"Goce Delcev" University

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of "Goce Delcev" University. The evaluation took place during two visits to the university in March and June 2014.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

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

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

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

1.2 "Goce Delcev" University's profile

1.2.1 The "Goce Delcev" University takes its name from Georgi Nikolov Delchev, an important revolutionary figure in Ottoman-ruled Macedonia and Thrace at the turn of the 20th century. The university was founded in 2007 and comprises 13 faculties with over 500 teaching staff and just over 11,000 students. (It should be noted that two new faculties (academies) in film and classical art were in the process of being

formed as a result of a government decision to emphasise programmes in these areas.)

1.2.2 There are limited references to the wider national higher education context in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in the university's self-evaluation report (SER). Mostly, references are on the impact of national laws on the establishment/working of the university. From external sources (Ministry of Education 2013 data) the team established that there are 20 universities and seven non-university higher education institutions (HEIs) in the FYRM. "Goce Delcev" University (UGD), founded in 2007, is one of five public universities. The others are "St Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje (1949); "St Kliment Ohridski" University in Bitola (1979); the State University in Tetovo (2004) and the University of Information Sciences and Technologies "St Paul the Apostle" in Ohrid (2009).

1.2.3 The team understood that a key strategic focus in higher education for the Macedonian government has been the implementation of dispersed study arrangements so that universities operate in most of the major towns in the country with the intention of increasing the number of graduates from rural areas. "Goce Delcev" University was founded as part of this strategy and according to the SER teaches in ten other Macedonian towns in addition to the teaching that takes place in Stip. In a number of meetings it was stated that the founding of "Goce Delcev" University in Stip had transformed the economy and culture of the town and, in some respects, the wider region.

1.2.4 The decision to establish a new university in Stip was viewed with some pride by the town, not least as the "St Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje had previously been responsible for the limited higher education provision in the town. In this context, the town's leadership thought that the decision to establish "Goce Delcev" was a courageous one. The university's leadership commented to the IEP team that, from the government's point of view, UGD was part of a strategy to prevent Macedonian students leaving the country to study in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia and also that it was intended to support poorer families in the area who could not afford to move away from home to study.

1.2.5 The team was informed that the HE sector received between 15,000 and 20,000 new students each academic year and that this came from an overall population in Macedonia of approximately 2.2 million.

1.3 The evaluation process

1.3.1 The SER of the "Goce Delcev" University, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in February 2014. The visits of the evaluation team to "Goce

Delcev" University took place from 19 to 21 March 2014 and from 8 to 11 June 2014, respectively. In between the visits "Goce Delcev" University provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

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

- Professor Öktem Vardar, Rector, TED University, Turkey, team chair
- Professor Carmen Fenoll, former Vice-Rector, University of Castilla-la Mancha , Spain
- Professor Ingegerd Palmér, former Rector, Mälardalen University, Sweden
- Ms Ieva Baltiņa, student, University of Latvia, Latvia
- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, UK, team coordinator

1.3.3   The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a Self-Evaluation Group that was a continuation of the group that had performed internal reviews of the university covering the periods 2007-2010 and 2010-2012.   The Self-Evaluation Group was composed of:

> Professor Dejan Mirakovski (Chair), Head of the Quality Assurance Centre and Dean of Faculty of Mechanical Engineering
> Professor Cena Dimova, Faculty of Medical Sciences
> Professor Lijana Koleva Gudeva, Faculty of Agriculture
> Professor Aleksandra Mileva, Faculty of Computer Sciences
> Professor Nikola Smilkov, Faculty of Educational Sciences
> Professor Ljupco Sotirovski, Faculty of Law
> M.A. Risto Kosturanov, Secretary General
> Milkica Paneva, Head of Rector's Cabinet
> Goran Stamenkov, President of the Student Parliament
> Ivan Tasevski, Member of the Student Parliament

1.3.4   The team was informed that the Self-Evaluation Group had been proposed by the Rector's Board and then confirmed by the Senate. The group had been selected in such a way as to ensure that all stakeholders in the university were represented. Thus, faculties were represented in terms of the coverage of technical sciences, philology, law, social sciences and medicine. The group also represented the four campuses, administration and students. The students in the group had been recommended by the students sitting who sat on the Rector's Board. In these respects the team viewed the composition of the group as providing meaningful representation and coverage from the key stakeholders across the university. Most of the people whom the team met said they were aware of the SER and that they agreed with the content.

1.3.5   The team noted that the Self-Evaluation Group had already been responsible for two internal evaluations required by national regulation. The most recent evaluation covered the period 2010-2012 with a SER produced in October 2013. It appeared to the team that the SER prepared for the IEP evaluation was largely an abridged version of this report. In this respect the team felt that it had simply received "another" SER, and that the IEP process had not led to extensive discussions or analyses or been seen as an opportunity to deliberate on the most important issues facing the university at this time. The presentation of national and institutional characteristics in the SER would have been improved by greater use of statistics, graphs and visual presentations and this, in turn, would have helped the team's understanding of the university prior to the two visits. Trends in the seven years since the establishment of the university and expected extrapolations based on these trends could have been instructive to the team and helpful for reflection within the UGD community. Some inconsistencies in the report confused the team as it sought to appreciate the complex mechanisms of the university. In general the team felt that there was a disconnection between the narrative of the SER and the SWOT analysis and conclusions of the SER.

