

Faculty for Montenegrin Language and Literature

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

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

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

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. 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?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Profile of Faculty for Montenegrin Language and Literature

The Faculty for Montenegrin Language and Literature (hereafter referred to as FCJK) was established in 2014. As a "faculty", it is a non-university higher education institution consistent with Article 15 of the Higher Education Act of 2014 of the Republic of Montenegro. It is situated in the former royal capital of Cetinje, which is also home to many cultural institutions as well as the national library.

The faculty was developed from the Institute for Montenegrin Language and Literature, set up by the government of the newly independent republic in 2010. The institute continues as part of FCJK and constitutes its nationally recognised and prolific research base.

The law and its amendments establish the legislative framework of higher education institutions, which includes the requirement that both institutions and their programmes must be accredited. Accordingly, at the time of the IEP evaluation, FCJK is an accredited, state-recognised faculty with one accredited Bachelor study programme in Montenegrin language and literature, and two specialties in research and in teaching.

As described in its self-evaluation report (SER), FCJK was established with the aim of "studying, preserving and developing Montenegrin language and literature, as well as for educating young people whose work would, following their graduation, become vital for the Montenegrin state and its educational-pedagogical, scientific research, identity, and cultural-historical life."

Since 2003, Montenegro has been a signatory to the Bologna Declaration (initially as Serbia-Montenegro and, since 2007, as Montenegro), and its three-year Bachelor programme is in line with the 3+2+3-year cycle system. Bachelor and Master programmes consist of 180 and 120 ECTS, respectively. FCJK has restructured its originally four-year Bachelor programme into a 3+2 structure, with the accredited Bachelor programme now running and the Master programme planned, but pending accreditation from the Ministry of Education.

The country has one large higher education institution, the University of Montenegro, as well as two private universities (Mediterranean University and University Donja Gorica), nine independent private faculties, and FCJK as the only independent public faculty. The country has a national total of around 26,000 students¹, of which over 20,000 study at the University of Montenegro².

According to figures supplied by FCJK, the faculty had 112 students enrolled for the academic year 2017/18, consisting of 23 men and 89 women. About two-thirds were

¹ http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-montenegro (9 July 2018)

² http://www.ucg.ac.me/ (9 July 2018)

aged between 16 and 26 years, and most of the rest between 27 and 51 years old, with two students between the ages of 52 and 66. There were 39 staff members, 27 of whom were academic staff. Of the total, 31 were employed full time, either permanently or on fixed-term contracts, and eight worked part-time for FCJK.

As a public faculty, FCJK receives a state budget that is negotiated with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance on an annual basis. By law, Bachelor students at public higher education institutions do not pay tuition fees.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was launched by the dean. A self-evaluation committee set down the framework for the process and the drafting of the SER. It also identified the relevant indicators to be used for the self-evaluation process and launched the SWOT evaluation. A draft SER was circulated among the various members of FCJK who had participated in the self-evaluation process, including a student representative.

The SER was produced in accordance with the IEP template. The IEP evaluation team (hereafter referred to as the team) welcomed the indications that JCFK found the self-evaluation process to be an opportunity for self-reflection and quality assurance, which is its main purpose, and hopes that an analytical approach to this self-reflection will be elaborated in any future exercise. For a self-evaluation process to be truly beneficial for an institution, the issues identified in a SWOT analysis should be elaborated upon and the consequences for strengths and weaknesses discussed.

The team requested additional documents and data prior to and also after the first visit, which FCJK readily provided.

The self-evaluation report of FCJK, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in January 2018. The visits of the evaluation team to Cetinje, Montenegro took place on 28 February to 2 March and on 13 to 15 June 2018, respectively. During the two site visits, the evaluation team met members of the FCJK governance bodies, and several groups of academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Luc Hittinger, former President of the University Paris Est Créteil Val de Marne, France, team chair
- Marian Dzimko, former Vice Rector of the University of Žilina, Slovakia
- Ian McCready, student, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland
- Christina Rozsnyai, Program Officer, Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Hungary, team coordinator.

