

EUA (European University Association)  
Institutional Evaluation Programme

*Institutional Review*  
*of*  
*Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje*

*EUA Reviewer's Report*

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## Introduction

### *Institutional Evaluation Programme*

The Institutional Evaluation Programme is a service provided to the more than 645 member institutions of the European University Association (EUA) wishing to assess their institutional strengths and weaknesses in terms of strategic policy and quality management. In offering an external diagnosis by an international team of experienced university leaders, the Institutional Evaluation Programme focuses on the institution as a whole, taking into consideration the mission, goals and needs of the university, as well as the particular contextual factors surrounding the institution.

This dynamic peer-evaluation method intends to help the university examine its own short- and long-term goals, to understand how internal and external factors affect and constrain its development, and to provide specific tools and recommendations to support institutional leaders progress towards the kind of strategic development desired by the institution. It does not offer a blueprint for development, nor does it evaluate the quality of teaching and researching *per se*; it does however consider *management* of teaching, learning, and research as fundamental aspects of university quality. The review process is consultative and supportive and aims to develop quality as a central value to an institution's strategic development and management, thus enhancing both its autonomy and accountability.

Originally established by the CRE in 1994 (one of the predecessors of the EUA), over 90 universities from Northern, Southern, Western, Central and Eastern Europe have benefited from the experience of the Programme in its near 10 year history, further improving the orientation of quality culture, good university governance, university autonomy, and strategic thinking across Europe's universities.

### *The Participation of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM)*

In May 2003, Prof. Aleksander Ančevski, the Rector of UKIM approached EUA with the interest of participating in the Institutional Evaluation Programme. The application came at what seemed an opportune time for the University. Internal quality assurance procedures were being discussed in Macedonian higher education, it was anticipated that Macedonia would be accepted as a signatory of the Bologna Declaration, and UKIM was seeking assistance in converging its activities to the standards of the European Higher Education Area. Wanting to develop a new strategic plan, it wished to receive external input before doing so. The German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the Open Society Institute generously agreed to provide financial support for this exercise.

The review team appointed by EUA for evaluating UKIM was comprised of:

- *Henrik Toft Jensen*, Rector, Roskilde University, Denmark – chairperson of the team
- *Hélène Lamicq*, former Rector, Université de Paris XII, France
- *Virgilio Meira Soares*, former Rector, University of Lisbon, Portugal
- *Kate Geddie*, EUA Secretariat, Belgium – secretary of the team

Usually, the Programme begins with the university preparing a self-evaluation report as described in the guidelines provided by EUA. At the time of applying for its evaluation, the UKIM had already undertaken the writing of such a report (January 2003), which was deemed to fulfil the necessary aims of the report - namely providing data on the functioning, aims, strengths, weaknesses, and constraints of the university. However, the *process* of involving many people at the university in producing a self-evaluation report is a key aspect of the Programme because it raises awareness of problems facing the entire university and

encourages an institution-wide perspective to addressing these challenges. This is vital because successful carrying out of a reform process hinges on wide-spread support of the changes. It seems that the university did not fully capitalise on this opportunity in preparing UKIM's self-evaluation report for this Programme as it produced a report by compiling previously prepared faculty self-evaluation reports. The University therefore continues to have much work to do in informing the university community and generating support around the need to undertake the reform process.

On 4-6 June 2003 the review team made its preliminary visit to make initial acquaintance with the university and its main actors, which included visits with the Rector and his Vice-Rectors, select members of the Committee for Self-Evaluation, the Faculties of Economics and Pharmacy, as well as a meeting with the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Education and Science. At this time the team requested supplementary budget figures, information on student pass and completion rates, age and gender statistics of academic staff, and forms of international cooperation, which was absent from the self-evaluation report.

The main visit, held on 12-15 October 2003, enabled the team to follow-up issues raised in the preliminary visit and the newly acquired data. The team also met with elected student representatives, members of the business community, the Faculties of Philosophy, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Agriculture, Electrical Engineering, and Pedagogy, as well as the Institutes of Agriculture and Sociological, Political and Juridical Research. The visit concluded with a public presentation of the team's oral report in the Senate.

The written report, which concludes the process, offers an elaborated version of the team's findings and recommendations publicly made to the University in October, with a structure as follows:

- The context of change and the external constraints shaping the framework in which the UKIM operates
- The internal strengths and weaknesses of the institution in respect to its internal quality and strategic management
- The potential of the institution and individuals to develop a strategic policy for the UKIM to become a quality European university, and the capacity to bring about this change
- Recommendations for the university to remedy the existing weaknesses and to develop the university as desired.

It should be noted that this report places slightly greater emphasis on steps needed for institutional development at UKIM than is usually done in the Programme. As will be described in the following section, this is due to the difficult circumstances and context of flux in which the university is situated. In the view of the team the university needs to clarify its objectives and strategic goals before an assessment of the implementation of these goals can be made.

The review team wishes to express its gratitude to the UKIM, especially its Rector, but also to its many staff and students whom were met for sharing their candid opinions on the challenges facing their university. The complexity of the functioning of such a large institution can only begin to be understood by people coming from outside the university for a few days, but the team hopes to have achieved an accurate understanding of a significant part of the reality, and appreciate the efforts made by the university staff to make the visits as full and worthwhile as possible. In particular, the team wishes to thank their Liaison Person, Prof. Vladimir Dukovski, and Kostadina Mokrova, for their efforts in successfully organising the demanding visits.

