

University of Hradec Králové

EVALUATION REPORT

EVALUATION WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON MANAGEMENT OF RESEARCH AND USE OF RESEARCH RESULTS

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Hradec Králové (UHK). The special focus of the evaluation is on the management of research and the use of research results. The evaluation took place in spring 2022, with the first visit from 26-28 April and the second visit from 31 May to 3 June.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support 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; and
- support for improvement.

The focus of IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses on:

- decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management; and
- relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management, as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

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

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 UHK's profile

The Czech town of Hradec Králové is situated some 100 km east of the capital Prague. UHK is the only comprehensive university in the city, with a medical and a pharmaceutical faculty of Charles University, Prague, also located here, and the Faculty of Military Health Sciences of the University of Defence. The closest other multi-faculty university is in Pardubice, some 20 km away. In September 2021, unemployment in the Hradec Králové Region was below 2.7%, a fraction higher than in the Pardubice region, according to UHK's self-evaluation report.

UHK was established as a teacher training institution in 1959. In 1992 it became the Teaching Higher Education Institution in Hradec Kralové. It became the Faculty of Education when the Faculty of Management and Information Technologies was added in 1993., which in 2000 changed its name to Faculty of Informatics and Management and at the same time the institution became the University of Hradec Kralové . The Philosophy Faculty, separating from the Faculty of Education, was set up in 2005, and finally the Faculty of Science in 2010. The main campus building was raised in the late 1990s, with another two buildings added since then, and there are plans for further structures in the surrounding space.

With some 6500 students and 800 staff, UHK is considered a medium-sized higher education institution. Of the staff, about 500 are academics and researchers and 300 are administrators and maintenance staff. Study programmes are offered on all three levels: Bachelors, Masters, and PhD.

UHK has steadily been building up its research capacity in the past years. While UHK defines itself in its self-evaluation report as “predominantly a social-science- and humanities-oriented institution”, the medical and pharmaceutical faculties in the city offer possibilities for collaboration and have steered part of UHK’s profile toward biological research. However, the other faculties all conduct research, although to varying degrees. Aware of its regional significance, UHK continues to educate teachers and social workers. Nonetheless, internationalisation is equally a priority and, based on having identified a niche in the market, is focusing on collaborations with countries in Africa, Latin America and also Asia.

As a public higher education institution, UHK is governed by the Higher Education Institutions Act, which determines its governing bodies, the rights of the faculties and others as well as financing but grants it a high degree of autonomy.

1.3 The evaluation process

The team consisted of:

- Professor Dr. jur. Jürgen Kohler, former Rector of Greifswald University Germany, Chair
- Professor Lučka Lorber, former Vice-Rector for Quality Development at the University of Maribor, Slovenia
- Professor Peter Wieringa, former Vice Rector at the Technical University, Delft, The Netherlands
- Mr Arnoldas Solovjovas, PhD student at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania
- Ms Christina Rozsnyai, quality assurance expert, formerly at the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Team Coordinator

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) identified the distinctive features of UHK to be what in an interview was coined as a “regional university with global ambitions”, which is also reflected in UHK’s strategic plan. The self-evaluation report as well as the interviews during the team’s site visits testify to UHK’s strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase and peer review approach. It is improvement-oriented while focusing on the institution as a whole. The self-evaluation process and the IEP evaluation report are expected to support the advancement of its strategic leadership and capacity to manage change.

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a group of seven persons headed by the Vice-Rector for Strategy and Development. In addition to the other two vice-rectors, members included strategy, quality and science and transfer expert representatives as well as two students. Other university stakeholders were involved in the discussion of various issues. A set of internal bodies commented on the draft self-evaluation report. It commented on the value of the self-evaluation process for the participants, which, together with the open atmosphere in the discussions was reflected in the self-critical document that identified not only internal weaknesses but also possible solutions.

The self-evaluation report of the UHK, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in March 2022. Following the first site visit in late April, the evaluation team requested specific additional documentation, which UHK provided in preparation for the second visit in early June.

In the two site visits, the team met the rector and four vice-rectors, academic staff and research staff as well as research support staff, student representatives, quality assurance staff and administrators, as well as a representative of the UHK Board of Trustees and external partners. In the second site visit, the team focused its interviews on three themes: teaching and learning; research and transfer of knowledge; and governance and management, with cross-sections of university academic, administrative and research staff and students participating in the interviews; in conjunction with the aforesaid three themes, matters of internationalisation were also addressed.