The team thanks Dean Adnan Čirgić, Vice-Dean Ethem Mandić and all FCJK colleagues and partners for their contribution to the IEP evaluation, and for their kind organisation and hospitality.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

FCJK describes its mission in the SER in eight points, as can be summarised in the following extract:

To deal with the overall study, preservation and promotion of the Montenegrin language, literature, culture, identity; to educate competent personnel in the field of humanities and be responsible for the promotion and status of Montenegrin language and culture in the process of European integration; and to be actively involved, as a socially responsible subject, in the life and work of the local community.

In its vision, FCJK aims "to be the most important and most recognisable higher education and scientific research institution in the field of study of Montenegrin philology and culture" and goes on to envision "to position Montenegrin as one of the European languages and ... to retain the role of the most important factor in promoting and preserving Montenegrin identity". The team received a copy of FCJK's strategy in advance of its second site visit. It found the strategy to be a good foundation for developing a more mature document. It recommends condensing FCJK's mission into a few key goals and developing a strategy and a derived action plan that includes how to achieve the mission and goals. It also recommends building both short and long-term objectives into the strategy as reflected upon in the SER. The elements set down in the SER under the section on mission, as well as in various other parts of the document, can serve as the basis for a concise mission statement that would be the guiding motif for the faculty's development and which would also appear on the FCJK website.

Through its discussions with various internal and external stakeholders of FCJK, the team found that the faculty is succeeding in its mission and that it has attained recognition as a key contributor to the culture of Montenegro since its establishment in 2014. In addition to teaching, research and producing publications, FCJK is active in promoting the Montenegrin language and literature through public events and external forums and activities. The team recommends exploring and adopting good practices in teaching and managing institutions with similar profiles, locally, regionally and internationally, as noted among the aims in the SER, in order to be a synergy point for developing Montenegrin teaching and research further.

As the next stage in its development, FCJK has developed a Master programme that it has submitted for accreditation and is thus building up its research-based educational activity. The team recommends implementing the Master programme and also planning additional Bachelor and Master programmes in order to strengthen the faculty and expand its teaching and research base.

Among the additional documents made available for the second visit, the team was given an essay entitled *Remarks on Innovative Approaches in Teaching*. The team recommends considering the idea in the text of "continuous promotion of unconditional

competitiveness within the educational system among students..." when further developing the strategy.

The SER sets out many realistic challenges and opportunities. FCJK is a small institution with relatively few students and staff. Its organisational structure is, according to the Law on Higher Education (amended in 2017), determined by the faculty itself and is set down in its statutes. It comprises a governing body, a management body, and a council. In line with the legal requirement, the governing body "must include representatives of academic staff, other employees and students" (Article 48).

As a public faculty, FCJK is governed by the Government of Montenegro. Its Management Board has five members, two of whom are appointed by the government. It comprises the chair of the Board, who is external to FCJK, two members appointed by government, and elected representatives of the teaching staff, the non-teaching staff and students. The head is an internationally renowned academic from University of Novi Sad. The law determines that the Management Board is "responsible for lawful and purposeful use of resources" (Article 58). A student parliament is also mandated (Article 112).

The FJCK Council is made up of 33 members comprising the dean, vice-deans, academic staff and four students. The task of the Council is to decide on academic matters. Staff recruitment is determined by law to be carried out by open competition. The faculty is headed by a dean and two vice-deans, one for education and the other for science and international cooperation.

Government funding for public higher education institutions is based on the number of students and their field of study, and accreditation sets the maximum number of funded students. A funding agreement between the government and institution is concluded annually. The tuition ceiling is determined by law and set by the governing body of the institutions, but public institutions may not charge for Bachelor or Master studies (Article 69a). The law allows institutions to generate profit from educational and research activities (Articles 64a and 65).