## Contextual Challenges and Constraints

To understand the challenges facing UKIM it is imperative to view the university within the economic, political and social context of the Republic of Macedonia, taking due account of the constraints that exist there within.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Context*

The Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (or Ss Kiril and Metodij) in Skopje is the largest of three state-funded universities in the Republic of Macedonia.<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1949, the university is a compilation of 24 faculties and 10 institutes and other institutions that operate in various locations in Skopje, the capital city, as well as the town of Štip. While the university can not be sure of the accuracy of its figures, it believes to currently have over 36,000 students from the Republic of Macedonia, 700 foreign students, and 2,600 members of academic staff in its faculties and institutes. The majority of teaching is performed in the Macedonian language.

The break-up of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 marked the beginning of rapid and broad economic, social and political changes in the country. The attempted transition towards a pluralistic democracy and a market economy in this nation of under 2 million inhabitants and roughly 25,000 sq. km in area has involved economic instability, high levels of unemployment (32.4% in 1999), and continued ethnic tensions<sup>3</sup>. Notably, in 2001, inter-ethnic discord rose to dangerous levels of armed conflict, disrupting national security and the functioning of civil liberties. UKIM continued to operate during this difficult period but was certainly affected by the limited financial and material resources available to the university. Although relative peace has ensued since 2001, social tensions continue to be played out in the multi-ethnic parliament and European peacekeepers maintain a presence in the country.

To add to the context of political change, the sphere of higher education in Macedonia has also been altering. Firstly, in 2000 a "new" Law on Higher Education was unveiled by the Ministry of Education and Science giving greater autonomy to higher education institutions but also aggravating existing challenges. Secondly, Macedonia has been preparing to join the signatory countries of the Bologna Process, which formally took place in Berlin, September 2003, between the preliminary and main visits of the EUA review team.

While challenges exist for all European universities to successfully implement the wide-reaching and ambitious goals of the Bologna Process, they are particularly challenging in the region. Support and assistance from the government that signed the Declaration is needed for universities to make the necessary reforms to be recognised as part of the European Higher Education and Research Areas. But participation in the Bologna Process ought not to be perceived as the costly imposition of foreign principles, but as an opportunity for UKIM to reaffirm its commitment to European academic values and to reassess internal quality management and performance.

In short, it is difficult to do justice to the social and economic hardship experienced in Macedonia over the past ten years or to the feeling of instability perceived by the university community. That the university has

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this report, the review team has chosen to use "Republic of Macedonia" or "Macedonia" to refer to what is also known as the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM).

<sup>2</sup> The most recently established university in Macedonia, the South-East European University in Tetovo was established in 2001 to offer Albanian-language teaching in a higher education institution. Originally established as a private institution, during the interim period between the preliminary and main visits of the EUA review team, it was deemed applicable to receive state funding.

<sup>3</sup> Thematic Review of National Policies for Education - FYROM: Stability Pact for South East Europe, OECD 04-Oct-2001.

not only survived the past decade but now has several staff members dedicated to undertaking considerable reforms to improve the system of higher education for Macedonia's citizens is testimony to the extraordinary commitment of individuals who give this institution a hopeful future.

## ***Constraints***

For the purpose of this report, *constraints* are defined as a range of factors affecting the way in which UKIM operates, but that are beyond the control of the university. Such constraints must be acknowledged as the university needs to learn to develop within the framework they create. It should be noted that constraints differ from *institutional weaknesses* – factors over which the university can exercise power and bring about change – which will be examined in the subsequent section. The team identified the following factors as constraints to the university's development:

### **Economic instability**

The political and social instability over the past ten years has led to relative economic stagnation in Macedonia. Manufacturing and industrial activity is low, with a national GNP of roughly € 3 billion.<sup>4</sup> While it is hoped that this situation will ameliorate in the medium- to long-term with improved economic regeneration and development, the poor economic climate and low average income (€1,400 per capita) of Macedonian citizens has to be considered as an important constraint to the development of the university.<sup>5</sup>

### **Fragmented Institutional Structure**

Having been developed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in what was then Yugoslavia, the historical legacy of UKIM's internal structure as a compilation of legally and financially independent faculties and institutes was similar to that of other higher education institutions in neighbouring countries. Unlike the many institutions that have begun to reform their structures into one integrated university, however, UKIM continues to consist of 24 legally autonomous faculties and 10 institutes.

Faculties are perceived as disciplinary-specific "universities" unto themselves. Some faculties have existed since the 1920s and were merged into the UKIM in 1947. They each have their own legal identity, independent budget, administration, student admission process, responsibility over curriculum development and research projects. Faculty-level research is intended to be devoted to the education and economic needs of the country. Institutes, on the other hand, and similarly legally autonomous but differ in that their mandates it to perform only applied research of society's economic needs (and not of teaching relevance).

