

**UNIVERSITY OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SAN MARINO**
EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of the Republic of San Marino (UniRSM). Taking place in 2024, this was the first IEP evaluation in which UniRSM participated. The evaluation was conducted in collaboration between the EUA-IEP and the Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO).

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. 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 for improvement

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

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

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

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

1.2 The University of the Republic of San Marino's profile

The University of the Republic of San Marino or Università degli Studi della Repubblica di San Marino (UniRSM) is a distinguished institution based in the Republic of San Marino. Given the small size of San Marino, the university is an integral part of the society, closely connected to its public and

private entities and supported by the state of San Marino. Founded in 1985, the university has experienced significant changes in recent years. Its student population has grown five-fold in just a decade, now hosting just over 1000 students coming from San Marino as well as from all Italian regions. Additionally, there are also around 1000 participants in smaller training activities, such as seminars or specific trainings organised by the university. Over 85% of these students are Italian, about 14% are Sammarinese, and less than 1% come from other international backgrounds.

The operational and legal context of the university has significantly changed in the past two years as the legislation guiding the institution has been revised, bringing both new obligations and new opportunities to the university. From the university's perspective, some of the most significant of these recent changes have been the entry to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the joining of the Erasmus + Programme, the requirement for periodical external quality evaluation, as well as the ability to recruit international academic staff on full-time permanent contracts.

The university is structured into three departments: the Department of Economics, Science, Engineering, and Design or *Dipartimento di Economia, Scienze, Ingegneria e Design* (DESID), the Department of Humanities or *Dipartimento di Scienze Umane* (DSU), and the Department of History and Law or *Dipartimento Storico Giuridico* (DSG). The university hosts five bachelor's programmes with approximately 750 students, three master's programmes with approximately 100 students, and two PhD programmes with just under 40 students. The university also offers a number of first and second level professionalising diplomas and advanced training courses enrolling over 150 students altogether. Additionally, approximately 1000 trainees participate in specific training activities or seminars organised by the university in collaboration with other institutional bodies or academic partners. The university activities are guided by a strong ethos of student-centeredness and service to the community, as well as social inclusion. At the same time, the large reliance on visiting and part-time staff and limited resources, especially those available for scientific research, constitute a significant constraint, which the university has tried to overcome by allocating limited internal funds for research activities.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the self-evaluation group, appointed by the rector in December 2023 and chaired by Professor Luigi Guerra. The group comprised of representatives of the academic and administrative staff, as well as a student representative. The members of the self-evaluation group are:

- Professor Luigi Guerra, President, Department of Humanities (DSU)
- Professor Michele Baccocchi, Vice President, Department of Economics, Science, Engineering and Design (DESID)
- Professor Elena D'Amelio, Department of Humanities (DSU)
- Professor Luca Gorgolini, Department of History and Law (DSG)
- Professor Riccardo Varini, Department of Economics, Science, Engineering and Design (DESID)
- Paula M. Cenci, Department of Economics, Science, Engineering and Design (DESID)

- Francesca Stefanelli, University Quality Assurance Committee (PQA)
- Tea Masi, Student

The self-evaluation report (SER) was compiled by the SER group with the help of relevant administrative and academic personnel. The draft was widely discussed in the various university bodies such as the academic senate, university board of administration, directors and councils of degree programmes, and several specialised committees in the university. The people met by the IEP team widely said they were familiar with the SER and considered it a good representation of the university and its circumstances.

The SER of the UniRSM, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team on 5 September 2024. The online visit of the evaluation team to UniRSM took place from 15-16 October 2024. The onsite visit took place from 3-6 December 2024. In between the online meetings and the site visit UniRSM provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

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

- Jānis Vētra, former rector, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia, team chair
- Andrea Toniolo, former dean, Facoltà Teologica del Triveneto, Italy (AVEPRO)
- Luis Felipe Navarro Marfá, former rector, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Italy (AVEPRO)
- Katarzyna Gajda, doctoral student, University of Warsaw, Poland
- Terhi Nokkala, research professor, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, team coordinator

The team thanks the rector and his team, the self-evaluation group, the liaison person for the IEP evaluation, and the entire university community for their warm welcome during the two visits. The openness and warmth of the university community made the team's task not only easy, but also enjoyable.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university strategy is built on the three pillars of education, research and service to society, which are outlined in the university's SER as follows: *"The University is committed to advancing science and culture through an eco-sustainable and supportive vision, supporting high-level research and education. In particular, the University actively engages in teaching and research activities, fostering connections with social and professional sectors, mostly within San Marino. The advancement of knowledge is further guaranteed by many scientific and technical consultancies, contributing to the growth of both national and international cultural and scientific collaborations."*

(p.4) The key principles guiding all university activities, outlined in the SER and confirmed by the various members of the university community interviewed by the team include: student centrality; inclusion, gender equality, and well-being; internationalisation and mobility; stakeholder

engagement; transparency, legality, and integrity; as well as sustainability and environmental protection. Of these principles, the team feels that especially the territorial mission, student-centredness afforded by the small and tight-knit organisation, and the aim of creating an inclusive community, are reflected in both the strategy and governance of the university as well as the daily life of the community.

2.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The rector plays a central role in the coordination of the university, including the Academic Senate and the University Board of Administration. Due to the small size of the university, a small number of people hold multiple positions in university governance and administration.