1.3.6   In the SER it is stated that the Self-Evaluation Group's methodology was determined by the university's Quality Assurance Centre. In terms of process, each member of the group was responsible for collecting data in a specified area e.g. student numbers, staff numbers. Opinions were sought from staff and students via questionnaires. These were then analysed and contributed to the development of the SER. The team was also advised that the SWOT analysis in the SER had been produced specifically for the IEP process and that it was a synthesis of separate considerations by members of the group in areas such as research, students, etc. The group had had six months to produce the SER. A draft was circulated to deans, vice-deans and professors. There was also a pool of academic staff who received the report and there was an almost 100% rate from this group. Although at the highest level in the university there was a view that the SER was too strong in its criticisms, for example in the SWOT analysis where the recommendations were regarded as "too precise", the team learnt that there were no significant objections to the SER. The report was then presented to the Senate.

1.3.7   Senate members received the SER a week before it was formally considered at a meeting of the Senate. In discussion, Senate members confirmed that they were well informed about the IEP process and had sufficient time to make comments on the draft. It was confirmed to the team by Senate members that the SER produced prior to the IEP evaluation had largely followed the content of the earlier nationally required report produced in October 2013.

1.3.8   The university leadership saw significant benefits following an evaluation of the progress of the university - seven years after it was founded - by an independent

body from outside of Macedonia. This could lead to wider recognition abroad and increase the flow of students joining the university from outside of Macedonia. More importantly the IEP could act as a stimulus to institutional improvement. The university might have an awareness of some of the problems it faced but it was valuable to receive external advice on the way forward. The team also understood from the senior management of the university that such an independent evaluation would be looked on favourably by central authorities.

1.3.9   In summary, the team considers the SER process to be a valuable opportunity for the university to look at itself objectively, to share information and judgements amongst university units and individuals, to discuss sensitive issues and to allow time to discuss non-urgent but important problems rather than focus on less-important but urgent daily business. The team was not convinced that UGD had used this opportunity to its fullest extent.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1   The SER sets out the formal governance and institutional decision-making arrangements for the university. The university is described as an autonomous public institution "responsible for its own self-government and for the implementation of its own strategies and development policies…" This autonomy and academic freedom is said to be enshrined by the 2008 Law on Higher Education.

2.2   The mission of the university is described in very general terms as "promoting and further developing scientific disciplines present in study programmes, in accordance with the requirements of the region and the country". Its vision is to create an "institution recognizable for its highest human values: Knowledge, Expertise, Truth and Honour". Students are seen as being at the centre of its endeavours. *From the team's perspective there was considerable scope for greater specificity in the vision and mission statements and it recommended that these be reviewed to ensure that they display, inter alia, the specific character and the development direction of the university.* The same tendency to generalisation appeared in the faculty mission and vision statements and, equally, the team felt that these could be made more concise whilst at the same time stressing aspects that were unique to UGD.

2.3   The team found that decision-making processes followed the classical model adopted in many universities in Europe. The key elements involved in managing the university are the Senate for academic matters and the rector (elected by the Senate) and the Rector's Administration which is entrusted with executive deliberations. The Senate is described by the university as the "highest academic and professional body" and is chaired by the rector. Students form 15% of the Senate's membership.

2.4   There is also a Student Parliament which elects a president and the university's leadership regards this as an important mechanism for hearing the student voice. However, in conversations with students, the team heard that the Student Parliament was not particularly effective, and that this was partly due to the elected members failing to communicate with the other students. The shortcomings of the Student Parliament were also said to be due to the indifference of the wider student body. While structures existed for student engagement in university affairs, it appeared to the team that, in general, students were not active participants in decision-making either at a local faculty or at central university level.

2.5   An advisory University Council (Board) is shown at a senior level in the organisational chart provided as Appendix 1 of the SER. This Council appears to be dominated by members nominated by the Senate but also includes representatives from politics and the local region.

2.6   The rector, who has been in post since the founding of the university, sees the priorities for the university as being (1) to establish a "system" that is not dependent on the will of the rector i.e. setting up standards and principles, with faculty deans being an important part of the footprint for the future and (2) the development of the profile of the university so that it is not regarded as a "small town" institution. It was important, in his view, to recruit academic staff from outside of Stip and, indeed, outside of Macedonia. The team concluded that the university's leadership had been relatively successful in creating a university able to compete with others in Macedonia and that the university had achieved much in the seven years since its inception.

2.7   UGD has been established as an "integrated" university with a strong central focus for managing the strategy and development of the university. This was seen to be an important feature of governance and contrasted with most other universities in Macedonia where it was normal for faculties to be established as relatively self-governing units. In particular, the budget and other core resources e.g. laboratories, were controlled centrally. The team understood, however, that other universities in Macedonia would be moving to the integrated model in future years. The "integrated" model seems to be well rooted at the university with, for example, curricula structures standardised across the university. However, there is a danger that simple, non-policy issues might be left for decision at the central university level and this tendency should be resisted. Overall, the team felt that UGD will soon reach a degree of maturity to allow appropriate diversity in practice across the university.

