

**Evaluations of nine higher education institutions in
Montenegro
System review report**

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1. Introduction

This report is based upon the evaluations of nine higher education institutions in Montenegro by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA).

The evaluations took place in the framework of the “Higher Education and Research for Innovation and Competitiveness” (HERIC) project, implemented by the Government of Montenegro and financed from a World Bank loan. The overall objective of the project is to strengthen the quality and relevance of higher education and research in Montenegro by reforming the higher education finance and quality assurance systems and by improving research and development capacity.

While the institutional evaluations took place in the context of the project, each institution was reviewed by an independent evaluation team, using the IEP methodology described in Annex 1. In addition, IEP was asked to assess changes in the higher education sector following the institutional evaluations and subsequent sectoral report delivered in 2013/2014 in the framework of the same HERIC project.

1.1 The context

Montenegro is currently undertaking a thorough reform of its higher education system in order to increase its quality, create better alignment between higher education and the labour market as well as integrate it further in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA).

As part of this reform, an IEP system evaluation of Montenegrin higher education was carried out in 2014, comprising evaluations of individual institutions as well as a sectoral report¹ containing a set of recommendations for the improvement of the whole system. In the following years, the Montenegrin government issued a Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro for 2016-2020 (thereinafter, Higher Education Strategy or the Strategy) and, amended the Law on Higher Education as well as the rules for the national quality assurance agency.

The Strategy takes a broad view on Montenegrin higher education, including reforms of learning and teaching and alignment to the labour market, quality assurance, research capacity building, internationalisation, and the establishment of a new funding model. The Strategy itself mostly concentrates on the goals for Montenegrin higher education. The implementation of specific initiatives is specified in an Action Plan.

For the purpose of this report, the Strategy will serve as a background document, as it is clear that it is too early to evaluate the concrete implementation of most individual parts of it. The

¹ <https://www.iep-qaq.org/component/attachments/attachments.html?id=20>

report will also refer to the recommendations made in the 2014 sectoral report produced by IEP on the basis of the first round of individual institutional evaluations.

1.2 Evaluated institutions

Nine institutions were evaluated as shown in Table 1 (see below). The Montenegrin higher education system consists of one large, public university, the University of Montenegro, and a group of much smaller, mostly private, institutions. Among these are three private universities and five faculties, which are focused on teaching a very limited number of study programmes. Three smaller institutions have university status, which means that they have the right to issue doctoral degrees, although in practice, doctoral education is almost exclusively done at the University of Montenegro.

Table 1: List of higher education institutions evaluated by IEP in 2017/18

Name	Type of evaluation	Year of establishment	Type of HEI (university/faculty)	Status (public/private)	Total students
Adriatic university, Bar	Initial	2017	University	Private	1498
Faculty for international management in tourism and hotel industry, Miločer	Initial	2014	Faculty	Private	38
Faculty for Montenegrin language and literature, Cetinje	Initial	2014	Faculty	Public	112
University of Montenegro, Podgorica	Follow-up	1974	University	Public	≈ 20,000
University Donja Gorica, Podgorica	Follow-up	2010	University	Private	≈ 2600
Mediterranean university, Podgorica	Follow-up	2006	University	Private	1461
Faculty for state and European studies, Podgorica	Follow-up	2005	Faculty	Private	209
Faculty for business management, Bar	Follow-up	2005	Faculty	Private	481
Faculty for traffic, communication and logistics, Budva	Follow-up	2008	Faculty	Private	163

Source: Institutional self-evaluation reports

In the following chapters, this report identifies shared issues and challenges amongst the nine institutions and concentrates on the areas that are the usual foci of IEP evaluations: governance and strategic planning (chapter 2); internal quality assurance (chapter 3); learning and teaching (chapter 4), research (chapter 5), service to society (chapter 6); and internationalisation (chapter 7). Each of these chapters end with recommendations to the national authorities and the institutions. The concluding chapter identifies the overarching priorities and main findings.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 The 2014 sectoral report

In the 2014 evaluation of the Montenegrin higher education system, governance issues were defined as the most important area for reform, both culturally and formally. Generally, it was found that the decentral governance model of Montenegrin institutions led to a lack of strategic capacity with consequences for development of the institutions' missions. The national authorities were recommended to:

Support the improvement of governance structures in institutions by:

- Including standards for good governance in the external quality assurance system.
- Implementing the principle of “autonomy with accountability” that the CHE [Council for Higher Education] promotes in its self-evaluation guidelines, and holding higher education institutions accountable for their strategic planning.
- In the long term, increasing university autonomy while applying high governance standards.

For institutions, the report recommended that:

Institutions need to professionalise and institutionalise their governance structures by:

- Building strategic capacity to implement and realise institutional missions. This should be done by assigning clear objectives, deadlines and responsibilities in a professional manner.
- Creating appropriate organisational cultures:
 - For private institutions, the organisational cultures must be related to the institutional mission rather than the personality of the founder, dean or rector, and the founders and investors should keep at arms' length from academic decisions-making processes.
 - For the institutions with multiple faculties, there is a need to go beyond traditional allegiance to individual faculties, and instead to reinforce a sense of institution-wide affiliation and envisage the future of the institution as a whole.