Governance

University governance is based on clearly defined, many-layered governance structures and processes. Its key structures are defined in the Delegated Decree, 30 November 2023, No. 169, Institutional and Organisational Structure of the University of the Republic of San Marino, which determines the key bodies of the university's governance, namely the rector, the academic senate and the university board of administration.

The two highest decision-making bodies of the university are the academic senate and the university board of administration, each with its specific mandate. The academic senate is chaired by the rector and comprises department directors, two faculty representatives from each department, one student representative, and one technical staff representative, all with voting rights. The senate is responsible for leading and strategic decision-making pertaining to the scientific and education activities of the university. The university board of administration similarly is chaired by the rector and comprises the general director, one professor from each department, one student representative, and one administrative staff member. Furthermore, the university board of administration comprises two members appointed by the state of San Marino, one representing the governing parties, and one the opposition. All members have equal voting rights. The university board of administration is responsible for its overall strategy, approving the budget and financial statements of the institution, as well as ensuring the alignment of the strategy and resource management of the university.

The rector is the head of the university, and chairs both the academic senate and the university board of administration. According to the current law, the rector's term is three years, and the rector can be reappointed once. Given that the change in the law is very recent, the current rector has already been in his position for a decade. He has now been appointed for the first three-year term according to the current legislation.

The university also has a students' council, comprising elected student representatives in the governing bodies such as the academic senate, the university board of administration, the department councils and the territorial pact. The students' council has an advisory role, and it represents the interests of the students to the university through dialogue between the university staff and students.

At the departmental level the main administrative bodies are the directors of departments and the department councils, which comprise the representatives of academic and administrative staff and students. The degree programme councils decide on the matters pertaining to the degree

programmes. Additionally, the university also has a number of specific representative bodies, such as the quality assurance committee (PQA).

In addition to the representative bodies, another noteworthy feature of the university organisation are the rector's delegates, established in the Delegated Decree, 30 November 2023, No. 169. The rector's delegates are one of the arrangements that enables the university to mitigate the challenges arising from limited personnel. The delegates, proposed by the rector to the academic senate and the university board of administration, are appointed by the rector. The delegates are academics who also typically conduct important administrative and representative duties, such as heading departments or sitting in various other university governing bodies. The delegates are for the most part not financially compensated for these tasks; they only receive a compensation if their portfolio is particularly labour-intensive or if the same person holds multiple portfolios. At present, there are 17 delegate portfolios pertaining to, for example, research, third mission, and relationships with local stakeholders.

Another significant framework that bears mentioning in this context is the territorial pact. Serving an important advisory function, the pact brings together the university and the stakeholders representing the state of San Marino, the other significant societal stakeholders in San Marino, such as representatives from local schools, administration, employers, trade unions, sports and cultural associations, students, and academic staff, as well as the representatives of significant employers in the wider Emilia-Romagna region. Under the territorial pact, the university has regular meetings with the significant stakeholders to discuss issues such as the future development of the university, proposals for new degree programmes and fundraising efforts. The territorial pact meetings are chaired by the rector.

Financing

Approximately 40% percent of the university's funding comes from the state of San Marino. The remaining 60% comes from the student fees and the selling of services such as technical measurement and analysis services. The university recognises that in the future expenditure will increase due to the planned recruitment of academic staff on permanent contracts, and the enhanced support of crucial infrastructure such as IT services and access to research databases. Given the dependence on two main funding sources, the state provisions and student fees, the university is keenly aware of the need to balance the resources between the different activities of the university.

The university's funding allocation is closely linked to both its strategic plan as well as the multiannual recruitment plan. The university's budget is approved by the university board of administration and overseen by the general accounting office. The team understood that the departments and degree programmes have great autonomy in managing the resources allocated for them in the budget for implementation of teaching, research, and third mission. The process is managed through a digitalised system that enables the departments to request the release of funding allocated to them for various tasks.

Staffing

The recruitment processes of full and associate professors are regulated by the University Decree 46/2024, Regulations for the discipline of the appointment of Full and Associate Professors. New recruitments are planned as part of the three-year plan for academic staff, according to the needs presented by the departments, and are subject to availability of financial resources. The University Decree 47/2024, Regulations on the assignment of teaching, research, and collaboration contracts, regulates the procedures for hiring the academic staff on other types of contracts. While most recruitments are conducted through open competition, the university also has the option to directly appoint staff from collaborating universities for specific positions, as per existing agreements on joint degrees. In cases of specific urgency, staff on fixed-term contracts can be appointed outside the planning period. The main university administrative bodies are involved in the process of appointing new staff.

The university comprises approximately 160 (permanent and non-permanent) academic and 50 administrative staff. The university leadership met by the team recognised that continuous updating of staff knowledge and skills was necessary owing to the new digitalised processes as well as the need to provide completely new types of services such as support for increased internationalisation and competitive international research funding applications.

Until very recently, the legislation of the Republic of San Marino required individuals employed on permanent full-time contracts in the public sector, including the university, to hold either Italian citizenship or permanent residence status in San Marino. This has constituted a significant constraint to the university staffing policy. Therefore, while the university has been able to hire administrative staff locally, it has largely relied on fixed-term, part-time academics holding second posts in Italian universities. While this has enabled the university to draw from the expertise of collaborating universities, it has at the same time limited its ability to establish an independent attractive career path and to attract international talent. However, the recent ratification of Delegate Decree No. 133 of 2024 will change the regulation regarding staffing, enabling the university to hire permanent full-time staff from outside San Marino. The full implications of the new decree are yet to be seen at the time of the IEP evaluation.

