for example, 10% of each course has to be taught by an external expert, the so-called "clinical teaching". While acknowledging the positive aspect of this concept of establishing links between curricula and the labour market, SEEU was critical about its feasibility and reported that it is often difficult to

find and invite suitable candidates. Thus, the institution concludes that it would be desirable to establish a regular resource for the staff to support this process, which the team found to be sensible. Furthermore, the team learned that all students participate in mandatory internship programmes, through which they can gain insights into the work of businesses and institutions. The team was told that companies and institutions varied very widely in the quality of internship opportunities they provided. To ensure relevance and quality, SEEU has introduced a mentor scheme, which means that every student is assigned to an academic staff member who will act as their mentor for support during the internship.

SEEU provides a range of mobility opportunities for student and staff mobility (see further in chapter 7), with the main source of funding being Erasmus+. The team learned that SEEU is thinking of extending the idea of providing international mobility opportunities for the obligatory internships, thus integrating the international dimension further into the curricula. SEEU has a set of criteria for selecting students for mobility, for example, language skills relevant for the future host institution are an asset. The university is applying ECTS and providing the Diploma Supplement. In relation to the recognition of results, SEEU noticed in the process of self-evaluation that further improvements are needed, but it was the team's impression from talking to staff and students, that the procedures for this are working well and if problems do arise on a sporadic basis, the institution tries to find a good solution to them.

Regarding the evaluation and professional development of academic staff in their teaching skills and the link between research and teaching, it should be reminded here that it is a contractual obligation for all staff members to contribute to teaching and research, as described in chapter 2. Involvement in research is monitored via the yearly staff evaluation, including the participation in projects, conferences and publications (see further in chapter 5).

SEEU is particularly proud of its student services, stating that it is “the regional leader in the provision of effective and documented student services”, with assistance throughout the student lifecycle. This was also confirmed during meetings with students, who stated that there are always staff to support them. Altogether 17 staff are involved in the provision of student services in the direct sense, including student advisors at all five faculties, one for all master students and one for the Skopje campus, which makes this area well-staffed. Furthermore, SEEU has a broad understanding of student services so that they cover not only student administration throughout their studies, but also library services and support for career development. The team was informed by SEEU that they were the first institution in the Republic of Macedonia to have established a Career Centre. The Career Centre is staffed by two persons, who are responsible for assisting in the organisation of internships and for helping students with job applications. It organises a career fair (at the last one over 50 companies were present) and runs a survey on the employment of graduates and the appropriateness of the curricula for the job-market. The team noted that the Career Centre has a programme that enables students to work on the campus and co-finance their studies, which the team found a good idea and worth exploring further. As SEEU notes, the Career Centre is the main unit in touch with alumni (SER, p. 27). SEEU itself was clearly critical of the lack of results in working with alumni, stating that this area has been a “profound failing of the institution” (SER, p. 27).

This matches the team's observation, and it recommends that SEEU should *make more use of its alumni as promoters of the institution, whether as recruiters, internship providers, role models for students, donors or as international points of reference for further development in teaching and research*. The team learned from one faculty that it had not made much use of the data deriving from the alumni survey for their curriculum development, which the team found striking, not only due to the fact that this is highly relevant information for further curriculum development, but also in view of the small size of the institution. The team was therefore pleased to see that alumni relations are mentioned as an important area for future institutional development. The team is of the same opinion and recommends that *SEEU should start serious work building an alumni network at both central and faculty level. It should strive to locate alumni and work with them*.

5. Research

SEEU sees research as central to the reputation of its staff and the institution in general (SER, p. 27) and places the development of its research capacities into one of the three priorities of the new strategy for 2017-2020. The starting point is a general understanding that many research questions cut across traditional subject boundaries, and in order to address these, strong core disciplines are needed as much as effective mechanisms for interdisciplinary collaboration. Thus, for the period 2017-2020, the university aims at strengthening interdisciplinary research, to enhance research cooperation across faculties as well as with institutions from the region and internationally. Furthermore, SEEU states that it "will provide appropriate training in research methods and conduct at all career stages from research student to principal investigator." As stated earlier (see chapter 3), SEEU has been acknowledged with the European Commission award for HR Excellence in Research in 2015 for its commitment and plans to provide a stimulating and favourable environment for researchers.