2.8   While the university leadership strongly supports this integrated model of management, it was suggested that the position of rector attracted too much power. This power could be challenged by the Senate but, in practice, the rector led the Senate towards decisions. While the faculty deans form part of the rector's administration, the rector determines who heads the faculties and there was little evidence of challenge to the rector's position in this area. The senior management of the university was keen to see the faculties develop more independence from central authority, but in meetings with deans, the team found that on the whole they saw their role as very much confined to the academic leadership of their faculty and that it was not part of their role to be involved in decision-making outside of the educational process of the faculty and any specific projects delivered by the faculty. For example, the key decisions concerning research were made by the vice-rector for science. In summary, the dean was seen as a representative of the faculty on the rector's administration. The team also understood from meeting with the deans that the more established faculties found it easier to work in this context and contribute to the development of the wider university. This dominant position of the rector caused some reflection at the highest level in the university that there might be merit

in the Senate being chaired by someone other than the rector. The team did not share this view.

2.9   The deans whom the team met during the two visits were all broadly supportive of the integrated model of management. Even in areas where there was some experience of faculty management of budgets, the integrated arrangements were seen as offering more advantages than disadvantages and co-operation between faculties was regarded as good and this encouraged, for example, the development of multi-disciplinarity in the curriculum. The current system worked because it was an accepted structure and also because of the personality of the current rector. There was confidence that this structure would be sustained following the election of a new rector later in 2015.

2.10   In terms of the supporting mechanisms for governance and decision-making the university's pioneering e-system had improved efficiency and effectiveness and helped reduce the burden on administrative staff. In this context, the university believes that the administrative staff resource is largely sufficient for its needs. Bids are made to the Ministry of Education for additional staffing as the need is perceived. The team recognised and applauded the considerable investment made by the university - over one million euros - in its e-systems, including e-learning. This investment was also praised by a number of students whom the team met.

2.11   With regard to the academic structure of the university the team understood that a change to the faculty structure, for example the merging of faculties, could be achieved but that, following agreement in the university, it would require a change in national legislation to approve the title of the newly merged faculty. *The team was struck by the fact that, given the size of UGD, it was difficult to justify the existence of 13 (15) faculties and that these should be reduced in number. On the basis of the subject disposition in the university a number of faculties could be merged, leading to the development of departmental structures under the umbrella of fewer but larger faculties (for example, four or five in number).* This would offer synergies in academic development and also encourage wider cooperation both in teaching and research. Also, importantly, it would provide a platform for the consolidation of the rector's administration and offer a more dynamic basis for the delivery of wider university leadership. The team understood that the university leadership had this type of faculty rationalisation very much in mind although no timescale for such change was suggested to the team.

2.12   One area in relation to faculty autonomy that did attract comment from some deans and academic staff was that of academic staff appointments. Here it was suggested that there should be greater local flexibility for faculties to hire full-time staff. However, this was not only an issue of internal governance but one where the constraints were imposed through central government. Authority was required from

the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance for full-time appointments and this even included permission to replace existing posts. It was possible to hire part-time staff without the involvement of the government and these were overwhelmingly (90%) professors from other HE institutions. Part-time staff are paid on hourly contracts and an attempt is made to integrate such staff into the mainstream of full-time staff, including a contribution to research. In the academic year 2012-2013, according to the SER, there were 329 full-time staff and 184 part-time associates employed by the university. The team noted, however, that student-staff ratios in some faculties were very high, particularly in the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics. The Team noted that there had been some improvement in this respect since the publication of the SER. While national constraints were recognised, the *full-time* staffing position was viewed by the team to be one of the major weaknesses of UGD. And although the low numbers of full-time academic staff had been balanced by part-time appointments and academic staff working across faculties, the student-full-time staff ratio of 80-1 (11,000/135) was, in the opinion of the team, far too high. *In summary, the team urged the university to improve full-time academic staff numbers even if this required a more significant investment allocation from its own funds.*

2.13   In the SER it is stated that the Senate decides on a "one-year and four-year programme for the development work of the University". In its meeting with Senators the team was advised that a strategic plan had been developed three years ago. Progress on this strategic plan was monitored by the Senate through an annual report from the rector. This report also included goals for the coming year. The team was unclear, however, as to the extent to which this strategic plan had been reflected upon in the wider university. It was also noticeable that in programme documentation each faculty had summarised its own vision, mission and objectives. However, the team understood that, while such text was often discussed with the vice-rector, it did not relate to wider university considerations and was very much a faculty creation. It appeared from these comments that the rector and vice-rectors were the central figures in determining the strategic direction of the university.

2.14   The team concluded that in the area of governance and institutional decision-making managerialism clearly outweighed collegial features. Financial issues are left to the rector; similarly research activities are co-ordinated through the vice-rector (for science). Senate members appeared more like individuals representing their disciplines rather than fully-fledged and experienced members of a strategic policy-making higher body. As a consequence routine business required by law seemed to be the major pre-occupation of the Senate. The team recognised that in the early stages of its development the university required greater guidance and steering from the top of the organisation; in this sense the managerial approach was commendable. *Rather than creating a separate chairperson for the Senate, the team advised a continuance of the consolidated leadership through the rector. This should be*

tempered by increased accountability and transparency so that checks and balances can exist. This implied a reconsideration of how members of the Senate performed in their role and the skills and experience required from inside the Senate to hold the executive to account.

3. Teaching and learning

3.1   The majority of first cycle studies involve four-year programmes. This is true across most of the university's 13 (soon to be 15) faculties.   Five-year programmes in dentistry and pharmacy are offered in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. From information provided by the university there are 98 first cycle programmes, 90 second cycle programmes and seven PhD programmes. The team noted with concern the very low student numbers in some study programmes, particularly at the Masters level. Average undergraduate student numbers per programme are 110 (11,000/98) and average graduate student numbers per programme are 3.6 (322/90). The seven PhD programmes had less than 30 students.