2.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The framework of the university governance appears to be establishing clear lines of decision-making and reporting in all university activities, and the small size of the community facilitates easy communication. The team was also told that the academic senate and other university governing bodies take an active approach in discussing all affairs of the university, rather than merely rubber-stamping decisions. The student council collects and mediates student initiatives.

The small size of the community, and the limited number of people being employed on permanent contracts, means that in practice several of the same individuals sit in multiple representative bodies. Furthermore, the rector wields a very significant influence over the institution, due to his position as the chair of the senate, the university board of administration, and the territorial pact, as well as his personal influence and role in the development of the university over the past decade. This allows him to manage the university based on excellent information about the state of all affairs. The same goes, in a somewhat more limited scope, for the other key figures in the university, such as the general director, the vice-rectors, the heads of departments, and other key academics. The university representatives explained that they valued the ease of communication and student-centredness

within the institution so much that they would be unwilling to jeopardise the current system by expanding too quickly or widely.

The university also collects information about its impact in San Marino and in the wider region through the territorial pact meetings and other formal and informal means of communication with stakeholders, upon which the university lays great emphasis. The team learned that the ties within San Marino as a small country are also tight. For example, the general director used to hold a position within the state administration before being recruited to the university. These close ties with official bodies, including representation from the community such as the university board of administration and the territorial pact within the community, enable the university to both advocate for its own position and to tailor its offer to meet the needs of the community.

2.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team would like to point out the following strengths regarding governance and management at the university:

- The rector and other key leaders are very experienced
- The university has clearly documented strategies and processes that are a foundation for further development
- The small size of the university community facilitates easy communication

At the same time, however, the team feels that the university governance contains certain weaknesses:

- Key leadership on which a great deal of power and responsibilities are concentrated, is approaching retirement
- There is little indication that the university is thinking of bringing up the next leadership group
- Due to the impact of informal processes stemming largely from the tight-knit university community, early-stage implementation of strategic decisions tends to be opaque for the larger community within and outside the university. This risks valuable viewpoints potentially being lost.

In order to help the university to improve its governance and management capacity, the team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university's consideration:

- Start early in terms of building capacity for renewal of the leadership
- Grow the capacity amongst staff for a wider distribution of roles and responsibilities to avoid the "multiple hats" problem
- Ensure that preparation of decisions is transparent and follows the university regulations
- Ensure that relevant authorities and actors have adequate skills and knowledge to properly apply/implement the recently changed regulations

3. Quality culture

3.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university strives to foster a quality culture across all activities. The four key principles that guide the quality assurance activities of the university are described in the university's SER, and include the following:

- **Integrated and Shared Strategic Planning:** The system clearly defines and integrates strategic planning that is shared across the University, ensuring alignment with overall objectives.
- **Active Participation:** It encourages active and conscious participation from students and all members of the University community in achieving clearly defined improvement objectives, communicated effectively and shared transparently.
- **Community Involvement:** The system involves the academic community by providing simple, timely, up-to-date, and comprehensive information about quality assurance processes and initiatives.
- **Education and Awareness:** It educates and raises awareness at all levels and roles within the University community about the importance and benefits of quality assurance practices, fostering a culture that values continuous improvement. "(p.10-11)

Conceptually, the university has developed two quality assurance (QA) systems. The QA system for education and student services ensures alignment of the educational offer and student-facing services with university strategy. It also ensures adequacy of the resources while monitoring and updating their quality. The QA system for research and third mission does the same for those two activities and ensures their alignment with university strategy. The team understands that the university is eager to formalise and implement the comprehensive QA systems and procedures not only as a bureaucratic exercise, but as a tool to genuinely help the university solve potential challenges.

3.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The need for having a QA system is prescribed in the Law 69/2023, Framework Law on Higher Education of the Republic of San Marino. The law aligns the higher education in the country with the EHEA and its Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which emphasise the importance of comprehensive internal and external QA and continuous improvement of quality. The university is autonomous in establishing its QA system, but the law further mandates a periodic external evaluation every six years. In accordance with the law, the university has recently designed a QA system comprising an external and internal element. The need for a periodic external evaluation is filled at present through the university's participation in the IEP evaluation.

The process of building the QA system comprised two stages. In 2019, the university established an independent evaluation body (OIV) to oversee the planning of QA for teaching, research, third mission and services. The OIV presented its report in early 2023, after which the university ratified a QA policy document and established an internal QA committee (PQA) to monitor the implementing of the

regular QA cycle. The team was furthermore told that the OIV will periodically review the functioning of the QA system.

The university has prepared a comprehensive quality handbook and guidelines for the educational offer, research, as well as the third mission. It is clear from the SER that the QA procedures are aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs), part 1, which each individual standard clearly outlined. However, both the SER and the interviewees indicated that while the QA of teaching and services are already largely implemented, there is still some way to go for the implementation of the QA of research and third mission.