The team notes that while it presents a fact-based view in its evaluation report, its insight into UHK is limited to UHK's self-evaluation report and the information provided in the site-visit interviews. Indeed, as is the case in all evaluation procedures, some of the answers to questions varied between the respondents. Therefore, the team puts forward points to consider for promoting UHK's self-learning process. The evaluation report focuses on those issues where the team believes its observations and recommendations may help UHK move forward; it does not extend to the full range of UHK's structures and activities, which can be found in UHK's self-evaluation report.

The team thanks Rector Kuča and his colleagues at the University of Hradec Králové, with special thanks to Kateřina Vyleťalová for organizing the two visits and sending the requested documents.

2. General observations, strengths and constraints of UHK

UHK is a relatively young university with roots in its teacher training mission. From there it branched out into different fields: sciences, informatics and management, and humanities under the umbrella of the faculty of philosophy. UHK is undergoing a reinvention of itself. It has a remarkable, impressive capacity for self-analysis, indeed, a self-critical approach and clarity of judgement about its own abilities and goals. The will to change is coupled with ambitious aspirations, while there is clear understanding on where and how to proceed. This is especially so with regard to research, which was the special focus of the team's evaluation.

The team found that UHK has an ambitious, visionary and at the same time hands-on oriented leadership team as well as capable administrative departments. It has identified a set of core developmental areas – strategic priorities – along with tangible ways on how to proceed toward attaining them.

However, in developing UHK even further, the institution has to face a number of constraints. Among these constraints is its location within the Czech Republic, which makes it difficult to reach. The national funding matrix, which the team heard is currently under reconsideration, seems to favour large, traditional universities, focusing on the number of students and overall number of publications, and leaning towards the natural sciences, without taking into consideration the number of academic staff, or different types of publications and research output. The legal framework, too, poses hurdles for UHK: the Academic Senate, which is the ultimate decision-maker on most issues, is constituted by a federation of faculties, a structure which is not consistent with the concept of a comprehensive university as a holistic unity. That faculty focus extends to the role of students in the Senate and critically also to decisions on the internal distribution of funding. The structure emphasises the traditionally diverse cultures within the university rather than the promotion of a UHK identity.

3. Governance and institutional decision-making

The team commends UHK for the clarity of its mission, vision and profile. As a guiding light, UHK has set itself four strategic priorities, with which it aligns its teaching and learning, research and knowledge transfer, service to society, internationalisation and environmental responsibility, and programmes and projects:

- “Attractive and inspiring UHK;
- Dynamic and excellent UHK;
- Open and responsible UHK;
- Modern and efficient UHK.”

The mission, set down in the Strategic Plan 2021+, is to “disseminate knowledge within the regional and global community”. UHK’s vision, aligned with its strategic priorities and summarised in its self-evaluation report, is

“attractiveness of study programmes and other forms of education; highly valued and socially beneficial research activities and valued research results; social responsibility and openness of the institution which actively contributes to the formation of public space; firm anchoring in the region and cooperation with external partners and contributing to meeting the needs of the city, the region and their inhabitants; internationalisation and development of global potential in the field of international cooperation; continuous improvement of the environment for students and employees.”

UHK fulfils its self-proclaimed regional role with global ambitions in various ways. It has found its niche in higher education cooperation by establishing contacts with higher education institutions in Latin America, Africa and Asia for student and staff mobility, in which it considers itself unique in the Czech Republic. It is also collaborating with European partners to apply for a European University Alliance under Erasmus+. Regionally, UHK is also cooperating in various ways. These include research projects with the medical and the pharmaceutical faculties of Charles University and the Faculty of Military Health Sciences in the city. It is also concluding information exchange alliances with other universities in the country, with one purpose being to act as a joint platform for discussions with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The team believes that UHK has selected its partners in a strategic way, looking for added value and capacity to the university.

As far as is concerned, UHK has been building its profile in line with its vision by focusing on three areas in particular, as set down in its research strategy “Healthy Ageing and Quality of Life, Security and Sustainable Development in Digital Society, and New Challenges in Education”. Applied research projects stand out, many with local or regional partners. Basic research is prevalent especially in the Faculty of Philosophy as well as the Faculty of Education, with specific projects within and beyond the three areas.

