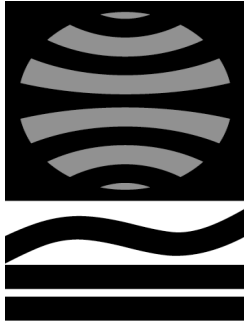


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**INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATIONS OF UNIVERSITIES  
IN SERBIA 2001 - 2002**

***EUA OVERVIEW REPORT***

*Presented at the wrap-up conference on reforms of Serbian higher education held  
on 14 – 15 November 2002 at the University of Belgrade*

*November 2002*

## **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this short “overview report” is to give a coherent summary of the experiences, findings and recommendations from the five individual EUA institutional evaluation processes undertaken at the Universities of Belgrade, Belgrade Arts, Kragujevac, Nis and Novi Sad during the academic year 2001-2002.
2. It is hoped that this short overview will be of additional use to the Serbian Universities, individually and collectively, in the on-going implementation of the higher education reform process in their country. It is hoped that this overview will also prove of interest to the Ministries and national bodies with responsibility for higher education in Serbia, as well as to other key stakeholders in the country, notably the students and their organisations. Finally, the document may also be of interest to other external partners, academic or otherwise, of the Serbian higher education system.
3. This “overview report” does not replace the individual reports, which contain much more detailed and specific feedback and recommendations for each of the participating universities. The individual reports also contain a large amount of feedback which is hoped will also be given serious consideration by the responsible Ministries and other bodies. This “overview report” gathers together some of this feedback at the level of the higher education system in Serbia, but likewise does not replace the detailed information of the individual reports.

## **Introduction**

4. During the summer of 2001, in the framework of its annual call to its members to participate in the EUA Institutional Evaluation programme, EUA was contacted by the Rector of the University of Novi Sad with the request to conduct an institutional review there. Similar requests were also rapidly received by EUA from the Rectors of the Universities of Nis, Kragujevac, Belgrade and Belgrade Arts.
5. The German Rectors’ Conference (HRK), using German government Stability Pact funds, and the Foundation for an Open Society Yugoslavia (FOSY) each generously agreed to cover half of the total costs of this exercise.
6. Given this unprecedented situation, with all the universities in the same national system requesting an EUA evaluation during the same year, and given the special circumstances of higher education in Serbia at that time, EUA and the participating universities agreed that a preparatory workshop should be held, in order to ensure that each institution could make the most of the review process. This workshop was held at the University of Novi Sad from 24-26 November 2001, with discussion focusing on quality assurance theory and procedures, including self-evaluation methodology and techniques.
7. It was also agreed in advance that a wrap-up conference should be held at the end of the process, in order to analyse what lessons could be learned from the exercise and how these

could contribute to the on-going reform of higher education in Serbia. This conference took place at the University of Belgrade from 14-15 November 2002.

8. These two additional meetings have also been supported by the HRK and the FOSY, with generous supplementary support from the Council of Europe, as part of its support for higher education reform in States which have recently acceded to the European Cultural Convention.
9. This system-wide exercise has taken on additional significance following the formal request in early 2002 by the Serbian Minister for Education and Sport for the Serbian higher education system to join the Bologna Process. Quality assurance has become a key issue in this process, and the request by the Universities of Serbia to be reviewed by the EUA from an institutional quality assurance perspective is therefore most encouraging.
10. Given this general environment, the EUA review teams see the present situation as a tremendous opportunity which should not be missed. There is a confluence of internal and external reasons and influences which mean that reform is essential, and which help provide a coherent framework for this reform. There is also a healthy and positive approach to reform within Serbian higher education, involving all partners. And not least, there is a significant number of external academic partnership opportunities which, if well used by the Serbian universities, can substantially support the reform process in a wide variety of ways.
11. The EUA review teams therefore are pleased to give this overview of their collective experiences, feedback and recommendations. This overview should be taken as positive and constructive critical analysis of the situation as perceived by friendly peer review teams from partner universities. We sincerely hope that this will be of use in helping carry through the next stage of the reform process in the Serbian universities, and ensuring the rapid integration of Serbian higher education into the European higher education area.