In the QA of the educational offer an important role is played by the periodically collected student questionnaires on teaching and services. The team was told that the surveys are modelled after the Alma Laurea survey used by Italian universities, with UniRSM adding further descriptors to the Alma Laurea template according to its own needs. The analysed survey results are discussed in multiple levels of the organisation, including a peer committee comprising both students and teachers, thus allowing for a deeply participatory and student-centred approach to QA. The team was told that most issues can be addressed at the level of the degree programme, but that in cases that cannot be resolved it is possible to escalate the resolution to the departmental or even senate level. The senate will also discuss the annual QA report that compiles the results from all programmes and services. The team was also told that the OIV will pay special attention to any problems identified in the report. At present the students are not receiving any formal feedback on measures taken as a result of the questionnaires, but in the future, as the team was told, the peer committee will receive information of the action taken.

3.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The QA system comprises several stages and bodies, each with its own task to ensure the collection and analysis of information about the quality of university's activities. The Independent Evaluation Body (OIV) monitors the fitness for purpose of the internal QA system. Furthermore, the university's committees for education, research and third mission can propose further action to raise the overall quality of the university's activities.

In addition to the formal procedures, the university's small size and student-centred culture enables the students, upon identification of a problem, to immediately bring it to the attention of their teachers. This approach is also favoured by OIV, who considers addressing potential issues during a course preferable to leaving it to the formal procedure at the end of the course. This is the reason why some students consider the formal questionnaires as a mere formality without much significance. While this is an effective and low-threshold way of addressing challenges, it would be hard to sustain in the event of more profound challenges or larger organisation.

3.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team identified the following strengths in terms of the quality culture and QA procedures designed in congruence with the ESGs:

- All required QA guidelines have been elaborated

- Collaborative peer discussions between students and teachers allow the university to gain deeper feedback in a formalised manner

The team also identified some weaknesses:

- Discrepancy exists between the new formal structures and informal processes of quality analysis and enhancement; students are sometimes demotivated to answer student questionnaires
- Analysis and improvement of the quality of the study programmes is not under an institutional framework
- The implementation of QA for research and third mission is in a very early stage

The team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university to consider with regards to quality culture:

- Implement the new QA mechanisms and confirm a formal trail while ensuring that the benefits of the existing quality culture are not lost. Check periodically that the formal QA corresponds with the existing good practices based on a more personal and flexible approach
- Include the part-time staff to formal and informal QA activities and check that the procedures also fit the realities of the large reliance on part-time staff
- Adapt the QA procedures to fit the scope and scale of research activities and engage the local stakeholders in QA of the third mission

4. Teaching and learning

4.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university's commitment to student centrality and service to society is evident in its educational offerings. Pedagogical innovation, inclusive teaching practices, and student engagement are core values of educational provision. Furthermore, the university highly values degrees and professional training that address the needs of the community of San Marino. In its strategic plan for 2024-2026, the university defines its goals with regards to teaching and learning as follows: *"It promotes an education that not only imparts disciplinary knowledge but also aims at preparing young people for the job market. This transversal education fosters interdisciplinarity, developing students' critical thinking and cultural, ethical, and civic growth. The University of San Marino is particularly committed to promoting gender equality and inclusion, as well as fostering a culture of sustainability—whether environmental, economic, or social. It also rejects all forms of violence and plays an active role in fostering dialogue among diverse cultures and peoples. The small size of our University facilitates the pursuit of pedagogical innovation, inclusive teaching methodologies, and the full engagement of students, who become active participants in their learning. Interdisciplinary and collaborative research is also encouraged."* (p.3)

Discussions with the university representatives reveal that UniRSM aspires to foster an inclusive community of students, and also to meet the needs of the labour markets in San Marino and beyond. To realise these aspirations, it mines the benefits of being a small community and having close relationships between staff and students. At the same time, while the small size is seen as a key strength, the university has set strategic goals on teaching and learning that also include expanding the degree and postgraduate programmes and building up campus facilities to sustain growth.

4.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

Design of the educational offer

On the one hand, the educational offer of the university is designed to take into account the needs of the local community and the region beyond it; on the other, it is designed to complement the degree offer of the larger universities in the wider region. At the same time, the university actively collaborates with many universities in the region, for example, by offering courses for a given degree conferred by an Italian university. Many of the teaching staff work part-time in Italian universities, and part time in San Marino.

Degree programme councils can make proposals to the respective department council on initiating, modifying or discontinuing programmes and courses. Furthermore, the degree programme councils may make proposals on the curriculum changes, admission requirements and other elements related to teaching and learning. Departments are responsible for ensuring that each activity specifies learning objectives, disciplinary content, programme duration, location, methods of delivery, examination procedures, and, in case of courses offered in languages other than Italian, the language of instruction. The team was told that opening new programmes can only be done after a careful consideration of the senate, provided that the programmes are aligned with the university's strategic plan and that adequate financial resources are in place.

The process of developing the educational offer is steered by specific guidelines that define the procedures and mandate a consultation with stakeholders in order to ensure that the programmes meet the needs of the local community. Through joint committees comprising both students and teachers, students, too, are consulted in changes of the educational offer or its contents. The university publishes the catalogue of taught courses annually, along with the terms and procedures for enrolment, transfers, and other student-related processes, including deadlines for final examination applications.