3.2   The university has a sizeable student population (11,000) with regular intakes of around 3 000 new students. According to data provided by the university, places available to new students were far higher than those actually registering. The team was advised, however, that the total number of new places available were allocated by the Ministry of Education and were not determined by the university. It may be that this contributed to a lack of a careful planning and monitoring of these numbers.

3.3   However, the team noted relatively high attrition rates and graduating student numbers seemed on the low side. It is for the university to follow dropout rates and time taken up to graduation and ensure the necessary actions to improve the situation.

3.4   The team heard from faculty staff of the problems of regular changes in national law affecting the curriculum. Currently it is a legal requirement that 60% of subjects on a programme are compulsory on a faculty level, 30% can be electives from within the faculty, while 10% can be chosen from subjects available in the wider university. While the team understood some of the constraints of the national law there appeared an opportunity to present these requirements within a major-minor framework commonly adopted in Europe and the United States. In the view of the team interdisciplinary awareness was not sufficiently developed and faculty and university electives lists were often very short, sometimes offering only one course for students to select. *The team urged the university to consider more innovative approaches to curriculum development to reflect the university's dynamic character and to support the learning experience of its students.*

3.5   Both staff and students explained that the Moodle platform was used to support learning and teaching. The team received some conflicting comments about the use of this virtual learning platform which was said to be a compulsory aspect of

pedagogy in the university. Some staff and students suggested that it was widely used in all faculties. A contrary view offered by some other staff was that there were three types of Moodle users in the university: (1) those who, in reality, do not use it; (2) those who do not use it fully; and (3) those who use it effectively. The team gained the impression that the general use of Moodle was excellent but that some users needed more persuasion to engage with the VLE platform. Aside from general usage – posting of lecture notes, on-line chat, etc. - there was clearly significant scope for innovation in the use of the platform.

3.6   Students whom the team met were generally positive about their experiences on their programmes. Academic staff was accessible with published "office" hours and it was also possible for students to chat with professors on the Moodle platform. Examinations were scheduled at the end of each semester and there was also an end-of-year oral examination. Teaching (contact hours) involved 4-5 hours a day for three days a week. Private study time was largely undertaken at home and there was often weekly coursework to complete, although this depended on the individual professor. Teaching assistants supported professors in co-ordinating the practical elements of programmes. The teaching assistants were Masters students and generally the students that the team met spoke favourably of the role of these teaching assistants. Indeed students said that conversations with, and guidance from, teaching assistants was often easier than approaching their professor.

3.7   In some faculties of the university there was a desire to improve practical education. This was a common theme raised by senior managers, academic staff and students. Programmes had to include a month's internship at the end of the academic year although these had to be arranged by the students themselves. Students made clear to the team that they wanted more practical experience on their programmes. Internships were seen to be an important part of this experience. But the team was advised that internships have become compulsory for all students as a result of new national legislation; this clearly places a considerable burden on the university and, in the view of the team, could lead to an undermining of the quality of the experience.

3.8   While access to professors was regarded as good by the students whom the team met, the system for providing feedback to students on examination or coursework performance appeared reactive rather than pro-active. Student centred education is promoted and academic staff provide close guidance to students and try to increase student participation in class. The SER also highlights the benefits of the university's e-library as a "good tool for monitoring and control of the need for new teaching materials." The team commends the university in this area but also believes that there is a need for more active learning, learning by laboratory/practical sessions and the development of "soft skills". Equally there was clearly much scope for enhancing innovation in learning and teaching methodologies e.g. buzz groups - short discussion in twos; snowballing - buzz groups continuing the discussion into larger groups; cross-

overs - mixing students into groups by letter/number allocations; rounds - giving turns to individual students to talk; short writing reflections on learning; role play; students producing mind maps in class; and portfolio development. To support this type of transformation in learning and teaching practice the team recommends that a *Centre for Teaching Innovation (CTI) be established and systematic training opportunities be offered to academic staff.*

3.9   The team suggested to academic staff members that student contact hours (27 hours per week) were too high. Staff responded by saying that it was at their own discretion to shorten lectures. The team did not, however, detect any significant move in the university to reduce contact hours by shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning. Equally student workload correlation seems not to be questioned; courses are designed by allocating exact hours such as 216 or 156 hours, but the university did not seem to have a mechanism for monitoring the delivery of these hours which is becoming the trend in Bologna aware institutions.

3.10   Learning outcomes for study programmes and for individual courses exist. The team felt that a connectivity matrix between them would also be advisable. All learning outcomes are subject specific, generic competencies (communication in written, oral and graphical forms, team work, ethics, time management, critical thinking, respect for different cultures, motivation to pursue continual professional development) need to be made explicit in the written description of the courses. Students confirmed that they were aware of the learning outcomes linked to their subjects and the team noted that each faculty had comprehensive documentation (module specifications) setting out details for each subject on each programme. The team commended the university on the availability of such comprehensive documentation. However, assessment methodologies for generic competencies should be spelled out in documentation. This might lead those in charge of individual study programmes to reconsider their curriculum or introduce co-curricular activities since the curricula support only the attainment of the subject specific outcomes. In science and technical subject areas, for example, often only 10% of curriculum involved non-specialist courses. This restricted the extent to which broader educational outcomes extending from contemporary contextual issues to social and cultural awareness could be accommodated. Employers tend now to insist on the ability of graduates to function professionally and with ethical responsibility both as an individual and as part of multidisciplinary teams.   There was a real danger that unnecessary conservatism in curriculum would hamper the production of well-rounded graduates.