Research at SEEU is overseen by the pro-rector for research, supported by the Research Office (staffed with one person), which provides assistance in identifying opportunities to apply for research funding and disseminating calls for papers for high quality conferences. Furthermore, the Research Office notifies staff about fake publishers, and how to detect and avoid them, which the team found very positive. The Research Office is in charge of the SEEU Review, a peer-reviewed open access online journal, and assists in the organisation of conferences (SER, p. 28).

SEEU has two research institutes: the Max van der Stoel Research Institute and the Institute for Environment and Health. As the team has learned, neither research institute employs research staff except for few supporting staff (one junior assistant, one researcher). Instead, the institutes are conceptualized as space for research groups consisting of staff from the five faculties, organised around different research topics. The intention is to use these thematic research groups to support the development of research capacities, to gather ideas and to initiate some project applications on current topics. For example, within the Max van der Stoel Institute, there are research groups on inter-community relations and political dialogue; human rights; multiculturalism and language policies; good governance; European studies; preventive diplomacy and conflict resolutions. This strategy has led to a variety of activities, including project applications and the organisation of events such as round table discussions or conferences. Thus, SEEU is aiming to enhance research cooperation between faculties and disciplines within the institution and externally, which the team found a convincing and efficient mechanism given the examples provided. The team was told that in addition to the coordination of research groups, the Max van der Stoel Research Institute also acts as the main unit for the organisation of conferences at institutional level.

There are currently 215 doctoral candidates enrolled at SEEU. Tuition fees are currently around 6,000 EUR for three years. The university has established a doctoral school which was, at the time of the site visits, in a period of transition as a new head was assigned only recently. Contrary to expectations, the team learned that the doctoral school serves mainly as a unit for

administrative purposes, whereas the actual training of doctoral candidates is mainly done at within the faculties. In particular, the team noted a gap when it comes to providing a space or a community for doctoral candidates to interact. When talking to senior management, the team heard that there are not many opportunities to bring together all doctoral candidates, as many students come from Kosovo or other countries. Given SEEU's aim to foster cross-faculty and cross-disciplinary cooperation, the opportunities which digital media provide and the small size of the university in general, the team still thinks that SEEU should seek more internal cooperation in doctoral education and recommends that it *extends the understanding of the term "school": providing a community, someone responsible for organising social space and joint courses e.g. on research ethics, academic writing, publishing and grant applications, and digital tools linked to academic publications*. During the second site visit, the team learned that SEEU is also currently discussing the introduction of a pilot project for attracting post-doctoral students from other universities to SEEU through placements at the Max van der Stoel Institute, which the team found positive.

SEEU is aware of the necessity of measuring quality rather than quantity. The institution addresses the quality of research activities mainly through the yearly staff evaluation, which forms the basis for monitoring the contractual obligations of staff to conduct research, and which is also used for staff promotion. The team learned that academic staff members have a contractual obligation to reach a certain number of points per year (e.g. one conference or paper for a journal per year or one internally acknowledged journal publication in two years) and that the underlying concept is that 70% of the time is spent on teaching and 30% on research. If the minimum criteria are not met, the salary is reduced. The team was informed that the planning for research per staff member was previously done on a yearly basis, but is now shifting towards longer periods of two to three years with annual monitoring, which the team found to be a positive development. As outlined earlier, a full time academic staff member is expected to teach eight to 12 hours a week and to be present on campus for 40 hours per week. Regarding the latter, the team was told that the requirement to be on campus could be reduced to 32 hours per week, in order to accommodate research.