Degrees offered by the university follow Italian regulations; they are structured according to the Bachelor's-Master's-PhD structure with ECTS credits. However, the financial and human resource considerations as well as the good employment situation of the students, especially in engineering and design fields, contribute to the fact that the university does not offer full paths from the bachelor's to the master's to the PhD degree. The university currently only offers two PhD programmes—one in history and the other in economic and management engineering—and only in the latter is there a full path from BA to PhD available at UniRSM. The PhD programme in history was established in 1989 and is considered very prestigious. In October 2024, the call for applications to the seventeenth cycle (2025–2028) was published, offering 16 positions. Since its establishment,

the programme has enrolled nearly 250 students from around the world. The PhD programme in economic and management engineering, originally established in 1994, has had a rockier path, with many years of no student intake. The current seventh cycle (2023-2026) hosts three PhD students. In the field of Design, the University of San Marino has been promoting, co-managing, and funding several positions in PhD programmes in collaboration with Italian universities for seven years. Currently, three PhD positions are funded: two co-supervised positions with scholarships are available within the PhD in Architecture and Cultures of Design, promoted by the Department of Architecture at the University of Bologna and one independent position with a scholarship is available for the XL cycle of the National PhD in Design for Made in Italy: Identity, Innovation, and Sustainability, in collaboration with the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli. Moreover, in June 2024, the University of San Marino signed a scientific collaboration agreement with the University of Macerata to fund a scholarship as part of the PhD programme in Education and Inclusion for Cultural Heritage and Tourism. The PhD programme is affiliated with the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage, and Tourism at the University of Macerata.

In addition to degree programmes, the university offers a number of professional development courses in areas such as techniques for the rehabilitation of specific learning difficulties, criminology and forensic psychiatry, and communication, management, and new media. Some courses specifically target the needs of the Sammarinese society, such as advanced training in legal and economic professions and teacher qualification training course in the republic of San Marino.

Study process and student services

The teacher-student ratio is high, which allows for a close-knit community between teachers and students and study processes based on small groups. The team's discussions with students revealed that the university's unique pedagogical approach significantly contributes to its reputation, with many students choosing UniRSM specifically for this reason. Both the university documents and conversations with teachers and students reinforce the high employment rates of UniRSM graduates, further contributing to the university's attractiveness.

The teaching facilities visited by the team are up-to-date and support the educational process. The team was especially impressed by the world-renowned history library, as well as laboratories and workshop facilities that were flexibly accessible for students. The university offers a number of student benefits and services such as, for example, psychological counselling services and free public transportation inside San Marino. The university offers a small number of scholarships for well-performing students which exempts them from part of their tuition fee. In the academic year 2023-2024 altogether 45 scholarships were provided. The biggest challenge identified in terms of student services is the lack of a dormitory, which would go some way towards alleviating the challenging housing situation inside San Marino. The team was told that the university has long advocated for a student dormitory in the old town, but up to the present day it has not been able to secure a suitable place or funding.

While teaching is for the most part provided face-to-face, the university also offers various distance learning and asynchronous learning opportunities. The team was told, for example, that the university has several distance-learning facilities around Italy in which students from areas outside

San Marino can do their group work together and follow on-site teaching through a video-conferencing system. The university also offers asynchronous learning opportunities in the form of recorded lectures for those students who work part- or full-time. However, the team was not able to establish whether the university offers its teachers support in developing pedagogically robust online teaching. The team also heard variable views from students on the extent to which practicing professionals are engaged in teaching.

4.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

According to the SER, the university annually collects data on a number of indicators such as the percentage change over the last three years in the number of enrolments in degree programmes, comparison between the percentage of students graduating on time and the total number of graduates, average duration of studies, percentage of dropouts, and student satisfaction index on each degree programme. This data allows the university to monitor its success on education and, if necessary, take reparatory action. The university similarly collects data on the persistence of recurring student suggestions. In its annual cyclical review, the university analyses its performance and results against the established objectives. It also analyses the relevance of the cultural and professional profiles, assessing the related competencies and educational objectives, as well as the coherence of the expected learning outcomes both in the degree programme and course level. Finally, the effectiveness of the adopted management system is evaluated.

In addition to the data collected internally, the fitness for purpose of the educational offer and adjustment, if relevant, is assessed jointly with the local and regional stakeholders. For example, the views of the employees on the competences of the UniRSM students and graduates are surveyed, using a digital platform, in connection with student placements. The regular consultation with local stakeholders regarding the quality and contents of the educational and cultural offerings under the auspices of the territorial pact ensures that the university is apprised of the quality and fitness for purpose of its activities. Finally, the university has recently entered into an agreement with the Italian Alma Laurea graduate survey, which ensures that the university can track the employment of its graduates for three years after graduation.