2.2 System level reforms

Despite the focus on institutional governance in the 2014 sectoral report, the Higher Education Strategy does not address the issue directly, nor is governance reform part of the Action Plan, as the question is seen as part of the autonomy of higher education institutions.

It is clear from the 2018 institutional evaluations that governance has not changed. The existing de-central and often personalised governance structures constitute an important limitation on the capacity of institutions to make and implement strategic choices in all areas of activity. Significant progress for Montenegrin higher education will be dependent on finding a better balance between the need for central leadership and the culture of faculty independence.

The development of external quality assurance in the Strategy is focused on evaluation of programmes and does not explicitly mention the quality of governance, nor does the Strategy aim at increasing the existing level of institutional autonomy. The document entitled “Decision Establishing an Agency for Quality Control and Quality Assurance in Higher Education” does allow the Agency to evaluate both institutional governance and individual programmes, which could provide a legal basis for embarking on such a process.

Some elements of the Strategy would indirectly require that institutions develop a higher level of strategic capacity. Particularly the planned introduction of a performance contract between the government and the University of Montenegro will require a higher level of central coordination and could possibly lead to a better balance between central and de-central decision making within the university. However, it is not clear what the goals of the policy will be, and which model will be used. Performance contracts are frequently used in European higher education. They follow different models and have different advantages and disadvantages.² It will be important to choose the best model for the University of Montenegro, in line with policy goals that have been clearly identified.

There are no provisions in the legal framework to prevent institutions from implementing the unquestionably needed reforms of institutional governance, the law does clearly allow for such reforms to happen. However, more could be done at national level in terms of incentives to promote institutional change and move towards a model of more autonomy, dependent on institutional capacity and accountability, as recommended in the 2014 sectoral report.

2.3 Institutional level

At the institutional level, the individual evaluation reports show that it has proven very hard to implement reforms that would provide for a better balance between the central administration and faculties. Even new institutions perpetuate a model in which the majority of activities are planned within the individual faculties with little coordination or cooperation. This decentralised governance style makes it very difficult to produce and implement strategies for the whole institution, which are particularly necessary in a time of system reform, such as the one Montenegro is going through. Therefore, the largely unsolved challenges of governance remain a significant obstacle for achieving the reform objectives,

² Claeys-Kulik, Anna Lena & Thomas Estermann (2015), *DEFINE Thematic Report. Performance-based funding of universities in Europe*, EUA, p. 30-35

despite of the obvious and laudable piece-by-piece reforms that have been carried out, such as setting up a Scientific Board at the University of Montenegro.

In the evaluation reports from both 2014 and 2018, governance is identified repeatedly as a serious structural problem, which limits strategic and coordination capacity. Better governance is essential for reforming key areas such as quality assurance, research capacity building, and learning and teaching.

Concretely, the lack of institutionalised governance structures is systemic: many institutions do not have positions, such as vice-rectors, with institutional responsibility for some or all of these areas. Strategic plans are largely missing and long-term planning is absent. One institutional report finds that the university is using its limited capacity in this area to ensure compliance with the changing legal and financial framework, which is understandable in the specific situation, but nevertheless telling of the weakness of institutional governance in general.

Moreover, there has been little progress concerning the concerns raised in 2014 about the personalised style of leadership, where ownership and leadership of private institutions were often mixed in a sometimes insufficiently transparent manner in the same person. The 2018 institutional reports still refer to such situations where for instance individual faculty owners in private institutions occupy several different positions within the governance structure. In one case, the Senate was hardly functioning, and decision-making was almost completely personalised.

Student participation comes across as a relatively positive element in Montenegrin higher education; students participate in governing bodies and the evaluation reports have positive conclusions regarding this, although not for all institutions. However, due to the weak status of central governing units, it is difficult to assess the actual influence of students on the running of their institutions. Where students are not an active part of institutional governance, this should be addressed.

Human resources continue to be an issue, although there are signs of discussions being held about, for example, changing promotion criteria. However, the general lack of centralised leadership make it difficult to lift these discussions to the strategic level (identifying the staff profiles that are needed and wanted), let alone to implement such a strategy. Smaller institutions rely partly or completely on part-time staff that are either working in other Montenegrin higher education institutions or based abroad. Particularly where the use of part-time staff is the dominant model, this limits their participation in governance, contact with students and overall contribution to the institution.

The financial model is changing with the abolishment of fees for Bachelor-level studies, and the planned performance contract for the University of Montenegro, and investments have increased. However, there is a risk that funding remains low and dependent on political priorities when it comes to state funding.