The review team has decided to include UKIM's fragmented structure as a *constraint* because it is a historical legacy of the region's Communist past. In addition, the law on higher education released in 2000 can be seen as a *constraint* to the positive transformation of this and other Macedonian universities in that it does not offer incentives to remove the autonomous identity of faculties and institutes, thus aggravating the tensions within the fragmented university. With a cultural tradition of juridical prudence it will be very difficult for the UKIM to develop into a fully integrated university when the legal framework still regards faculties and institutes as sovereign institutions with the result that they perceive themselves as such.

Yet the review team is of the opinion that maintaining the status quo of legally independent faculties is a disastrous choice for the University as genuine university autonomy is essential for developing an

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<sup>4</sup> GDP is calculated from the World Bank's "World Development Indicators" of Macedonia's Gross National Income in 2002 as \$3.5 billion in current US dollars ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)).

<sup>5</sup> GNI per capita, Atlas method, 2002. Published as \$1,700 in current US dollars from the World Bank's "World Development Indicators" ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)).

accountable institution based on strong internal quality mechanisms. It is a *grave weakness* of the university to passively accept the fragmented structure and to not immediately begin to challenge the resistance against a reformed structural model. Therefore the review team insists that UKIM must begin the process of reforming its internal structure to become one integrated institution for the following reasons:

1. Full institutional autonomy is of paramount importance to develop a quality culture in a university and for it to demonstrate accountability. The current fragmented structure at the UKIM gives significant administrative and academic autonomy to the faculties; however by the state prescribing to each faculty how to spend its resources (ex. 70% to salaries, 30% to overhead), the faculties and especially the university have only an illusion of financial autonomy. A stronger integrated university that determines how best to spend its own resources is the only logical method to attain true financial autonomy and have influence regarding higher education legislation.
2. An integrated university can strategically plan its pooled resources to efficiently provide coordinated services to the faculties and students. Expenditures such as administration and overhead costs are unnecessarily and inefficiently duplicated among the 24 faculties and 10 institutes in its current fragmented structure. Removing this inefficient duplication and coordinating services would lead to reduced administrative costs and make more money overall available for the faculties. Centrally coordinated services would enable enhanced internal communication, the development of staff development programmes, and provision of common services such as a central library.
3. With the exception of some universities in South Eastern Europe, all other European universities operate as unified, integrated institutions and view the fragmented structure as outmoded and inappropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The UKIM will only be able to fully participate as an equal partner in the Bologna Process if it functions within a similar structure that is respected as comparable to European standards and viewed as a transparent institution based on academic values.
4. Independent faculties are not recognised as institutions eligible for European or other external funding sources. Becoming an integrated and respected institution will improve the UKIM's potential to participate in international research and education or exchange programmes - a possible source of significant external funds
5. An integrated university will have the potential to provide better education to its students. It can make credit transfer within the university possible, enabling students to develop flexible learning paths and to gain from broad exposure to ideas and research from different disciplines.
6. Duplication of research between faculties and institutes would be removed, and an integrated university can better pursue the development of innovative interdisciplinary research and teaching.
7. An integrated university can better serve its community and the region. The future needs of the labour market, becoming increasingly knowledge-based with economic structural change, will need strategically developed curricula. New initiatives such as science parks and continuous education courses for the business community will likely become important aspects of the local economy, and only an integrated university can provide these services.
8. The process of consensus-building to change the university into a fully integrated institution offers the opportunity to address areas of dysfunction and stagnation within the university.

### **Funding Constraints**

With a national budget of € 15 million for all higher education activity in Macedonia, which must be divided between three state universities, it must be recognised that UKIM is *acutely under-financed* from state

revenues. Already down from € 17 million the year before, the national percentage dedicated to tertiary education has decreased from 1.4% ten years ago to 0.47% of GDP today. It is important to note that the national per capita (€ 1,400) is already considerably lower than elsewhere in Europe, putting the university under severe financial constraint. At the time of the main visit, there was even concern about the state being able to meet its commitment of paying building heating bills.

Regarding research, the annual research budget is a staggeringly low € 1 million which equals roughly 0,03% of the national budget -- a far cry from the target of 3% of GNP proposed to support research financing in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Under such financial tight circumstances, the ability for the University to operate becomes questionable and the quality of education and research is certainly put into jeopardy.

The way in which the limited funds are divided amongst Macedonia's state-financed universities is under discussion, and currently unclear. Since the passing of the new Law, there has been interest in establishing a "Fund" or "Council" with representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science and each of the Macedonian universities to determine the allocation of the national higher education budget. Until this body has been established, the UKIM will continue to have an *unstable financial planning horizon*, a major constraint to its future development.

### **Outdated physical resources**

As the UKIM has operated in relative isolation with limited financial resources for many years, the *teaching and research equipment is largely outdated*. Although certain faculties have generated enough external funding to purchase new communication technology and library resources, this is generally not shared with other faculties and general status is outdated and under-resourced libraries and ill-equipped laboratories.