The challenge for UHK at this time is its central role vs. interests in decentralisation; it must come to terms with being a confederate university while ensuring university-level policies. Strong, unified central university policy underpinned by central management is needed in domains such as: (1) funding mechanisms and cultures, which is currently encumbered by the internal structure of the Academic Senate as a representation of faculties, leading to consequences already identified in UHK’s self-evaluation report and corroborated in the team’s interviews during the site visits; (2) quality assurance practices and procedural mechanisms; (3) research support schemes; and (4) the

establishment of what may be called a ‘teacher training centre’, i.e., an overarching unit serving as an administrative body coordinating those facets of teacher training that are common to all faculties engaged in the practice. The team encourages UHK to take steps towards addressing the aforementioned four issues, with the understanding that this is predominantly a matter of changing internal institutional culture rather than changing legal regulations. The team believes that, while there may be limits due to national legislation, namely as regards distribution of funding, enhancing internal understanding of the hurdles to UHK’s progress should contribute to finding a solution. Therefore, the team *recommends that UHK consider ways in which to strengthen central management in the above-mentioned four areas of responsibilities and activities. It can do so by demonstrating the advantages of reforms along the lines indicated here and by illustrating the disadvantages of the current deficits in these respects to its internal stakeholders in a process of mutual communication and learning.*

The bodies of UHK, beyond those determined by legislation, include a Rector’s Board. It is an advisory body that encompasses the four vice-rectors, the Bursar, the Chancellor, the Deans of the faculties, the chair of the Academic Senate and the vice-chair of the student chamber of the Academic Senate. The team found that the Rector’s Board is a well-established body that plays a positive role as an integral policy-setting unit. The team believes that *cooperation between the vice-rectors and with the vice-deans, together with administrators, is a good initiative and recommends that it be maintained and used actively. The initiative can ensure integral university policies, practices, and administration, presenting UHK as an effective and efficient institution, aspiring to quality and optimal service to its members, external partners, and society at large.*

The Board of Trustees is a legislated body for Czech universities that comprises representatives from public life, including from business, public administration and interest groups. Members are appointed by the Minister in consultation with the rector. The team explored how this board sees its main role and found that while its usefulness for the university was clear as a prominent body and external partner, UHK should focus on how best to take advantage of the Board of Trustees in light of the university’s strategic aims. The team *recommends clarifying the role of the Board of Trustees as lobbying, fundraising or providing input into strategy and aligning the choice of appointees accordingly in order to make best use of their expertise.* Moreover, given that currently the board is consulted on completed strategic and operational documents, the team instead *recommends ensuring the Board of Trustees’ timely and ongoing input into university issues so that its expertise can fully contribute to the development of UHK’s vision and strategic issues.*

The team observed that student representation is functional and that students are listened to within the university’s bodies. Again, the faculty-focused make-up of university governance is reflected in student representation with strong faculty identities. Nevertheless, the team saw that transversal interests are also emerging.

Looking beyond institutional bodies, when considering the overall spirit that prevails in UHK, the team noticed and fully acknowledges that governance and management at UHK are driven by broadly shared ambitions and willingness as well as capability to move forward towards improving UHK’s standing as a high-performance institution, notwithstanding some scepticism about reform in parts of the university. Under the strategic priority of being “modern and efficient”, UHK strives toward “the continuous improvement of the system and of the institution’s strategic management process and efficient administration of the internal affairs...”. This statement is not mere rhetoric, but it is tangible as institutional reality. UHK has shown itself capable of identifying weaknesses, working on a SWOT-based approach. This attitude extends beyond the university’s committed

leadership to many internal stakeholders from the knowledgeable administrative level and the four faculties whom the team has interviewed.

4. Quality culture

Accreditation is mandatory in the Czech Republic. Programme accreditation extends to new and running programmes. Institutional accreditation extends to the institutional level and encompasses disciplinary fields. Successful institutional accreditation allows higher education institutions to start and run their programmes without programme accreditation in the fields for which accreditation was granted.

UHK has not yet undergone institutional accreditation and therefore regularly submits its programmes to the national accreditation agency. The agency's standards are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

There is a comprehensive quality assurance document titled "Rules of the System of Quality Assurance and Internal Quality Evaluation at the University of Hradec Králové". UHK has an Internal Evaluation Board, as required by the higher education act, whose legislated function is to approve internal assurance activities and quality-related documents, including programme accreditation applications. There is a UHK Accreditation Code in place which governs processes and criteria to be applied in cases of programme accreditation applications. A Quality and Strategy Office was set up in 2019; it has three staff members.

Beyond designing its study programmes in line with national standards, UHK has a number of quality assurance elements in place. Students conduct course evaluations at the end of the semester; academic staff undergoes annual appraisals in their departments; successful research proposals serve as indicators of quality, and other measures covering various units are also listed in the self-evaluation report. The team heard from students that action is taken on their comments in questionnaires, but the team also heard that there is a very low survey participation rate, listed as 21-33% in the self-evaluation report.

It was evident to the team that while there are many quality assurance elements, what is lacking is both a clarification among internal stakeholders on the UHK concept of quality, which is particularly with regard to teaching and learning matters, and an overarching quality assurance strategy. What the team saw, which was corroborated in several interviews, is a focus on meeting external quality requirements, primarily for programme accreditation; hence, the quality concept strongly focuses on compliance with standards sets externally. The issue of clarifying the quality concept for teaching and learning is discussed further in that section of this report.

