EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

Evaluations of six higher education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia

System report

Andrée Sursock

30 March 2018

Table of contents

1. Introduction

This report is based upon the evaluations of six higher education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia[1] by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA). After this introductory chapter, the report identifies shared issues and challenges amongst the six universities and concentrates on the areas that are the usual foci of IEP evaluations: governance and strategic planning (chapter 2); internal quality assurance (chapter 3); learning and teaching (chapter 4), research (chapter 5), service to society (chapter 6); and internationalisation (chapter 7). These chapters end with recommendations to the national authorities and the institutions, which are recapitulated in a different format in Annex 1. The concluding chapter identifies four overarching priorities and proposes a roadmap to address them.

1.1 Scope of the evaluations

The evaluations took place in the framework of the project "Skills Development and Innovation Support Project" (SDISP), implemented by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia through the Ministry of Education and Science. The overall objective of the project is to improve transparency of resource allocation and promote accountability in higher education, enhance the relevance of secondary technical vocational education, and support innovation capacity in the country.

While the institutional evaluations took place in the context of the project, each university was reviewed by an independent evaluation team, using the IEP methodology described in Annex 2. In addition, IEP was asked to provide an analysis of the following aspects:

1. How institutions address the quality of study programmes, through:

   - The governance and organisational structure of study programmes (e.g. connection of study programmes with the university's mission and vision, labour market needs and national priorities; implementation of ECTS and Diploma Supplement; student-teacher ratio; student and teacher mobility opportunities, criteria for mobility and the recognition procedure; management of prolonged studies on the programme level).

   - The implementation of study programmes (e.g. types and methods of delivery and their relevance for the development of targeted skills and competences; research-based teaching; assessment of knowledge, skills and competences).

   - The quality assurance at the programme level (e.g. student survey results).

[1] This designation is used for the purposes of this project only and does not represent any formal position of EUA or IEP regarding the name of the country.

2. How institutions address the quality of academic staff, through:

   - The management of the teaching process (e.g. number of contact hours per teacher for each study cycle; conditions of academic titles).

   - The implementation of teaching (e.g. use of digital technologies; innovative approaches to teaching; research-based teaching; involvement of third mission into teaching).

   - The quality of teachers (e.g. involvement in research projects; participation in conferences; publications; students' evaluations; mobility; quality of mentoring the final theses).

3. How institutions address the quality of research activities, through:

   - The management of research (e.g. facilities; accessibility of international databases; external funding; promotion of research; existence of quality assurance system for research activities, such as projects; involvement of young researchers in teaching and research; postdoctoral opportunities).

   - The quality of research (e.g. number of publications in journals with high impact factor; participation in international projects; contacts with the international research community; applicability of research results: patents and the formation of new businesses).

The first two questions are discussed as part of chapter 4 on teaching and learning, while the third is part of chapter 5 on research.

1.2 The six institutions

Six universities participated in this project as shown in Table 1 (p. 5). Four of the six universities that were evaluated are fairly new and fairly small. The largest university is located in the capital city (Skopje), one university is located in the eastern part of the country (Shtip), two universities are in the southwest (Orhid and Bitola) and two are in Tetovo. Five of the six universities have several campuses.

Table 1: The six institutions by their geographical location (2016/17)

Name	Year of establi-shment	Status	Under-graduates	Master students	Specialist students	Doctoral students	Total students
Bitola							
St Kliment Ohridski University (UKLO)	1979	Public	5 247	187	17	55	5 506
Ohrid							
St Paul the Apostle University of Information Science and technology (UIST)	2009	Public	356	13	0	0	369
Shtip							
Goce Delchev University (UGD)	2007	Public	10 054	138	22	55	10 269
Skopje							
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM)	1949	Public	25 606	914	31	172	26 723
Tetovo							
South East European University (SEEU)	2001	Public/ Private Not for profit	2 006	704	0	146	2 856
State University of Tetovo	1994[2]	Public	8 238	230	3	11	8 482

[2] The University was officially recognised in 2004 although it was created in 1994. Source: Official website of the University, 2018. Retrieved on 27 February from http://unite.edu.mk/en/index.php?news=3069

Source: State Statistical Office.[3]
Undergraduate students: http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie.aspx?rbrtxt=29
Postgraduate students: http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija.aspx?id=39

A special mention should be made of the two universities that have been established in Tetovo, an area of the country where the Albanian-speaking population reaches around 75% (the total percentage of the Albanian-speaking population in the country is around 25%). The State University of Tetovo was established in 1994 and operated for 10 years as a non-recognised institution. It attained the status of a recognised public university in 2004.

The South East European University (SEEU) is the second university in Tetovo. It was established in 2001, with a unique status as a public private institution, to provide higher education in the Albanian language, which at that time was not possible in the public universities. This is a unique case in the country and means that SEEU can receive State funding.

The six universities are part of a larger higher education and research environment in the country. Eight private higher education institutions have been established recently and the system also comprises other types of institutions, such as 16 research institutes (six public and ten private), six schools of higher professional education and other types of institutions (e.g. foreign branch campuses, academies). It is estimated that a total of 71 000 students are enrolled in all cycles and types of institutions, out of which about 59 000 are in public universities.[4] The expansion of the higher education system in the country has raised concerns about its quality, which is compounded by concerns about corruption in the sector (European Union 2018 b, p. 9).

1.3 The context

The universities face a challenging environment. The economy has not been thriving. In the process of de-industrialisation, the country lost its large employers. Small and medium-size companies predominate and sluggish growth limits employment opportunities. A recent European Union report describes the situation in the following terms:

> The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia suffered a recession in 2009 as a consequence of the global financial crisis. Since then, from 2010-2015, real GDP has increased at an average rate of 2.6% per annum. Growth is currently forecast to reach 3.3% in 2016 and 3.5% in 2017. Living standards are still low with per capita GDP of €4,127 (compared to an average of €4,410 for the rest of the Western Balkan region), and there is a high rate of unemployment. (European Union 2016b, 12)

The European Union report summarises the situation of university graduates in the country in the following way:

[3] The State Statistical Office figures differ from and are lower than those provided by the universities and which are used in the IEP reports.

[4] Figures provided by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2016.

> … the HE system is failing to meet the needs of the labour market. Of all the students that enrol in the system each year, less than half go on to complete their studies. Of those that do complete their studies, only half succeed in finding a job. Of those that do succeed in finding a job, less than half find a job that is well matched to their field of study or level of qualification. (European Union 2018 b, p. 10)

There are persisting high rates of unemployment (26% in 2016[5]) and a report by EURYDICE notes that having a higher education degree does not protect university graduates from either unemployment or underemployment (Eurydice 2015, pp. 185-189). A survey of graduates in the Western Balkans revealed that the Republic of Macedonia has also the highest level of graduates in the region (20%) who stated that they were underqualified for their job. The regional average is 15%, leading to the conclusion that this illustrates the level of nepotism (European Union 2016a, p. 49). The report argues that the ineffectiveness of university career centres pushes graduates to rely on family and friends in finding a first job (European Union 2016b, p. 9).

This unfavourable economic situation, combined with demographic decline, means that the country is facing increasing outmigration and brain drain and that the universities face tougher competition for a smaller pool of high-school leavers.

This very sombre assessment is balanced by brighter signals that some aspects of the situation could improve in the future:

> On the positive side, the number of available graduate-level jobs is expected to increase over time due to continuing economic growth, especially in the ICT sector and among fast-growth SMEs. Many employers provide additional training to their new recruits, and there is evidence of a positive impact from better cooperation between HEIs and employers, which could be a relatively low-cost way to ease the transition to the labour market for more graduates. (European Union 2018 b, p. 10)

Nevertheless, for higher education, the current economic context has resulted in a lack of investment in the infrastructure (buildings and equipment), little to no national funding for research and limited opportunities for staff and student international mobility. Furthermore, salaries are low and have been frozen since 1999 and hiring new staff has been challenging and difficult.

University budgets are allocated annually, on the basis of an input-oriented budget model (staff costs, material costs and investments are addressed separately). No multi-year planning is possible and there are no incentives for innovation. Universities can charge tuition fees; the level of the fees requires approval by the government.[6]

[5] European Union (2016 b, p. 8).
[6] Higher Education Funding in Macedonia. World Bank (2011, p. 23).

University autonomy is constrained in many ways. Spending State funding is regulated by complex national regulations set by the Treasury. The procurement process is equally complex. Legislation tends to be prescriptive rather than supportive of activities by autonomous universities (for examples of the detailed legislation, cf. Annex 3). Furthermore, legislative instability was cited in several IEP reports. Legislation has changed frequently in the recent period and a new law was being discussed at the time of the site visits and expected to be passed before the end of 2017. This created anxiety and uncertainty.

Other ways that autonomy is constrained include being unable to decide on the number of staff and students (even those, among the latter, who do not receive State stipends) and which programmes to offer. The Ministry of Education determines which faculties open and close and where provision should be located. As an example, the UKLO Faculty of Law is based in Kichevo, with a branch in Bitola. “This arrangement was not optimal in terms of recruitment as demand in Kichevo was limited. Yet there were limitations on the autonomy of the university to effect a full relocation of the faculty to Bitola where demand would be higher and development opportunities greater.” (UKLO IEP report, p. 3)

Because the universities are seen as part of the public administration, national authorities can take back a certain percentage of their income. This, combined with legal instability, curtails the strategic capacity of universities, which end up focusing on short-term actions. The increasingly controlling nature of the external quality assurance system curtails further institutional autonomy (Pecakovska, 2017; Salmi, 2017).

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Structures and decision-making bodies

The two highest decision-making bodies in the five public universities are, in order of decreasing importance, the senate and the rector's board.

- The senate includes elected representatives from each unit (e.g. faculties, institutes) and a number of elected student representatives (15% of the senate members). Because of the representative nature of the senate, this body is very large in the largest university. The senate is defined in the law as a "management and expert body". Its decision-making power is broad and includes academic activities as well as policies, finance, statutes and regulations (faculty and university levels), criteria for selection and promotion of academic staff, enrolment policies, development of service to society, etc. The law requires the senate to form a commission for self-evaluation. Some universities have formed other standing committees as well.

- The rector's board includes the vice-rectors, the deans, the directors of the scientific institutions, the student parliament's president and the head of administration. Although not required by law, the board is normally organised in commissions that include academic staff and students, and deal with such issues as research; finance, investments and development; international partnerships; publications. The rector's board prepares the material on the basis of which the decisions of the senate are made; the board also executes the senate's decisions.

The rector has a significant role in leading the institution. In the five public institutions, the rector is selected through a three-step process: the faculties nominate their candidates; the rector's board elects two of these, and the senate votes to elect the rector. At SEEU (a semi-public, not-for-profit university), the rector is appointed by the university board based on a shortlist from the senate.