The 2014 sectoral report identified the existence of several small institutions with similar missions and programmes as a challenge for the system. This challenge has in part been met in 2018 through the merger of six existing institutions, leading to the establishment of the Adriatic University in Bar. This merger has the potential to solve one of the big issues identified by the 2014 report by limiting the number of small institutions and attaining critical mass. However, the new institution has chosen to continue the traditional decentral governance structure, which perpetuates a number of challenges inherent to the Montenegrin system, particularly by leaving the constituent parts of the merger (the former independent faculties) as legal entities.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Continue to develop the framework conditions for a higher education system in line with European standards in terms of institutional autonomy and accountability
 - a. Develop the external quality assurance system to include good governance of institutions
2. Develop incentives for governance reforms within higher education institutions
3. Develop sustainable and stable funding mechanisms that allow long-term strategic planning within higher education institutions

Recommendations to the higher education institutions:

1. Embark on radical governance reform to enable the articulation and implementation of clear strategies at the institutional level
 - a. Find the right balance between central and decentral management through an inclusive debate that makes all parts of the institution take ownership of the result
 - b. Create posts of vice-rectors to take responsibility for priority areas
 - c. Professionalise leadership, separating roles of ownership and leadership, moving away from personalised management and towards institutional structures
2. Increase student participation in governance, where this is not well developed

3. Quality culture

3.1 The 2014 sectoral report

The 2014 sectoral report concluded that although some structures were in place at Montenegrin institutions, the system was far from having a well working quality assurance framework and a quality culture. In order to reach this goal, the report recommended that:

National authorities should support the development of internal quality processes by ensuring that Council for Higher Education has addressed all three parts of the ESG and support the development of internal quality processes.

According to the 2014 report, the institutions should:

- Develop quality assurance further by using Part 1 of the ESG as a guide.
- Pay careful attention to the development of a quality culture by entrusting administrative and academic staff (including part-time staff) and students with responsibilities for monitoring quality and by communicating how the results feed into institutional planning and improvement.
- Consider appointing a vice-dean or vice-rector with responsibility for quality assurance who would play an important role in the future development of the institutions' quality system. This senior officer should be supported by a qualified staff member who is capable of analysing the results of evaluations and other data, monitoring activities and supporting academic units in enhancing the quality of their work.
- Improve student feedback by a) including questions on the learning process and allowing some modification of questionnaires for individual disciplines; b) evaluating the learning environment (e.g. library, registrar functions, student support services, etc.); c) exploring alternative models of collecting feedback (e.g. student focus groups); d) informing students about the use of the results; e) establishing alumni tracking mechanisms.
- Extend quality assurance systems to encompass research activities and non-academic functions such as the administrative units.

3.2 System level reforms

Quality assurance has played an important part of the on-going reforms of higher education in Montenegro, corresponding to recommendations made in the context of the HERIC Project.³ The ambition, as stated in the Higher Education Strategy, is to move beyond the

³ Hénard, F. (1 July 2013) *Review of the quality assurance system*

present system based on student surveys, to involve a broader set of stakeholders, and broaden the remit beyond teaching to also include “research and cooperation and infrastructure and human resources” and establish better institutional arrangements.⁴ This is laudable and well in line with the 2014 recommendations.

As a part of this, Montenegro established an independent quality assurance agency in 2017. The agency has not yet carried out any accreditation due to its recent establishment. For the same reason, it has not yet been externally reviewed to verify its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) so as to be able to apply for inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Such a review would be possible after the agency has been operating for two years. The review is not part of the Action Plan for the Higher Education Strategy. In order for the new agency to benefit from the experience of other European countries and be a full partner in the EHEA, it is highly recommended to ensure that the new quality assurance agency is recognised as being ESG compliant and included in EQAR through the appropriate review process. Likewise, it will be extremely useful for the new agency to join the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as an affiliate in order to benefit from the discussions and interactions with other European agencies.

The national authorities draft questionnaires for students, which are often the main tools also for internal quality assurance. These questionnaires are focused on the quality of teaching, but noticeably do not cover the learning environment or the learning experience. It is highly recommended that these questionnaires are modernised by the institutions and not drafted at the national level (see below).

3.3 Institutional level

Some progress has been made since 2014 with formal structures and responsible senior leadership positions having been established or planned in some higher education institutions. This is a laudable first step, which can support the development of internal quality assurance in line with the Higher Education Strategy and is comparable to other European systems. However, there seems to be considerable work ahead for these new bodies to ensure compliance with Part 1 of the ESG, implementation of quality assurance beyond teaching evaluations, and continuous enhancement of quality in alignment with institutional priorities. None of the institutional evaluation reports indicated that institutions were close to complying with the ESGs concerning internal quality assurance, which should be a high priority.

The decentral governance structure of Montenegrin institutions has a clear impact on quality assurance due to the strong independence of faculties. There were examples of central structures having been established, which is a clear step in the right direction. However, as decentralised institutions have limited capacity to adopt a common strategy for quality

⁴ *Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Montenegro 2016-2020*, chapter 1.3

assurance based on common goals and a common vision that could lead to a pro-active approach, these structures would appear to be oriented towards compliance rather than quality enhancement. Also, quality assurance remains closely linked to the evaluation of teaching, and implementation of the 2014 recommendation to expand the quality assurance system beyond this is largely absent.