4.4. Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team observed the following strengths pertaining to the teaching and learning function and activities of the university;

- The close relationships, appreciated by students across all disciplines and programmes, is a reputational strength for the university
- The workshops and laboratories are flexibly accessible by students
- Distance learning arrangements foster a community of students in various sites around Italy

- The university has started a collaboration with Alma Laurea that will enable it to track graduate employment on a longer trajectory

The team similarly observed some scope for further improvement:

- Some of the disciplines do not make use of practising professional experts in their teaching to the fullest possible extent
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) support for new teaching and learning methods is modest

To remedy these weaknesses, the team would like to offer the following recommendations for the university to consider:

- As the university is expanding, ensure that the IT infrastructures will enable the university to keep track of the development of study programmes
- Support staff in adopting innovative pedagogical approaches, including ICT-based methods
- Ensure that students in all programmes have an opportunity to interact with practising professionals in their area of expertise to be fully prepared for the future

5. Research

5.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university aspires to increase its engagement in research by consolidating its research staff and expanding its research funding and output. The strategic objectives of the university for the period 2024-2026 include goals related to funding research projects from internal funds, fostering research partnerships with the private sector, and planning for staff development for both established and early-career researchers. The university also wishes to expand research support services with the aim of applying for EU funding in the future.

5.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

According to the SER, the university-wide research priorities include preserving San Marino's social, cultural, and physical heritage while contributing to its sustainable and prosperous future development. Other priorities for research include supporting inclusion and gender equality as well as students with disabilities, learning disorders, and other special educational needs. Additionally, research aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development prioritises sustainable practices, environmental protection, and societal well-being, driving progress towards a more equitable and resilient future.

The two biggest challenges for the university in developing its research profile are the lack of sustainable academic careers and the lack of significant research funding either nationally or in the

European context. The first challenge is expected to be alleviated by the new legislation that will allow the university to hire international academic staff on permanent full-time contracts. The European research funding may become accessible with the current eligibility of the university for Erasmus + actions, and the future EU association agreement will enable the university to apply for EU Horizon Europe funding. The university aims to establish a research office in order to support acquisition of international research funding.

To cope with the scarcity of research funding, the university has developed various strategies for conducting research. The most important strategy, of which the university is rightly proud, comprises allocating internal PRIU funds to support larger scale research initiatives. The team was told that the university is able to allocate approximately 100 000 euros annually for these research projects. The funding is distributed through an open university-wide competition, and the size of a single grant is approximately 15 000 euros. These grants typically engage more than one person in the project. The second strategy involves using smaller scale funding such as profits from selling services to the community or savings from department's annual budgets to fund smaller research-related activities like conference participation or publication fees.

The team understood from various discussions with the academics and leadership at the university that collaboration is particularly important for research in UniRSM. As the service to the Sammarinese society is one of the key values of the university, much of the research conducted by the university also focuses on serving the community of San Marino. Community-facing research addressing territorial sustainability issues, needs of the elderly, or preservation of the Sammarinese cultural heritage is often conducted jointly with various public and private stakeholders. Given that the majority of research-active staff have a collaboration with Italian and international universities, some of the research is also conducted in collaboration with Italian universities, making use of their research infrastructures and other resources. While the team understood that individual academics can find time to do research within their contracts, the scarcity of full-time, sustainable research careers at UniRSM may result in a disadvantage for the university, as researchers may be more inclined to affiliate their publications with Italian universities, where they have more opportunities to secure permanent positions.

The university prioritises open access opportunities for disseminating research results, although staff also publish in subscription-based journals. The team learned from discussions that while the university does not publish its own journals, faculty members engage in editing, guest editing, and reviewing articles for academic journals. The university gives as an example of open access publishing the '*Critica storica*' ('Historical Criticism') series published by Il Mulino, some of which are available open access through Darwin Books.

In research benefitting directly the community of San Marino, the commitment of the university in openly disseminating the results of its research is demonstrated by direct communication with relevant communities, which enables research to enrich practice on a very fast timescale. Similarly, the SER mentions that lessons learned from teaching and learning related research are incorporated in teaching methodologies at the university. The San Marino Legal Institute, which is part of the Department of History and Law, has compiled the collection of San Marino's jurisprudence, published in 10 volumes from 1911 to 1995 and on the Portal of San Marino Jurisprudence from

1995 onwards; making it easily accessible to all interested parties. This has become a valuable resource for the community of San Marino.

5.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The university monitors the development of the research output annually. The publication activity of academic staff is monitored on an individual basis in connection with the periodical academic staff evaluation. In conducting the staff evaluation, the UniRSM follows the same criteria as Italian universities do.

5.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team perceives that the university exhibits the following strengths in terms of research:

- Open access emphasis ensures that research is effectively disseminated within the San Marino community
- Even in the conditions of limited state subsidy for research, UniRSM is able to fund research from surplus of department budgets or from profits of third mission activities
- The university's PhD programme and library of DSG have a very strong reputation
- The recent changes in legislation will enable the university to hire international academics on permanent contracts

The team would like to point out, however, also some weaknesses in terms of the university's research function and activities:

- Only limited resources have been allocated in the state budget for research
- The largest department does not have a strong research profile, including PhD degrees that would support its research-based educational activities
- There are prior constraints on the university's ability to establish stable and progressing academic careers

The team would like to present the following considerations for the university:

- Build autonomous capacity at UniRSM in terms of academic staff and research alongside maintaining collaboration with other universities
- Plan and implement coherent career paths for academic staff, given that the current legislation will allow for the university to recruit internationally
- Ensure that the opportunities to devote time for research are fairly and transparently decided
- Identify disciplines/courses where establishing the complete BA-MA-PhD path is feasible and institute adequate research activities to support that path