SEEU has changed its policy for providing financial support to present research results insofar that it allocates up to 700 EUR per year to each academic staff member for conference attendance and publication support. As the university states, this change caused a notable shift in publications due to the fact that the previous practice of supporting textbook publications via the SEEU university press had ended. This resulted mainly in a decline of books published and in an increase of publications in journals and conference proceedings. For the period 2012-2015, SEEU has recorded the publication of 77 books and 1,086 articles in peer-reviewed journals, 21 of which are recognised in the Web of Science (SER, p. 28).

With regard to the numbers of completed projects and project applications (national and international), SEEU notes that it was impossible to provide reliable data about the number of applications, as there is neither a central registry, nor a process to notify the Rectorate or the Research Office of such applications. Deriving from this finding in the self-evaluation process, the university's self-evaluation group recommended the introduction of a mechanism for

internal notification of project applications and outcomes. Similarly, SEEU states that it has incomplete records of conference attendance before the academic year 2014/2015; from 2014/2015 onwards it has records only related to conference attendance which was financially supported via internal funding. This means that activities not supported are not recorded. With this in mind, SEEU estimates 438 conference attendances over the academic years 2011/2012 to 2015/2016 (SER, p. 28-29). However, having met with staff and senior management responsible for research and international relations, the team was provided with many examples of participation in projects at national and international level and found that staff are aware of the importance of well-established networks and partnerships (see further in chapter 7). It is worth mentioning that SEEU has recently established an internal fund for guest professors with a suitable academic profile to spend up to one semester at SEEU. The team found this a good example for developing further partnerships and encourages the university to *maximize already existing opportunities for attracting international researchers to SEEU*.

The team noted that there is so far no particular support to help academic staff in the preparation of applications for external funding (administrative support as well as in grant writing) and, if a project is funded, there is similarly no particular support in project management. Having said this, the team would like to stress that it was impressed by the high commitment of staff and management to push forward research and by what SEEU has accomplished so far. Furthermore, the team was pleased by the approach SEEU uses to organise its research around topics or themes rather than disciplines, and by the awareness of the institution of the need to connect its research with societal needs in the Republic of Macedonia and the larger region. Nevertheless, it was the team's impression that resources to provide continuous, more systematic support in finding the right instruments, partners, writing proposals and managing projects are too small and dispersed to have major effects. There was little evidence of resources to foster cooperative, project-oriented research. Here, the team found that SEEU could think more innovatively of what the 700 EUR allocation per staff member could be used for, as the current system encourages mainly individual efforts. Also, the team found that a prioritisation of research areas is missing. While keeping up the mechanism of institutes providing space for exchange across faculties and disciplines to define and work on relevant research topics for research, the team recommends that *SEEU should analyse its current research strengths and seek to prioritise areas of research*. Even though SEEU has made use of a broad range of available external funds in the past, the team is not sure whether there is a real strategy in place for seeking external funding in a more systematic and resource-wise form. Therefore, and in view of SEEU's aims towards the further development of its research capacities, the team also thinks that it would be useful for SEEU *to review its approach and staffing for supporting the development and management of research projects based on external funds (grant writing, project management)*.

The SER notes that due to SEEU's profile there is "little need for constant upgrading of physical labs and resources". If at all, such "constant upgrading" is mainly relevant for the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies (SER p. 8). Even though the team understands that this statement is related to physical laboratories and technologies, it would like to make some

reflections on the availability of another key resource for research, whatever the discipline: the library.

SEEU has two libraries: the central library "Max Van der Stoel", located at the Tetovo campus, which can also be used by students from Tetovo State University; and a small branch library located at the campus in Skopje. Based on the description in the SER and observations from the site visits, the team can say that library services as such are in place, with online services for easier search and request of books and other materials, linked with personal staff and student profiles. Available online databases are mainly the World Bank Library, Akademika and the EBSCOhost, for which the library also provides training sessions. However, SEEU is aware that resources are not yet adequate to support staff and doctoral candidates when it comes to research (SER, p. 22). The team learned from staff that lack of access to national statistical data made SEEU's input in the context of a larger EU-funded research project impossible; but also more generally, staff members noted that access to certain important journals is missing. For example, in the field of law, the university had enjoyed certain journal subscriptions thanks to funding from the ministry, but that this was discontinued approximately five years ago. Furthermore, the team was told that there has been a Macedonian initiative to establish a consortium for joint library resources at the national level, but that this had not been realised. Given these observations, the team strongly supports SEEU's plan to find a way to enable cost-effective subscriptions of relevant international databases, which was one of the findings of the self-evaluation process.