### **The first steps – the self evaluation reports**

12. The first and most important step in the EUA institutional review process is the self-evaluation report prepared by the University. The rest of the process is based on this report, the writing of which can also in fact provide a major learning opportunity for the university. It became clear at the introductory seminar in Novi Sad that this was the first time that such an exercise had been attempted, at least at the level of the university, in most of the participating institutions. The complexity of the issues which needed to be addressed, as well as the volume of work to be done in a relatively short time, also became apparent to the Universities.
13. However, all five universities successfully produced substantial self-evaluation reports in advance of the EUA external visits, and based on prior EUA experience, the quality of these documents was in general better than could have been expected. Honest, if limited and sometimes partial, SWOT analyses were undertaken which helped make the essential elements of these reports clearly visible. Some of the reports were also based on similar exercises at faculty level, which in turn generated considerable momentum for reform within the universities.

14. Most of the self-evaluation reports were put together by teams of specially selected persons from across the University, sometimes also with student involvement. The dynamics created by this self-evaluation effort alone seem, in some of the universities, to have had an effect far beyond that of producing a report.
15. The weak points of the self-evaluation reports were, in general, the lack of hard statistical data (e.g. financial, demographic, staff and student information). More detailed data would have been useful to back up some of the statements being made and to illustrate the real situation within the universities. However, often such data does not exist, at least not at the university level, although most of the Faculties do have such data but do not appear to share this with the University. Some Faculties did not wish to share financial data with the EUA teams. In such conditions, no monitoring of performance is possible at the University level.
16. The SWOT exercises within the self-evaluation reports tended to be weak on the analysis of opportunities and threats. Given that opportunities and threats usually refer to the university's capacity to relate its internal strengths and weaknesses to the external environment, this shortcoming highlights a general observation of all the review teams at each of the universities. In some Universities, the understanding of which areas might constitute current strengths was mistaken, in the opinion of the EUA teams, since these areas should rather have been considered as weaknesses.
17. The self-evaluation reports were also, in general, unable to evaluate university strategies or policies in various fields, likewise because these strategies or policies did not previously exist.
18. In a number of cases, the completed self-evaluation reports were unfortunately not well known or distributed within the universities in advance of the EUA visit, thus limiting the initial internal impact of these reports, as well as the impact of the EUA reviewers' meetings with staff and students.
19. However, in most cases the self-evaluation reports were improved during the interval between the two EUA team visits, leading to very interesting developments and exciting dynamics. The University of Novi Sad turned the report into a draft development plan, the University of Arts Belgrade wrote a precise follow-up report as an action plan for the implementation of change, the University of Nis wrote the first elements of a strategic plan, and the University of Kragujevac developed the first draft of a mission statement. As only one extended EUA visit took place to the University of Belgrade, there was no opportunity for the self-evaluation report to be further developed between visits.

## **CONSTRAINTS**

20. It can be seen from the EUA reviewers' reports that most of the constraints faced by each individual university are in fact generalised in all universities across the country. A number of boundary conditions exist which the universities themselves cannot change immediately, such as the economic situation, recent damage to societal values and norms, the general educational profile at school level, the legal framework, and current levels and methodologies of resource allocation.

21. In addition to these generalised constraints, there are also a number of regional differences within the Republic of Serbia which affect the universities in various ways. The most obvious of these is at the University of Novi Sad, with the recently strengthened role of the regional government of Vojvodina. Other examples however include the universities in Belgrade, which also face some specific issues by virtue of being in the middle of the capital city and the additional problems that this can bring. The University of Kragujevac faces an exceptional situation given the concentration of refugees in that region and the collapse of the industrial complexes around which the university was previously structured.

### ***Resources***

22. The funding received from the Government is currently based mainly on input factors and student numbers, and not linked to quality measures, output factors or good performance in priority areas. Thus the current funding model does not support the strategic needs of either the universities themselves or of Serbian society in general.