Internal quality assurance is strongly based on an ex-post approach, i.e., with the Quality and Strategy Office and the Internal Evaluation Board, which are mainly concerned with checking compliance with accreditation standards when programme accreditation documents completed at faculties are submitted to them. Faculties are responsible for designing programmes, a process that goes through various quality control channels. The team noted in this respect that the involvement in programme design of external stakeholders from business and industry, including UHK graduates, is arbitrary, although that is part of an ESG standard. As for running programmes, student questionnaires focus mainly on teacher performance, even though some structural questions are also included, e.g. concerning the appropriateness of content and location of modules in the curriculum, and the overall validity of the programme in terms of usefulness as to developing skills and competencies. And being a medium-sized university, informal quality checks are functional to some degree through personal communication, which, however, are necessarily random.

The “Rules of the System of Quality Assurance” touch on numerous other quality elements. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the self-evaluation report testifies to UHK’s ability for self-reflection, and identifying weaknesses while proposing solutions to overcome them. It is noteworthy that there seems to be a living quality culture without a comprehensive and deliberate direction. This may be partly due to the fact that the need for internal quality assurance beyond programme accreditation is viewed with distrust by some internal stakeholders, which is surely due to a lack of understanding of the nature and purpose of quality culture.

The team thus *recommends clarifying a quality concept for the entire institution in line with its mission and vision. Building on these and the numerous quality assurance documents and deliberate and involuntary quality actions UHK practices routinely, the university should devise a strategy for quality assurance that spans all internal activities, from teaching and learning to research, as well as to governance and administration. The team further recommends readdressing the coverage of quality assurance processes by seeing them also as an ex-ante engagement, accompanying all university activities in a supportive way right from their beginnings.*

Due to this extension of concept, the team also *recommends that the Quality and Strategy Office reconsider its mission, coupled with discussion with the faculties, to play a pro-active role in programme accreditation applications by supplying quality- and standards-related input at the beginning of the programme design process. The team recommends that UHK make better use of its Internal Evaluation Board, as is indicated in the higher education act, by involving it in the development and oversight of a quality culture.* The broader assignment would require training the board members.

The team *recommends, further, aspiring to apply for institutional accreditation.* Becoming familiar with broad institutional accreditation standards would help UHK in its implementation of an overarching quality strategy and purposeful quality culture. More than that, holding accreditation as an institution would provide UHK with a “quality hallmark”, allowing the university to gain more national and international credibility.

5. Management of research and use of research results

UHK's research strategy, which the team received in draft form, defines "three basic research directions that it intends to further develop: Healthy Ageing and Quality of Life, Security and Sustainable Development in Digital Society, and New Challenges in Education". These areas reflect both the opportunities offered by the external market and partners, and UHK's internal capacities, which the university has been methodically building up along these lines. The draft strategy has been defined top down but developed with good communication with internal stakeholders and broad endorsement both internally and externally. It has had positive effects: it has enhanced UHK's visibility; created unity within the university; generated a critical mass of resources in the topical fields; and increased the budget by attracting funding. The team believes that the strategy is credible and feasible; it is fit for purpose. It is systematically structured and analyses the status quo, that is, the weaknesses and aspirations. Sub-objectives are formulated and they are broken down into fields of actions together with performance indicators.

Building on the strategy as a good starting point, the team has four suggestions and recommendations. The strategy is academic in a sense, concentrating on research. (1) The team *recommends raising entrepreneurship to the primary level of attention, linking research to society, business, and employability*. In that respect, therefore, the team suggests adding one major aspect to UHK's recent strategy paper on research. (2) On the other hand, however, the team suggests removing one aspect from the research strategy document: sustainability. As a facet of good practice, while also being relevant for research activities, sustainability is essentially generic, extending to the daily routine of all operations in all parts of the university. Therefore, the team recommends that *matters of fostering sustainability, which UHK does not intend to identify as one of its specific research areas, should be kept as a goal for good practice on the institutional policy level*.

Sustainability is to some degree implicit in the Strategy 2021+ and could be made implicit there, or in a possible governance and management strategy. (3) On a procedural note, the team *recommends making the performance indicators concrete, coupled with detailed action plans with indication of input required, timelines, responsibilities, and intended outcomes* (using the SMART tool: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). (4) Finally, the team believes that the deadline of 2025 for achieving the set goals is too ambitious. In order to avoid frustration about failing to achieve them in time, the team *recommends reviewing the timeline and setting priorities for different action lines*.