6. Service to society

6.1 Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The service to society and to the community of San Marino is one of the university's key priorities, evident both in the documentation and in the teams' interviews with the university leadership. As the strategic plan states : *"The third-mission activities of the University, in the specific context in which it operates, play an extremely important role and deeply characterise the activities carried out by the institution. In the coming three years, the University will continue to offer its expertise, ideas, projects, and human resources to the local community and its public and private institutions. We aim to support San Marino during this historic transition marked by a new international dimension. Given this context, we believe it is reasonable to seek financial support for the University, which will undoubtedly translate into benefits and growth—both economic and cultural—for the country and its citizens."* (p. 5)

The strategic plan also mentions the strategic goals of further strengthening collaboration with the private sector in order to increase the university's societal impact and to acquire funding for its other activities. Furthermore, UniRSM aims to build a network of advanced training programmes to enhance skills for the Sammarinese and neighbouring regions' workforce. The team also understood that the university wants to establish a fundraising office to support fundraising efforts.

6.2 Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

The broad areas of service to society outlined in the university's SER, and engaging all departments, include: promotion and dissemination of culture, knowledge, and research; activities aimed at interventions in the public sector; activities aimed at interventions in the private sector; public communication and awareness-raising; and training aimed at social and territorial development. For example, the university provides professional development courses to further develop the skills of lawyers and public officials in San Marino, provide training for both pre-service and in-service teachers in the country, and foster research collaboration with local businesses. The university contributes important assistance to the EU association agreement of San Marino, placing great emphasis on contributing to the Sammarinese identity and cultural patrimony. Notably, the university has been instrumental in developing the new museum hub and the new visual identity for the country's museums. Additionally, the university supports San Marino's participation in global cultural events, such as the World Expos in Dubai (2023) and Osaka (2025).

In its third sector activities, the university greatly benefits from the close relationships it has with the community. However, the university has formalised those relationships in the territorial pact, forming an advisory body that meets regularly, comprising representatives of many public, private and third sector actors in San Marino and in the wider Emilia-Romagna region.

The local stakeholders met by the team expressed deep appreciation of the various contributions of the university. They especially complemented the agility and flexibility of the university in joint projects. The university's contribution to revitalising the cultural life and historical centre of San Marino is also greatly appreciated; and the vibrant community of students is especially important for the city during the off-season. However, the local stakeholders also recognised that there might be

new initiatives that the university could take to help revitalise the country. For example, the banking and financial sector that has traditionally been important in San Marino is currently weak and unable to support local companies in global competition. The university could assist in updating skills in that sector to better support local businesses. Similarly, while the university already offers courses in tax and legal matters, it could also aid new investors in navigating operations within San Marino and its businesses.

6.3 Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The small size of both the university and of the country enable easy and flexible collaboration and communication between the university and the surrounding community. For example, the rector regularly meets with all relevant public authorities. The university board of administration comprises two members appointed by the state of San Marino. Furthermore, the team was told that the university sometimes invites the Secretary of State for Education to audit discussions in the academic senate. Along with the territorial pact meetings, these connections allow the university to speedily receive feedback on its activities and on the needs of the community.

6.4 Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team would like to point out the following strengths in terms of the outreach and service to society:

- University expertise directly benefits the community in many areas of the societal life (e.g., legal counselling, training of teachers and public officials, applied research projects with public stakeholders)
- The university closely works with employers and businesses in San Marino, both in education and research
- The university's contributions and agility are greatly appreciated by all stakeholders
- The university has revitalised the historical centre of San Marino

The team would like to remark on the following weakness in terms of the outreach and service to society:

- The university's support to the renewal of the key sectors of the Sammarinese economy (banking, tourism) could be strengthened

In order to build on the university's strengths and to remedy the weakness, the team would like to offer the following recommendation for the university's consideration:

- Adopt a proactive role in accompanying the San Marino society in its economic development

7. Internationalisation

7.1. Norms, values, mission, goals: What is the institution trying to do?

The university wishes to expand its internationalisation in both education and research, enabled by Erasmus+ and the future EU association agreement while facing constraints from the non-Schengen status of the country. In its three-year strategic plan, the university has outlined the following objectives in terms of strengthening its internationalisation efforts and infrastructure:

- *“Erasmus Plus: Launch the first scholarships in the academic year 2025/26.*
- *European and Non-European Research Projects: Join these projects to benefit from substantial financial contributions.*
- *Promote Mobility: Encourage student, faculty, and technical-administrative staff mobility.”*
(p.5)

7.2. Governance or activities: How is the institution trying to do it?

At present, internationalisation efforts in education and research focus on collaboration with Italian universities. The English proficiency in the university is limited, and the country’s non-Schengen status within the Schengen area poses challenges for expanding internationalisation, as anyone entering must also obtain a Schengen visa.

In the future, the university will be able to participate in the Erasmus+ programme, and the first call for Erasmus mobility is planned to be launched in the academic year 2025-2026. The university has formed a partnership with Italy’s National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE), the agency responsible for administering the Erasmus+ programme in Italy. INDIRE will also oversee the administration of the Erasmus+ programme for UniRSM.

The university does not offer any degrees in English, which constrains its internationalisation efforts. However, the university does employ international visiting lecturers in individual courses in some programmes and aims to expand use of English language teaching to other programmes as well. The team was told that the limited English proficiency provided by the Italian-language school system, despite the efforts made in this regard, poses some limits also to the extent English can be used in the university.