23. Moreover, this funding is sent directly to the internal units of the university for use in a highly prescribed way, and not to the university itself. This funding model is based on existing and historical parameters, rather than future strategic options. This combination of all these leaves no possibility for the university to plan and implement change in a realistic way, either at central or decentralised level.

24. The overall percentage levels of this state funding for both education (3.2% in 1999<sup>1</sup>) and research (0.24% in 2001<sup>2</sup>) are very low in European terms (5.7% OECD average<sup>3</sup> and 1.9% EU average in 2001<sup>4</sup> respectively).

25. Despite the desperate need for alternative non-state sources of funding, the universities are extremely weak in their capacity to raise and manage such funds.

26. The universities currently have no system for the strategic and transparent internal distribution of funds, either in terms of strategic planning decisions (quality, efficiency, priorities) or in terms of administrative mechanisms and competencies.

27. Where external funds are earned by individuals or units within the university, there are no policies or mechanisms on the need for each university to levy an overhead on such external income.

28. One source of such external funds is student fees. There appears to be no mechanism to ensure the transparent and accountable use of these student fees, which in the opinion of the EUA teams should not be used only to increase salaries but also to ensure higher quality of teaching and better learning standards and conditions within the university.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD Thematic Review of National Policies for Education, Serbia, 2001

<sup>2</sup> figure given to EUA Review Team at the University of Kragujevac

<sup>3</sup> OECD Education at a glance, 2001

<sup>4</sup> EU Directorate-General (DG) for Research, see [http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/era/listcom\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/era/listcom_en.html)

29. It is clear that *official* salaries in the universities are too low, but that there are also excessively wide discrepancies within each university between the *real* salaries of those employed in different parts of the university. The fact that the university has in effect no control over these real salary levels nor over the internal discrepancies appears to be a highly dangerous situation to the EUA teams. In the opinion of the EUA teams, the major part of salaries should come from government core funding, not from student fees, and there should be university-wide procedures on these matters.
30. There is a heavily inverted age pyramid of academic staff at all the universities, which is already a constraint but which will become a serious problem in the near future.
31. Linked to paragraph 30, the general low numbers of post-graduate and doctoral students across the universities also give reason for concern, not just for the internal human resource planning at the universities but for the wider Serbian society. The low numbers of doctoral students can be explained as the consequence of overall very low and weak levels of research activity at the Serbian universities, and of course to very low levels of research funding they are receiving.
32. In general, the infrastructure in and with which the universities are working is both outdated and inadequate. This is the result of many years of under-investment and poor investment. The solution is of course long-term capital investment in infrastructure, but this should only take place in the framework of well defined strategic development plans at national level, higher education sector level and institutional level.

### ***Organisation and structure***

33. The May 2002 HE Law is a clear improvement on the previous 1998 law, and includes a number of significant and positive developments. However, it does not take the essential step of integrating each individual university, currently no more than a weak conglomerate of highly autonomous faculties and other bodies. In the opinion of the EUA Review Teams, such a move must come from a top-down legislative decision, since there are too many vested interests in the current fragmented structures for this radical change to be possible as an initiative from within the university only.
34. This “traditional” fragmented structure offers no perspectives for a rapid and successful reform of higher education in Serbia in line with the objectives of the Bologna Process. The fundamental question is not whether faculties should have total independence or no autonomy whatsoever – since neither of these extremes can be successful either -, but whether the university should have the means to fulfil its mission as a coherent provider of higher education services in response to the needs of its country and citizens.
35. As a result of the traditional structures still in place, the universities do not have trained and professional administrative officers capable of providing the essential core functions a modern European university now needs.
36. As noted already in paragraphs 22 and following, the universities do not have the necessary internal financial structures and competencies to function as modern European universities.