The team was pleased to read in the new strategy that SEEU plans, from available resources, to "enhance the infrastructure which supports research at the highest level, including libraries and information systems." Within the broader context of this chapter and in particular in view of doctoral training, the team would like to focus attention on these plans, in the sense that SEEU should aim to *develop the library into a source of open knowledge*. The team would like to stress the necessity to broaden the specific plan of providing relevant databases into a more general concept, thus picking up the overall direction of the university towards digitalisation and linking it more prominently to research. Apart from the central question of access to relevant journals or data, this also covers the questions of providing training - not limited to the use of the resources themselves - and also of technologies supporting research, for example referencing software or software for qualitative and quantitative data analysis. In view of the well-established mechanisms for staff training, the broad use of digital technology that SEEU has already reached in teaching and learning, the small size of the institution and having met SEEU's dedicated staff and management, the team thinks that such a commitment to digitalisation in research and research training would be a logical and realistic next step for the university to maintain its leading position at the national level and to further enhance its reputation and visibility in the region and abroad.

In summarizing this chapter, the team believes that SEEU is on a good track for improving further its research capacities and implementing its high aims, in particular deriving from the award for HR Excellence in Research. Similarly to comments in the previous chapters on teaching and learning and quality in general, the team observed a high commitment towards

quality in research. The team observed several good examples of SEEU's capacity to think of new ways of establishing partnerships and encourages the university to keep *thinking innovatively about partnerships and academic staff exchange outside the big funding schemes*. In order to keep up the good work and develop it further, the team recommends SEEU to *identify a potential research-led mentor institution in the region to be a long-term partner on a regular basis*. The team thinks that it would be particularly helpful to receive input on approaches and experiences in the above-mentioned areas which the team felt SEEU should explore.

6. Service to society

Given the particular mission and history of SEEU, service to society underpins all of SEEU's activities. The team could see that SEEU has developed robust formats to integrate external stakeholders in the development of the university and to keep its teaching and research portfolio relevant for the society it serves. In addition, SEEU is committed to serving the community also as a professional partner, where feasible, for businesses, NGOs, governmental offices, and other potential collaborators in the community (SER, p. 26). The team was told that a particular challenge for SEEU is gaining access to national partners, as distinct from regional, governmental partners. Examples of SEEU's service to society are the creation of a Climate Action Plan for the Municipality of Tetovo, including a monitoring system for pollution; and the leading role SEEU plays in a project to assist visually impaired children in the Republic of Macedonia. The university has a cooperative agreement with Romaversitas to promote and assist the inclusion of Roma students in higher education; and furthermore, it has links with local NGOs. The aim to act as a role model not only for a modern university, but for a modern society in general, is also reflected in the concept of having a green campus.

To support these activities and links, SEEU has established a Technology Park, a Business Development Centre and the Business Academy. The Technology Park was established to serve as a technological centre and a business incubation area. According to the SER, it is still "a developing effort" (SER, p. 26), creating a small income which it gives back to the university. In the last years, it had an increase of income of 37% (2016) and 30% (2017). The Technology Park is currently providing space for 10 companies in the field of new technologies, with approximately 80% of the employees being SEEU graduates or students. The Technology Park has supported 23 companies, created 160 new jobs and provided more than 50 internship opportunities, which the team found impressive numbers in context of the general economic situation in the Republic of Macedonia.