In the public universities, the equivalent structures to the senate and the rector's board at the faculty level have different functions. While the university senate has a decision-making role, the equivalent body at the faculty level – the faculty council – has an advisory role, and the dean's board which is the equivalent of the rector's board, has a decision-making role.

A third body, the university council, is required by law to provide oversight of the institutions but was not in place at any of the universities at the time of the IEP evaluations. One report mentioned that this was due to governmental delays in confirming the external members and that this would be addressed in 2018. This meant that there was no representation of external stakeholders in university governance at the time of the IEP evaluations.

With the exception of one university, whose difficulties were discussed in detail, comments

on this governance structure were sparse in the evaluation reports because the IEP Guidelines stressed that the individual evaluation reports should not focus on a critique of the legal framework. Nevertheless, two reports observed that the role of senate members was conceived by the academic community as having the obligation to represent their faculty's interests rather than consider the common good of the university as a whole.

In addition, one report recommended that the responsibilities of the two top university bodies should mirror that of the faculties and that if the senate is considered a "decision-making" body, then the rector should chair it because s/he would be ultimately legally responsible. If, however, the senate is considered an "expert body" then someone other than the rector could chair it and the senate's remit should be limited to academic matters only. That is, the senate would not discuss financial or personnel matters.

SEEU comes somewhat closer to that model in that, as opposed to the public universities, the rector does not chair the board but chairs the senate, whose role was advisory (rather than having decision-making capacity). Its board includes external members. The senate advises both the board and the rector on academic activities only. This is also the only university with an international advisory board as well as international peers as part of its internal quality review of programmes. The SEEU report found the institution's governance to be "convincing and effective."

2.2 An integrated university

The Western Balkans have had a tradition of autonomous faculties, with separate legal personality, that dates back to the 1954 Yugoslav law on universities, which distributed university-level responsibilities to the faculties, and identified them as autonomous entities.[7]

In 2008, a new higher education law changed a number of governance aspects. Most significantly, it reduced faculty autonomy and established the notion of an "integrated university". This required that the university proposes to the Ministry an integrated annual financial plan, combining those of each unit, and that the university represents the faculties legally.

[7] Sources:
Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1954, *General Law on Universities*, Official Journal 27/1954, Article 2.
https://www.uni-lj.si/univerzitetni_arhiv/zgodovina_ul/univerza_v_ljubljani_%E2%80%93_ustanovitev_in_razvoj_do_konca_20%20_stoletja/
http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/O_Sveucilistu/Jucer_danas_sutra/Povijest/Monografije/Spomenica/prvi_dio/0527_SamoupravljanjeNaSveucilistu.pdf

Aside from that, the faculties have continued to enjoy a large degree of autonomy as compared to faculties elsewhere in Europe, and a faculty culture has endured as the following examples illustrate:

- The law requires a minimum of five faculties as a condition for using the title "university". This has led to a situation where one very small university has five faculties when, in fact, its small number of registered students (fewer than 500) constitute a single faculty in a large university. Although this institution operates in a centralised fashion, the university cannot reduce the number of its faculties without losing its title; this puts a big strain on the limited number of staff who could occupy senior positions.

- The number of faculties at one university went from seven in 2007 to 12 in 2017, while in another university the number has risen from the original four in 2004, to 13 today, two of which were created in academic year 2016/17 and the university is planning to introduce two more faculties.

Having too many faculties reduces opportunities for interfaculty cooperation and a decentralised organisation is associated with a small central administration whose capacity is limited and is not staffed at the required level.

Faculty autonomy, however, varies according to the university. At one end of the spectrum, the faculties in one university do not have an independent budget and all funding allocations are decided in the senate, while at the other end of the spectrum, faculties in another university have their own bank accounts and get money directly from the Ministry and from student fees. In this university, they manage their funds and develop their own study programmes autonomously. They decide on promotions and appointments of academic staff and seek the senate's approval for the appointment and promotion of full professors only. Their own management bodies decide on whether and how to prioritise research or teaching.

Given that the two oldest universities have experienced faculty autonomy for the longest time, both have set the strengthening of institutional integration as a strategic priority; one of them, for instance, has done more to move toward that goal than is legally required. It established a single doctoral school, developed a university-wide information system, required the rector's signature on all faculties' international agreements, and levied a (modest) 5% overhead on faculty-generated income which was redistributed according to needs. Nevertheless, the weight of faculties was still preponderant.

There are other factors contributing to institutional fragmentation. Table 2 (p. 12) gives an overview of the number of units and campuses in relation to institutional size and shows that, aside from having too many faculties, some universities have also too many campuses. In one instance, a university has a geographical distribution that is too great in relation to its size, resulting in some satellite campuses enrolling fewer than 40 students.

Table 2: Number of units, campuses, students and staff (2016/17)

				Staff		Type of employment	
Name	**Faculties**	**Other units and campuses**	**Students**	**Academic staff**	**Admin. staff**	**Full time**	**Other employment arrangements**
Goce Delchev University (UGD)	12	3 academies 12 campuses	10 269	260	84	288	56
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM)	23	5 research institutes 12 associate members 5 campuses	26 723	1 437	401	1 823	31
St Kliment Ohridski University (UKLO)	10	1 higher vocational school 1 research institute 5 associates 6 campuses	5 506	297	39	294	42
St Paul the Apostle University of Information Science and technology (UIST)	5	/	369	16	14	23	7
South East European University (SEEU)	5	2 campuses	2 856	109	24	89	44
State University of Tetovo (Tetovo)	13	5 campuses	8 482	343	428	335	436

Source: http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie_en.aspx?rbrtxt=22

2.3 Staffing

The national authorities decide on the number and type of posts (e.g. professor of biology) on proposal of the universities. Opening a new post requires the approval of both the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Finance. All academic staff who are teaching in the second and third cycles are required to be accredited individually, every five years, by the quality assurance agency and a number of other national requirements are in effect. For

instance, national academic staff on standard contracts are required to engage in research, teaching and administration.

In at least two universities, there was no central human resource office at the time of the IEP evaluations and no central human resource management; this was the responsibility of the faculties. Other universities, however, had centrally-run processes.

Several universities stated that no new professors had been hired over the last five years. This, combined with limited teaching support in the form of teaching assistants, was reported to have led to some inertia and complacency among some professors in one university, with negative impact on teaching and learning. The restrictions on hiring have been a concern, notably because there soon will be a significant wave of retirements and because a number of teaching positions remain open.

One IEP report noted that, within each rank, all academic staff receive the same salary: about €300 take-home pay for assistants, €400 for docents, and €500 for full professors. Some faculties are able to top up salaries for service extending beyond the normal teaching workload (for instance, for research activities). Other universities use self-generated central funds to supplement salaries, up to 40% in two cases, or they use those funds to hire additional academic staff to cover basic teaching needs and improve the student-staff ratio. These approaches may prove to be unsustainable and the universities face the risk that, in the long term, all self-generated income would be allocated for salaries rather than for funding strategic priorities.

The staff on short-term contracts are listed by the universities as part-time staff, even if they are working full time; as such, they could be working in several institutions, provided they secure the formal agreement of all rectors concerned. The national authorities require that short-term contracts are for a single year, which means instability for both the university and the staff.

One university faced particular difficulties because it had been allowed to recruit international staff, but only from the top 500 globally-ranked institutions. To attract them, the institution topped up their salaries from its own income and provided short-term, one-year contracts. This resulted in high staff turnover, salary differentials between national and international staff members, and workload imbalance because foreigners could not take on senior administrative posts. The international staff on short-term contracts were considered part-time and some held appointments in several institutions. This weakened the sense of affiliation to the academic community.

Salmi noted the high level of inbreeding at both the old and the new universities, “which indicates that the newer universities have not managed to diminish this practice engrained in the academic culture of the country” (2017, p. 24). This is detrimental to quality as Horta’s research has revealed (Horta et al. 2010, Horta 2013). A growing number of academics with PhD have been trained abroad (Salmi 2017, 26) but the culture of inbreeding militates against their recruitment (European Commission 2016b).

The contractual obligations of academic staff members are determined by their faculty or their university. The IEP reports noted that while all academic staff members have a contractual obligation to be engaged in teaching and research, the teaching load varies depending on their status (full-time or part-time) and academic rank (full professor or not). The weekly teaching load for full-time academic staff includes teaching between 8 and 12 hours and being available for student consultation for at least four hours. The maximum teaching load equates to four courses per semester. Academic staff who are not full professors teach 12 to 16 hours per semester, in some cases up to 18 hours. Part-time academic staff teach as necessary.

Article 134 of the law requires that "Associate professor, part-time and full professor and professor at a school of higher professional education shall be elected for a period of five years, and the full professor shall be re-elected for a period of seven years." Typically, however, staff members retain their posts in the reselection process.

Only one IEP report noted that a university has performance appraisals and staff development in place for the academic staff. That university also provides €700 per academic staff member to support writing for publication and conference attendance.

2.4 Students right and responsibilities

The law requires that students are involved in the governance bodies at both the levels of the university and the faculties and provides specifications about the percentage of student representation. While the universities complied with the legal requirement, only one IEP report was positive about the degree of engagement of students in governance at both the university and faculty levels and in the internal quality assurance process. One report was silent on this issue and the remaining four evaluation reports noted that student representation at the university level was relatively weak; engagement at the faculty level seemed to fare better, at least in one institution.

The student parliament is not perceived by some students as their representative body and is described as being ineffective in involving students in university life and decision-making. In one institution, university regulations do not permit substituting a student representative who is not able to participate in meetings and, in two universities, the previous student leadership failed to organise elections for their succession, leaving a vacuum in student representation. Some students recognised a degree of apathy on the part of the larger student body. The university leadership is aware of those issues and, in at least two universities, is attempting to address them. One university, however, did not promote student representation at all.

Student representation usually rests on a foundation of active student life at the university, which is sustained by student associations. Two IEP reports discussed this point; one university provides funding to student associations and supported their cultural and sports activities while the other neglected this aspect altogether. In that university, students were minimally aware of the opportunities to influence decision-making through their student

representatives and how to provide feedback, complain or appeal even though formal arrangements for those processes are in place.

Finally, one report discussed the quality and timing of the information given to students about such aspects as international opportunities and their rights and responsibilities; it suggested that this be strengthened and rethought.

2.3 Strategic capacity

Most universities presented strategic documents, which included some or all of the following components: mission, profile, priorities and an action plan. However, the IEP reports were nearly unanimous in pointing out the following:

- Mission and profile were generally vague and not sufficiently specific; they did not stress the distinctive features of the university or were overly ambitious.

- Priorities were variously described as being unclear, too numerous, unfocused, and short term; the latter aspect was related to the prevailing legal instability and funding uncertainty.