37. Because of the above structures, most of the universities suffer from multiple layers of unnecessary and costly duplication in a number of fields (teaching, administration, services), resulting in wasted resources at all levels and a high degree of inefficiency. Also because of these structures, inadequate use is made of essential but scarce equipment which does exist in some universities.
38. Partly, but not only, as a result of the above, all universities lack effective management information systems for the collection and use of data concerning the most basic issues, including financial issues. This is a serious handicap for the necessary strategic planning and management processes, as well as for the monitoring of performance and efficiency, and not least, for benchmarking and comparisons with other institutions.
39. Linked to paragraph 38, the universities in general have poor internal communication tools and practices, which mean that it is difficult to spread formal information rapidly and effectively. In some cases, there are large parts of the universities relatively unaware of the efforts of the university leadership in a number of fields, despite the best efforts of these leaders to rebuild a university community following the divisive policies of the previous years.
40. One system-wide structural constraint observed by the five EUA teams is that, with the exception, for specific reasons, of the University of Arts Belgrade, all universities in Serbia follow the same traditional model in their organisation and structure. They all have more or less the same profile of Faculties and academic programmes, the curricula and teaching materials are highly similar from one to another, and in many cases, the same senior teaching staff is actually employed by several universities at the one time. This situation leaves little room for diversity or differentiation between the universities, and therefore only reduced scope for innovation.
41. The EUA review teams heard, in the University of Belgrade, as well as in at least one other university, opinions in favour of splitting the universities into smaller, potentially more manageable and more specialised institutions. However, apart from reducing the overall size of the institution, none of the arguments put forward proposed any significant change in the organisational structure of the proposal new smaller institutions. This would mean that the current built-in problems and inefficiencies would just be re-created several times on a smaller scale. In the opinions of the review teams, this idea would then be rather pointless. It would be much better to reduce the overall number of Faculties within a university, clustering them around five or six main academic areas, thus allowing for intense rationalisation of teaching, learning and research resources across subject areas. This would result in a much stronger academic base in most disciplines, and would create exciting new opportunities for inter-disciplinary teaching and research.

### ***Teaching and learning***

42. The unfortunate general picture resulting from the academic isolation of the 1990s is one of outdated and highly repetitive curricula, taught using outdated and internationally non-relevant literature and materials.

43. Coupled with this, the EUA teams formed the opinion that in many cases the teaching methodologies used are seriously out of date. There is an urgent need to move towards a philosophy of student-centred learning, rather than teacher-centred teaching.
44. In general, the EUA teams observed courses and programmes with too many teaching hours, and not enough other learning time for the students. Little use is made of alternatives to traditional ex-cathedra teaching, such as group or project work or problem solving exercises.
45. These generalisations should not hide however the encouraging new developments which are taking place within parts of each university regarding the creation of new study programmes and new teaching methodologies.
46. The use of ECTS and of modules, based on coherent grouping of learning outcomes, has not been introduced yet in a widespread way across Serbian higher education, although positive first steps have been taken in most universities. These mechanisms are useful not only in helping structure study programmes in logical and flexible ways, but also in reviewing curricula and identifying core elements of these. They will also contribute to a policy of transparency and more learner-oriented study possibilities.
47. As in some other higher education systems in Europe, there appears to be a high level of academic in-breeding within the Serbian system, and indeed within each university. This problem is increased in Serbian universities by the established practice, even in some cases the requirement, for the students to learn from the professors own publications, rather than broadening their intake of knowledge from other external sources as well.
48. It is true that in many cases, the universities are constrained by the poor academic levels of incoming students from the secondary school system. This *de facto* situation however increases even more the necessity for improved teaching methodologies and materials at the university.
49. The EUA teams are of the opinion that the current procedures for the assessment of student knowledge and learning in the universities are far from satisfactory. Far too many exams take place to serve any objective academic purpose, and the assessment practices – in many cases oral, in many cases only between an individual student and an individual professor - are far from being optimal from the perspective of either academic quality or transparency. These give rise to consistent allegations of unethical practices (see paragraphs 81 and following).
50. Very large percentages of students take far too long to complete their university studies, even considering the exceptional social situation of the recent years. This fact, coupled with the unacceptably high drop-out rates in many faculties throughout the universities, shows that the universities are not efficient in fulfilling their most essential purpose. The review teams also suspect that in the larger universities there are important number of students on the registers who have not attended classes or attempted to pass exams on a regular basis, and who should therefore be considered inactive and removed from the university. This would create both space and resources for increasing the quality of the current learning environment for active students.
51. The EUA teams were extremely concerned by the poor state and organisation of the libraries they saw in all the universities. Apart from the lack of availability of modern documentation