The Business Development Centre (BDC) was established in 2005 "to promote SEEU as a partner and service provider to local industry, particularly in the context of training or programme development" (SER, p. 26). The team heard that the aim of the BDC is to link academia with the business community (public and private), to offer business consulting, training designed for the needs of the companies and event management. For this it draws on internal staff from SEEU, and in particular it has a close cooperation with staff from the Language Centre for providing language courses for the business community (examples given were in Macedonian, Albanian, English and Turkish). The team was informed that to date, the BDC is the only institution of its kind in the Republic of Macedonia. It has a cooperation arrangement with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), through which 50% of the training costs are covered. In addition, SEEU has established the Business Academy, in order to "link students with companies". In particular the Business Academy has developed specialised programmes which later on can be upgraded towards Master level. For example, programmes in cybercrime and corporate law were introduced in 2017. Given these examples, the team was pleased to see that the university is able to combine cross-faculty

expertise for the development of new programmes, and to establish options to combine these with degree programmes.

In relation to the general set-up of the different units, the team found it difficult to understand the differences between the profile of the Business Development Centre and the Business Academy, both labelled as being active in the development and delivery of programmes linking the academic world with the needs of companies, thus providing new formats for teaching and learning. Given the small size of the institution and the aim of the leadership to have lean management structures within the institution, the team recommends SEEU to *reconsider the profiles and boundary between the Business Academy and the Business Development Centre*.

Overall, the team congratulates SEEU on its achievements in providing a service to society and encourages the university's leadership and staff to maintain this clear commitment to applying its teaching and research strengths to the needs of the Republic of Macedonia and the region. In particular, the team recommends *the further development of SEEU's cooperation with NGOs in the field of environmental protection and the support of disadvantaged groups*. In this regard, the team thinks that students should play a pivotal role, which would be not only beneficial for the groups approached, but also for the university's reputation within the community and for preparing its students to become good citizens.

7. Internationalisation

The team learned from the pro-rector for international relations that the major goal for SEEU in internationalisation is to be "the regional leader in international cooperation". This is also found in the new strategy, which states that SEEU will concentrate its efforts to "develop opportunities for staff and students to gain international experience while working or studying at SEEU" (SEEU Strategy 2017-2020, p. 6). The team noticed that at SEEU internationalisation is a key underlying concept for the institution in general, going beyond the traditional understanding of student and staff mobility.

The university hopes to achieve these goals by (1) increasing the number of agreements with partner universities; (2) increasing student and staff mobility - both outgoing and incoming; (3) increasing the international visibility of the institution in general and in particular by more participation in research projects funded by Erasmus+ and other programmes; (4) increasing the percentage of students studying in English.

Internationalisation at SEEU is overseen by the pro-rector for international relations backed by the International Relations Office with one staff member and international coordinators in each faculty. Similar to the faculties and other units, the International Relations Office has an annual action plan for all necessary activities to be undertaken during the academic year, but differently from the faculties, the team was told that this plan is reviewed and approved twice a year in the Rector's Council meetings.

As emphasised in the SER, SEEU has been internationally orientated from the very beginning and is keeping close relations with foreign institutions - most prominently, with the University of Indiana, the University of Zagreb and the University of Ljubljana. Altogether, SEEU has currently has 74 bilateral memoranda of understanding (MOU) with foreign universities, the large share of which are with universities in the EU (51). Others are with universities in the USA (4) and with regional universities (19). It is not clear how many of these MOUs are or will ever be active, and the university may wish to review its policy in this area. It should avoid assuming that inactive MOUs are evidence of international activities. SEEU has held the Erasmus Charter since 2010 and has concluded 35 bilateral agreements under Erasmus+, with a growing number of grants each year, which the team found impressive. Furthermore, the university is also making use of other funds such as the Mevlana protocol with Turkey for incoming students.