3.11   In a meeting with academic staff the team learnt that there was an *intention* to develop some courses for delivery in English. This followed on from statements in faculty programme documentation given to the team that subjects were being delivered in both Macedonian and English. The team could not judge how practical

this initiative would be in terms of staff language expertise and demand from students.

3.12   The team met students from a number of the university's faculties. The majority of these students lived in Stip or within 30 kilometres of the town and they were generally optimistic about their career prospects.   More broadly, the services provided to students appeared to be relatively limited. The Careers Centre was not, on the whole, used by students and some students whom the team met were unaware of its role or believed that the advice provided needed to be more focussed. Advising, mentoring, and tutoring mechanisms relied mostly on good personal relations between students and their professors rather than formal and organised structures. Students told the team that they wanted to become more involved in research projects, that there should be more dormitory accommodation and social activities organised by the university. Student clubs, if they existed, were not widely referred to and had limited support from the student body.

4. Research

4.1   There is very little reference in the SER to research. In the SWOT analysis there are references to a weak research infrastructure in some faculties and "mediocre" scientific production - published articles and research grants won by competition. In the SER's conclusion it is stated that the "next stage of UGD development must be focused on creating a better environment for research and EU project integration". During the course of its two visits, however, the team saw the research potential of the university to be more advanced than that presented in the university's SER.

4.2   There is no written overarching university research strategy but there are a range of policies relating, for example, to the reduction of teaching loads for researchers, small awards to encourage researchers and a university research fund for projects of 100,000 EUR. The research fund was very much appreciated by staff members whom the team met.

4.3   The team understood from the university's leadership that faculties had considerable autonomy in their dealings with industry and that they had discretion in deciding how surpluses from research projects could be spent. There was a 10% overhead for projects that did not use university facilities. On occasions when university facilities were used the split was 55% to the faculty and 45% to the university.

4.4   One senior figure, in discussion with the team, agreed that the weaknesses relating to research identified in the SER were justified. However, the team heard that the university had been successful in gaining an award of 5 million EUR for research infrastructure through a government-level competition. Almost half of this award was linked to the Faculty of Natural and Technical Sciences while other funds that were received supported the development of laboratories in the Faculty of Medical Sciences and the Faculty of Agriculture. The Faculty of Natural and Technical Sciences describes research and scientific activity in the faculty as "one of the leading and most important aspects of the faculty..." Reference is made to co-operation with "numerous economic organizations and institutions in (…) Macedonia (…) based on professional consulting, mutual projects, drafting of projects, designing mines…"

4.5   There were opportunities to apply for further government or EU funding but time constraints were felt by some staff to be an impediment to such initiatives. Senior academic managers in some faculties spent considerable time during the week travelling to various parts of the university and this limited opportunities to involve themselves in research matters. Equally some members of the academic staff were concerned that they did not have sufficient time for research. In part this was the

consequence of too heavy an administration but there was also a general problem of academic staffing levels.

4.6   A contrary view was also expressed to the team which understood some of the concern over travel demands, but argued that teaching took place only short distances away from their main campus and was not, therefore, overly disruptive. Academic staff from the same faculty maintained that while they would, of course, welcome more time for research they did have opportunities for meaningful research and that this was made evident by published works that could be found in the university's e-repository. More significantly, many faculty staff felt that the shortage of full-time academic posts in their area was the main barrier to quality research. This was emphasised very strongly in discussions with staff in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The team also noted comments that it was difficult to appoint faculty members from the region, especially those possessing a PhD.

4.7   A view expressed during meetings with staff suggested that newer universities such as "Goce Delcev" University could not improve their research standing without greater funding from the government. The older faculties were able to raise some funding but other newer faculties found this far more problematic. Some experienced and high level researchers have joined the university and brought with them their existing research and international collaborations.

4.8   Research collaboration between faculties is still to be developed and interdisciplinary team formation and cross-disciplinary focus development is weak. *The team encouraged the university to develop priority areas for research, form multi-disciplinary teams and provide institutional full support to these targeted research groups.* This approach could be facilitated by a leadership role for the more experienced researchers.

4.9   The university had established a central combined research facility ("Research Centre") using old and new equipment and the team commends the university for obtaining a government grant of 2.5 million EUR to fund this development. The team observed, however, that there were still gaps in the provision of laboratories and equipment in some subject disciplines. This was confirmed by both staff and students.

4.10   The team saw good progress in the growth of publications since 2007, including some in high status journals such as *Science* and *Nature*. The team noted that ISI publications were highly concentrated in a few faculties. Shanghai rankings seemed to attract national interest and was mentioned several times in discussions with the team. The team believes that such rankings do not add to the meaningful development of universities and supplemental indicators should be used.

4.11   The team understood that around 75% of PhD students were employed by the university as teaching assistants and that they combined this teaching load with their doctoral studies. In other cases students were supported by project income. Some students had to finance their studies privately and the cost was then 5 400 EUR for the total programme. The team learnt that all PhD students had to spend three months abroad as part of their studies and to publish at least two papers which was seen by the team as very positive aspects of these programmes. In addition, new PhD programmes were going through accreditation and the team welcomed this development.