- Action plans reflected the above weaknesses and lacked implementation details such as identifying timelines, the responsible persons and their reporting bodies, the available resources, and the performance indicators that will measure whether an action has been properly executed.

- Risk management, scenario and contingency planning were missing even although they are particularly important given the prevailing uncertainties in the national context.

Good strategic plans are generally the result of wide consultation, within and outside the university; good implementation requires thoughtful delegation of roles and responsibilities. The evaluation reports commented on those aspects as follows:

- Process of developing the strategic documents: some universities consulted the university community while, in others, it was the rector's plan, based on elective campaign proposals. Praise went to one university for the collegial development process, which included the rector's visit to all faculties and to another for involving its board, which included internal and external stakeholders.

- The link to the internal or external quality assurance results were in evidence in two universities while a third had developed an action plan to address all items of non-compliance that had been identified in recent financial audits.

- Role of faculties: this was discussed in the report of two universities, where each unit was required to develop its own action plan, based on the university strategy and provide an annual activity report, which went to the faculty council and the rector.

One of the two universities required that the annual report be a self-reflective evaluation that included recommendations for improvement.

In conclusion, the funding uncertainty and legal instability meant that the universities were opportunistic rather than strategic. While this can be explained by the external environment, nevertheless, there was a general sense that the universities could strengthen their limited strategic capacity by revising their mission and vision and strategic goals, and ensuring that the action plan reflects those goals, that it is focused on SMART[8] goals and includes performance indicators. In addition, external stakeholders should be included in the development of the strategy and the universities could usefully benefit from establishing an international advisory board to provide international benchmarks.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1 Ensure that the legislative framework is sufficiently flexible to adapt to different university profiles and modes of governance while promoting further the requirements of an "integrated university".

2 Funding mechanisms should authorise universities to roll over surplus and design multi-year strategic investment plans in order to allow the universities' decision-making bodies to steer strategic change.

3 Ensure that the division of responsibilities between the senate and the rector's board mirror the respective responsibilities of the faculty councils (advisory) and the deans' boards (decision-making). The key principle that should guide that reflection is that the body or person making a decision should be the one that is responsible and accountable.

4 Discourage inbreeding by offering incentives for academic staff mobility within the country and abroad and invest in staff development.

5 Provide a plan for academic staff recruitment to allow universities to design long-term plans.

6 Review the policy about staff contracts. Specifically, remove the obstacles to international staff recruitment, review the policy of one-year short-term contracts to make it less constraining and forbid the practice of multiple appointments for those who are employed full time.

Recommendations to the universities:

1. Strengthen the "integrated university" by:

    - ✓ Bringing together, at regular intervals, staff responsible for specific functions in

[8] Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

the faculties at both the management (e.g. vice deans) and administrative levels (e.g. staff responsible for human resources, finance, Erasmus+).

- ✓ Reducing the number of units and consolidating the number of campuses.
- ✓ Promoting greater interfaculty cooperation by encouraging interdisciplinary programmes in teaching and research.
- ✓ Asking faculties to develop an action plan, aligned with the university's strategy, and organising yearly meetings between the rector and each dean to review the activities undertaken during the year and the proposed improvement plans for the following year.

2. Promote staff quality:

- ✓ Ensure that the recruitment and promotion criteria and processes are robust and transparent. In particular, discourage inbreeding by setting a limit on the number of "home-grown" staff per department and fund short-term periods of international staff mobility.
- ✓ Increase the professionalism of administrative staff through appropriate training.

3. Promote student engagement:

- ✓ Promote student involvement in the formulation and implementation of the university strategy as well as in institutional decision-making processes and quality assurance processes by working actively with the student parliament and supporting the student organisations, for instance, through leadership training and orientation to the governance of the university.
- ✓ Review, with the help of students, how students learn about their rights and responsibilities (student handbook, orientation day for new students) to ensure that they retain that information.
- ✓ Ensure a fair and transparent complaints and appeals process for the students.

4. Bolster strategic capacity:

- ✓ Ensure wide ownership of the strategy by consulting broadly within the university (i.e. including academic and administrative staff and students) and with external stakeholders.
- ✓ Elaborate a distinct profile for the university as part of the vision and mission statements.
- ✓ Set out informed and realistic priorities; the associated action plan should identify timelines, responsible persons and university bodies, resources and performance

indicators which would be monitored regularly and be part of the internal quality process.

- ✓ Establish an independent and regular source of advice by consulting external stakeholders.
- ✓ Benchmark the university's activities against a set of foreign universities and consider establishing an international advisory board to strengthen international benchmarking.

3. Quality culture

Quality assurance processes have quickly spread around the world since the 1980s and have been a central concern in the European policy discussions. While the early stress on quality assurance focused on the creation of quality assurance agencies, today there is an increased recognition of the importance of internal quality assurance processes. In Europe, this shift was marked by the 2003 Berlin Communiqué, which placed the responsibility for quality assurance on the universities.

In line with this view, IEP focuses on internal quality processes (IQA) and examines them in the specific context of each university and the national external quality assurance system (EQA) in order to understand the extent to which the universities are able to develop appropriate IQA processes.

The national approach to EQA appears to be controlling due to the rapid growth of the higher education sector (Pecakovska, 2017). As a result, universities are required to undergo an external accreditation of all first- and second-cycle study programmes and an assessment of the quality of academic staff every five years; the accreditation of doctoral study programmes takes place every three years. "The key criteria of the accreditation process are the competences of the teaching staff, research activities and the implementation of the ECTS system." (European Union 2016a, 22) New institutions go through a licensing process.

Those activities are carried out by the Higher Education Accreditation and Evaluation Board (HEAEB), an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since October 2011. Salmi, however, points out that the external quality assurance system is weak for the following reasons:

> The accreditation board has limited technical capacity, employs very few fulltime staff, and appears to follow input-oriented evaluation processes. In addition, there is a widespread feeling that it has not yet reached a sufficient level of independence from political forces to be able to accomplish its mission of professional support and quality enhancement in an effective manner. (Salmi 2017, p. 25)

In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science commissioned the consultancy group "Academic Ranking of World Universities" (ARWU) to produce a ranking of Macedonian institutions. The first ranking was released in 2012 and ranked 19 institutions, including the six that were part of this evaluation. The AWRU website explains that "The ranking used 21 indicators of academic performance and competitiveness, covering core missions of HEIs such as teaching, research and social service."[9] Without commenting on this particular ranking

[9] The "Academic Ranking of World Universities" (ARWU) is also known as the Shanghai ranking. For the results of the Macedonian ranking cf.:
http://www.shanghairanking.com/Macedonian_HEIs_Ranking/Macedonian-HEIs-Ranking-2015-2016.ht

instrument, Salmi notes cogently that “benchmarking is a better approach because each institution can choose the appropriate indicators and the other institutions it wants to compare itself against, rather than being subject to the often biased or methodologically flawed indicators that the ranking organizations use.” (2017, p. 36)

The internal quality assurance (IQA) requirements, as specified by Article 77 of the law, include the obligation to collect student feedback through questionnaires, to evaluate administrative staff and, for the university and its units, to undertake a process of self-evaluation every three years.

The analysis of the evaluation reports revealed a continuum in the extent to which universities have developed their own quality assurance processes on top of those requirements and, most importantly, how successful they have been in embedding a quality culture.

At the positive end of the spectrum, one university was identified as having a shared quality culture as well as a set of institutional mechanisms to enhance quality levels; those were integrated in the governance mechanisms and strategic management of the institution. This university involved students and staff in the IQA processes as well as international advisors who came regularly to the university to evaluate specific aspects of the university. It also received the "HR Excellence in Research" award of the European Commission. At the other end of the spectrum, another university was described as having no internal quality assurance mechanisms. The institution paid attention to its relatively high position within the national ranking but did nothing else beyond this because it claimed to lack the appropriate staff resources. That university was unresponsive to the students who were dissatisfied with the uneven quality of the teaching. In between those two poles, the remaining universities had some IQA processes in place. The following aspects were found in most institutions:

1. The main quality mechanisms were the triannual self-evaluations and the student questionnaires required by law but there was no evidence of linking those two instruments and analysing their results together.

2. ISO is used by some faculties and some universities.

3. With respect to student questionnaires, concerns were expressed about their length, frequency, anonymity, ambiguity of wordings, and the lack of apparent consequences from the students’ perspective. In one university, the response rate to the questionnaire was as low as 8%.

4. Where student information systems were in place, there was scant evidence that their analytical potential was used fully; in some cases, this was related to the decentralised tradition of universities in the country and of letting faculties decide which parts of the system they would use.

5. As required by law, universities had a permanent senate commission that was responsible for the triannual self-evaluation process. The resulting self-evaluation reports went to the senate, but the IEP reports expressed concerns that these was not used in strategic decision-making and for enhancement.

6. In most cases, staffing of the IQA function was thin to non-existent: in some institutions, a single administrative staff member was in charge; in others, the faculty vice deans were responsible for this function.

7. With the exception of one university, staff and students were not involved in any meaningful way in developing, discussing or reviewing the internal quality processes. As a result, there was no shared understanding of quality concepts.

This diagnosis concurs with Salmi's conclusion that "significant capacity building measures and resources are needed to support the development of an internal quality culture and to institutionalize it in all tertiary education institutions" (Salmi 2017, p. 25).

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Ensure a robust *ex ante* licensing process to avoid the establishment of institutions of dubious quality.

2. Ensure that HEAEB is in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), notably with respect to its human and financial resources and its independence.

3. Promote internal quality procedures by providing resources to the universities and capacity building workshops and by asking HEAEB to conduct institutional quality audits.

Recommendations to the universities:

Universities should further develop their quality assurance mechanisms while being mindful of promoting and embedding a shared understanding of quality concepts and a non-bureaucratic quality culture. Specifically, each university is encouraged to:

- ✓ Use the ESG 2015 Part 1 as a guide for developing IQA processes (e.g. formal and informal mechanisms for collecting student feedback, alumni tracer surveys to help adapt study programmes).

- ✓ Develop a shared understanding of which internal quality assurance mechanisms require developments and what type of quality culture should be developed in each university. This can be achieved by training staff and students, and organising frequent discussions about quality across the faculties.

- ✓ Enhance the quality and use of the student questionnaires by forming a committee that would include academic staff and students to work on the list of questions (content and formulation), decide on the frequency and timing of the

questionnaire, reassure that the questionnaire is anonymous, and explain, on a regular basis, how results have been used.