to students in most disciplines, the fragmented structures of the library systems means that large amounts of administrative resources (mainly personnel) are wasted, without any benefit to the users of these libraries. There appeared to be no university-wide integrated electronic catalogues anywhere, let alone a system for the exchange and sharing of documentation between all universities across the country.

### ***Internationalisation***

52. The Bologna Process offers an excellent opportunity for higher education in Serbia to integrate a fully European and international dimension into its own reform process. Awareness of the main objectives of the Bologna Process appears to be quite high within the universities, and the student bodies and Ministry for Education and Sport are also very active in this respect.
53. However, given the early stage of the reform process in Serbia, few of the Bologna objectives have yet been implemented. There is an urgent need for moves towards the Bologna-model two-cycle degree structure (with shorter first degrees than at present), and the wide-scale adoption of mechanisms such as ECTS to make learning pathways more coherent and more flexible. The pioneering work in these fields in a number of pilot faculties in some of the universities deserves special mention. This work will also make the universities more internationally visible and comparable.
54. As already mentioned, quality assurance is a key element of the Bologna Process and the openness with which the universities have undertaken the EUA institutional reviews shows that they are very ready to work in this respect and to introduce a European dimension in this field. However, following-up after this initial exercise, much internal work needs to be done to establish effective and useful internal quality cultures within the universities, and a coherent national framework for the improvement of quality across the system.
55. The EUA review teams were pleased to note the significant and growing numbers of new or renewed international contacts which the universities now enjoy. However, few of the universities seem to approach these international opportunities in a strategic manner, and the success or otherwise of most of these opportunities appears to be left almost entirely in the hands of the individual academics most concerned. This is the level at which real cooperation should indeed take place, but the university as a whole should be aware of the important possible synergies that can be created between these individual initiatives, and the dynamic contribution such initiatives can bring, when strategically harnessed, to the university's own reform strategy.
56. Despite such opportunities and potential contributions, the EUA review teams found that the international relations offices of the universities were in general in extremely weak positions, and given only marginal importance in the overall structure of the institution. This should be seen as a serious handicap for the international development of the universities.

### **CAPACITY FOR CHANGE**

57. The EUA review teams consider such capacity to be a *sine qua non* for a modern university in a modern society.
58. The EUA review teams observed very positive changes in the universities during the institutional review process – i.e. between the start of the preparatory workshop in Novi Sad in November 2001 and the main EUA visits in late spring/early summer 2002. These changes, some already mentioned at paragraph 19 in the form of revised strategic thinking, others less measurable but nevertheless clearly felt as a change of climate within the universities, mean that the EUA review teams are convinced that some capacity to change certainly exists within the universities and that this capacity is indeed already showing itself and needs strengthening.
59. The EUA review teams would like to emphasise the key role that students can play as catalysts for reform in Serbia. The teams were impressed by the quality of the student representatives they met at each university, and by the serious and constructive approach which these student bodies brought to the reform process. This should be seen as a major opportunity and strength in working towards the integration of Serbian higher education into the European Higher Education Area.