Quality assurance at all institutions is dependent on the standardised student questionnaires about teaching. Low response rates to these questionnaires is a systemic problem in Montenegro. In some institutions, this is related to the perception among students that the responses to these questionnaires are not acted upon, as they did not receive any feedback on the results. In smaller institutions, more informal practices prevail – though student questionnaires are still used – with students having a much more direct access to teachers to discuss problems. Generally, it should be the role of institutions to develop questionnaires according to their needs and to draft them in collaboration with students and staff. The process of drafting questionnaires has the potential to promote more ownership among the students and teachers alike, making the questions relevant for all, improving response rates, as well as making it more likely that the feedback is actively used to enhance quality.⁵

There is still a long way to go in order for the Montenegrin system to reach the accepted standard for quality assurance in the EHEA. As in many other areas, embryonic initiatives are present, but they need to grow into established structures that can act in a stable manner, preferably under the direction of a responsible vice-rector or similar senior leadership figure. Such structures should be able to extend the activities beyond learning and teaching and aim to enhance quality across the institution. This will also require investments in data collection systems, professional staff, and it will moreover involve a wider awareness and a deeper understanding of the spirit and content of the ESG.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Follow up on the ambitions stated in the Higher Education Strategy and implement them in a timely and systematic manner
2. Ensure that the new quality assurance agency is ESG compliant and included in EQAR through the appropriate review process
3. Delegate the drafting of student questionnaires to the higher education institutions

Recommendations to the higher education institutions:

1. Designate a responsible vice-rector or similar for quality assurance as a part of an overall governance reform in all institutions

⁵ See Surssock, Andrée (2011), *Examining Quality Culture Part II*, EUA p. 37-38

2. Broaden the scope of quality assurance beyond teaching
3. Invest in data collection and human resources to implement the broadening of scope beyond teaching to encompass all activities, including research and service to society
4. Increase awareness of the spirit and content of the ESG as a step for fostering a quality culture
5. Develop questionnaires within the institutions, including students and staff of the individual institutions in the drafting process

4. Teaching and learning

4.1 The 2014 sectoral report

In 2014, the outcomes of the evaluations resulted in the following recommendations:

National authorities should re-examine the existence of the specialist qualification and bring Montenegro in line with European developments, particularly through a national qualifications framework that is compatible with the European one. This would also require rethinking the public administration career ladder and communicating effectively with private sector employers on the new degrees.

Institutions should pursue their efforts to implement the Bologna reforms by:

- Ensuring that the curricula are redesigned to fit the Bologna three-cycle degree structure rather than the current hybrid structure.
- Ensuring that learning outcomes are identified for each study programme and course, that these are aligned with assessment strategies and that students and the wider public understand the learning-outcome approach. This understanding could be promoted by including students on curricular committees and requiring that all syllabi list the learning objectives of the courses and that all teachers introduce their courses by explaining these.
- Promoting examples of good and innovative practices in the area of student-centred learning (e.g. interactive learning, use of case-studies, problem-based learning, etc.) through periodic events directed at the academic staff, and focusing particularly on part-time faculty members who come from the professions and may not be as familiar with European higher education developments.
- Allowing individual learning paths by increasing the number of elective courses.

4.2 System-level reforms and institutional responses

Much of the dynamics in the area of teaching and learning comes from the implementation of system level reforms at the initiative of the government.

The progress within the institutions in this area corresponds to the general situation in the Montenegrin system, where reforms are under way, but not yet completed. As the legal framework for study programmes has been a subject to substantial changes at the system level, much attention within the institutions is in general given to aligning programmes with the new rules.

4.2.1 New study programmes

The Montenegrin government has followed the main recommendation from the 2014 report and brought the system in line with a model more commonly used in Europe: 3-year Bachelor and 2-year Master cycles instead of the old system of 3+1+1. The reform of the degree structure seems to have been thorough and recognised by the institutions as a high priority, which is very positive as it demonstrates how clearly formulated reforms can be carried out throughout the system. At the time of the 2018 evaluations, the new structure is either in place or in the process of being implemented. Notably, the University of Montenegro, with by far the largest number of students, has fully moved to the 3+2 model, and the programmes were accredited in May 2017.

4.2.2 Qualifications framework and learning outcomes

A new national qualifications framework has been established bringing the Montenegrin system in closer alignment with the rest of the EHEA According to the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report⁶, Montenegro is among those countries that have fully developed their national qualifications framework, including public self-certification (Step 11). This is a very positive step, in line with the 2014 recommendations.

Although the 2018 evaluation reports show that learning outcomes have been implemented in some institutions, it was not always clear how well and to what extent this has been done.

In addition, most study programmes are still very prescriptive in their offerings with little possibility for students to choose between different modules. It should be noted, however, that the University of Montenegro has made considerable progress in consolidating its offer of programmes from 270 to 160.

4.2.3 Practical training

The Law on Higher Education specifies the use of learning outcomes and requires that study programmes entail at least 25 % practical training outside the higher education institution, such as internships. This corresponds to the Higher Education Strategy and the Action Plan.