- ✓ Exploit the data and information system, which holds great potential for the analysis of patterns of student success and failures and for developing appropriate responses. Faculties should be asked to use the full functionalities of the system to allow for more meaningful data analysis and opportunities for improvement across the university.
- ✓ Require that each unit produces an annual report to show how it is enhancing its activities and responding to the self-evaluations and to any externally organised QA process. This report should be discussed with the rector.
- ✓ Assign appropriate human and financial resources to this area. For instance, consider assigning the IQA responsibility to a senior staff member, who would be reporting to a senior university officer (such as a vice rector or even the rector).
- ✓ Review regularly the IQA system in order to ensure that it continues to be effective.

4. Teaching and learning

A European report on the Western Balkans noted the very important market-orientation of study programmes in the country and the greater satisfaction of graduates with the Master level than with the Bachelor level (European Union 2016a, pp. 17 and 25). Students who had been on an exchange programme in the European Union, "highlighted the diversity of teaching methods as a positive side of their experience abroad".

> (They) felt that that the broad knowledge learnt at their home universities was helpful to engage successfully in universities abroad, they nevertheless rated favourably the high degree of specialisation that they found in EU universities and which they thought is lacking in their home universities. (European Union 2016a, 29)

This report was accompanied by national studies. The study focused on Macedonia noted:

> About 60,000 undergraduate students are registered at HEIs, and about 19,000 new students enrol each year in both public and private HEIs. Each year, about one quarter of new students enrols for study programmes in the fields of Business, Administration & Law. Completion rates are very low – just 47% on three-year Bachelor programmes – as many students drop out or spend more time than needed to complete their degrees. Despite the high dropout from the HE system, each year there are more graduates than can be absorbed by available jobs on the labour market. The greatest surpluses are from the study fields of Business, Administration & Law, Arts & Humanities and Services. Yet, there are shortages of new graduates in some study fields such as Natural Sciences, Mathematics & Statistics. (European Union, 2016b, 8)

The European Union report adds: "Worryingly, students who studied STEM[10] subjects are less satisfied with the quality of their education than others." (2016b, p. 9) The Rathenau Instituut (2017) confirms that, overall, the share of graduates in science and technology is very low in Macedonia, one of the lowest in a recent comparative study of European countries.

The IEP reports noted the commitment of the six universities to deliver good quality education. Four of them were aware of the need to promote student-centred learning, to introduce e-learning, and develop students who would become active and creative citizens and professionals, equipped with critical thinking skills and ethical values. The other two demonstrated little or no strategic thinking on this important mission.

It should be recalled that decentralisation means that faculties are primarily responsible for delivering teaching. Weak central monitoring of the strategic plan (cf. chapter 2) as well as weak central internal quality assurance mechanisms (cf. chapter 3) imply that the universities'

[10] STEM subjects refer Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

leadership are generally not in a position to monitor and steer effectively this area. This is generally left to the faculties.

The sections below look at admission and attrition, student support services, student to staff ratio, the learning environment, study programmes and employability, digital learning and student-centred learning.

4.1 Admission and attrition

The common admission criterion is the high school grade point average. Some faculties in the oldest universities have additional criteria such as an entrance examination, the performance of the students on specific matura subjects that are particularly relevant for their disciplines, or the quality of the high schools. By and large, however, the national system is one of open admission.

All students pay fees, but those with the best high-school record receive a State stipend; the others are self-funded. The overall number of study places (including self-funded students) for each programme is set by the Ministry of Education and Science. Two IEP reports noted that this led to a mismatch of planning and resources.

Universities have the obligation to admit special categories of students (such as Albanian, Turkish, and Serbian students, students from mono-parental families or from those affected by the 2001 war); the affirmative action quota is set at 10% of the entering cohort. Those are additional places provided to qualified students. Monitoring is done by the Ministry and the universities are not allowed to charge tuition fees for students with special needs.

When students do not like their initial choice of major, the law allows them to study in an additional programme in parallel. Transfer to another major is legally possible within a faculty or across to a related field but not across faculties.

The open access to higher education, the limitation on switching majors and the financial situation of some students result in attrition rates during the first year that can reach 50%. It was difficult to get any precise numbers of how many students drop out and, therefore, to analyse the underlying reasons for this. The key challenges faced by universities in keeping accurate records is linked to the “inactive student” category, that is, students who withdraw but who are still counted as students; in addition, in some cases the data management system (cf. chapter 3) is not fully used by the faculties, which limits the university’s monitoring capacity.

There is some evidence of outreach to high schools, with the goal of promoting higher education as an option and, in some cases, introducing the students to the necessity of becoming autonomous learners at university. There are some examples of addressing gaps in knowledge and skills during the first year in order to smooth the transition to university, but this practice is not widespread.

Some problems about student assessment are reported. Examinations can be retaken many times, and students in one university were reported to be dissatisfied that all examinations are only in writing rather than included a mix of project work and other types of assessment. The students at that university also reported endemic cheating, which the IEP report attributed to lack of information and a lenient approach to punishment.

4.2 Student support services and staff-student ratio

Student support services are often grouped under a career centre, that could be located in the faculties, and staffed by academics; the students are not always aware of what specific services are available and they tend to rely on their teachers for support and advice. Lack of funding meant that the full array of student services (such as counselling, tutoring) is rarely found and a centre for teaching and learning to support academic staff development is a rare occurrence. The 2016 European report on the Western Balkans and Macedonia found that the career services are not as effective as they could be (European Union 2016).

Figures about staff to student ratio, as reported by the universities, ranged between 1:20 and 1:25, depending on the institution, the course type and the mode of delivery. One university managed to improve the staff-student ratio from 1:27 to 1:22 by splitting students into smaller groups and hiring short-term teachers; another one noted recent improvements because of a decrease in the total student numbers and a very slight increase in academic staff numbers.

4.3 Learning environment

Only one university was reported as having been able to invest in its infrastructure in recent years. Lack of funding resulted in disparities across universities and the decentralised structures resulted in disparities within a university. Thus, one IEP report noted the attractive environment of some faculties while others dealt with substandard conditions (outdated labs, poorly maintained buildings). This particular university applied an internal overhead of 5% on faculty income, which was too little to address those disparities.

Although the extracurricular setting is an important factor of student success at university, two institutions lacked any common rooms for students (even canteens) and did not offer opportunities for extracurricular activities.

The quality of the learning environment was a frequent topic of discussion during the two site visits in a fourth university. Student and staff were dissatisfied with the inadequate facilities and outdated laboratories.

4.4 Study programmes and graduate employability

Three reports discussed the number of study programmes. There were mentions of duplication of offer across faculties and interfaculty competition over students, which resulted in overly specialised and narrow first-cycle study programmes. One of the universities had the strategic aim of developing interdisciplinary programmes and promoting interfaculty cooperation but, in spite of its small size, was unable to avoid course duplication.

The universities are concerned about preparing their graduates for the world of work. This is evident in some faculties whose curriculum are regularly updated to keep pace with professional trends. More frequently, however, formal and frequent external input into programme development is lacking.

Other IEP reports observed that the design of study programmes is in conformity with national accreditation requirements but recommended that curriculum development takes into account broader international practice and alumni input. In addition, two IEP reports observed that learning outcomes are subject based, which meant that generic skills and competences such as teamwork, leadership and entrepreneurship were not taught or assessed. This led to the recommendation that transversal and soft skills should be identified and assessed across all study programmes and that the universities – at the central level – should be taking the lead on this.

The soft skills are usually developed during periods of credit-bearing internships which the universities are required to provide. Article 99 of the law provides that internships "cannot be shorter than 30 days." Therefore, internships generally take place during one month in the summer and are based on an agreement between a faculty and a company. However, demand exceeds the number of appropriate places, which affects the quality of internships. To ensure greater relevance and quality, one university assigns academic staff members to serve as mentors for students during their internship. It also considered encouraging students to undertake international internships.

4.5 Digital learning

A very comprehensive approach to digitalisation is being implemented in one university, which entrusts its eLearning Centre to implement this strategy gradually. In the other universities there was patchy evidence of using information technology and progress was reported to be slow due to limited funding, the hesitation of academic staff to engage in new ways of teaching and the lack of staff development activities to promote such engagement.

4.6 Student-centred learning

An important aspect of the Bologna reform is the shift to student-centred learning, which includes active learning.[11] The understanding of student-centred learning, however, varied across the six universities and across faculties within a given university. Only one is commended for a well-founded concept and systematic approach to this area. For instance, it promotes flipped classrooms and provides staff training to support this development. In the other universities, decentralisation resulted in a patchy and inconsistent delivery that depended on individual faculties or even individual teachers, with little staff training provided to support pedagogical innovation. Nevertheless, the IEP reports indicated that students have positive relationships with their professors who hold formal office hours and provide students with their email addresses or phone numbers.

[11] cf. ESG 2015 provide a good framework for developing student-centred learning.

4.6 General conclusions about teaching and learning

In conclusion, the main findings from the IEP reports are as follows:

- With respect to the governance and organisational structure of study programme, the universities are aware of the need to respond to labour market needs and national priorities. They find ways to comply with the student-teacher ratio requirement, but student and staff international mobility opportunities are limited due to lack of funding.

- The development of student centred learning is still at a very early stage; the types and methods of delivery tend to be traditional and do not always take into account the development of targeted skills and competences and their assessment; active learning, the involvement of third mission into teaching and research-based teaching require further promotion via staff development activities.

- The quality assurance at the programme level relies too much on student survey results and, as discussed in chapter 3, the students are not engaging with the surveys. Other tools of quality assurance need to be introduced aside from student surveys, which are often unreliable.

- The management of the teaching process (e.g. number of contact hours per teacher for each study cycle; conditions of academic titles) is specified by law and there were no reports of non-compliance. Students are generally satisfied with their teachers (with the notable exception of one university) but the hiring freeze and upcoming retirements should be addressed.

- The quality of teachers (e.g. involvement in research projects; participation in conferences; publications; students' evaluations; mobility; quality of mentoring the final theses) is monitored to the extent prescribed by law. However, the very detailed legal specifications hinder the sense of ownership of those rules; the universities are in a compliance mode instead of making efforts to develop their staff. Lack of funding and the decentralised nature of some of universities compound this challenge.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Invest in the learning infrastructure and in staff development (e.g. by funding a national forum on teaching and learning or sending staff abroad for staff development).
2. Relax the limitations on switching majors but limit the number of times student can re-take examinations.
3. Provide incentives to attract students to STEM fields.
4. Review the timing and duration of the internships, in consultation with employers and the universities, in order to improve their effectiveness.