### ***Strategic development***

60. Based on the new HE law of May 2002, each university has developed new university statutes for itself. These changes in statutes were done after the end of the EUA visits and therefore have not been monitored in the EUA reports. These new statutes will presumably provide the basis for the internal organisation of each university for the medium-term future, at least until the next HE law is passed.
61. EUA review teams did however encourage the universities to exploit the new structures possible under the May 2002 HE law, and to do this in an imaginative way, without waiting for more precise instructions from the Ministry. From informal information received since the team visits, it appears that at least in a couple of cases, such imagination has indeed been fruitfully used.
62. During the 2001-2002 academic year, each university appears to have reconsidered either formally or informally its mission, as the first step in approaching the change process. However it is not clear to the EUA review teams whether these revised mission statements were widely discussed within the universities or with a larger public, or subject to governmental or ministerial approval.
63. The next stage, in the implementation of its mission, means that each university should develop an institutional strategic development plan, ensuring that this plan incorporates the faculty development plans and that these are coherent with the overall institutional strategy.
64. It will be necessary to think, from the very beginning, about regular follow-up procedures to monitor and assess the implementation of these plans.

65. These plans should obviously also fit into national strategies for higher education and research, with clear priorities, as part of an overall strategy for economic development. Important stimuli should be provided to encourage change in the areas desired.

### *Quality assurance procedures and system*

66. As in many universities, the first systematic work in the field of quality assurance serves to underline the need for more such work on a continuous basis. The self-evaluation reports acknowledged in most cases the need for developing greater awareness of quality issues within the universities, and developing these into an internal quality culture. Such a process needs to be coordinated at both institutional and faculty levels, in order to show the benefits to be gained at various levels from this work.

67. Student input is an important element in quality assurance procedures across European universities and systems. The role that students should play in these procedures should be taken seriously by all involved. The EUA review teams were pleased to note the growing cooperation between student bodies and the university and faculty leaders in the Serbian universities, and the recognition of the importance of this in some of the self-evaluation reports. However, much work is still needed in order for this student input to become a normal part of the quality assurance procedures of each university.

68. The evaluation of courses and teachers, by the students and also by other academic peers, from the same university or different ones, is also a necessary part of a quality assurance system. Despite a number of excellent examples to the contrary, this form of evaluation cannot be said to be standard procedure in Serbian universities at the moment. However, without the regular evaluation of courses and teachers, the university is unable to be reasonably confident that its academic content will continue to meet expectations and international comparison. In order for this to be effective, the results of this teaching evaluation procedure need to be analysed properly and integrated into the continuous improvement of the content and methodology of teaching and learning.

69. During the review visits, the EUA teams were convinced that the more rational use of existing resources would help however help improve the basic tasks of the universities. For example, the staff : student ratios in the Serbian universities are considerably higher than in most other European countries, which means that these generous staff resources in Serbia could be used, among other possibilities, to ensure that much more work is done with students in small groups and tutorials. An alternative possibility could be that some of the financial resources currently allocated to staff could be used to improve libraries, laboratories and learning facilities, and to promote a greater international dimension in the teaching and learning process.

70. The EUA teams also observed many overlaps within and between universities, for example, similar or identical cathedra in several faculties of the same university, or very small departments in the same fields across a number of universities. In order to ensure the best quality outputs from limited quantitative resources (human, financial and in terms of infrastructure), it would be natural for such similar structures within each university to be grouped together. This would also encourage greater academic synergy in the relevant fields. It would also make sense for the resources of small departments or fields of study across the

country to be concentrated in one or maximum two universities, in order to ensure a critical mass of academic activity and student numbers. The EUA teams have since learned that some initiatives along these lines have indeed been started during 2002, and would strongly encourage further work in this area.