While meeting the legal organisational requirements, the small size of FCJK nevertheless determines that much of its decision-making takes place on an informal level. The team observed that its highly dedicated leadership and staff are proactively looking for new challenges. They uphold an ongoing communication with the ministry in order to secure support for the faculty's activities. The team recommends holding regular staff meetings in order to ensure smooth operation and a shared flexibility in responding to external challenges.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of the annual budget is uncertain and this represents a permanent threat to the fulfilment of FCJK's mission. Given the country's very limited resources, it is the constant financial risk that hampers the faculty's ability to fulfil its potential. The team recommends ensuring institutional sustainability beyond FCJK's established cultural recognition by exploring activities that are recognised to be useful

by society. Furthermore, it recommends ensuring financial sustainability by continuing to explore additional financial sources, such as linking with international study programmes, seeking out international funding schemes, attracting NGOs as partners, and offering additional educational and other services.

A further threat is that teaching facilities in the current building are not suitable for growth. The team learned during its first visit that a new building had been promised by the ministry, but there was still uncertainty about its allocation at the time of the second visit four months later. The team recommends that FCJK continue to insist on adequate facilities, specifically the allocation of the new building, in order for it to be able to fulfil its mission.

FCJK recently received a World Bank grant through the HERIC project for higher education and research in Montenegro. It has invested it into modernising its library holdings and facilities and has connected them to the national digital bibliographic system and service known as COBISS.

3. Quality culture

Some basic elements of quality assurance are set into the Higher Education Law. It requires that institutions conduct annual self-evaluations with the use of anonymous student surveys and submit them to the ministry and the quality assurance agency that is being set up. It also defines the main areas to be evaluated. Holding accreditation for the institution and its programmes is the precondition for their operation and implementation. Institutions must be reaccredited every five years (Articles 41 and 42). To check the relevance of programmes, institutions must carry out "a labour market research at least once in five years by conducting surveys among graduate students, associations of employers, commercial entities and entrepreneurs concerning the applicability of the obtained knowledge, skills and competences required in the labour market" (Article 44).

Thus, there are elements of quality assurance present at FCJK. A key quality assurance exercise has been the SWOT analysis carried out for its SER. Moreover, the team received an additional document in advance of its second visit that listed the indicators, beyond those set in the law, that the faculty evaluates. Additionally, the team received a quality assurance strategy, which lists a number of quality assurance measures. These include setting up a quality assurance team and data collection. The team recommends finalising and adopting a separate mid-term quality strategy along with an action plan on how to implement it, together with assigned responsibilities and deadlines. The strategy can build on the existing quality assurance elements but also reconsider and refine the SWOT analysis and explore new measures.

The Higher Education Act as amended in June 2017, under Article 13a, implements the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (commonly known as the ESG)³ as an instrument for the new quality assurance agency. But while Parts 2 and 3 pertain to quality agencies, Part 1 of the ESG sets quality standards for higher education institutions, to be used in their internal system. The 10 standards cover issues including setting up a quality policy in line with the institution's strategy to programme design and monitoring, student-centred learning, assessment, student support and admission, teaching staff and information management. The team recommends that FCJK should integrate the ESG Part 1 into its quality assurance system, building on existing elements and setting up new ones as required. It also recommends assigning quality assurance staff in order to ensure ongoing quality assurance, complete with follow-up actions. It recommends further to facilitate the participation of quality assurance staff in international quality assurance events to acquire relevant skills.

³ http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

4. Teaching and learning

During both its site visits to FCJK, the team witnessed how much the faculty's staff, students and external stakeholders identify with the faculty's mission for "preservation and promotion of the Montenegrin language, literature, culture, identity". This translates into a dedication for the work at hand and an eagerness to contribute to the future of the country, which only recently has attained independence, something that Montenegro has experienced rarely in its history. With a language that, as stated on FCJK's website, traces its origins back to the 9th century and with literature dating back to the Middle Ages, teaching and learning at FCJK are certainly felt to be fulfilling a national mission.

The recognition for this mission is evident also in the number of student applications. The team learned in both visits that FCJK supports recruitment by sending its students to promote its study programme and mission among secondary schools.