Recommendations to the universities:

Each university should develop a strategy for teaching and learning. The strategy should identify priorities, based on identified strengths. It should include a timeline, identify resources, responsible staff members and university bodies, success indicators and monitoring mechanisms to measure progress. The implementation of the strategy should be driven by the university to ensure consistency across faculties. The strategy should consider the following aspects:

- ✓ Review all study programmes across the university to eliminate duplication and to increase efficiency. This should also include aligning the university's educational offer to both the available resources and its strengths in a well-defined set of disciplinary fields. This will help the universities to optimise their limited resources.
- ✓ Develop criteria for approving existing and new study programmes, promote interdisciplinarity through interfaculty cooperation and integrate quality assurance mechanisms as both an *ex-ante* element in designing future study programmes and an *ex-post* process to assess performance when the programmes are already running.
- ✓ Consider learning outcomes when developing study programmes and the associated assessment formats. These should include subject specific outcomes and generic competences, factoring in labour-market needs. At the same time, the pervasive focus on employability should be balanced with "Bildung", that is, learning for personal development, learning to learn, developing a critical attitude and other generic skills in order to allow graduates to develop professionally.
- ✓ Assess the quality of internships in line with the learning outcomes that have been identified.
- ✓ Develop student-centred learning further by promoting the following aspects:
  - active teaching methodology
  - better student support to develop their autonomy as learners
  - personalised and flexible learning paths
  - student self-assessment
  - e-learning and e-textbooks
  - ongoing pedagogic development for teachers (e.g. offering collegial forum for the exchange of good teaching practice)

- ✓ Review student services to ensure that they are standardised across the university, fit-for-purpose and focused on the diversity of student needs, including those of at-risk students.
- ✓ Strengthen the information flow to students through a variety of formats such as a regular newsletter, the website, emails, and social networks, including about the right and responsibilities of students, and the complaints and appeals procedures.
- ✓ Monitor student's ethical behaviour and develop appropriate penalties.
- ✓ Increase the number of visiting lecturers, including those from outside the country in order to promote new ways of teaching.
- ✓ Review the quality of the university's library and IT infrastructure and address key deficit areas.
- ✓ Provide a social environment for students in order to promote their greater involvement in university governance. This should include social space and amenities (e.g. cafeteria) and an active student life which ultimately support the development of their soft-skills and greater academic and professional success.
- ✓ Keep accurate records of student enrolment, achievement, completion and retention. Identify problems, analyse the underlying reasons and address them. Particularly, consider different approaches for addressing the existing drop-out rates in the first year, including through the introduction of a bridging programme for high-school leavers who lack some of the key study skills and subject-related knowledge.

5. Research

The chapter on research examines the scope of research activities (section 5.1) and doctoral education (section 5.2) since the latter is essential for the development of research capacity.

5.1 Scope of research activities

The leadership of the six universities view research as an important dimension of their activities and have been promoting research activities. Examples of how this has been done include such initiatives as rewarding publications in high-impact journals, providing research project funding, using research activity as a basis for promotion, tracking the university's annual research activity in a e-repository, offering professional development workshops (e.g. writing for publications, proposal-writing), and allocating funding for conference attendance.

The legal framework also encourages research activities. For instance, "mentors" of students in the second cycle of university studies must abide by Article 95-a:

> Only a teacher who has published at least six papers in international scientific journals or papers which have at least 5 points in total in a journal with impact factor in the appropriate field from the Web of Science database, in accordance with paragraph 6 of this Article, and who has been accredited by the Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of the Higher Education shall have the right to be a mentor of students of the second cycle of studies. The Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of the Higher Education shall keep a register of mentors of master and doctoral theses which is updated every third month.

For doctoral studies, Article 96 states:

> The mentor of the doctoral thesis at the higher education institution that delivers study programs of third cycle of university – doctoral studies, should have at least six published reviewed scientific-research works in international scientific journals or international scientific publications, out of which papers that have at least 10 points in total, in accordance with Article 95-a paragraph 6 of this Law, in international journals with impact factor in the appropriate field from the Web of Science database, in a given field in the last five years.
>
> The higher education institution shall not allow defense of a doctoral thesis of a candidate who, before the defense of the doctoral thesis, has not published two reviewed scientific-research works as an author in international scientific journals or international scientific publications, or papers that have at least 5 points in total, in accordance with Article 95-a paragraph 6 of this Law in international journals with impact factor in the appropriate field from the Web of Science database.

The stress on research has raised the importance of research activities as measured by an increase in the number of publications and of research contracts. One university provided

structured mentoring to its young researchers, while another received the European Commission award for "HR Excellence in Research". A number of academic staff members understand that a stimulating research environment contributes positively to their teaching. Those achievements, however, are patchy and the IEP reports identify a number of important external and internal obstacles that limit the institutional research capacity.

The external obstacles are of a financial and administrative nature. Research funding is very scarce. The main funding mechanism consists of diverting 40% of student fees toward research activities. This provides a rather unstable financial context that is dependent on the fluctuating student recruitment. The public procurement process is very challenging and time-consuming and, as such, not adapted to purchasing state-of-the-art research equipment. This hinders research capacity and the potential to develop international partnerships and attract international funding. Furthermore, as a result of lack of investment, library resources, access to online databases and research infrastructure are inadequate.

Those external obstacles are compounded by internal ones. The absence of good institutional research strategies means that available funding is spread thinly across the universities rather than building on research strengths or funding activities in priority areas.

The research culture in universities is not very strong. Academic staff tend to think that their primary activity is teaching, and that any other activity should be remunerated with salary bonuses. The enduring, decentralised legacy of the universities results in little cooperation across faculties, no central service that can effectively support research-proposal writing and limited leadership provided at the university level. As a result, research activity depends on individual motivation.

This has consequences for young researchers who cannot rely on a structured research environment. With the exception of one university, which offered a mentoring programme, there is little focus on providing, in a systematic way, research opportunities for young researchers, who must rely on their capacity to engage individually with more senior researchers.

Apart for the university that holds the "HR Excellence in Research" award, it is unclear if the other universities have a code of practice to ensure research integrity. This is a crucial element, particularly in a context where there is external pressure to increase the number of publications. Experience in other countries has shown that this can lead to unethical behaviour and scientific fraud.

5.2 Doctoral training and education

Investing in doctoral education is crucial for the development of research capacity as the discussion in section 5.1 alluded to. The legislation provides that doctoral awarding powers are conferred to universities (1) that are ranked amongst the top five institutions in the national ranking done by AWRU and (2) whose staff members are accredited to supervise

doctoral students based on their publication record (cf. Articles 28 and 77-a of the law on higher education).

A 2012 amendment to the higher education law requires that supervisors demonstrate their research activity by having published either two articles in the last five years in a ranked journal or six papers in a less prestigious journal. They can supervise a maximum of three doctoral candidates. Those new requirements have caused some shortages of qualified supervisors. It should be noted also that supervisors are not offered any specific training or support and are not monitored and that doctoral students' views on their education and training are not collected.

Doctoral programmes include a taught component (e.g. ethics and research methodology, plus subject-related courses). The students select their thesis topic at the end of the first year, based on a literature survey that they present in public. In the following two years, they work on their project and write one paper a year that they present at a public seminar and that should be published in peer-reviewed journals.

They defend their thesis when their supervisor feel that they are ready. Article 96 of the law specifies that "The doctoral studies, in general, shall last three years and shall correspond to 180 ECTS credits." The Article also specifies that the committee includes five experts (one of whom is external); they should be at the professorial rank and can include the thesis supervisor. The thesis committee is approved by the faculty although it should be noted that best practice in Europe excludes the supervisor from the thesis committee. Article 103 specifies the language of instruction.[12]

Doctoral schools exist but their functions vary according to the university. In some, they had an administrative function and in others they organise the generic courses. Two universities had a very fragmented doctoral offer in that they had too many doctoral programmes in relation to the small number of doctoral students. Orientation of doctoral students was not a practice and several reports mention the feeling of isolation of graduate students and the

[12] The teaching at the higher education institutions shall be delivered in Macedonian language.

The higher education institution may provide the teaching and the scientific-research work, that is, the taking of the exam and the defense of the doctoral thesis of the third cycle studies to be conducted in English language.

The teaching at the private higher education institutions may be also delivered in the languages of the members of the communities that are not a majority in the Republic of Macedonia or in the world languages.

When the teaching is delivered in the languages of the members of the communities that are not a majority in the Republic of Macedonia or in the world languages, the Macedonian language shall be studied as a separate subject and the teaching of at least two other subjects shall be delivered in Macedonian language.

need to provide them with opportunities to meet socially and to attend interfaculty seminars and conferences.

The strength of postgraduate education was questioned in some reports: postgraduate students take a long time to complete their work and many go abroad.

5.3 General conclusions about research

Main findings from the IEP reports include the following aspects:

- Research capacity is curtailed by the limited funding and the intricate procurement regulations. The high number of institutions further weakens the overall national capacity for research.

- The management of research can be improved but this requires further financial investment and a review of procurement regulations: facilities are not always state of the art; accessibility of international databases and capacity to attract external funding are limited (due to lack of state-of-the-art facilities and prominent researchers); quality assurance system for research activities is at an incipient stage; involvement of young researchers in teaching and research is patchy; postdoctoral opportunities are limited by the available funding.

- The quality of research could be measured using such metrics as the number of publications in journals with high impact factor (although this presents disadvantages that should be considered); participation in international projects; contacts with the international research community; and applicability of research results (patents and the formation of new businesses). The first three priorities, however, are to increase research funding, interinstitutional cooperation and international networking before launching into a measurement exercise.

Recommendations to the national authorities:

1. Establish a national consortium for joint library resources, including national and international databases.

2. Find a way to increase research funding and simplify the procurement process for research activities.

3. Support the organisation of international conferences to promote good practices on how to develop a research culture in universities.

Recommendations to the universities:

1. The universities should bolster research activities by developing a research strategy, with clear priorities, based on a mapping exercise that would identify areas of strength, and a set of realistic, and achievable and measurable targets for the next three to five years.

The strategy should include consideration of the following aspects:

- ✓ Ensure appropriate leadership at the vice-rectorship level to foster cooperation across faculties and international partnerships
- ✓ Strengthen, at central level, provision of information on calls and support for research proposal writing.
- ✓ Ensure that funding supports projects in areas of strengths that have the potential for attracting European and international funds.
- ✓ Secure time for research activities, particularly for young researchers.
- ✓ Develop a monitoring system that would allow analysis of research productivity and provide the basis for informing the public and potential partners of the university's activity.
- ✓ Develop a code of practice to ensure research integrity and enforce it to prevent corruption.

2. The universities should strengthen doctoral education by:

- ✓ Developing a more extensive concept of doctoral schools and entrusting it with an administrative, intellectual and social function. It should be responsible for the admission of doctoral students, provide an orientation day to entering students, promote interdisciplinarity by offering conferences and workshops that bring students from different faculties together, and break the isolation of students by organising social events.
- ✓ Offering annual seminars to supervisors with the opportunity to exchange experience and hone their supervisory skills.
- ✓ Collecting feedback on doctoral education from the students.
- ✓ Ensuring that thesis committees exclude the supervisor, as is the standard practice in much of Europe.