### ***Human resources policy***

71. All the EUA review teams explicitly identified the need for staff development policies and programmes at each of the Serbian universities. This is normal since the successful work of the university rests essentially on the work of its staff and their interaction with the students. These staff development policies need to focus, among other things, on new approaches to teaching, modern methods of communication, and on mutually beneficial interaction with students. It was also suggested by several EUA teams that specific training policies for new and junior staff might bring special benefits.
72. It was also recommended that recruitment and promotion criteria and procedures should be made comparable and transparent on lines similar to those used in most European countries. These should encourage flexibility, and be part of a university-wide policy concerning staff structure, general employment conditions, the need for regular re-qualification, and regulations concerning sanction, appeal and dismissal. Such human resource issues need to be governed at the university level, based on proposals from the competent departments, in order to ensure that the university can develop its institutional profile according to its priorities.
73. Appointments of professors should be linked to programmes, which can disappear or be restructured if the need arises, rather than professorial chairs, which are much more rigid structures.
74. Likewise, the position of assistant should remain a temporary one with no guarantee of prolongation, otherwise the system of promotion runs the risk of being based on age or whose place it is in the queue, rather than on merit, thus killing any incentive for innovation. The duties of assistant could be assigned to promising Master level or PhD students.
75. In order to increase the international exposure of their staff, the EUA teams recommended in several cases that much more systematic use be made of sabbatical years or semesters, and that these be used specifically for the upgrading of staff. At the same time, greater and more systematic use of visiting professors should be made to bring new knowledge and techniques to the universities, in line with each of their priorities. European partner universities should be approached to see what possible opportunities could be identified to support such schemes.
76. As the universities move towards greater autonomy and as the necessary university level coordination is strengthened, so will the need for highly trained and competent university managers and administrators also increase. This was seen by the EUA review teams as an important weakness in the current organisation of the universities, which will have serious longer-term implications for the ability of the universities successfully to participate in the European Higher Education Area.

77. An important number of centralised services can and should be offered by the university in order to ensure the efficient organisation of the whole institution. Examples of such central services include an international relations office, an investment and planning office, a procurement office to ensure compatible equipment and systems across the university - at the best prices possible, a legal office, a contracts and payments office, a student admissions and records office to ensure the central registration of students – resulting in effective monitoring of student progression and performance, and tracking of graduates after they have left the university, etc. Doing these jobs at Faculty or department level, as is currently the case, means countless repetition of this work across the university, often done in poor conditions by staff who have other priority tasks to achieve or who are not specialised in such jobs. It also means that it is difficult if not impossible to have a university-wide perspective on these often key functions.

### ***Internationalisation strategies***

78. As already mentioned in paragraphs 52 and following, the EUA review teams noted the need for the strategic development of international relations, linked to institutional policies. Many contacts exist across the universities which could be used in wider institutional perspectives also.

79. International specialised networks and associations can play an important role in helping the universities to find the relevant partners in various fields. However, this implies that the Serbian universities are themselves ready to be active partners in these bodies. International conferences, summer schools and a pro-active international exchange policy for both staff and students are all elements in this.

80. The future of higher education in Europe will be heavily influenced by the Bologna Process, with its emphasis on cross-border mobility of staff and students, and the European employability of graduates. These “Bologna” elements emphasise the international dimension but in fact entail significant changes for domestic students and national study programmes, so that internationalisation and local issues can no longer be separated. This is why the EUA teams have stressed on many occasions the need for more coherent international strategies at the universities, and for these to be an integral part of the overall development of the university.

### ***Transparency and ethical issues***

81. Several of the EUA teams emphasised the need for increased transparency in the teaching and learning process, and especially in all dealings with students. The plans of some universities to publish student handbooks, with descriptions of courses and modules, and explanations of the overall aims, learning outcomes and purposes of each course, as well as guidelines on written and project work expected from students during the year, the principles on marking and feedback to students, as well as the curricula vitae of the staff involved, will be a big step forward in this direction.