The team interviewed teachers from regional schools and learned of the close cooperation between FCJK and these schools. The team recommends taking advantage of the potential in regional schools and the willingness of their teachers to be involved in common research projects, together with their pupils, and by involving teachers in proposing and propagating research topics for FCJK students.

Programme design and implementation are regulated in the Higher Education Law as far as the following matters are concerned: setting Bachelor programmes at three years and Master programmes at two years of study, applying ECTS with a 30-hour per credit value, issuing diploma supplements, indicating level descriptors with reference to the National Qualifications Framework, and implementing affirmative action and consideration for disabilities (Articles 10 and 4).

As noted, FCJK has submitted a Master programme for accreditation and plans to expand its programme offer at all levels in the future. The Master level constitutes a crucial development for FCJK to ensure the sustainability of its mission.

The background of FCJK as a research institute has laid the groundwork for a strong research focus, which is also inherent in its mission. The team heard in interviews with academic staff that their research work as well as up-to-date research outcomes feed into their teaching material.

The library and database access, developed with the aid of the HERIC project, allows FCJK staff and students access to the best national collection of books and journals relevant to their subject. Additionally, they visit the National Library of Montenegro, located in Cetinje.

The small size of the faculty allows for the personal care of students by FCJK staff, both academic and administrative and students also have access to a Student Service Centre.

The team recommends setting up dedicated career services with staff who are competent in advising students on planning their studies and exploring their work prospects as well as maintaining links with partners for work placements.

Students are also encouraged to participate in extracurricular events and are given primarily administrative but also some financial support for studying abroad. Some teaching staff whom the team interviewed were aware of student-centred and technically advanced teaching and learning approaches, although the team identified that these focus especially on involving students in projects. The team learned that guest professors are invited from abroad and introduce diverse approaches to students and staff. The team recommends, therefore, exploring a variety of teaching methods and promoting awareness of them among all teaching staff in a systematic way. The team also recommends exploring possibilities for sharing didactic methods with other higher education institutions in the area or region.

The team looked at the FCJK website and, although it exists only in Montenegrin, it was able to recognise that information on the faculty and its organisation, the study programme and student services, as well as research, is transparently available.

5. Research

Having started as a research institute with numerous fundamental publications to its name, FCJK has a sound basis on which to build its research activities. The original institute is now part of FCJK, but research publications appear not only by its academic staff but also by external academics, literary figures and researchers. In fact, the FJCK staff is ambitious to carry out research in line with the faculty mission, and staff members have received recognition for their achievements. In order to ensure sustainability of research, the team recommends systematically stimulating research among all teaching staff, which will be needed particularly when implementing the new Master programme. To do this, the team recommends formulating a research strategy that sets priorities in research topics and considers their impact on society in the long term.

When expanding into education provision at the Master level, the team recommends exploring research topics that will attract students to continue their studies.

As noted earlier, FCJK has benefited from an HERIC grant, which has established a good foundation for the availability of literature for research. Under HERIC, FCJK carried out the project "Modernisation of the Library of the Faculty for Montenegrin Language and Literature". Its specific objective, according to the SER, has involved "upgrading the quality, quantity and accessibility of the library contents at the Faculty". The project has enabled the library to ensure volume acquisitions of over 1 300 new books, most of them recent publications, to conduct inter-library loans and establish and maintain links with the "Cooperative online bibliographic system and service" (COBISS). All are accessible to staff, students and the public, and the project has also included the public promotion of the library. Additionally, the project helped FCJK to acquire technical equipment necessary for research.

FCJK continues to publish the biannual periodical *Lingua Montenegrina*, subtitled "the magazine of linguistic, literature and cultural issues", and which was established in 2008 by the predecessor institute. The journal, which contains articles by renowned researchers and literary figures, is a nationally recognised linguistic and literary source. The faculty also issues numerous other publications related to its mission, including a new dictionary.