The university has signed a large number of various bilateral collaboration agreements; but it was unclear to the team how many such agreements have led to active collaboration beyond Italian universities. The university is also a member of several different international university associations. It is noteworthy that UniRSM is a founding member of the Network of Universities of Small States and Countries (NUSCT) which the university considers an important network for itself.

The team was told that the university students and academic staff participate in the implementation of Sammarinese projects that contribute to the country’s international reputation, such as the World Expo 2023 and 2025. Notably, students’ involvement in these international stakeholder projects is recognised as part of their study programme.

7.3. Monitoring: How does the institution know it works?

The university collects statistics about the numbers of international students, of which the majority are Italian with very few other nationalities present. The university also pays attention to recognition of its diplomas, and offers a Diploma Supplement in Italian and English to aid the mobility of its graduates.

International collaborative research can be tracked through the periodic staff evaluation, and the most important collaborative projects such as the contribution to the World Expos is widely publicised.

7.4. Strategic management and capacity for change: How does the institution change in order to improve?

The team recognised the following strengths pertaining to internationalisation at UniRSM:

- The university has adopted mobility and conversion instruments such as ECTS and Diploma supplement, which facilitate the mobility of its students and graduates
- International professors engaged in teaching various courses are made available for PhD supervision

However, the team also recognises some weaknesses:

- Very few courses are taught in English
- Limited English proficiency constrains the possibilities for international collaboration and mobility
- The lack of available and affordable accommodation for students limits the ability of the university to enrol/attract international students and researchers

Finally, the team suggests the following recommendations:

- Make consistent use of international visiting lecturers to expand the educational offer in English
- Formulate strategic goals and work together with the San Marino community to build capacity to expand English proficiency in the university and beyond
- Explore public and private collaboration to solve challenges related to accommodation
- Raise awareness in San Marino society about the importance of international engagement

8. Conclusion

The team would like to state that, despite the challenges arising mainly from the challenging financial and regulatory context, the University of the Republic of San Marino is a well-performing university, highly respected by the community of San Marino. The university is committed to continuous improvement and is therefore well placed to respond to current and future challenges. Furthermore, the university has amply demonstrated its ambition and capacity to overcome difficulties and move forward in achieving its goals.

The overall strengths of the university are the following:

- The university is greatly appreciated by its staff and students, as well as the entire community of San Marino
- The strong orientation of the university towards the San Marino community and the nearby Italian region in all its activities is a key strength
- The students of UniRSM are very motivated to study in this university, their motivation stemming from the university's key value of student centrality
- The university has an ambition to look for answers to the numerous changes and challenges both in its operational environment and internal structures
- The university is supported by a strong ethos of community-building
- The legal framework provides the university with a high degree of autonomy and opportunities for sustainable development

The main challenges perceived by the team are the following:

- The financial challenges related to research activities constrain the university's research performance
- The great reliance on part-time and visiting teaching staff due to prior legislative constraints have resulted in a lower international visibility of UniRSM given that, for example, research publications may be attributed to other universities
- The challenges related to the staff numbers and the lack of suitable student accommodation limits the ability of the university to sustain and expand its student numbers
- The capacity of the university's study and research infrastructure limits rapid growth

The team would like to take this opportunity to thank the university once again for its openness to the evaluation process and to wish the university a great deal of success in achieving its goals.

Summary of the recommendations

Governance and institutional decision-making

- Start early in terms of building capacity for renewal of the leadership
- Grow the capacity amongst staff for a wider distribution of roles and responsibilities to avoid the “multiple hats” problem
- Ensure that preparation of decisions is transparent and follows the university regulations
- Ensure that relevant authorities and actors have adequate skills and knowledge to properly apply/implement the recently changed regulations

Quality culture

- Implement the new QA mechanisms and confirm a formal trail while ensuring that the benefits of the existing quality culture are not lost. Check periodically that the formal QA corresponds with the existing good practices based on a more personal and flexible approach
- Include the part time staff to formal and informal QA activities and check that the procedures also fit the realities of the large reliance on part-time staff
- Adapt the QA procedures to fit the scope and scale of research activities and engage the local stakeholders in QA of the third mission

Teaching and learning

- As the university is expanding, ensure that the IT infrastructures will enable the university to keep track of the development of study programmes
- Support staff in adopting innovative pedagogical approaches, including ICT-based methods
- Ensure that students in all programmes have an opportunity to interact with practising professionals in their area of expertise to be fully prepared for the future

Research

- Build autonomous capacity at UniRSM in terms of academic staff and research alongside maintaining collaboration with other universities
- Plan and implement coherent career paths for academic staff, given that the current legislation will allow for the university to recruit internationally

- Ensure that the opportunities to devote time for research are fairly and transparently decided
- Identify disciplines/courses where establishing the complete BA-MA-PhD path is feasible and institute adequate research activities to support that path

Service to society

- Adopt a proactive role in accompanying the San Marino society in its economic development

Internationalisation

- Make consistent use of international visiting lecturers outside Italy to expand the educational offer in English
- Formulate strategic goals and work together with the San Marino community to build capacity to expand English proficiency in the university and beyond
- Explore public and private collaboration to solve challenges related to accommodation
- Raise awareness in San Marino about the importance of international engagement