The team was able to discuss during its interviews the operation of research support units in two faculties. Their functions include scanning research project opportunities; scouting for partners; serving as a point of first contact between external stakeholders, such as the Centre for Investment, Development and Innovation, and generally industry and business in the region; and acting in an advisory and checking capacity for project applications. The team believes that this is good practice. At the same time the team notes that these institutionalised supportive processes are limited to the faculties dealing with natural and technical sciences. The team suggests also involving the other two faculties. In order to allow all internal stakeholders to benefit from such services, the team *recommends building up a central professionalised research support unit with a role similar to the current offices mentioned above in two faculties*. Whether or not the Technology Transfer Office, established in 2020, is the appropriate body to serve that function, or whether a different body should be established, is a matter for UHK to explore in detail. That is not to say that the faculty offices, where there are contacts with specific partners in the given fields of research, should be eliminated; rather, the technical and field-based services could be separated, benefitting all faculties

while optimising resources. The team realises, as it was mentioned in the self-evaluation report and in interviews, that increased project income has enabled the running of this office over the past few years, and that the end of several projects in the coming months, with a hiatus between now and future project income, will reduce the budget for such a central office. However, the team believes that there is potential in collaboration between faculties, if discussions can clarify the benefits to all of them, as noted above in this report.

Transfer of knowledge involves, or could and should involve, all UHK faculties, hence, in principle, not only those faculties with academic fields related to technology and medicine. De facto at present, this is most prominently so with respect to the medical and pharmaceutical faculties and the Military Health Sciences in partner universities via the Science and the Informatics and Management faculties; but also to schools via teacher training; to archaeological services via the Faculty of Philosophy; and to musical and art projects via the Faculty of Education's respective departments. The Centre for Investment, Development and Innovation, whose representative the team met in an interview, seems to be well-functioning as a link for several faculties and departments to business and industry. Its benefits are that it provides match-making between companies and researchers; supports start-ups; fosters entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer; and serves as a point of contact for upgrading professional knowledge through university courses.

UHK notes in its self-evaluation report that it "does not have a University-wide concept for developing collaboration with institutions in the field of research and the use of research results; cooperation is established and developed mainly at faculties (departments, institutes, research centres) and often follows up on individual contacts of relevant staff". The team agrees with UHK's analysis that it would benefit transversally from a university-level unit that could provide a wider range of such services and would support working on a relevant concept, perhaps – as mentioned above – via the recommended extension of the mission of the Technology Transfer Office.

UHK is providing a number of incentives for its academic staff to promote their research activities. They include awards for publications and projects and some financial rewards, as well as reductions in teaching load for a specified time. Research also plays a key role in the careers of staff in the annual appraisals of their career progression.

The awards system, such as the Rector's Award and university-level research and bonus support, seems to be working. The number of publications has increased sharply in the last years as has the number, albeit still low, of PhD students. Funding gained from national research grant and technology agencies as well as from private partners has grown and UHK has risen in international rankings. There exists some cooperation between faculties, although in this respect there is unexploited potential.

In summary, the team believes that UHK is on the right track towards increasing its research achievements and using these to raise its international visibility. With research high on the strategic agenda, there is a strong institutional drive to enhance it, underpinned by incentivising measures. It is also underpinned by UHK's ongoing reflection on its strategy, with a generally high degree of ownership of the strategy throughout the university, even though not necessarily equally balanced across faculties. For example, the Faculty of Education is possibly not fully aware of its potential in terms of research and transfer possibilities. The team sees potential for expanding UHK's research activity by boosting targeted international research cooperation through its partners in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

6. Teaching and learning

In line with its strategic priorities, UHK's ambition is to offer high-quality study programmes and life-long learning courses by providing "attractive opportunities" in an "inspiring environment" that allows learners to "fulfil their potential". As far as the team was able to observe, UHK has been progressing toward these goals. Regarding its study programmes, which are subject to periodic national accreditation, the team nevertheless questioned UHK's own quality concept. It did not become clear in the interviews with academic staff, or indeed quality assurance staff, what the quality concept is. Is it merely compliance with national accreditation standards, thereby aiming for a minimum threshold of quality? Is it market orientation, whereby programmes should be attractive and ensure the employability of graduates – and which is reflected in the strategic priorities? Or do study programmes aim to educate research minds? Fitness of and for purpose was not mentioned, nor was the concept of excellence raised: how does the programme excel above others, what is the particular UHK hallmark? With regard to its teaching and learning, the team *recommends that faculties, together with the central quality assurance unit of UHK, define their joint concept of quality, which can be several or others not mentioned above, but should be in line with the university's clear and ambitious strategic priorities, and transcend mere compliance with prescribed national standards.*

The website of UHK, in both Czech and English, is clear and informative. Students have access to information about the structure of UHK and its faculties as well as about admission requirements. While there are no detailed course descriptions, there are general overviews on the content of study programmes. A handbook for foreign students is also accessible.