82. Unfortunately, the EUA teams also encountered repeated and systematic accounts of non-transparency and corruption in several universities. These accounts refer to a number of “traditions” which have been allowed to build up over the years in certain circumstances, and are mostly related to the practices and procedures of examinations, admissions, the issuing of grades and diplomas, academic appointments and promotions, and the awards of stipends, scholarships and travel grants, among other things.
83. A number of these “traditions” are encouraged by the official procedures in place, such as the almost standard practice in some universities of oral examinations, where the student also has the official possibility to pay in order to change the examining professor. Such practices, official or otherwise, would be considered as very irregular in most EU countries, and will not facilitate the Serbian universities participation in the European higher education area.
84. The EUA review teams consider that a more rigorous application of accepted European academic norms and procedures in the fields of examinations, admissions, appointments and promotions would result in an immediate and drastic decrease in the opportunities for such unusual practices. The centralisation and computerisation of student admission and records procedures would also have a clear effect. The EUA teams encourage the official bodies of the universities to take a clear stand on these issues, and to supply the university leaders with appropriate means to handle such situations, in order to convey an unambiguous message to all staff and students, as well as to the universities’ external stakeholders and partners.
85. The development of improved student services will also help increase the transparency of higher education in Serbia. The EUA review teams have suggested that such services could include student counselling, especially for first year students to help them successfully to find their way through the system and to help reduce the alarming drop-out and non-completion rates among undergraduates. Other possible services include assisting students with information regarding careers and employment opportunities, and the tracking of graduates since this can provide valuable information for curricula reform and for current undergraduates. It can also help the university assess and strengthen its contribution to society.
86. The EUA review teams encourage the universities in their moves to develop further the participation of students in the various decision making bodies of the universities. The EUA teams also encourage the universities to give the students real responsibilities in these bodies. Such active participation can play an important role in the overall life of the university, and will certainly help increase general transparency across the institution.

### ***Linking with society***

87. While it is clear that the universities in Serbia have many links with their stakeholders and with society in general, the EUA teams were of the impression that more strategic links could be established with many of these external partners, and that the benefits of these would be mutual. There has been a clear trend in other European countries during the last ten years to strengthen cooperation with the universities main stakeholders in society.

88. One of the reasons for doing so is to stimulate the links between the university, its students and current and potential employers. As a major provider of knowledge and innovation, the university has an important role to play in this field.
89. Linked to changes in society and changes in the labour market, there has also been a massive increase in demand for adult education, continuing education and lifelong-learning possibilities across Europe in recent years. With the economic and social reforms now taking place in Serbia, the review teams anticipate that these non-traditional aspects of higher education will also become more important in Serbia, and they therefore encourage the universities to develop strategies in this respect, as a major service to society.
90. A number of review teams explicitly mentioned the crucial role that the universities currently play in the teacher training process in Serbia. Given the difficult situation and great needs which the school sector is currently facing, the universities also have responsibilities to contribute to the training and re-training of school officials and teachers.

### ***Research***

91. As mentioned in paragraphs 24 and 31, the current very low levels of investment in research and in young researchers are a cause for concern to the EUA review teams. This results in reduced research capacity at the universities, and weakened or non-existent university research strategies.
92. However, the review teams would like to encourage the universities to strengthen their research strategies, based on existing or foreseeable opportunities, in order to make the most of what little is available, and to continue to ensure the essential link between research, innovation and teaching.
93. Given this situation, the universities are encouraged to identify priority areas in which they can concentrate research efforts, including resources for staff and post-graduate students.
94. A concrete step which each university could take would be to establish a university-level Research and Development office to assist the faculties and departments in the search for research funding and partners, participation in international research projects and the necessary administrative procedures that these involve, as well as the potential commercialisation of research outcomes and results.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

95. These points represent an overall summary of the findings and recommendations from the five individual EUA institutional evaluations carried out at the Serbian universities during the academic year 2001-2002.
96. They should be seen as constructive and friendly critical analysis resulting from the peer reviews made by other European academic leaders, who have been impressed by the courage with which the Serbian university community and its leaders are addressing the very serious problems they are currently facing.

97. The EUA review teams would like to stress again that this moment in time, linked to the necessary internal reforms of higher education in Serbia, but also completely connected to the Bologna reform process leading to the European higher education area, is an opportunity which should not be missed. It can provide both the internal and external reference points and parameters for the successful achievement of both.
98. The reform process will take some time to complete, and EUA invites the Serbian universities to request formal follow-up visits two or three years after these first visits have taken place, in order for the same EUA review teams to provide structured feedback, as a form of external monitoring, on the developments which have taken place within the universities during this period.