6. Service to society

Service to society is an important aspect of universities' mission in Europe and elsewhere. Involvement in the local community creates opportunities for the universities in acting as an engine of economic and social development and supporting and enriching cultural activities; in return, the community can provide the university with economic support and the students with opportunities to develop professional and soft skills.

The six IEP reports present evidence of the good relationships that the universities maintain with their communities. The reports mention that stakeholders provide student internships and scholarships, and input to curricular development while universities provide social and cultural activities and some technology transfer through contract research.

The universities, however, show varying degrees of intensity with respect to these activities. Two provide a range of services such as a technology park and a development centre and have a structured strategy for this area; one of the two has the aspiration to serve as a model of a diverse, open and sustainable organisation while two at the other end of the spectrum did very little in this area; the remaining two fell in between this continuum and provided some services, sometimes based in the faculties.

There were good examples of close and enduring ties with external stakeholders, and many stakeholders (themselves university alumni) commended the universities for the quality of their graduates. However, perceptions of whether graduates were sufficiently work-ready varied according to the university and the stakeholders. Some of the regional stakeholders felt that the graduates needed to develop such basic skills as time management, communication skills, team working, and problem solving while other stakeholders, mostly based in Skopje, did not mind providing them with further training.

It should be noted that students could be developing these soft-skills through volunteer activities in the local community. This, however, was not mentioned as a practice in any of the IEP reports.

Other areas that could be strengthened include the career centres and the alumni relations. One important limitation to good developments is the lack of administrative staff. Thus, one university had established a centre at university level as a focus for career advising, lifelong learning and alumni activities but could have increased its effectiveness with more staff. Another university had decentralised to the faculties the career centres, alumni relations and stakeholder partnerships. This reduced the impact of those services.

Other functions that appear to be lacking and requiring further development included market research to understand the needs of the local community, tracer studies of graduates, and lifelong learning activities, including through digital learning.

Significantly, the chapter on service to society was generally the shortest in the evaluation reports, reflecting the limited scope of activities in this area. Four reasons could be surmised from the evaluation reports:

- The Treasury's restrictions that hinder those activities.
- The weak economic context of the country, particularly in rural areas. Proximity to the capital city provided more opportunities than the more remote areas of the country.
- The lack of administrative staff to support those functions.
- The decentralised tradition of universities, with some faculties being more active than others but with little exchange of good practice across the faculties.

As a result, service to society was generally not embodied in the person of a vice rector as is often the case in European universities or in a single gateway into the university (such as for instance, a single technology transfer centre serving the whole university) and there is little to no monitoring of the impact of the university on society.

Recommendation to the national authorities:

1. Provide regulations that foster better relationships with stakeholders and allow universities to use the income they generate for further development.
2. Encourage employers to provide staff development to their employees by requiring a number of staff development days per year.

Recommendation to the universities:

The universities should develop an integrated university strategy that would include consideration of the following aspects:

- ✓ Identify strategic national and international partners, based on identified strengths of the university and its strategic development goals.
- ✓ Initiate a systematic approach to engagement with external stakeholders, share good practice across faculties, and monitor those relationships.
- ✓ Support the service mission with qualified administrative staff.
- ✓ Consider volunteering schemes for students as a way of serving society at large and developing the students' soft skills.
- ✓ Develop employers' surveys to collect and analyse their needs (e.g. about knowledge transfer and lifelong learning) as well as their perceptions on the quality of the graduates.

7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key factor in enhancing the quality of universities. It includes activities that promote the university abroad (staff and student exchange, partnerships, etc.) and "internationalisation at home", i.e. activities that take place at the university to increase the attractiveness of the institution and leverage the international dimension in teaching and research.

Based on the six IEP reports, internationalisation is clearly a priority for all six universities. This is signalled by entrusting the operational coordination of this area to a central international office (albeit with a relatively small staff), having dedicated staff in the faculties, and assigning the governance and strategic leadership to a vice rector; one evaluation report noted that a senate committee oversaw this area. Several universities are planning to increase the number of English programmes (albeit without a strategy behind the choice of programmes).

The international priority is translated into the objectives of increasing the number of international partnerships and agreements, as well as promoting both incoming and outgoing student mobility. There is evidence of some staff mobility and a limited number of international research partnerships.

The geographical targets generally include the Balkan and south-eastern European countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Serbia, Slovenia) and, in some cases, further afield (e.g. Brazil, China, Italy, Germany, Japan, and the USA).

All six universities participate in various Erasmus+ programmes; at least one holds an Erasmus Charter. Some take advantage of various funding programmes such as Fullbright, DAAD, Tempus, the Mevlana protocol with Turkey and national government scholarships. One university funds, from its own budget, a programme requiring each faculty to host one international guest lecturer per semester and issued a policy requiring a mandatory period aboard for doctoral students.

While the issue of recognising ECTS earned abroad was relatively rarely mentioned as an obstacle to student mobility, other obstacles were more frequently identified. They included weak foreign language skills, lack of resources to support staff interested in teaching in English, shortage of student residence, lack of institutional attractiveness and reputation, lack of information to students about international opportunities, and differential cost between the Republic of Macedonia and more expensive study destinations.

The set of recommendations proposed in the six IEP reports were strikingly similar. Chief among them was the necessity to develop a strategy with clear priorities and building on areas of strengths. Therefore, the evaluation reports recommended the universities to consider internationalisation in much broader terms than student mobility, to include "internationalisation at home" and to look at internationalisation as a cross-cutting

dimension of all three missions of the university: teaching and learning, research and service to society.

Recommendation to the national authorities:

Develop the international capacity of universities by funding selected university projects aimed at stimulating internationalisation initiatives in such areas as curriculum development, research activities, and services.

Recommendation to the universities:

The universities should develop a strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be measurable and achievable, and a rolling action plan should chart the way for achieving such priorities. The strategy should consider the following aspects:

- ✓ Define the focus, purposes and goals of internationalisation.
- ✓ Identify areas with high potential for attracting international partners and students. This should guide which courses would be taught in English and which international bilateral agreements will be sought.
- ✓ Set targets for the recruitment of international students to an agreed percentage of the overall student population.
- ✓ Improve the foreign language proficiency of staff and students to support mobility in relation to education and research.
- ✓ Make use of student and staff mobility to foster “internationalisation at home”.
- ✓ Promote information to students about international opportunities.
- ✓ Develop online provision and the virtual learning environment to ensure the better and more efficient integration of international students into each university’s programmes.
- ✓ Ensure an adequate administrative staffing level in the international office.

8. Roadmap: four priorities

As this report has shown, the six universities face a number of common challenges: legal instability, low funding levels, particularly for research, and constrained autonomy levels. The external quality assurance process is summative rather than focused on improvement and the internal quality system is, by and large, underdeveloped. Most importantly the strategic capacity of universities requires bolstering. Beyond those general findings the six universities differed greatly according to their size, their profile and specific trajectory.

A number of recommendations have been made in the previous chapters, that are addressed to both the national authorities and the universities. Those are summarised in Annex 1, while this chapter focuses on four priorities that need to be addressed.

Firstly, the funding base as well as the funding mechanisms do not allow each institution to provide a quality learning and research environment. The dispersion of resources results in lowering the overall quality of the national higher education system; this is compounded by the lack of interinstitutional cooperation and weak link with private partners. It would be important to re-think the use of limited resources in a context where (1) the number of institutions is high in relation to the relatively low number of students; (2) some of the satellite campuses are very small; (3) the decentralised nature of most universities leads to spreading resources across too many units; and (4) there is very little cooperation nationally and internationally even although this is key to raising the quality. There is a need to focus on a better use of limited resources through more integrated institutions (with fewer campuses[13] and units), improve interinstitutional cooperation within the country and strengthen the links to external stakeholders.

Secondly, the external quality assurance system does not support the development needs of the country and the universities. The licensing system is not able to filter out dubious providers and the approach of the national agency is reported to be bureaucratic and politicised. At the same time corruption is not effectively dealt with. The key to making changes is to ensure that internal quality assurance is bolstered, and that the external quality assurance system supports this development.

Thirdly, most institutions need to develop their strategic capacity and improve their ability to develop a long-term strategic orientation, which will be endorsed by their students, their staff and their external stakeholders. The strategies should consider all three missions of the universities – teaching, research and service to society – as well as internationalisation, and should explain how internal and external quality assurance is used to monitor progress and enhance the institution.

[13] Cf. Usher and Pelletier (2017) for an interesting discussion of how the Province of Manitoba, Canada, can address the needs of remote, rural areas.

Fourthly, staff issues should be addressed by both the national authorities and the universities to ensure that recruitment, promotion and staff development processes are improved and support both the individual staff members and the universities.

These four priorities should be discussed with the academic community to find ways to address them. The legislative framework will have to reflect and be adjusted to the outcomes of this discussion. In the meantime, the institutions can start to work, in parallel, on many of the aspects that have been identified, which do not require legislation changes, such as internal quality assurance, strategic capacity, development of student-centred learning, etc.

The following roadmap is based on those four priorities. It picks up the recommendations given in the various chapters to national authorities and the institutions. However, the specific recommendations found in chapters 4-7 are not systematically recapitulated in the roadmap since they generally fall under the strategic capacity of institutions.

8.1 An integrated higher education system and strong universities

The authorities should:

- Ensure that the legislative framework is sufficiently flexible to adapt to different university profiles and modes of governance while promoting further the requirements of an "integrated university".
- Funding mechanisms should authorise universities to roll over surplus and design multi-year strategic investment plans in order to allow the universities' decision-making bodies to steer strategic change.
- Ensure that the division of responsibilities between the senate and the rector's board mirror the respective responsibilities of the faculty councils (advisory) and the deans' boards (decision-making). The key principle that should guide that reflection is that the body or person making a decision should be the one that is responsible and accountable.
- Establish a national consortium for joint library resources, including national and international databases.
- Find a way to increase research funding and simplify the procurement process for research activities.
- Provide regulations that foster better relationships with stakeholders and allow universities to use the income they generate for further development.
- Develop the international capacity of universities by funding selected university projects aimed at stimulating internationalisation initiatives in such areas as curriculum development, research activities, and services.

The universities should:

- Strengthen the “integrated university” by:
  - ✓ Bringing together, at regular intervals, staff responsible for specific functions in the faculties at both the management (e.g. vice deans) and administrative levels (e.g. staff responsible for human resources, finance, Erasmus+).
  - ✓ Reducing the number of units and consolidating the number of campuses.
  - ✓ Promoting greater interfaculty cooperation by encouraging interdisciplinary programmes in teaching and research.
  - ✓ Asking faculties to develop an action plan, aligned with the university’s strategy, and organising yearly meetings between the rector and each dean to review the activities undertaken during the year and the proposed improvement plans for the following year.
- Promote student engagement by:
  - ✓ Promoting student involvement in the formulation and implementation of the university strategy as well as in institutional decision-making processes and quality assurance processes by working actively with the student parliament and supporting the student organisations, for instance, through leadership training and orientation to the governance of the university.
  - ✓ Reviewing, with the help of students, how students learn about their rights and responsibilities (student handbook, orientation day for new students) to ensure that they retain that information.