The priority given to practical training in the Strategy is visible in many institutions. However, there are large differences between disciplines with some programmes having difficulties in finding placements or internships for all students. There does not seem to be a definition of the term “practical training” in the material provided to IEP, although it does implicitly appear to refer to experiences in non-university contexts. It could be beneficial to begin a discussion about the elements of practical training and possible ways of integrating it in the curriculum following the latest trends in European higher education towards experiential learning, including project-based approaches. Practical learning should not be limited to internships, but seen as a broader concept. As is discussed in chapter 6 (Service to Society), it could be

⁶ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. *The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

considered to include practical work in relation to the social and civic mission of institutions in the definition of practical training, and be explicit about this possibility when accrediting new programmes.

4.2.4 Innovation in learning approaches

European higher education is going through a period of innovation with new technologies and approaches to learning. Higher education institutions are giving high attention to innovative learning methods, digital provision, blended learning, and project-based learning.⁷ The 2018 Paris Communiqué from the Bologna Ministerial Conference⁸ underlines this point by dedicating a chapter to “Innovation in Learning and Teaching”, committing to exploring and sharing good practice with particular attention to inter-disciplinary, research-based and work-based learning, as well as underlining the importance of digitalisation. In Montenegro, a number of the institutional evaluation reports acknowledged individual awareness about this development among staff, and in one instance also among senior leadership.

However, the lack of efficient governance structures is an obstacle to serious attempts to introduce innovative approaches, bringing in the latest methods and ideas from the rest of Europe. Another obstacle is the student questionnaires for quality assurance, which are reported to be narrowly focused on teaching and do not include the whole of the learning experience. This is an issue, as the situation is favourable for such a leap forward, as there is a broad European discussion and innovation at the same time as the Montenegrin national system is undergoing reform.

E-learning exists in some institutions, but the use of digital platforms and similar in teaching and learning is very uneven or non-existent, also due to lack of infrastructure and the small size of many institutions. In this regard, there could be a role for government to support institutions by coordinating and investing in the appropriate infrastructure.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Begin a discussion to better define the scope of “practical training”, considering the experiential learning approach.
2. Work to modernise the quality assurance of learning and teaching through a revised student questionnaire and a generally broader approach as discussed in chapter 3

Recommendations to the higher education institutions:

1. Use the occasion of moving to a 3+2 model for a more radical reform of study

⁷ Trends 2018, forthcoming, see also <https://eua.eu/issues/20:learning-teaching.html>

⁸http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf

programmes

- a. Giving more choice to students as to what elements to include in their education
 - b. Implementing learning outcomes in a thorough manner
 - c. Taking part in the European discussions about innovation in teaching and learning and creating the conditions (e.g. the human and financial resources) for implementing such innovations in a systematic manner
2. Broaden the concept of practical learning beyond internships with companies and develop project-based learning with a wide set of social partners including NGOs and local/national authorities

5. Research

5.1 The 2014 sectoral report

The 2014 report underlined the low level of research in Montenegro, mainly due to the lack of institutional capacity to set priorities and identify pockets of excellence on which to build, as well as lack of overall national investments. The report recommended that:

In order to develop research capacity, national authorities must increase funding and adapt funding models to finance research adequately.

Institutions interested in developing their research capacity should:

- Identify and focus on existing or potential areas of strength.
- Invest in basic research infrastructure.
- Train administrative and academic staff.
- Participate in international networks with the purpose of developing the research capacity in Montenegro.

5.2 System-level developments

The Higher Education Strategy identifies research as a “key factor for future economic, social and cultural development of Montenegro” and points to “significant progress” having taken place in research activities.⁹ The Strategy does not refer to the need for more national investment in research, but in practice this has happened. The Strategy likewise aspires to higher participation in EU research programmes, also for capacity building. This aspiration has been met by an increased participation. However, while such participation is undoubtedly beneficial to research in Montenegro, success rates are – and will likely remain – very low for Horizon 2020 and the future Horizon Europe programmes. Moreover, these programmes are not principally aimed at capacity building and support for basic infrastructure, but rather at supporting research cooperation and excellent projects. Participation in these programmes would also require direct investment to build capacity, and indirectly through the need to fund implementation costs that would not be covered by the project grants, as these are not fully costed.¹⁰ It would still be of utmost importance that Montenegro invests more in research directly if it wants to develop its capacity. Unfortunately, it is not clear from the Action Plan if there are real targets or commitments for this kind of public investment.

⁹ *Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Montenegro 2016-2020*, Objective 3

¹⁰ See Estermann, Thomas & Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik (2013) *Financially Sustainable Universities. Full costing: progress and practice*, EUA

The Higher Education Strategy aims at giving better access to research results by securing access to international databases, which is an important element of building research capacity. It would have been beneficial to combine this goal with a policy for open access, not only for Montenegrin institutions to use the possibilities for free access to research results and data, but also for Montenegrin research itself to be more available and part of an international discussion.

The Strategy underlines the need for improvement of human resources for research, making the research profession and research activities more attractive. This is to be achieved by improving the system of evaluation, providing encouragement for research activities, involving young people in the research process, and promoting science and research in society.¹¹ According to the Action Plan, the improvement of the system of evaluation has 2018 as a deadline for implementation.