According to the SER and despite the high number of agreements, the number of full-time international visiting staff members from abroad is very low with currently only a small number of staff members from Albania, the USA, Turkey and Germany working at the institution (SER p. 27). The university makes use of programmes such as Fulbright and is currently seeking to establish visits by guest lecturers from abroad via similar programmes, with the intention that they will stay at SEEU for a longer period than is, for example, the case with incoming staff funded by Erasmus+. In addition to these efforts towards more international staff, SEEU has recently introduced a new policy described as "one foreign professor in each faculty during one semester", meaning that SEEU is using its own funds to host staff members from partner

institutions abroad. The team found this to be a good proposal and worth exploring further, as it could bring in new expertise to be used in teaching and research, combined with new contacts to enlarge the university's network and new opportunities for collaboration. Another institutional approach to enhance staff and student mobility is the university's new mandatory requirement for doctoral candidates to spend a period of at least a week abroad before they are permitted to apply for the defence of their thesis.

Since 2012, the university has had 91 outgoing and 16 incoming students, and 18 outgoing and nine incoming staff (staff numbers are related only to mobility in the context of Erasmus+). With regard to the low number of incoming students and staff, the team was told that incoming mobility depends on agreement from the home universities, an argument that the team did not find convincing. When talking to staff, the team also observed some doubts about whether it is realistic to raise the number of incoming staff and students from abroad because "no one wants to come to Macedonia". The team found this viewpoint curious insofar as SEEU staff are clearly proud of its profile, high quality standards and awareness for international trends. The team thinks that SEEU can be very attractive to many students and staff from abroad in subjects such as public administration, political sciences, law, communication, conflict solution in transformative societies in general and Eastern Europe and the Balkans in particular, due to SEEU's unique history, its academic profile in the context of the Republic of Macedonia and the region, the dedication of its staff, the high quality standards of the institution, as well as very practical matters such as the availability of student dormitories. Therefore, the team encourages SEEU staff *to change this mind-set and to think about what SEEU has to offer*. Linked to this and the above-mentioned ways to become a regional leader in internationalisation, the team thinks that SEEU *should set clear and realistic targets*. This is similar to the recommendation made earlier about the general set-up of steering documents, that is to have an overall action plan with defined targets, deriving from the strategy (instead of the yearly arrangement of several action plans from different units).

Short-term staff mobility such as through Erasmus+ (in- and outgoing) could be explored further as a starting point for close cooperation with foreign universities and subsequently to attract students from these partner institutions. In view of the high number of existing agreements, the team recommends to *concentrate rather on a limited number of functioning partnerships*. From the discussions with the International Relations Office, it became clear that the university is aware of this issue and the team encourages SEEU in its efforts to focus on *qualitative* agreements. As it was already mentioned in the chapter on research, the team thinks that SEEU should also *explore further ways of building up partnerships and staff exchange outside the big funding schemes*. The internal fund for attracting foreign staff to SEEU in addition to schemes such as Erasmus+ or governmental programmes such as Fulbright, is a positive approach in this direction. If understood as an instrument for internationalisation at home, this can also be a more cost-efficient way to improve international experiences for SEEU's students.

The self-evaluation report mentions that several faculty councils had retroactively disputed learning agreements, which had made it difficult for returning students to receive the full ECTS

credits from their mobility experience (SER, p. 26). However, when talking to students and student representatives about this question, the team observed that procedures and regulations for student mobility are clear and the recognition of learning outcomes from studies abroad is working well.