### **Staff Constraints**

The fact that university staff members are conceived as civil servants can also be viewed as a constraint because it means that while the university has academic freedom to select candidates, it does not have financial autonomy to hire when it wishes to employ someone. Having civil servant status also means that the university has been unable to hire new academic staff due to an IMF-imposed hiring freeze on state employees in the last decade. Combined with the failure to establish a strategy dedicated to training PhDs in Macedonia means that there will be few individuals - who speak Macedonia's official languages - qualified to replace the majority of professors expected to retire in the next 10 years. The institution is going to face a significant *shortage of academic staff*.

In addition, salaries paid to academic staff are not determined by the university but by the Ministry of Education and Science. A system of financial reward for teaching or research excellence does not exist, and academic promotion (which is linked to salary levels) seems dependent solely on age seniority. Having such a large proportion of academic staff as full professors (at the highest end of the pay scale) means that the *total budget of staff costs is greater* than in situations with more balanced age pyramids.

### **Brain drain**

The poor economic climate, the lack of funding for postgraduate studies in Macedonia, and the difficult entrance to academic or research career paths has resulted in a situation where many of the brightest or wealthiest Macedonian youth are going abroad for studies or to find employment. Without a government strategy to attract Macedonians with foreign experience back to the country means that the Macedonia is losing part of its greatest human resource asset -- its educated youth. For the university, losing many of the country's greatest minds to foreign scholarships is a challenge to developing a stimulating research and teaching environment.

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<sup>6</sup> Calculated by the author based on a Macedonian GNI of € 3 billion and research expenditures of € 1 million.



## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

### *In terms of development*

#### **Institutional leadership**

One of the greatest strengths of a university is a leader willing to undertake the process of self-reflection and external evaluation. In requesting to participate in EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme, Rector Ančevski fully demonstrated that he possesses this positive quality. Involvement in this programme indicates leadership that is aware that changes are needed to address UKIM's fragmented structure and to develop internal quality mechanisms in all faculties, and has chosen to begin the process of change by openly examining the institution's strengths and weaknesses to determine what reforms must be made.

The team found the current Rector to be particularly successful in understanding and communicating with the constituent parts of the university, as well as with the state. He is sensitive to the fact that reform processes have different dynamics and will encounter various responses ranging between support and resistance from people involved. This awareness and openness in the current university leadership is a real opportunity to make considerable advances in the university's development.

#### **Staff commitment to the University**

During the visits, the review team was also impressed by the commitment of many staff members to the university. It is difficult to make generalisation on individual attitudes or to discern whether loyalties were stronger to individual faculties or the overall institution, but a sense of membership to the university community is widespread, thus giving fertile ground for developing an institution-wide commitment to improving the university's internal quality culture.

While many of the staff members at the UKIM are already committed and supportive of the need to embrace structural reform to build a responsive and responsible university, others fear they will lose authority in the reform process and need to be further convinced. These different responses are a normal aspect of change dynamics; however, the review team insists that universities that do not change can not progress, and there can be no positive future for a static higher education institution. Support must continually be built among staff.

#### **UKIM's students**

The review team felt that the students it met during its visits were one of the university's most promising aspects. The students were generally interested in their studies, eager to be involved in the reform process, willing to openly share their opinions, and often articulate in English. Additionally, the large number of students keen to be involved in student politics indicates a sense of responsibility and engagement with university life. Above all, the students that the team met were keen for Macedonian students to benefit from the opportunities offered by participating in the European Higher Education Area. This important attitude will be a valuable force in pushing for positive transformation.

#### **Experience of hardship**

It is also worth noting that a university which has demonstrated such a strong will and commitment to survive the last difficult decade, including during periods of civil war, has certainly acquired the necessary drive to move forward now.

#### **Need to assume national responsibility**

As the largest university in Macedonia, the UKIM has considerable responsibility as a national institution. It plays a significant and influential role in educating its students as active citizens in Macedonia's economic, political and social spheres and in performing research relevant to the local and national context. While this

role is acknowledged in the UKIM's self-evaluation report, it is the review team's opinion that the university has not fully assumed its role as an agent for social and economic change. Particularly in the fast-changing society of Macedonia, the UKIM needs to perceive itself as being a responsive and responsible university that cooperates with other higher education institutions to develop socially relevant curricula and research activities.

### **Need for university wide commitment to a strategic development plan**

The university identified itself in its self-evaluation report the need to develop a long-term strategic development plan. While it has adopted a short-term Working Programme, a longer term *strategic development plan is urgently needed* and must be prepared. This long-term development plan should be the main document to map out the future development of the UKIM. For this plan to have the possibility of successful implementation, it should be devised and drafted by central administration in collaboration of academic and administrative staff from faculties and institutes, and student representatives. After being drafted it should be presented to external stakeholders such as members of local governance and the business community. Genuine consultation is essential and the plan must be publicly discussed and shared.

### **Lack of reliable information**

For the university to be capable of developing and implementing such a strategic plan it is vital to understand how the university currently operates. A weakness identified by the review team is the lack of basic institutional information and statistics in which the university management can have confidence. For example, figures on overall institutional spending, faculty budgets, student completion rates, and academic staff demographics were not easy to assemble for the review team, and once amassed were considered relative estimates at best. It is vital that this information be collected centrally for the university to be aware of its own activities, thus being able to perceive where it functions well and where improvements are needed.