The team believes that FCJK could benefit from the experiences of other countries which have been able to revive their national language, such as Ireland or Israel. Therefore, **the team recommends FCJK to explore such experiences and disseminate the findings.**

6. Service to society

FCJK has a strong commitment to promoting Montenegrin culture, literature and language in the local and national community. In addition to organising cultural events, its students and staff actively participate in developing activities and disseminating information about them. The team learned during interviews that students take part in theatre and literary performances. Authors and poets present their work to the public in productions staged by members of FCJK, often collaborating with the art academies. **The team recommends ensuring ongoing support to students in upholding their enthusiasm in being "ambassadors to Montenegrin language and literature" in and for the country. The team also encourages FJCK to continue organising events for the community.**

In addition to students being active in promoting studies at FCJK in schools, they also organise cultural events with pupils and their teachers. The team learned during the site visit that students from all educational institutions in and around Cetinje collaborate in many programmes. The team recommends that FCJK keep up the support for the student parliament that embraces all students in the city in order to facilitate the community spirit and strengthen the faculty's position in society.

The HERIC project has, as noted, provided the resources for producing, accessing and disseminating literature and cultural resources that are accessible not only to members of the faculty but also to the public at large.

The very mission of FCJK in researching and disseminating the culture, and in preparing new generations of teachers, is an importance service to the Montenegrin public. Social and environmental responsibility also features on the website of the faculty. Furthermore, the link with the National Library in Cetinje, beyond ensuring student and teacher access to research material, supports the library's sustainability. **The team recommends continuing to contribute to and promoting the national library as a hub for national literature and research sources.**

7. Internationalisation

FCJK upholds some international contacts in the region, primarily through some of its professors researching South Slavic languages. The FCJK website indicates that its research institute maintains various lines of cooperation with Croatia, FYR Macedonia and Bosnia. The team recommends exploring contacts with philology faculties in other countries in order to gain additional ongoing experiences in the field of language and literature.

The faculty is aware of the need for internationalisation; its stated quality assurance objectives include partnering with international study programmes so as to establish publishing and research links as well as paving the way for student and staff mobility. The team heard from students during interviews that several of them had studied and worked abroad. The team recommends setting down concrete priorities for internationalisation to benefit the faculty, students and staff.

With regards to mobility, this is currently at a low level, but the faculty is exploring various possibilities and is providing information to its students. Setting up networks for student and staff mobility in many Slavic countries is an ongoing endeavour. The team recommends setting up an International Office, starting with a dedicated staff member who is trained in internationalisation. The faculty has also established links with the Montenegrin diaspora in Argentina. The team recommends actively searching for international cooperation possibilities that also include attracting foreign staff to teach at the faculty. It recommends promoting student and staff mobility through Erasmus+, CEEPUS and other partnerships and taking advantage of the lower interest from the rest of Europe in Erasmus+ studies in Slavic countries by finding partnerships there. Along these lines, the team also recommends placing research publications in international journals or databases, such as the Reuters database, in order to increase international visibility.

As further drivers for internationalisation, the team makes the following recommendations:

- Explore offering summer schools with ECTS credits for international students in the field of small languages and cultures.
- Explore other countries' ways of support for small cultures, including funding, available also for other countries (e.g. the Norwegian fund).
- Explore support in other countries for small disciplines and ethnic research.

8. Conclusion

The perceptible enthusiasm of FCJK leadership and staff is a resource of which the faculty is very well aware. The team encourages the faculty to continue to exploit and maintain their dedication to sustain further development in the coming years.

The new, larger building that the faculty expects to receive is essential for FCJK's operations and progress. It is the foundation on which the faculty can build its teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and sustain its research activities and services to society. The implementation of the new Master programme will also be an important building block for a sustainable future in line with the faculty mission.

Just as important is achieving stable and reliably allotted state funding. FCJK may explore opportunities for additional resources by searching for contacts with minority communities in other countries and motivating their contributions to the faculty, not only for financial support but for links for student and staff mobility, for attracting teaching staff and guest lecturers, for research projects and for the dissemination of the Montenegrin language, literature and culture.