Research in Montenegro could be strengthened overall by pooling resources between different institutions in order to share the infrastructure and capacity that is present as well as to build further potential particularly in well defined focus areas such as tourism or preservation of the coastal environment. Inter-institutional cooperation would also give more possibilities to doctoral candidates, for example through joint programmes. The national authorities could incentivise such collaboration, for example through specific funding schemes.

5.3 Institutional level

The University of Montenegro remains the only institution in the country that has research activities of any significance. The three other universities, Donja Gorica, the University Mediterranean, and the Adriatic University, have plans to build research capacity and doctoral education, but efforts are still at a very early stage.

The potential research-performing institutions are all characterised by common problems of the system: the strategic capacity and the level of investment are very low. No university has a research strategy, and infrastructure investments are at best sporadic and dependent on external project funding, with resulting low levels of activity and lack of strategic planning. However, discussions about research priorities are taking place within the universities, with smaller institutions tending to move towards more applied research. The University of Montenegro has established a Scientific Board under the Senate, which deals with issues such as promotion criteria and criteria for selection of doctoral supervisors. Compared to the situation in 2014, this is an important step forward. It is also reported that research activities have grown with more publications being produced and more international cooperation taking place.

¹¹ Ibid. Objective 3.4

In all of the evaluated universities, doctoral education plays a crucial role in the discussions about building capacity in research. As in 2014, it is necessary to build capacity in order to have research environments where doctoral candidates can learn, while at the same time it is necessary to train more doctoral candidates in order to build capacity. As in many other systems that are building research capacity, these two, interlinked aspects need to be taken into consideration together, preferably through an institutional strategy. Moreover, there is a challenge in terms of allocating sufficient time for research for doctoral candidates due to the high teaching load for some candidates. However, small steps towards a more robust system of doctoral education have been taken, for example through the establishment of a Doctoral Studies Board to review the doctoral theses at the University of Montenegro.

The 2014 recommendation to establish doctoral schools at the University of Montenegro has not been implemented; it would be a big step forward for a more stable planning and management of doctoral education. Particularly as good practices for establishing doctoral schools exists across the continent, this could be an attainable next stage of development. The University of Donja Gorica had established a “Doctoral Hub”, which could develop into a doctoral school, but it is at an early stage.

In terms of human resources, some improvements have been noted, but due to the decentralised nature of Montenegrin higher education institutions these are not very systematic and vary across faculties and institutions. At the University Mediterranean, staff has formally a good time allocation for research (30 %), but this was also due to the good student-staff ratio at the university. However, the Montenegrin system generally does not directly value research activity as part of staff promotion, and there has not been any major and systematic development of indicators that could be used for this purpose, although efforts have been made to work towards this at the University of Montenegro.

Generally, the development of research in Montenegro corresponds to the general stage of the reform process: positive but embryonic progress has been made since 2014, and there have been discussions about how to improve the system, as well as concrete improvements in terms of output. This could lead to increased strategic planning and realisation of capacity building for research in Montenegro, but given the constraints of the governance system, this important step seems to be very challenging for the individual institutions.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Improve overall public funding, diminish the reliance on external projects
2. Continue the initiatives to provide access to research in Montenegro and from Montenegro, including through an Open Access strategy
3. Ensure overall implementation of the Higher Education Strategy and Action Plan
4. Create incentives for cooperation and sharing infrastructure and expertise across institutions

Recommendations to the higher education institutions:

1. Move forward from the present discussion to articulating explicit research strategies and implementing them through SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-related) measures
2. Include research activities as part of promotion criteria for staff at universities
3. Continue the development of doctoral education, for instance through the creation of institutional doctoral schools

6. Service to society

6.1 The 2014 sectoral report

In 2014, the recommendations in the area of service to society focused to a high degree on the link between education and the labour market:

National authorities should support the development of distance learning and lifelong learning programmes, particularly by removing any existing legal obstacles.

Institutions should continue and deepen their engagement with other stakeholders through:

- Systematic dialogue concerning study programme and curriculum development, including of lifelong learning provision.
- Playing an active role in the local civil society, for instance through the organisation of public events on topical issues.
- Developing technology transfer with non-academic stakeholders (in the case of research-active institutions).

6.2 System level reforms

The Montenegrin government has taken a number of new initiatives in order to make a better connection between the higher education system and the labour market. This includes a labour market survey to identify needs in different sectors, setting up a post-graduation placement service programme, and the requirement for practical training in study programmes (see chapter 4).

The labour market surveys have identified a general over-supply of graduates from higher education, with shortages in some sectors.¹² From the material available, it is difficult to assess how and if this data is being used to identify solutions to this challenge in a systematic way; it is also not clear if and how higher education institutions are informed and included in discussions about the findings.