### **Poor strategic research development**

The need for strategic planning is similarly relevant for the UKIM's research activity. Currently, each faculty obtains research funds from external sources disconnectedly. The UKIM has the potential to be more successful in gaining research funds if a central research body could assist in establishing project contracts with the state and external sources. These funds, in addition to individual grants obtained by professors, should be used in research projects relevant for teaching and for the needs of society.

Related to the lack of strategic research planning, the UKIM does not seem to have a policy on strategically hiring academic staff. The lack of young staff has already been noted as a resource weakness, but despite the difficulty to foresee future needs, consideration ought to be given to hiring quality young staff to meet the long-term teaching and research needs of the university. Combined with the lack of funding, poor equipment, and the looming professor shortage, the picture for on-going research is not healthy and must be of great concern of the university for future development.

### ***In terms of organisation***

#### **Fragmented university structure**

As long as the university maintains its disjointed structure of independent faculties, it will not be able to fulfil its mission as a provider of higher education services to Macedonia. The unnecessary division between faculties and the maintenance of legal independence weakens the real autonomy of each component part of UKIM. Real functional autonomy is a prerequisite for developing a quality university, not possible within the current structure.

The choice is not between a decentralized university with independent and financially autonomous faculties and a highly centralized university with faculties that have no autonomy at all. Rather the choice is whether the university will adopt the model of other European universities with a common responsibility, strong central decision-making bodies and common central services. The team stresses that this is not a suggestion to establish an autocratic central body; it is important to have many decentralised initiatives and democratic decision-making bodies at all levels of the integrated university. A new university architecture should enable university management and academics to be innovative and collaborative in servicing the departments and faculties, but working within a single university identity.

An integrated university can not be created over night; the process of change must be gradual. To successfully bring about reform the process must begin with reflection and preparation in a university strategic plan, followed by public discussion to raise awareness and support, and then implementation. Public discussion needs to engage those who resist change in debate and convince them of the arguments in favour. These changes must be made if the university is to respond to the educational needs of Macedonia.

### **Privileges**

One of the greatest disadvantages of the current internal organisation is the anachronistic guarding of individual domain and authority within the university. For example, an accepted norm at the UKIM is for one professor to be solely responsible for course content and examination procedures. This feature of the university permits stagnation of course material and the abuse of power between the professor and the student. Students are often required to purchase textbooks authored by the professor (even if written many years ago), upon which the entire examination is based, putting money directly in the pocket of the instructor. Such practice is not feasible for a European university that considers itself open to diverse ideas, and is incongruous with the aims of knowledge-based societal development.

As long as professors, chairs, departments and even faculties feel unaccountable to the broader academic community - meaning that they do not feel obliged to advance academic knowledge and share this knowledge to students and colleagues in an open, creative and dynamic environment - the university will stagnate. Developing a new architecture of internal accountability, where course content, text books, reputation and financial reward is based on academic debate and related to the whole education of the students and to the research of the university will already make major steps to improving the university.

### **Faculty-institute relationships**

A false dichotomy has been established between research at institutes which were described to the review team to be undertaking research with local economic relevance, compared to research undertaken within faculties that is directed to contemporary teaching as well as local economic needs. The precious few resources available for research must be coordinated to meet educational and scientific needs as well as public needs. However, the most problematic aspect of the current situation is not that it is inefficient, but that it means that an important part of research at the university occurs far from educational activity. The review team believes that the need to combine these distinct efforts and develop new and larger institutions where collaboration in research is fostered.

### **Duplication of administrative roles**

The current fragmented structure also entails duplication of administrative roles in the university. Removing this duplication would mean that limited resources could be better used, and additional money would be freed up.

It is for example irrational not to have a central registration of all students and passed exams of all students.

## ***In terms of quality***

### **Initial steps to developing an institutional quality culture**

The new Law on Higher Education put forward by the Ministry of Education and Science now requires each faculty to perform a self-evaluation report as part of the state accreditation procedures, and many faculties have already undertaken this task. It is a positive development that faculties have embraced this self-reflection practice - a tool commonly used to begin an internal quality enhancement process. However, the review team is concerned that the willingness to carry out the process among UKIM's faculties seems to be directly linked to receiving state funding and not as a formative task for internal quality development. For internal quality assurance procedures to have any purpose it is fundamental that they are introduced with the objective of continual self-improvement. To confuse it with external accreditation and receiving funds confounds the understanding of *why, for whom, and to what use* such reports are written. Even more troublesome is that the effort to undertake self-evaluation reports seems to have been wasted as few faculties could explain how they will be followed-up.

Furthermore, the system of faculty self-evaluation could be equally problematic if it perpetuates the fragmentation of the university into independent faculties and gives no role to *central leadership*. A clear recommendation is for the university to focus efforts at the university-level, beginning with the UKIM self-evaluation and developing the strategic development plan at university level, to devise a proper timeframe to implement changes, and to ensure the changes are achieved. The university-wide self-evaluation reports should become the basis for improving the UKIM's internal quality.

### **In terms of student involvement**

A very positive development has been the introduction of student questionnaires to evaluate course content and professor performance in most faculties at the UKIM. The way in which they are implemented in each faculty varies, but generally they consist of paper forms being handed out at the end of a term to rank aspects of the classroom interaction as a basis for continual improvement of instructor performance and relevance of learning material.