8. Conclusion

Just as was outlined by SEEU itself in the SER and its new strategy, the team strongly felt that major decisions should be taken soon regarding the university's way ahead. Looking at the new strategy, the team thinks that the key points are covered, yet it believes that SEEU should keep its proactive attitude and not wait for government decisions. The main strengths of the institution are its dedicated and highly qualified staff, a green and modern campus with a breath of fresh air and an attitude of openness and transparency. The university has managed to build up a very good reputation in the Republic of Macedonia and the region, not only within the academic world, but in particular among external stakeholders. The team saw a solid basis to develop university cooperation with the community and industry, which will allow the institution to link even more tightly its teaching and research portfolio with societal needs, thus realising the university's motto, "bringing knowledge to life". With regard to the tools applied for monitoring quality in teaching, the team encourages SEEU's leadership to focus less on control and have more trust in its own staff, in order to keep the inspiring, open-minded and collegial atmosphere, that the team experienced during the visits and felt to be the motor and strength of the institution. SEEU has a teaching and learning philosophy which emphasises critical thinking and interactive approaches and it is particularly clear in linking programmes to the need of the labour market and society in general. Furthermore, SEEU has a clear understanding of and commitment towards quality standards in research, and how to maintain and develop its research capacity. On a general note, the team felt that SEEU is not yet taking full benefit of its small size in terms of internal cooperation, both in the development of interdisciplinary study programmes and in relation to research. However, given the well-developed institutional quality culture, the improvement-oriented approach, with a self-understanding of being a progress-oriented institution, the team is confident that SEEU has the capacity to change this. During its visits to SEEU, the team encountered a university that has established a great brand and wishes its leadership and staff success for its future.

Summary of the recommendations

Governance

1. Review the rules for electing students and the work of students in the university's bodies.
2. Organise training in cooperation with the Student Parliament for elected student representative, for example, on governance, quality assurance etc.

3. Set up a prioritised action plan for three years with clear and realistic targets at a general level, based on the strategy.
4. Be proactive, when possible, instead of waiting for government decisions.
5. Look into the general concept of the annual talks and supporting materials, redesigning them towards annual staff appraisal between the staff member and their superior colleague in the framework of the collective aims of the unit.

Quality Culture

6. Reconsider QA instruments and indicators: Is the institution measuring the right things? Is the yearly staff evaluation effective? Does it help the staff, is it inspiring? How do the different instruments for evaluation interconnect?
7. Simplify paper work and delegate responsibility towards processes involving less paper and time, in particular regarding the teaching observation and the yearly staff evaluation.

Teaching and Learning

8. Review the volume of undergraduate courses by removing overlapping courses and consolidating existing programmes.
9. Carefully expand the volume of courses taught in English at undergraduate level, while keeping the profile of Albanian and Macedonian.
10. Increase the use of English at Master level, and give a more prominent role to the Language Centre at this level.
11. Continue its commitment towards the digitalisation of teaching and learning and invest even more into the realisation of its strategy.
12. Use drop-out rate as a key performance indicator to follow up in a differentiated manner.
13. Explore opportunities for assisting those who drop out for financial reasons.
14. Make more use of SEEU alumni as promoters of the institution, whether as recruiters, internship providers, role models for students, donors or as international points of reference for further development in teaching and research. SEEU should start serious work on building an alumni network at both central and faculty level. It should strive to locate alumni and work with them.

Research

15. SEEU should seek more internal cooperation in doctoral education and extend the understanding of the term “school“: providing a community, someone responsible for

organising social space and joint courses e.g. on research ethics, academic writing, publishing and grant applications, digital tools linked to academic publications.

16. Maximise already existing opportunities for attracting international researchers to SEEU.
17. SEEU should analyse its current research strengths and seek to prioritise areas of research.
18. SEEU should review its approach and staffing for supporting the development and management of research projects based on external funds (grant writing, project management).
19. Develop the library into a source of open knowledge.
20. Keep thinking innovatively about partnerships and academic staff exchange outside the big funding schemes.
21. Identify a potential research-led mentor institution in the region to be a long-term partner on a regular basis.

Service to Society

22. Reconsider the profiles and boundary between the Business Academy and the Business Development Centre.
23. Develop further SEEU's cooperation with NGOs in the field of environmental protection and the support of disadvantaged groups, and ensure student involvement in these activities wherever possible.

Internationalisation

24. Set clear and realistic targets for internationalisation.
25. For attracting incoming staff and students, change the mind-set and think about what SEEU has to offer.
26. Concentrate on a limited number of functioning international partnerships.
27. Explore further ways of building up partnerships and staff exchange outside the big funding schemes.