The national accreditation agency evaluates study programme applications under consideration of the ESG. Consequently, the design of programmes at UHK must consider intended learning outcomes with a focus on competences rather than only knowledge transfer; student-centred learning; research reflected in teaching; and the coherent progression and articulation of programmes. Yet, in the interviews, the team gained the impression that these concepts were not yet clearly internalised. Similarly, using the potential offered by e-learning methodologies seems to be only partly implemented, and assessment not systematically aligned to quality parameters. There is no documentation of oral assessments. The team *recommends that when designing study programmes, the academic staff, together with the central quality assurance unit, reconsider the ESG in order to fully develop qualitative features such as competence development, student-centred learning, research reflected in teaching, and the coherent progression and articulation of programmes, and to align assessment practices accordingly.*

Specific issues the team has noted concern the structure of study programmes. The team noted that several programmes are taught in parallel by two or three faculties, in particular teacher training programmes. The team *recommends that UHK faculties revisit their programmes with a view of reducing their number and by fully embracing the concept of modularisation by introducing course modules as options or electives within a shared basic programme. This shift in programme design applies throughout.*

The latter may be particularly applicable to basic generic teacher training elements that could be offered by only one faculty, with pedagogic specialisation taught by the experts in the particular area. *In order to implement and run such a scheme, it would be useful to set up a teacher training centre, which the team recommends.* It could assist faculties in identifying commonalities, illuminating how they could profit from the scheme. In addition, a teacher training centre would be

able to provide organisational support in administrative aspects of teaching. The centre could also, as an add-on service to its primary role to serve school teacher programmes, facilitate “teach the teacher” courses or workshops on didactic and new learning methodologies by and for UHK teachers. This would also be useful for PhD students, for example, with the contribution of staff from the Faculty of Education. Indeed, one workshop could be organised together with an expert from the national accreditation agency on the various facets of the ESG.

Regarding PhD programmes, the team discussed in interviews the extent of taught elements, which seems to be quite high relative to those in international practice. The team realises that PhD programmes are subject to national accreditation standards. Nevertheless, the team *recommends that UHK explore how the standards can be applied to more independent research and study in PhD programmes, further fostering the development of independent young researchers.* Moreover, the team wondered whether the required number of research papers PhD students have to publish before graduation might be higher than necessary. The team has received no further formal information on what Doctoral Education and Training comprises. Finally, the team also observed that so-called ‘PhD projects’ are not necessarily in line with a student’s foreseen dissertation topic and suggests reviewing this practice.

UHK has identified the need to increase its interdisciplinary and joint programmes both together with its own faculties and internationally. *Cooperation between faculties to exploit the currently latent synergies holds the potential for innovative programme offers that would reflect UHK’s strategic priorities, which the team recommends.*

As far as internationalisation in teaching and learning is concerned, the team commends UHK for continually increasing its study programmes in English and attractively marketing its offer. *In implementing internationalisation in teaching and learning, the team recommends prioritising it toward focus areas and where partnering choices are aligned to research interests, for best use of available resources.* At the same time, *encouraging mobility for UHK’s own students calls for a robust policy for recognising foreign credentials, which the team recommends.* Concurrently, the team *recommends installing so-called “mobility windows” in the designing of study programmes.* Such most commonly third semester flexible curricula in the Bachelor year encompass a range of electives that can be studied at the home institution or abroad and, in the latter case, recognised by UHK when students return.

7. Service to society

In its vision, UHK declares its role as a player in the region where it aims,

“To be a socially responsible and open institution contributing actively to forming a public space having a distinctive integrating influence and an all-society impact.

To be an institution firmly anchored in the region, developing cooperation with external partners and contributing to the fulfilment of the needs of the city and region and their inhabitants.”

As a teacher training institution for six decades, UHK is firmly rooted in the region. Its graduates teach in the local schools, and the art and music teachers, students and graduates stage cultural events. Links to museums are, among others, the archaeology department of the Philosophical Faculty. In cooperation with the regional government, the department has established an Archaeopark of Prehistory. Basic and applied research projects benefit from contributions of locals through, e.g., surveys on social issues, and, conversely, transfer knowledge to the community, such as via the medical and pharmaceutical faculties and the Military Health Sciences in the city.