The post-graduation placement service seems to be working well. It uses an electronic system to pair graduates with employers with the result that 93 % of applicants (3452 graduates) have found placements. As Montenegrin higher education institutions graduated 4541 students from all cycles in 2017, this is a very impressive number. The Progress Report from 2017 points at data being collected to see how many of these graduates have continued to work for the employer, but IEP has not seen the results. According to a European Commission

¹² *Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Montenegro 2016-2020*

study, only 55 % of graduates report that their qualifications are well matched with their job.¹³

6.3 Institutional level

At the level of higher education institutions, much attention has been given to the implementation of the new model for study programmes and the requirement for 25 % practical training, as described above in chapter 4 (Teaching and Learning). Due to the small size and teaching focus of many institutions, the main concern regarding service to society is the graduates and how to prepare them for the labour market. Some smaller institutions are well-connected to their region and to local employers, but there is little evidence of systematic engagement and discussion of the type recommended in the 2014 report.

Lifelong learning is evidently not a high priority for the institutions. Most 2018 institutional evaluation reports point to a low level of activity, which does not correspond to the potential that lifelong learning has. The University of Montenegro has established a Lifelong Learning Centre but is not actively delivering lifelong learning due to missing accreditation.

There are good examples of institutions giving priority to their civil and social mission. The Faculty for Montenegrin Language and Literature has the promotion of Montenegrin culture as a key mission and students and staff participate actively in the cultural life in their region. The University Mediterranean provides examples of integrating social and environmental work as experiential learning opportunities in the curriculum; for example, students work on the situation of refugee and minority groups as part of their training. The University of Donja Gorica involves students in outreach to high schools. Such examples, though isolated, show that Montenegrin institutions have the potential to implement practices that are at the level of European best practice. It would be beneficial to be able to include such activities under practical training, as discussed in chapter 4 (Teaching and Learning).

Due to the limited research capacity of Montenegrin institutions and the nature of the private sector in the country, there is not much innovation activity and research based on university-industry cooperation. The University of Montenegro has a Science Park, which is not yet operational, and there is no Technology Transfer Office, much less a strategy or vision for the role that the university could play for innovation. However, a newly-established Centre of Excellence for Biodiversity is active and is coordinated between several faculties at the university.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Ensure that data collection regarding graduate employment is systematically discussed with higher education institutions and employers

¹³ Skikos, Helene (Ed.) (2016), From University to Employment, European Commission, p. 52, fig. 14

2. Recognise social and civic activities as “practical training”

Recommendations to the higher education institutions:

1. Engage in a systematic dialogue with other stakeholders as recommended in the 2014 sectoral report
2. Develop the lifelong learning offer
3. Further develop and recognise social and civic activities of staff and students
4. Develop a vision for the role of higher education institutions in innovation

7. Internationalisation

7.1 The 2014 sectoral report

The 2014 report described a system where there was awareness about the importance of internationalisation, but with few activities and links beyond the Balkans and very limited structural support. The report recommended that:

National authorities, in dialogue with the higher education institutions, should identify ways to overcome obstacles to internationalisation (e.g. to student and staff mobility, offering courses in non-national languages and joint study programme delivery) and develop a national internationalisation strategy to support the promotion of Montenegro as a study destination.

The institutions should:

- Elaborate an internationalisation strategy (with clear quantitative and geographical targets) that would in the longer term extend beyond the Balkan region. Such a strategy should consider the following aspects: promoting student and staff mobility, developing a language policy, exploring opportunities offered by international funding programmes (e.g. scholarship programmes), developing joint programmes, attracting visiting professors from outside the Balkans and developing marketing material.
- Consider creating an international office or enhancing the capacity of an existing one and assigning a senior officer (vice-dean or vice-rector) to lead this area.
- Strengthen their hosting capacity by developing housing and advising to mobile students, both outgoing and incoming.

7.2 System-level reforms

The Higher Education Strategy mainly aims at increasing mobility of students and staff by increasing the number of bilateral institutional agreements and strengthening support through the national and institutional offices. There is little strategic thinking at the system level about priority given to particular geographic areas or the long-term goals for internationalisation beyond general improvement of the quality of studies.

However, the government has made or plans to make some noticeable changes and initiatives: it has allowed for accreditation of English-language study programmes, which is an important step forward. Also, it plans to strengthen the National Erasmus+ Office and establish a new Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes. In that context, it should be considered whether Montenegro should not take the full step to associate to the Erasmus Programme, giving higher education institutions the possibilities to attain an Erasmus Charter, and setting up an Erasmus National Agency.

It is not clear if these ambitions come with plans for higher investment in services and/or increased financial support for mobility.

7.3 Institutional level

Seen from the institutional perspective, the picture is one of slight but unsystematic progress since 2014.

Services seem to have improved, particularly at the University of Montenegro, which has set up a much more comprehensive system of support for incoming students. Other institutions have done less in this respect, some of them due to their small size. Developments are not part of a systematic effort, but rather of *ad hoc* practical steps that nevertheless form a less critical picture than in 2014, and there are concrete improvements in the number of mobile students.

English provision continues to be a problem for incoming mobility, although it is now possible to accredit English language programmes. For outgoing mobility, the reluctance of institutions to accept credit recognition is also a problem with students not getting recognition for shorter stays abroad.