4.12   PhD students whom the team met came across as very committed and expressed considerable satisfaction with the support they received for their studies. However, the team did detect some degree of isolation for individual students and felt that opportunities for PhD students to share experiences were rather limited. *The team recommends that the university considers ways in which they could improve the sense of a doctoral studies culture in the university e.g. joint seminars, social gatherings, guest speakers.*

5. Service to society

5.1   As mentioned in 1.2.2 above, the university was founded as part of a strategic decision by the Macedonian government to support regional development and, in particular, to establish opportunities for university education in smaller towns. In the case of UGD, teaching activities take place in the following towns: Stip, Strumica, Kocani, Radovish, Probishtip, Vinica, Sveti Nikole, Gevgelija, Kavadarci, Prilep, Skopje and Berovo.

5.2   The establishment of the university has also helped address some of the problems relating to high youth unemployment by providing programmes that enhance the job prospects for graduates. The team also noted that the university was a major employer in the town and wider region. The town was projected to grow from a current population of around 50,000 to 60,000 within the next 10 years.

5.3   The importance of the university to Stip was confirmed by the town's current leadership who stressed the benefits of a concentration of qualified students from a variety of fields and described the town's support for the university as "unconditional". A Memorandum of co-operation exists between the municipality and the university. This offered a range of benefits to the university, such as land being provided free if the university requires space to build new premises; it is exempt from municipal taxes; and existing buildings are provided without charge if required by the university.

5.4   The value of the university and the liveliness it brings to the town is very much appreciated. The team was provided with several examples of reciprocal support that the town received from the university. The Faculty of Musical Education was a key contributor to the town's summer festival and other cultural events. The Faculty of Natural and Technical Sciences was an important supporter of the region's textile industry and also provided expert opinion in relation to the renovation of the town's river infrastructure. More generally, there was a volunteering arrangement with the municipality with students working in areas such as the taxation office and in other problem solving roles.   However, employment data, satisfaction with the graduates, mutual gains in practical training were not reported, and there would be clear benefits from the university using robust data or explicit cases in these domains as a way of underpinning its service to society.

5.5   The leadership of the Eastern Region Development Council confirmed the importance of the university to the wider region commenting that the opening of the university had been the most positive development for eastern Macedonia in the last four years. The team also understood that town mayors in the municipality were generally very happy with the role of the university in the local economy.

5.6   There is an advisory University Council that includes members from the Parliament, local community and local business although the team was advised that the Council had not met because of problems with membership from Parliament and local government. It was also surprising to the team that the Council did not include the town's mayor or the president of the Eastern Region Development Council. The University Council, which ought to be the link to external stakeholders, was not elaborated upon and the team did not meet any member of this group. It was not clear to the team whether industry was steering UGD in terms of expansion into new fields or whether the university was opening up new horizons to industry by providing well-educated graduates and specialised technological services.

5.7   One local business CEO provided some further positive commentary on the role of the university working with business. He was able to employ a small number of graduates from the university but was unable, however, to offer work experience opportunities. He stressed the benefits of the town's young population staying in the area to pursue their education. He was clear, though, that the university needed to follow the economics of employment and avoid promoting programmes that would only lead to graduates being employed in factory jobs that did not meet their career expectations or skills sets.

5.8   *In the view of the team the relationship between the university and industry business local economy could be better supported by platforms where external stakeholders could contribute to the longer term development strategy of UGD and, particularly, to policy development for technology transfer and continuing education/university extension*. This might be done through a reinvigorated University Council. A focus of this collaboration could be tackling the high levels of local unemployment. Such a forum should also be very active in the up-dating of curricula and the training of students in transferable skills to ensure that they meet the demands of industry/business and are better equipped for the world of work, including self-employment.

6. Quality culture

6.1   The SER argues that "one of the main reasons for the university's decision to take part in EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme was the desire to continue to consolidate the institutional quality culture". This point was reinforced by the university's leadership.

6.2   Quality assurance practices in the university appear to be focused mainly around a self-evaluation process performed every three years. These evaluations cover an assessment of the quality of academic staff, academic programmes and the achievements of scientific research units. The university's Quality Assurance Centre (QAC) seems to be central to processes that support the development of an institutional quality culture. The QAC is overseen by the Dean of Mechanical Engineering Faculty although he undertakes this role alongside his normal duties as dean of faculty. Other academic staff in the university provides support to the head of the centre although again this work is in addition to their normal academic responsibilities. A Quality Assurance Advisor, who is also the rector's Head of Cabinet, works with the QAC on the three-yearly institutional self-evaluations.

6.3   The team heard from senators and deans that an annual report on faculty performance was considered by the Senate. The report appeared to cover, *inter alia*, analysis of student achievement; resourcing issues; staff publications and research projects. However, the team gained the impression that quality assurance revolved rather more around the three-yearly institutional self-evaluation as opposed to an embedded annual monitoring process.

6.4   Historically, student views on the quality of learning and teaching had been gathered through university level questionnaires. The team heard from some students, however, that this process was not systematic. The team was therefore pleased to note that formal student feedback mechanisms had been introduced very recently and that student questionnaires were now circulated systematically for each course at the end of every semester.