8.2 A strong internal and external quality assurance system

The authorities should:

- Ensure a robust *ex ante* licensing process to avoid the establishment of institutions of dubious quality.
- Ensure that HEAEB is in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), notably with respect to its human and financial resources and its independence.
- Promote internal quality procedures by providing resources to the universities and capacity building workshops and by asking HEAEB to conduct institutional quality audits.

The universities should further develop their quality assurance mechanisms while being mindful of promoting and embedding a shared understanding of quality concepts and a non-bureaucratic quality culture. Specifically, the universities are encouraged to:

- Use the ESG 2015 Part 1 as a guide for developing IQA processes (e.g. formal and informal mechanisms for collecting student feedback, alumni tracer surveys to help adapt study programmes).

- Develop a shared understanding of which internal quality assurance mechanisms require developments and what type of quality culture should be developed in each university. This can be achieved by training staff and students, and organising frequent discussions about quality across the faculties.

- Enhance the quality and use of the student questionnaires by forming a committee that would include academic staff and students to work on the list of questions (content and formulation), decide on the frequency and timing of the questionnaire, reassure that the questionnaire is anonymous, and explain, on a regular basis, how results have been used.

- Exploit the data and information system, which holds great potential for the analysis of patterns of student success and failures and for developing appropriate responses. Faculties should be asked to use the full functionalities of the system to allow for more meaningful data analysis and opportunities for improvement across the university.

- Require that each unit produces an annual report to show how it is enhancing its activities and responding to the self-evaluations and to any externally organised QA process. This report should be discussed with the rector.

- Assign appropriate human and financial resources to this area. For instance, consider assigning the IQA responsibility to a senior staff member, who would be reporting to a senior university officer (such as a vice rector or even the rector).

- Review regularly the IQA system in order to ensure that it continues to be effective.

8.3 Increasing the strategic capacity of institutions

The universities should bolster strategic capacity in all areas of the university by:

- Ensuring wide ownership of the strategy by consulting broadly within the university (i.e. including academic and administrative staff and students) and with external stakeholders.

- Elaborating a distinct profile for the university as part of the vision and mission statements.

- Setting out informed and realistic priorities; the associated action plan should identify timelines, responsible persons and university bodies, resources and performance indicators which would be monitored regularly and be part of the internal quality process.

- Establishing an independent and regular source of advice by consulting external stakeholders.

- Benchmarking the university's activities against a set of foreign universities and consider establishing an international advisory board to strengthen international benchmarking.

8.4 Investing in staff

The authorities should:

- Discourage inbreeding by offering incentives for academic staff mobility within the country and abroad and invest in staff development.

- Provide a plan for academic staff recruitment to allow universities to project themselves in the future.

- Review the policy about staff contracts. Specifically, remove the obstacles to international staff recruitment, review the policy of one-year short-term contracts to make it less constraining and forbid the practice of multiple appointments for those who are employed full time.

- Invest in the learning infrastructure and in staff development (e.g. by funding a national forum on teaching and learning or sending staff abroad for staff development).

- Support the organisation of international conferences to promote good practices on how to develop a research culture in universities.

The universities should promote staff quality by:

- Ensuring that the recruitment and promotion criteria and processes are robust and transparent. In particular, discourage inbreeding by setting a limit on the number of "home-grown" staff per department and fund short-term periods of international staff mobility.

- Increasing the professionalism of administrative staff through appropriate training.

*

* *

It is hoped that those recommendations will be discussed nationally and will lead to useful institutional developments in the country.

Annex 1: Summary of recommendations

Summary of recommendations to national authorities

- Governance
  - Ensure that the legislative framework is sufficiently flexible to adapt to different university profiles and modes of governance while promoting further the requirements of an "integrated university".
  - Funding mechanisms should authorise universities to roll over surplus and design multi-year strategic investment plans in order to allow the universities' decision-making bodies to steer strategic change.
  - Ensure that the division of responsibilities between the senate and the rector's board mirror the respective responsibilities of the faculty councils (advisory) and the deans' boards (decision-making). The key principle that should guide that reflection is that the body or person making a decision should be the one that is responsible and accountable.
  - Discourage inbreeding by offering incentives for academic staff mobility within the country and abroad and invest in staff development.
  - Provide a plan for academic staff recruitment to allow universities to project themselves in the future.
  - Review the policy about staff contracts. Specifically, remove the obstacles to international staff recruitment, review the policy of one-year short-term contracts to make it less constraining and forbid the practice of multiple appointments for those who are employed full time.
- Quality Assurance
  - Ensure a robust *ex ante* licensing process to avoid the establishment of institutions of dubious quality.
  - Ensure that HEAEB is in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), notably with respect to its human and financial resources and its independence.
  - Promote internal quality procedures by providing resources to the universities and capacity building workshops and by asking HEAEB to conduct institutional quality audits.
- Teaching and Learning

- Invest in the learning infrastructure and in staff development (e.g. by funding a national forum on teaching and learning or sending staff abroad for staff development).
- Relax the limitations on switching majors but limit the number of times student can re-take examinations.
- Provide incentives to attract students to STEM fields.
- Review the timing and duration of the internships, in consultation with employers and the universities, in order to improve their effectiveness.

- Research
  - Establish a national consortium for joint library resources, including national and international databases.
  - Find a way to increase research funding and simplify the procurement process for research activities.
  - Support the organisation of international conferences to promote good practices on how to develop a research culture in universities.

- Service to Society
  - Provide regulations that foster better relationships with stakeholders and allow universities to use the income they generate for further development.
  - Encourage employers to provide staff development to their university-educated employees by requiring a number of staff development days per year.

- Internationalisation
  - Develop the international capacity of universities by funding selected university projects aimed at stimulating internationalisation initiatives in such areas as curriculum development, research activities, and services.

Summary of recommendations to higher education institutions

- Governance
  - Strengthen the "integrated university" by:
    - ✓ Bringing together, at regular intervals, staff responsible for specific functions in the faculties at both the management (e.g. vice deans) and administrative levels (e.g. staff responsible for human resources, finance, Erasmus+).
    - ✓ Reducing the number of units and consolidating the number of campuses.

- ✓ Promoting greater interfaculty cooperation by encouraging interdisciplinary programmes in teaching and research.

- ✓ Asking faculties to develop an action plan, aligned with the university's strategy, and organising yearly meetings between the rector and each dean to review the activities undertaken during the year and the proposed improvement plans for the following year.

– Promote staff quality:

  - ✓ Ensure that the recruitment and promotion criteria and processes are robust and transparent. In particular, discourage inbreeding by setting a limit on the number of "home-grown" staff per department and fund short-term periods of international staff mobility.

  - ✓ Increase the professionalism of administrative staff through appropriate training.

– Promote student engagement:

  - ✓ Promote student involvement in the formulation and implementation of the university strategy as well as in institutional decision-making processes and quality assurance processes by working actively with the student parliament and supporting the student organisations, for instance, through leadership training and orientation to the governance of the university.

  - ✓ Review, with the help of students, how students learn about their rights and responsibilities (student handbook, orientation day for new students) to ensure that they retain that information.

  - ✓ Ensure a fair and transparent complaints and appeals process for the students.

– Bolster strategic capacity:

  - ✓ Ensure wide ownership of the strategy by consulting broadly within the university (i.e. including academic and administrative staff and students) and with external stakeholders.

  - ✓ Elaborate a distinct profile for the university as part of the vision and mission statements.

  - ✓ Set out informed and realistic priorities; the associated action plan should identify timelines, responsible persons and university bodies, resources and performance indicators which would be monitored regularly and be part of the internal quality process.

  - ✓ Establish an independent and regular source of advice by consulting external stakeholders.

- ✓ Benchmark the university's activities against a set of foreign universities and consider establishing an international advisory board to strengthen international benchmarking.

– Quality assurance

Universities should further develop their quality assurance mechanisms while being mindful of promoting and embedding a shared understanding of quality concepts and a non-bureaucratic quality culture. Specifically, the universities are encouraged to:

- ✓ Use the ESG 2015 Part 1 as a guide for developing IQA processes (e.g. formal and informal mechanisms for collecting student feedback, alumni tracer surveys to help adapt study programmes).
- ✓ Develop a shared understanding of which internal quality assurance mechanisms require developments and what type of quality culture should be developed in each university. This can be achieved by training staff and students, and organising frequent discussions about quality across the faculties.
- ✓ Enhance the quality and use of the student questionnaires by forming a committee that would include academic staff and students to work on the list of questions (content and formulation), decide on the frequency and timing of the questionnaire, reassure that the questionnaire is anonymous, and explain, on a regular basis, how results have been used.
- ✓ Exploit the data and information system, which holds great potential for the analysis of patterns of student success and failures and for developing appropriate responses. Faculties should be asked to use the full functionalities of the system to allow for more meaningful data analysis and opportunities for improvement across the university.
- ✓ Require that each unit produces an annual report to show how it is enhancing its activities and responding to the self-evaluations and to any externally organised QA process. This report should be discussed with the rector.
- ✓ Assign appropriate human and financial resources to this area. For instance, consider assigning the IQA responsibility to a senior staff member, who would be reporting to a senior university officer (such as a vice rector or even the rector).
- ✓ Review regularly the IQA system in order to ensure that it continues to be effective.

– Teaching and Learning

The universities should develop strategies for teaching and learning. The strategy should identify priorities, based on identified strengths. It should develop a timeline, identify

resources, responsible staff members and university bodies, success indicators and monitoring mechanisms to measure progress. The implementation of the strategy should be driven by the university to ensure consistency across faculties. The strategy should consider the following aspects:

- ✓ Review all study programmes across the university to eliminate duplication and to increase efficiency. This should also include aligning the university's educational offer to both the available resources and its strengths in a well-defined set of disciplinary fields. This will help the universities to optimise their limited resources.

- ✓ Develop criteria for approving existing and new study programmes, promote interdisciplinarity through interfaculty cooperation and integrate quality assurance mechanisms as both an *ex-ante* element in designing future study programmes and an *ex-post* process to assess performance when the programmes are already running.

- ✓ Consider learning outcomes when developing study programmes and the associated assessment formats. These should include subject specific outcomes and generic competences, factoring in labour-market needs. At the same time, the pervasive focus on employability should be balanced with "Bildung", that is, learning for personal development, learning to learn, developing a critical attitude and other generic skills in order to allow graduates to develop professionally.