A concern of the team was that many students perceived that their anonymity was not protected in filling out questionnaires and were sceptical about what follow-up action will be taken from their comments. The review team therefore recommends that a university-wide policy should be developed for student questionnaires with measures being taken to assure students that their identity and views will remain anonymous and can not have bearing on final grades. This can occur by having the questionnaire administered by study boards or committees. The university needs to make clear how they intend to use the outcomes of these questionnaires, and the team recommends that this is done in collaboration with students at both the university and faculty levels.

### **Self-referential academic quality**

In general, an insular perspective was commonly found among academic staff, which in some faculties has led to a loss of international references in academic work and out-of-date teaching knowledge. The review team is of the opinion that the UKIM needs to evolve from an inward-looking, closed institution to a modern university open to the Macedonian society, to the international academic community, and truly committed to the broad principles of the Bologna Declaration. A policy of internationalisation should be further developed at the university, beginning with concrete activities of cooperation with the universities in Macedonia's surrounding countries.

## ***In terms of teaching and research***

### **Curricula reform, teaching methods, and use of ECTS**

The faculties at UKIM have academic autonomy over their teaching curricula, which are commonly subdivided into "studies", "departments", and "study groups." Programmes are divided between "undergraduate" and "postgraduate" studies, with the "Bachelor of Science" being the title awarded at the completion of an undergraduate degree. The minimum time required to complete undergraduate studies is four years (eight semesters) in most faculties, five years in technical sciences or six years for medical sciences, although it is rare for students to complete in this minimum period (again, unfortunately no reliable figures can support this wide-spread impression). Traditionally, it is upon enrolment that students enter their particular course of study. If a student wishes to change programmes, he or she must begin again at the initial point of departure in a new faculty.

During the visit, the review team did not gain a full impression of postgraduate studies at the university, but notes that the organisation of Doctoral degrees remains the responsibility of a professorial mentor.

In the past two years, many faculties at UKIM have begun undertaking a process of establishing a credit-transfer system and modernising their curricula in line with the new law and in anticipation of participating in the Bologna Process. In some faculties, such as the Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Pharmacy, the curricula reform has been implemented and the team was able to meet with first year students who are experiencing these revised study programmes. The students described fewer ex cathedra lectures and more involvement in project or lab work, as well as less reliance on traditional textbooks. They also were generally pleased with the structure of the compulsory and elective courses in their study programme.

While the introduction of a credit-accumulation system based on ECTS has been the basis for curricula reform in many faculties, it has not been implemented at the *university-level*. This means that credit transfer is currently *impossible between faculties* at the UKIM as well as between UKIM and other Macedonian universities. Before the university can hope to be involved with European-wide credit transfer and student exchange programmes, it must adopt a coherent university-level credit transfer system that operates smoothly inside faculties, between faculties, and inside Macedonia.

The review team found these initial steps and the willingness to revise and develop curricula as promising and were impressed by some faculties for the hard work that they have carried out. However, for the curricula reform and credit system to have their intended outcomes of modernising the university's educational system, the changes must also be made university-wide. The team reminds UKIM that the underlying philosophy of these changes ought to be a shift from professor-centred teaching to *student-centred learning*, the desired trend in European university practice. This is to say that the university should continue to encourage the proper implementation of student-centred study programmes, continual revision of course material, and recognition of the need to adapt teaching to different styles of learning. Most importantly, however, a university-wide policy to these changes is needed.

### **Disassociation between teaching and research**

Integrating the production of knowledge attained through research with the diffusion of knowledge to students is a valued feature of European universities that is underdeveloped at the UKIM. The team feels that professors need to nurture the link between their individual research activities and its relevance to the coherent study programme offered.

An excellent research development at UKIM has been in areas of interdisciplinary research activity such as the projects at the Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research. Further collaboration within the university and beyond in the surrounding community on research topics with relevance to teaching and economic activity is strongly encouraged for developing a stimulating academic environment among colleagues and students.

Unfortunately, such open and innovative programmes are the minority, and the little research activity that can occur with funding limitations at the UKIM occurs behind closed doors. Given the paramount

importance of research within a university, there needs to be significantly more awareness of what research activities are occurring.

### **Extra-university relations**

It can be noted that the stakeholders from the business community that the review team met, which included representatives of a Macedonian bank, public forestry, electric, confectionary, and pharmaceutical companies were satisfied with the services of the university and satisfied with the knowledge of the graduates. Nonetheless, as the university needs to improve its receptiveness to social and economic developments, the review team found the communication between the university and the local community to be low. The review team recommends including relevant industry representatives in curriculum planning activities to assist the university in being responsive to labour market needs. Similarly, representative members from the external community (such as representatives from national and local government, and/or local companies) should be consulted concerning research needs.

The review team also recommends that an internship programmes for university graduates should be established in partnership with the business and industrial communities to reduce the brain drain of Macedonian graduates. These internships should be co-financed between the government and industry and be an offer to as many newly graduated as possible.