Through its Board of Trustees, discussed in detail earlier in this report, UHK has ongoing contact with prominent external stakeholders from the city and the region. UHK staff are active on local and regional boards and are consulted as experts on various issues. Thus, from central management down to the faculty and department level, UHK is in touch with the city and the region as a central cultural, educational and social player in the community.

UHK has intentionally developed a common life-long-learning format for all faculties, seeking to boost those faculties that are less active than others in this teaching mission. Courses are attended by members of all age groups, from children, e.g., via summer camps, to the elderly. Specialty courses for professionals to update their knowledge are offered by some faculties.

As the examples show, UHK is an active player in the city and region, both through scientific and social activities. The team commends UHK for being mindful of its obligation to serve society. In doing so, as mentioned above in the section on research, it is reiterated as a recommendation in this context, to *strengthen the transfer of knowledge gained through research in all fields, i.e., not only in those fields related to the sciences, by identifying UHK’s overall academic capacities and making the best use of these by means of a fully developed UHK research and transfer support unit. Collaboration with the region’s centre, which has been established to back start-ups and develop cooperation with industry and business, is the most promising way forward towards enhancing UHK’s service to society.*

8. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key priority for UHK, and one of the four vice-rectors has been appointed with the assignment to promote it. In its self-evaluation report, the university states that it has allocated over a third of the budget received from the ministry for strategic development to internationalisation, underscoring its strategic standing. Since it runs through many of its activities, it has been touched upon in several sections of this report. UHK's deliberate strategy to uphold links with higher education institutions in Latin America, Africa and Asia have also been described in both the teaching and learning and the research chapters. The team noted that cooperation with these partners is at this point primarily on the educational level and has suggested exploring possibilities for linking up for research projects with or through these contacts. UHK has mentioned other international contacts and collaborations for individual projects with higher education institutions in Europe and elsewhere.

In its vision it declares its aim "To be a fully internationalised institution developing its global potential in the area of international educational and scientific cooperation". Internationalisation is an aim under most topics in UHK's Strategic Plan 2021+ and a dedicated Internationalisation Plan is contained in Annex 1. The implementation plan for 2022 describes detailed areas of action under various headings.

The rector has set up an International Advisory Commission in collaboration with the four faculties, each of them proposing one member, with a fifth appointed on proposal of the rector. The commission's function is advising on expanding UHK's international network and activities and, specifically, evaluating the international dimension of research and doctoral and post-doctoral education.

UHK participates in Erasmus+ to facilitate the mobility of its students and staff and has made great effort in setting up and teaching programmes in English. The English website caters to foreign students and English-language promotional material and activities raise awareness of UHK. Nevertheless, UHK notes that relatively few of its own students and staff participate in international mobility. While having identified this weakness, the team *recommends that UHK take measures pro-actively to promote the mobility of its students by consulting with the International Advisory Commission and other means*. UHK also has research collaborations through international projects and has increased its foreign staff, although administrative obstacles were mentioned. However, *UHK should carefully consider whether or not there is imbalance between its efforts in internationalisation, i.e., cost and labour, and the prospect of gaining sufficient numbers of international students. In that respect, UHK may be advised to consider whether its best option is to optimise its strengths, particularly its stand-alone role in the Czech Republic in relation to Latin America and Africa or in view of specific master or PhD programmes, rather than to follow the standard pattern of addressing mainly EU students at the level of bachelor programmes*. The evaluation team appreciates that UHK has already made great endeavours, and successfully so, with regard to that strategic objective in terms of regional focusing, i.e. mainly to enhance efforts to strengthen links to Latin America and Africa; therefore, the evaluation team considers this recommendation to be an encouragement to follow that path further.

The team commends UHK for having initiated partnership in a proposal for a European University Alliance, the decision on which is expected in 2022. The team certainly *recommends continuing to apply for such and similar partnerships as an effective means for expanding its international network of contacts*.

The team commends UHK for making internationalisation a priority and for the numerous measures it has launched in order to increase it. UHK is aware of its strengths and weaknesses, but also its opportunities, in this area. The aforementioned recommendation for modularisation will be beneficial to the design of joint study programmes.

9. Conclusion

UHK has undergone a steep rate of development in the past few years. That is evident both in the numerous actions taken and achievements attained, but, most importantly, in the attitude of its internal stakeholders. If they may not always agree on the pathways for advancement, they are united in supporting its significance and key features and actions.

The momentum for change is on, and the capability to manage change is high. The team trusts that UHK's launched initiatives are embedded enough to ensure their sustainability under the current and future managements.

The team hopes that its evaluation report and recommendations will help UHK in achieving its plans for further progress of UHK, building on its achievements in the past years. The team is optimistic that UHK is on a promising way forward, due to UHK's clarity of judgement, ambition to move ahead, and strong leadership and administrative competence.