Regarding the 2014 recommendation to widen the number of partner institutions, the number of global partnerships have clearly expanded, with activities stretching from Argentina to China. Good examples exist of deep relationships with individual institutions in Europe and beyond including examples of joint programmes, but there are no visible discussions concerning the balance between quality and quantity of international partnerships, or what kinds of partnerships fit with individual institutional missions. This would be an important discussion to take given that the geopolitical situation has changed, with countries like China and Turkey being more pro-active in expanding their presence in higher education, which is visible in the examples from the institutional evaluation reports. This development opens opportunities, but there is a risk for systems like Montenegro to be purely reactive and not define the outcomes that they would like from the new partnerships.

The Erasmus Programme is used by some institutions, and it is generally seen as a promising vehicle to develop internationalisation. Association to the programme could enhance this potential further.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Continue to develop support for international mobility
2. Consider association (Programme Country status) to the Erasmus Programme

Recommendations to the higher education institutions:

1. Continue and systematise support for outgoing and incoming mobility

2. Develop recognition of credit mobility
3. Engage in a strategic discussion about developing international inter-institutional partnerships (e.g. purposes, geographical targets)

8. Conclusion

The authorities and higher education institutions of Montenegro must be congratulated on having embarked on a process of reform of the system. Compared to 2014, there is noticeable and positive change in the legal and funding framework as well as within institutions.

The present moment in time looks both promising and precarious. Given the common acknowledgement of being in a reform period, Montenegro could take a significant leap forward in its provision of higher education, adopting innovative and proven approaches from the rest of the EHEA. However, the reform process at this point is piecemeal and at times not radical enough. What has been done in the last four years can be seen as a first, albeit important, step on a long journey.

Important challenges remains, particularly in the governance of institutions and the underdeveloped capacity to make and implement strategic choices. This is an obstacle for thorough reform in almost all areas, and the issue must be taken seriously. As pointed out in the 2014 report, Montenegrin institutions must move away from personalised governance, towards institutionalised decision-making and find a sustainable balance between central and decentral management. If these two challenges are met with determination, supported by an adequate legal framework and sufficient funding, further reforms in all of the identified areas will be easier to implement more fit for purpose.

There is a clear will to reform across the system, and this momentum must be used to move forward towards a Montenegrin higher education system with higher education and research that stands in line with European developments and practices. The developments within Montenegro in the last years show that there is a clear will to go towards this goal. This will be a long process, but the process has started, and the IEP wishes that this report and the 2018 evaluation as a whole will inspire discussions and give direction to the next step of reform.

Annex 1: The Institutional Evaluation Programme

General approach

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 individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes, 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?

The evaluations are mission-driven; that is, each institution is evaluated in the context of its own mission and objectives. Therefore, the evaluation reports do not compare or rank institutions.

Steps in the evaluation

The project took place between September 2017 and October 2018.

Following receipt of the institutions’ registration, five steps were undertaken to conduct the evaluations.

Preparatory workshops

Two workshops were organised to prepare the institutions and the evaluation teams:

- Participating institutions were offered individual preparatory video-conferences with the IEP secretariat to introduce them to the *Guidelines for Institutions*, the IEP philosophy and methodology and to respond to questions regarding the evaluation process.
- A workshop for the evaluation teams was organised during the 2017 Annual Seminar, which gathers together the IEP pool of experts at the beginning of the academic year. This workshop focused largely on the Montenegrin higher education context.

Self-evaluation process and report

Each institution undertook a self-evaluation process resulting in order to prepare a self-evaluation report. IEP stresses that the self-evaluation process is as important as the resulting self-evaluation report. The *Guidelines for Institutions* provided advice on how to select the members of the self-evaluation group and on how to involve the university community in the process: from gathering initial information to collecting feedback on the draft self-evaluation report.

Evaluation visits

Six institutions had been evaluated in 2013/2014 and therefore underwent follow-up evaluations, in which the IEP team visited the institutions once for a period of three days. During the visit, the team met with institutional leaders, academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders. The visit ended with an oral presentation of the findings and recommendations to the institutional community and, in some cases, external stakeholders.

The remaining institutions underwent initial evaluations, in which the IEP team visited the institutions twice:

- Each of the first visits lasted two days. The purpose of the first visit was to allow the team to become acquainted with the institution in its local context and to request additional information if necessary. Meetings were held with institutional leaders, academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders.
- Each of the second visits lasted three days (except in the smaller institutions where the visit lasted two days). The purpose of the second visit was to deepen the team's knowledge of the institution and to formulate and confirm its findings. This visit ended with an oral presentation of the findings and recommendations to the institutional community and, in some cases, external stakeholders.

Evaluation reports

The team coordinators prepared the draft evaluation reports, in consultation with their team members. The reports were sent to the institutions for correction of factual errors and the final versions were published on the IEP website.

Post-evaluation workshop

A post-evaluation workshop was organised on 19 October 2018 in Podgorica to discuss this system report and to provide the participating institutions and the national authorities with an opportunity to explore how to address the recommendations that they received.