### **High drop out rates**

The university needs to recognise that it has a serious problem of student completion rate. Again, while the university can not be sure of the accuracy of its own statistics, the extremely high drop-out rate seems to be as high as 90% from first year enrolment to graduation. It is incorrect of the university to assume that students only drop-out because of their individual weaknesses or inability to meet academic standards. The problem may primarily be the institution's inadequacy to take care of these students' needs or to allow a system where professors have the financial incentive to fail students because the student will need to pay to rewrite the examination. The review team was told of external factors such as the state social benefit that may also influence this phenomenon, but if the university wants institutional autonomy, this is exactly the area where it must show more commitment and efficiency. The review team strongly recommends that the UKIM recognises its accountability to society for student completion rate and implements measures to explore the sources of this problem and takes steps to ameliorate the situation.

### **Student examination**

The review team heard of the existence of corrupt practices at the university, particularly regarding financial bribery for passing examinations. We do not know to what extent or how widespread are these features. Nonetheless, the current system enables such practices to exist. Examination systems must be reformed to be viewed as fair and appropriate. If the system of examination is in question, the university and its graduates will not be trusted or recognised as high quality outside Macedonia, hence further weakening opportunities to benefit from internal cooperation and for Macedonian citizens to participate in the European labour market.

Any rumours concerning corruption at one faculty of the university will harm the entire university, and will harm possibilities for serious international collaboration. It is very important for the university to remove any reasons for the rumours by using different initiatives.

Examinations should be disassociated with the individual professor, developing systems that enable written exams to be marked blindly, and by involving external examiners to oral examinations. An appeal system must be put in place for students to be able to contest situations that were felt to be unfair or biased.

Examinations must also be improved to match the teaching methods focused on student-learning, meaning that a student's competence in dealing with relevant course material be tested, not his or her ability to retain unnecessarily large amounts of information.

## *In terms of finances*

### **Increasing reliance on students' contributions**

It is recognised the university is significantly under-financed; however, the answer to this situation should not be to shift the burden to the student population. By allowing two kinds of students at the same institution - those paid for by the state and those paying their own contribution ("private co-financing") - without taking any consideration of the financial means of the students is a flawed system. The financial punishment with late examination fees is equally considered unfair and detrimental to the progression of students through the higher education system, and the review team particularly recommends that this aspect be changed in reviewing the system of co-financing. It is also a serious problem that faculty income is regulated differently depending on its source: Money from the state budget has restrictions and money from students (through "private co-financing") does not have any restrictions. Money from the state budget and from students should be treated equally.

## Capacity for Change

Many of the recommended changes included in the report thus far call for nothing short of a complete overhaul of the functioning of the UKIM. The constraints and weaknesses listed have included a critique of the internal structural organisation of the university, the lack of a common university identity, an ageing professoriate, poor economic conditions in the university and in its surroundings, a poor understanding of the purpose of quality procedures, and no mechanisms to recognise good performance among teaching staff. The situation is such that reform will be a lengthy and difficult process at the UKIM.

Nevertheless, the review team is positive that the changes can and will be made by the university. And the main reason for this optimism is the important number of people who have accepted that changes at the university are needed, even inevitable, and their willingness to participate in the process is the essential factor in the university's capacity. Success will hinge upon the university leadership's ability to generate adherence among staff and students - many of whose loyalties currently lie with their faculty - to a common university identity. Conviction needs to be built among the entire university community to support the reasons for the change, and this task should not be underestimated. The first opportunity will be when the university community gives input in generating the university's much-needed long-term strategic plan. Participation in this process will be essential to developing ownership and commitment to this plan, a prerequisite to its success.

The Bologna Process also plays a particular role in the UKIM's capacity for change. It helps by offering a context of reform in the sphere of higher education in Europe, and provides concrete tools to tackle major problems within the university. The university has already made progress in this regards by beginning curricula development, for example. The Bologna Process may hinder, however, in becoming the sole rationale used for university reform when the constraints and weaknesses listed in this report indicate serious problems lying beyond the remit of the Bologna Declaration that risk being ignored. Therefore, the capacity to change has to be based on and argued for from the university itself and not just from an external factor: The Bologna Process

For quality assurance mechanisms to be adopted and trusted, the university leadership needs to work on developing the concept of quality as a notion of improvement and not of control (or even punishment). Developing and maintaining quality within a university is based upon an institution's own quality assurance mechanisms. And it is through this autonomy and responsibility to itself that the university can demonstrate accountability to the state and tax-payers. Yet the university must first know and analyse how it operates before it can establish if it is doing it well. Data collection and statistical information of all activities, but particularly concerning students and finances, needs to be centrally organised and easily accessible for university management.

And lastly, the university's relationship with the Macedonian government will be crucial to successful reform. The review team was encouraged by the Minister's awareness of the problems within the university and his shared commitment to improve higher education in Macedonia. This commitment must be strengthened and matched financially in a way that enables the university to develop, which is desperately needed. The government has signed the Bologna Declaration, a commitment which positively burdens universities to change, but this process must be financed. The team stresses that the UKIM needs more finances and needs to be given a financial planning horizon for a few years in advance.