Summary of the recommendations

- 1. Condense FCJK's mission into a few key goals and develop a derived strategy with both short and long-term objectives, as well as an action plan that includes how to achieve the mission and goals.
- 2. Explore and adopt good practices in teaching and managing institutions with similar profiles, locally, regionally and internationally, in order to be a synergy point for developing Montenegrin teaching and research further.
- 3. Implement the Master programme and also plan additional Bachelor and Master programmes in order to strengthen the faculty and expand its teaching and research base.
- 4. Consider the idea, as set out in the *Remarks on Innovative Approaches in Teaching*, of "continuous promotion of unconditional competitiveness within the educational system among students..." when developing the strategy.
- 5. Hold regular staff meetings in order to ensure a smooth operation and a shared flexibility in responding to external challenges.
- 6. Ensure institutional sustainability beyond the established cultural recognition by exploring activities that are recognised as useful by society.
- 7. Ensure financial sustainability through continuing to explore additional financial sources, such as linking with international study programmes, seeking out

international funding schemes, attracting NGOs as partners and offering additional educational and other services.

- 8. Continue to insist on adequate facilities, specifically the allocation of the new building, in order to be able to fulfil the FCJK mission.
- 9. Finalise and adopt a mid-term quality strategy along with an action plan on how to implement it, together with assigned responsibilities and deadlines.
- 10. Integrate the ESG Part 1 into the quality assurance system, building on existing elements and setting up new ones as required.
- 11. Assign quality assurance staff in order to ensure ongoing quality assurance with follow-up actions.
- 12. Facilitate the participation of quality assurance staff in international quality assurance events to acquire relevant skills.
- 13. Take advantage of the potential in regional schools and the willingness of their teachers to be involved in common research projects, together with their pupils, and by involving teachers in in proposing and propagating research topics for FCJK students.
- 14. Explore a variety of teaching methods and promote awareness of them among all teaching staff in a systematic way.
- 15. Explore possibilities for exchanging didactic methods with other higher education institutions in the area or region.
- 16. Set up dedicated career services with staff who are competent in advising students on planning their studies and exploring their work prospects, as well as maintaining links with partners for work placements.
- 17. In order to ensure the sustainability of research, systematically stimulate research among all teaching staff, which will be needed especially when implementing the new Master programme.
- 18. Formulate a research strategy that sets priorities in research topics and considers their impact on society in the long term.
- 19. When expanding into education provision at the Master level, explore research topics that will attract students.
- 20. In order to learn from other countries, explore their experiences on how they have revived their national languages, and disseminate the findings.
- 21. Ensure ongoing support to students in upholding their enthusiasm in being "ambassadors to Montenegrin language and literature" in and for the country.

- 22. Continue organising events for the community.
- 23. Keep up support for the student parliament that embraces all students in the city in order to facilitate the community spirit and strengthen the faculty's position in society.
- 24. Continue to contribute to and promote the national library as a hub for national literature and research sources.
- 25. Explore contacts with philology faculties in other countries in order to gain ongoing experiences in the field of language and literature.
- 26. Set down concrete priorities for internationalisation to benefit the faculty, students and staff.
- 27. Set up an International Office, starting with a dedicated staff member who is trained in internationalisation.
- 28. Actively search for international cooperation possibilities that also include attracting foreign staff to teach at the faculty. Actively promote student and staff mobility through Erasmus+, CEEPUS and other partnerships and take advantage of the lower interest from the rest of Europe in Erasmus+ studies in Slavic countries by finding partnerships there.
- 29. Place research publications in international journals or databases, such as the Reuters database, in order to increase international visibility.
- 30. Explore offering summer schools with ECTS credits for international students in the field of small languages and cultures.
- 31. Explore other countries' ways of support for small cultures, including funding, available also for other countries (e.g. the Norwegian fund).
- 32. Explore support in other countries for small disciplines and ethnic research.