Summary of the recommendations

Governance and Institutional Decision-making

1. Consider ways in which to strengthen central management in the above-mentioned four areas of responsibilities and activities. UHK can do so by demonstrating the advantages of reforms along the lines indicated here and by illustrating the disadvantages of the current deficits in these respects to internal stakeholders in a process of mutual communication and learning.
2. Maintain cooperation between the vice-rectors and with the vice-deans, together with administrators. This is a good initiative that should be used actively to ensure integral university policies, practices, and administration where this appears helpful to present UHK as an effective and efficient institution aspiring to quality and optimal service to its members, external partners, and society at large.
3. Clarify the role of the Board of Trustees for UHK as lobbying, fundraising or providing input into strategy and align the choice of appointees to make best use of its expertise.
4. Ensure the timely and ongoing input of the Board of Trustees into university issues so that the board's expertise can fully contribute to the development of UHK's vision and strategic issues.

Quality Culture

5. Clarify a quality concept for the entire institution in line with the mission and vision. Building on these and the numerous quality assurance documents and deliberate and involuntary quality actions UHK practices routinely, devise a strategy for quality assurance that spans all internal activities.
6. Readdress the coverage of quality assurance processes by seeing them also as an ex-ante engagement, supportively accompanying all university activities from their inception.
7. Reconsider the mission of the Quality and Strategy Office, and discuss with the faculties, its playing a pro-active role in programme accreditation applications by supplying quality- and standards-related input at the beginning of the programme design process.
8. Make better use of the Internal Evaluation Board, as is indicated in the higher education act, by involving it in the development and oversight of a quality culture.

9. Aspire to applying for institutional accreditation in order to build up an internal quality culture and to establish quality hallmark nationally and internationally.

Management of Research and the Use of Research Results

10. In the research strategy, raise entrepreneurship and transfer to the primary level of attention by linking research to society, business, employability, and sustainable development.
11. Keep matters of fostering sustainability, which UHK does not intend to identify as one of its specific research areas, as a goal for good practice on the institutional policy level, rather than in a generic way in the research strategy.
12. Make the performance indicators concrete, coupled with detailed action plans with indication of input required, timelines, responsibilities, and intended outcomes.
13. Review the timeline in the research strategy and set priorities for different action lines.
14. Build up central professionalised research support unit with a role similar to the current offices mentioned at the Faculties of Science and Informatics and Management.

Teaching and Learning

15. Faculties, together with the central quality assurance unit of UHK, should define their joint concept of quality in line with the university's clear and ambitious strategic priorities, and transcend mere compliance with prescribed national standards.
16. When designing study programmes, together with the central quality assurance unit, reconsider the ESG in order to fully develop qualitative features such as competence development, student-centred learning, research reflected in teaching, and the coherent progression and articulation of programmes, and to align assessment practices accordingly.
17. Revisit programmes with a view of reducing their number and by fully embracing the concept of modularisation by introducing course modules as options or electives within a shared basic programme. This shift in programme design applies throughout.
18. In order to implement and run such a scheme, set up a teacher training centre.
19. Explore how the national accreditation standards can be applied to more independent research and study in PhD programmes, further fostering the development of independent young researchers.
20. Promote cooperation between faculties to exploit the currently latent synergies, which hold the potential for innovative programme offers that would reflect UHK's strategic priorities.
21. In implementing internationalisation in teaching and learning, prioritise it toward focus areas and where partnering choices are aligned to research interests, for best use of available resources.
22. Set down a robust policy for recognising foreign credentials and include mobility windows in the designing of study programmes to encourage mobility for students.

Service to Society

23. Strengthen the transfer of knowledge gained through research in all fields, i.e., not only in those fields related to the sciences, by identifying UHK's overall academic capacities and making the best use of these by means a fully developed UHK research and transfer support unit. Furthermore, expand collaboration with the region's centre, which has been established to back start-ups and develop cooperation with industry and business.

Internationalisation

24. Take measures pro-actively to promote the mobility of students by consulting with the International Advisory Commission and other means.
25. Carefully consider whether or not there is imbalance between efforts in internationalisation, i.e., cost and labour, and the prospect of gaining sufficient numbers of international students. In that respect, consider whether the best option is to optimise UHK's strengths, particularly its stand-alone role in the Czech Republic in relation to Latin America and Africa or in view of specific master or PhD programmes, rather than to follow the standard pattern of addressing mainly EU students at the level of bachelor programmes.
26. Continue applying for international partnerships, such as European University Alliances, as an effective means for expanding its international network of contacts.