## **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

In summary, the review team makes the following recommendations:

### **Concerning structural reorganisation**

1. The review team recommends that the university begin the process of devising a new internal structural organisation for the UKIM. This new architecture should comprise central university management and administration working within modern democratic decision-making bodies, and faculties as important component parts of an integrated university, under one single legal identity and budget from the state. While this will be challenging given the current legal framework, the university needs to initiate and develop the process by internally building-consensus to the reform within the entire institution.
2. The UKIM needs to collaborate across the entire university community to devise a long-term strategic plan for the university to develop and to implement appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Priorities should be specified, implementation monitored, and an accompanying budgetary plan to finance this development should be drawn up.
3. Institutes and faculties need to be merged to create new, larger institutions performing collaborative research.
4. Central services that efficiently meet the needs of the academic community are needed. This can include shared library and information communication technology resources, central registration of all students and student support centres.

### **Concerning internal quality assurance development**

5. The university has already made important progress with each faculty producing self-evaluation reports. The university must now realize the value of these reports for its own internal quality enhancement, must decide how it will use the reports, and set out detailed timeframes for implementing the required changes.
6. Similarly, the use of student questionnaires is widespread in the university, which is an important first step. Now the university needs to discuss how to properly use them, and the team recommends that this should be done in collaboration with students at the university level and at the faculty level.
7. The university should create better knowledge of its own activities. It needs to generate systematic organisation of data collection for all kinds of university activities, including admissions and tuition payments, student completion rates, human resources, research publications, inter-university cooperation, and expenditures. These figures should be gathered centrally and easily accessible to university management.

### **Concerning teaching and learning**

8. A university-wide implementation of ECTS is needed. The university is eager to establish a credit transfer and accumulation system to make transfer credit with other European universities possible. Before this can be done, internal credit transfer must be established between study subjects inside faculties, and between faculties at the UKIM and inside Macedonia.
9. Continued reform of the curricula is also a high priority. Curricula have to be developed to meet new challenges from the changing environment. Syllabi have to be an integrated part of a curriculum, not the domain of the individual professors.

10. Steps need to be taken to change the system of student assessment and examination. The review team was told that corrupt practices exist. Current practice is open to abuse and does not appropriately evaluate students' competence or knowledge. Transparency and objectivity need to be the underlying values of the changes that are made, beginning with external examiners and a real possibility for all students to appeal unfair examinations.
11. Teaching methods need to be modernized and continually evaluated to cater to students' learning needs. Teaching systems need to find a balance between lectures and interactive teaching and to engage students as active learners. The team recommends that the number of teaching hours per week should be reduced to make sure that the students develop their own study habits and ability to do group project work. Academic staff development programmes should be organised to assist staff in developing their teaching methodology.
12. The university must take the extremely high drop-out rate problem as a serious problem for the university. It needs to explore the sources of this problem and take steps to ensure that more students progress through the higher education system.
13. The transfer of recent graduates into the labour market needs to be smoothed to reduce the brain drain of Macedonian university graduates. The review team recommends the development of an internship programme with the local business and industrial community to gain job experience upon completion of their studies, also benefiting the local economy. This internship should be co-financed between the government and industry.

#### **Concerning research**

14. It is important that the university modernise its research activity also as a background for bringing up-to-date knowledge to the classrooms, and linking the university to the international academic community. To generate new research, the university is recommended to establish a centrally-organised research body to assist the university in gaining external research funds. These funds could then be dispersed efficiently throughout the university to academics performing the best research in areas relevant for teaching and societal and economic needs. The quality of research should be evaluated through publication in international peer-reviewed journals.
15. The interdisciplinary research occurring at some institutes and departments the UKIM is an enormously positive development. The review team encourages that such activities be expanded and supported.

#### **Concerning spending and finance**

16. The team recommends reforming the state allocation system to one where it is the performance of the university and not the number of students admitted which should be used as the basis for financing the university.
17. The review team also stresses the need to increase state funding and to give universities a better planning horizon where they know their financial situation for a couple of years. At the same time, the Macedonian government has signed the Bologna Declaration and must finance the process.
18. The university's mission includes being open to all students on the basis of equality, but fails to take into consideration student financial means. The review team recommends that the current system of student co-financing be re-evaluated. Additionally, the penalty fee for late examination should be removed and a system that the students regard as fair and transparent ought to be created. The existing incentives to look at money instead of the qualifications of the students must be removed.

## **Postscript**

The review team hopes that this report and UKIM's experience with the EUA Institutional Review Programme will help support the university administration raise awareness and gain support for the changes needed at the university. The team is aware that the challenges facing the university are great and the contextual circumstances heighten the difficult situation in which the university is currently operating. However, the team believes that the seed to successfully bring the university through this difficult period to become an efficient, high quality institution that is recognised throughout Europe has already been sowed. It will take continuous effort and participatory action for these changes to bear fruition but the positive process of change has begun.

This report has attempted to draw attention to the main challenges for the university as perceived by the review team. Our aim was not to be comprehensive but to highlight the core structural issues and key questions pertaining to the university's future strategic development. It is hoped that in pointing to these issues and providing advice on how difficulties can be turned into opportunities will benefit both the university and the wider Macedonian society.

Lastly, the review team wishes, once again, to thank the Rector and the staff and students of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje for their participation in the review process, their hospitality, and their excellent arrangements for the team during their visit.