- ✓ Assess the quality of internships in line with the learning outcomes that have been identified.

- ✓ Develop student-centred learning further by promoting the following aspects:

    - active teaching methodology
    - better student support to develop their autonomy as learners
    - personalised and flexible learning paths
    - student self-assessment
    - e-learning and e-textbooks
    - ongoing pedagogic development for teachers (e.g. offering collegial forum for the exchange of good teaching practice)

- ✓ Review student services to ensure that they are standardised across the university, fit-for-purpose and focused on the diversity of student needs, including those of at-risk students.

- ✓ Strengthen the information flow to students through a variety of formats such as a regular newsletter, the website, emails, and social networks, including about the right and responsibilities of students, and the complaints and appeals

procedures.

- ✓ Monitor student's ethical behaviour and develop appropriate penalties.
- ✓ Increase the number of visiting lecturers, including those from outside the country in order to promote new ways of teaching.
- ✓ Review the quality of the university's library and IT infrastructure and address key deficit areas.
- ✓ Provide a social environment for students in order to promote their greater involvement in university governance. This should include social space and amenities (e.g. cafeteria) and an active student life which ultimately support the development of their soft-skills and greater academic and professional success.
- ✓ Keep accurate records of student enrolment, achievement, completion and retention. Identify problems, analyse the underlying reasons and address them. Particularly, consider different approaches for addressing the existing drop-out rates in the first year, including through the introduction of a bridging programme for high-school leavers who lack some of the key study skills and subject-related knowledge.

– Research

The universities should bolster research activities by developing a research strategy, with clear priorities, based on a mapping exercise that would identify areas of strength, and a set of realistic, and achievable and measurable targets for the next three to five years. The strategy should include consideration of the following aspects:

- ✓ Ensure appropriate leadership at the vice-rectorship level to foster cooperation across faculties and international partnerships
- ✓ Strengthen, at central level, provision of information on calls and support for research proposal writing.
- ✓ Ensure that funding support projects in areas of strengths that have the potential for attracting European and international funds.
- ✓ Secure time for research activities, particularly for young researchers.
- ✓ Develop a monitoring system that would allow analysis of research productivity and provide the basis for informing the public and potential partners of the university's activity.
- ✓ Develop a code of practice to ensure research integrity and enforce it to prevent corruption.

The universities should strengthen doctoral education by:

- ✓ Developing a more extensive concept of doctoral schools and entrusting it with an administrative, intellectual and social function. It should be responsible for the admission of doctoral students, provide an orientation day to entering students, promote interdisciplinarity by offering conferences and workshops that bring students from different faculties together, and break the isolation of students by organising social events.
- ✓ Offering annual seminars to supervisors with the opportunity to exchange experience and hone their supervisory skills.
- ✓ Collecting feedback on doctoral education from the students.
- ✓ Ensuring that thesis committees exclude the supervisor, as is the standard practice in much of Europe.

– Service to society

The universities should develop an integrated university strategy that would include consideration of the following aspects:

- ✓ Identify strategic national and international partners, based on identified strengths of the university and its strategic development goals.
- ✓ Initiate a systematic approach to engagement with external stakeholders, share good practice across faculties, and monitor those relationships.
- ✓ Support the service mission with qualified administrative staff.
- ✓ Consider volunteering schemes for students as a way of serving society at large and developing the students' soft skills.
- ✓ Develop employers' surveys to collect and analyse their needs (e.g. about knowledge transfer and lifelong learning) as well as their perceptions on the quality of the graduates.

– Internationalisation

The universities should develop a strategy with clear priorities for internationalisation. These priorities should be measurable and achievable, and a rolling action plan should chart the way for achieving such priorities. The strategy should consider the following aspects:

- ✓ Define the focus, purposes and goals of internationalisation.
- ✓ Identify areas with high potential for attracting international partners and students. This should guide which courses would be taught in English and which international bilateral agreements will be sought.

- ✓ Set targets for the recruitment of international students to an agreed percentage of the overall student population.
- ✓ Improve the foreign language proficiency of staff and students to support mobility in relation to education and research.
- ✓ Make use of student and staff mobility to foster “internationalisation at home”.
- ✓ Promote information to students about international opportunities.
- ✓ Develop online provision and the virtual learning environment to ensure the better and more efficient integration of international students into each university’s programmes.
- ✓ Ensure an adequate administrative staffing level in the international office.

Annex 2: The Institutional Evaluation Programme

1.1 General approach

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

The distinctive features of IEP are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

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

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

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:

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

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

1.2 Steps in the evaluation

The project took place between April 2016 and May 2018.

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

1.2.1 Preparatory workshops

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

- A workshop for the participating institutions was offered to introduce them to the *Guidelines for Institutions,* the IEP philosophy and methodology and to respond to questions regarding the self-evaluation process and report.

- A workshop for the evaluation teams was organised during the 2016 Annual Seminar, which gathers together the IEP pool of experts at the beginning of the academic year. This workshop focused largely on the Macedonian higher education context.

1.2.2 Self-evaluation process and report

Following the workshop for institutions, they prepared self-evaluation reports. The IEP stresses that the self-evaluation process is as important as the resulting self-evaluation report. The *Guidelines for Institutions* provided advice on how to select the members of the self-evaluation group and ideas on how to involve the university community in the process: from gathering initial information to collecting feedback on the draft self-evaluation report.

1.2.3 Evaluation visits

Two institutions had been evaluated in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 respectively, and therefore underwent follow-up evaluations, in which the IEP team visited the institutions once for a period of four days.

The IEP teams visited the rest of the institutions twice:

- Each of the first visits lasted two days. The purpose of the first visit was to allow the team to become acquainted with the institution in its local context and to request additional information if necessary. Meetings were held with institutional and faculty leaders, academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders.

- Each of the second visits lasted three days (except in the smaller institutions where the visit was a day and a half). The purpose of the second visit was to deepen the team's knowledge of the institution and to formulate and confirm its findings. This visit ended with an oral presentation of the findings and recommendations to the institutional community and, in some cases, external stakeholders.

1.2.4 Evaluation reports

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

1.2.5 Post-evaluation workshop

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

Annex 3: Some excerpts from the Law

Article 94

The contents of the study program for the first cycle of academic studies referred to in Article 99 of this Law should correspond in at least 80% to the contents and the learning outcomes of the same or similar study program which is delivered by a university that is among the top 50 in the respective area at the ranking list prepared by the Center for World Class Universities at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University in the People's Republic of China, except for the freely elective subjects.

As an exception to paragraph 7 of this Article, the contents of the study program for the first cycle of academic studies referred to in Article 99 of this Law in the field of legal sciences should correspond in at least 60% to the contents and the learning outcomes of the same or similar study program which studies the European continental law and which is delivered by a university in the European Higher Education Area and which is among the top 20 in the respective area at the ranking list prepared by the Center for World Class Universities at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University in the People's Republic of China, except for the freely elective subjects.

Paragraph 7 of this Article shall not apply to the study programs in the fields of arts, national history and linguistics.

Article 99

The profile, aims and starting points for developing study programs shall be in detail regulated by a decree for national framework for higher education qualifications adopted by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia on proposal of the minister responsible for the issues in higher education.

Article 100

The university or the unit within its composition, the higher education institution, that is, the school of higher professional education shall be obliged to organize a study stay for at least 30 of its students of not less than one month, and not more than three months at the top 500 universities ranked under the Shanghai Ranking, that is, the top 200 universities ranked in the respective scientific area, that is, the top 100 universities ranked for MBA program under the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, US News and Report, and Times Higher Education Supplement – World University Ranking.

The students referred to in paragraph 5 of this Article shall be necessary to have an average achievement of over 9 in the moment of selection for a study stay, as well as to have knowledge of the English language which the candidate proves by a certificate of language knowledge, that is, (TOEFL) - at least 74 points for online examination which is not older than two years as of the day of issuance, (IELTS) - at least 6 points which is not older than two years as of the day of issuance, (TOLES) - foundation level, (ILEC) - B2 pass, and Cambridge Certificate of Preliminary English - (B1).

The university or the unit within its composition, the higher education institution, that is, the school of higher professional education shall pay the costs for the stay, scholarship, insurance, transportation and similar, incurred in the activities defined in paragraphs 5 and 7 of this Article out of the revenues managed independently by the units, the higher education institution, that is, the school of higher professional education.

Article 112

The ministry responsible for issues in the field of higher education shall, every year, provide translated and printed professional literature of the 50 university textbooks that are used at the first ranked universities under the Shanghai Ranking.

References

ESG (2015). *The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.* https://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/72/7/European_Standards_and_Guidelines_for_Quality_Assurance_in_the_EHEA_2015_MC_613727.pdf

European Union (2016a). *From University to Employment: Higher Education Provision and Labour Market Needs in the Western Balkans*. *Synthesis Report.* Directorate General for Education and Culture, Erasmus+. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

European Union (2016b) *From University to Employment: Higher Education Provision and Labour Market Needs in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. Directorate General for Education and Culture, Erasmus+. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurydice (2015). *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Publications:The_European_Higher_Education_Area_in_2015:_Bologna_Process_Implementation_Report

Horta, H., Velos, F.M. and Grediaga, R (2010), Navel gazing: academic inbreeding and scientific productivity, *Management Science*, Vol. 56, N° 3, March 2010, pp. 414-429. http://www.academia.edu/263364/Navel_Gazing_Academic_Inbreeding_and_Scientific_Productivity; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

Horta, H (2013), Deepening our understanding of academic inbreeding effects on research information exchange and scientific output: new insights for academic based research, *High Educ*, Vol. 65, pp. 487-510. http://www.academia.edu/1887008/Deepening_our_understanding_of_academic_inbreeding_effects_on_research_information_exchange_and_scientific_output_new_insights_for_academic_based_research; last retrieved on 8 July 2014.

Pecakovska, S. (2017). "Curse of the Small Countries: Historical Overview of the Development of a Quality Assurance System - Case Study of Macedonian Higher Education". Paper presented at the *European Quality Assurance Forum, Responsible QA – Committing to Impact*. University of Latvia, Riga, 23-25 November 2017.

Rathenau Instituut (2017) "Share of graduates in science and technology in higher education compared internationally". https://www.rathenau.nl/en/page/share-graduates-science-and-technology-higher-education-compared-internationally

Salmi, J. (2017). *Modern Governance for the Macedonian Universities: International Trends and Reform Options*. Report prepared for the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science, January 2017.

Usher, A and Pelletier, Y. (2017). *Government of Manitoba: Manitoba College Review–System-Wide Report.* Toronto: Higher Education Strategy Associates. http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/4414934/Manitoba-College-Review.pdf