6.5   The management of the assessment of teaching staff is conducted in faculties and the team heard from senators that the Senate had recently agreed that the questionnaires used for this purpose should be tailored to the particular faculty context. This process was designed to stimulate excellence in staff performance rather than identify poor or unsatisfactory performance. In this connection the team noted that some students felt that mechanisms for criticising professors were not particularly effective. These students did not feel confident in raising such matters either with the Student Parliament or the dean of the faculty, even though these were stated to be the formal mechanisms for pursuing such matters.

6.6   Staff and students commented on some of the difficulties presented by the open admissions policy that the university was obliged to follow under the Macedonian Law on Higher Education. Some students were particularly critical of the move away from an entrance examination to a process that involved application via documentation. They felt that the current admissions system encouraged "lazy" and uncommitted students. Students on one course (financial management) said that from a total of 300 new entrants around 100 of their peers had dropped out after the first year. On another course (civil engineering) the equivalent figures were 30 new entrants, dropping to 20 by the end of the first year.

6.7   Some of the students who met the team linked the lack of high standards in admissions practice to a view that good students were being disadvantaged and that, in particular, assessment outcomes favoured poorer qualified students. Professors, it was said, gave the weaker students a second chance to improve their grades while this was not the case when excellent students wanted to achieve a higher grade at the top of the range. Students also expressed concerns over a lack of consistency and fairness in marking and the tendency for some subjects to award fewer ECTS credits even though they were harder to pass. Notwithstanding some of the problems posed by government guidelines on admissions criteria the team urged the university to reflect on the critical role that sound admissions practice played in the maintenance of academic standards.

6.8   The team noted problems with the temporary closure of programmes due to a lack of appropriately qualified applicants e.g. entry to health management and international economics was cancelled in the academic year 2012-2013. This also applied to courses in other faculties such as biology and chemistry.

6.9   In the view of the team "Goce Delcev" University is composed of conscientious members, proud of being at the institution and perhaps, as a consequence, many quality assurance issues appear to be resolved through traditional self-control, academic pride and direct reporting. Most feedback is through informal and traditional teacher-student contact. This is reinforced by the fact that course/instructor evaluation questionnaires have only recently been introduced on a systematic basis.

6.10   In summary, the university has a strong culture and practice of periodic self-evaluation reports and annual reports to the Senate from the rector and the deans. These processes are co-ordinated by a Centre for Quality Assurance. Such reports are appropriate instruments for accountability and transparency; however, it appeared to the team that there was too much emphasis on reporting and insufficient time spent on meaningful analysis. As a consequence the team had not seen any real evidence of data being used to help improve performance or develop quantifiable targets, e.g. student numbers, drop-out rates, staff-student ratios. And while scrutiny of the

quality of procedures and rules of operation (ISO 9001) is commendable this approach is designed for managerial purposes rather than academic quality assurance and enhancement. Discussions on quality tend towards upgrading, rather than quality assurance and, as a consequence, more effort needs to be given to the process of "closing the quality loop". *The team therefore recommended the use of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area on a systematic basis to help develop performance indicators for quality assurance and enhancement of the work and activities in UGD. In particular, the team felt that these guidelines could support the university in making better use of the analysis of data to drive improvements rather than the current tendency to rely on straightforward reporting mechanisms.*

7. Internationalisation

7.1   Figures provided to the team covering 2011-2012 show the total number of foreign students (degree seeking) as 105. These students are largely based in three faculties – Natural and Technical Sciences, Philology and Medical Sciences.   The team understood that this number had increased to around 200 in the academic year 2012-2013.

7.2   Interestingly, the SWOT analysis also identifies opportunities related to on-going national and international partnerships, yet there is no reference to the development of international policies in the summary of conclusions shown at the end of the SER.

7.3   There is a separate Centre for Inter-University Cooperation in the university that manages international exchanges such as ERASMUS. One student commented to the team that study abroad was popular although numbers were not high. Some staff also saw the benefits of ERASMUS staff exchanges, for example with the Czech Republic. The availability of these opportunities for staff was seen to be linked to the integrated structure of the university.

7.4   In discussions on international strategy, the team learnt that the university had started its involvement in the ERASMUS programme in 2011-2012. Prior to that, there had been a national government decision to put on hold participation in the ERASMUS programme. In 2012-2013 there were 25 outgoing students and two outgoing teaching staff; in 2013-2014 there were 34 outgoing students and three outgoing teaching staff. For 2014-2015 it is expected that there will be 40 outgoing students and a first intake of incoming students. The university had a capacity of 50 places for outgoing students and UGD is the leading university in Macedonia for sending students abroad under this programme.

7.5   The team understood that there was no formal evaluation process for the exchange visits and selection criteria used for both staff and student exchanges were relatively informal. The team was also concerned that the growing interest in the ERASMUS programme might not be sustained by the current staffing of the Centre for Inter-University Co-operation. *The university should therefore, (1) consider additional staffing and training for the Centre for Inter-University Cooperation, and (2) establish target figures for outgoing and incoming exchanges and introduce formal selection processes and monitoring of the programme.*

7.6   The students whom the team met had very positive experiences of their exchanges and the team was also very impressed by the knowledge and expertise of the Head of the Centre for Inter-University Co-operation.

7.7   There was some evidence of international co-operation with universities outside of Macedonia, the most recent (February 2014) being a project with the American University in Bulgaria. As part of this collaboration "Goce Delcev" University agreed to provide conditions to organise practical training in the area of gastronomy while the American University in Bulgaria is to provide conditions for improved knowledge and know-how transfer in the area of business logistics. An exchange programme will also provide opportunities to selected students to expand their knowledge in cuisine and business logistics during workshops.

7.8   In terms of international student recruitment the team noted that in 2012-2013 there were 127 students from outside Macedonia enrolled in study programmes at the university.   These students were mainly from Turkey and the vast majority were studying medicine.   The university indicated that it saw an opportunity in further recruitment from Turkey.   The team was concerned, however, that these levels of recruitment from a single source might not be sustainable.

7.9   The team noted that the university was planning to introduce courses and study programmes in English. From discussions with a range of staff at the university the team concluded that, at present, the university did not have the capacity to implement a full study programme in English. The university might want to re-visit this proposal when the academic staffing establishment is consolidated.

7.10   There were good examples of international collaboration in the area of research. The team commends the university for work in this area and would encourage continuing efforts to expand such links.

7.11   In respect of longer term developments the team received a very brief international strategy document. The team regarded this document as being far too generic and unlikely to provide an appropriate platform for moving forward in the international arena.

8. Conclusion

8.1   The university leadership emphasised to the team that there was a clear vision for the future of the university.   Considerable effort had been put into establishing the university and laying its foundations. Faculties were in place, campuses had been developed, and the basic structures and rules had been established. The model of an integrated university is favoured with some sense that there is scope for the devolving of some additional powers to the faculties and a debate should take place on whether the rector should remain as president of the Senate.

8.2   UGD is very clearly a new and ambitious institution with still much to achieve. Apart from the Senate there is no indication of other committees or of a strategic plan. No other strategies are articulated, such as learning and teaching, research or international and there is a lack of coherence in the organisational/management structure.

8.3   There appears to be excellent support for the university from the town and, in principle, from the government. In many ways the university has reached some sensible conclusions in the SER but seems to have done so without going through a robust discourse. As a result, there appears to be no implementation plan and staff, while reasonably self-aware, might lack some of the experience (and resources) to carry through the next steps of the institutional development project hinted at by the rector.

8.4   The team was impressed by the rector's plan for the development of the university between 2011 and 2015.   It reflects accurately the European context for higher education and has goals and targets. However, it appeared to the team that this was very much a plan owned by the rector and did not exhibit key features of a strategic plan, for example it was not prioritised, there was no timeline and it did not include an implementation plan. The team also noted that there was a useful SWOT analysis in the university's self-evaluation document. The rector's Plan and the SWOT analysis together provide a strong starting point for implementing change and improvement.

8.5   In terms of capacity to change, UGD has already shown an ability to meet a significant challenge in introducing the model of an integrated university. This offers an excellent platform for further change. The combination of strong leadership by the rector and other senior academic staff in the university, and the work of standing committees, may both create innovative solutions and keep the university community involved in the development of the institution.

8.6   The pioneering phase carries with it sacrificial behaviour. Reaching the next stage of development, however, will require different motivations to be innovative, adopt flexible structures and attract dynamic young academic staff. The team believes that there is an awareness that UGD needs to start thinking about the next phase of its history and that it will need various reforms to be in place to ensure sustainability, particularly in governance and institutional decision-making, and innovation in teaching and learning.

Summary of the recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

1   The university should review its Mission and Vision statements to ensure that they reflect, *inter alia*, the specific character and the development direction of the university.

2   Given the size of UGD, it is difficult to justify the existence of 13 (in the future 15) faculties and these should be reduced in number. On the basis of the subject disposition in the university a number of faculties should be merged, leading to the development of departmental structures under the umbrella of fewer but larger faculties (for example, four or five in number). Alongside this development the team also urged the university to improve full-time academic staff numbers even if this required a more significant investment allocation from its own funds.

3   Rather than creating a separate chairperson for the Senate, the team advised a continuance of the consolidated leadership through the rector. This should be tempered by increased accountability and transparency so that checks and balances can exist. This should be seen alongside a stronger commitment by deans to university level issues and their support for the rector in strategic decision-making.

Learning and Teaching

4   The team urged the university to consider more innovative approaches to curriculum development to reflect the university's dynamic character and to support the learning experience of its students.

5   A Centre for Teaching Innovation (CTI) should be established and systematic training opportunities be offered to academic staff.

6   Assessment methodologies for generic competencies should be spelled out clearly in documentation. This might lead those in charge of individual study programmes to reconsider their curriculum or introduce co-curricular activities since the curricula support only the attainment of the subject specific outcomes.

Research

7   Clear priority areas for research should be established, with stronger specialised research groups and multidisciplinary teams. Institutional support should be provided to these targeted research activities.

8   The university should consider ways in which to improve the sense of a doctoral studies culture, e.g. joint seminars, social gatherings, guest speakers.

Service to Society

9   The relationship between the university and industry/business/local economy could be better supported by platforms where external stakeholders could contribute to the longer term development strategy of UGD and, particularly, to policy development for technology transfer and continuing education/university extension.

Quality Culture

10   The university should use the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area on a systematic basis to help develop performance indicators for quality assurance and enhancement of the work and activities in UGD. In particular, the team felt that these guidelines could support the university in making better use of the analysis of data to drive improvements rather than the current tendency to rely on straightforward reporting mechanisms.

Internationalisation

11   Consideration should be given to additional staffing and training for the Centre for Inter-University Co-operation.

12   Target figures for outgoing and incoming ERASMUS exchanges should be introduced together with formal selection processes and monitoring of the ERASMUS programme.

Thanks

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