

ADRIATIC UNIVERSITY, BAR

EVALUATION REPORT

May 2018

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Adriatic University, Bar (AUB), Montenegro. The evaluation took place in the framework of the project “Higher Education and Research for Innovation and Competitiveness” (HERIC), implemented by the government of Montenegro with the overall objective to strengthen the quality and relevance of higher education and research in Montenegro. While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of the project, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

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 to 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 Profile of the Adriatic University, Bar (AUB)

The Adriatic University, Bar (AUB) was established as a private, for-profit higher education institution in March 2017 on the decision of the Ministry of Education of Montenegro. It was founded through the merger of a number of existing private faculties located on the

Montenegrin coast. At the start of the IEP team's engagement with AUB, its constituent faculties were: the Faculty of Maritime Studies, Bar; the Faculty of Business Economics, Bar; the Faculty of Business and Tourism, Budva; the Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies Tivat (incorporating the Department of Mediterranean Business Studies, Ulcinj); and the Faculty of Management, Herceg-Novi. Early in the evaluation process a further member institution was added. That unit, the Faculty of Transport, Communications and Logistics, is outside the scope of this evaluation. The founders and owners of AUB are drawn from the owners of those faculties which now comprise the Adriatic University, Bar.

It should be noted that, with the exception of the Faculty of Maritime Studies, Bar, all these faculties underwent individual IEP evaluations in 2013/14. However, this 2018 evaluation relates to the newly established university as a whole.

Today, there is one public university in Montenegro, three private universities, and four independent private faculties. The prevailing national *Law of Higher Education* dates from 2014, with subsequent amendments being introduced in 2015, 2016, and 2017. This provides the underlying regulatory framework under which all Montenegrin higher education institutions continue to function. As with other higher education institutions, AUB is required to be accredited, reaccredited and licensed to deliver higher education programmes. The university also has obligations under the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)*. Montenegro is a signatory to the Bologna Declaration (since 2003 as Serbia-Montenegro and since 2007 as Montenegro).

Each of the constituent faculties of AUB has the status of a legal entity, as is permitted for private universities by *Article 39* of the national *Law of Higher Education*, and each is licensed and accredited by the Ministry of Education and the national Council for Higher Education, respectively, to deliver undergraduate programmes at bachelor level, postgraduate specialist studies, and postgraduate Master studies. Of the approximately 25,000 higher education students in Montenegro, around 1500 students are enrolled at the faculties of AUB.

1.3 The evaluation process

The purpose of the evaluation of the university is to contribute to the advancement of its strategic management and to its organisational development, and to enable the university to strengthen its capacity to anticipate and address change. In its deliberations, the team assessed and focused on the university's strategic priorities and used this as a basis for making recommendations for the future.

In early January 2018 the university submitted to IEP a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), describing and analysing the university's vision, mission, and goals, as well as its governance and management arrangements and processes. This document also included a 'SWOT' analysis undertaken in preparation for the SER. The SER was accompanied by annexes which included institutional data; organisation charts; faculty self-evaluation reports; and the university's *Quality Strategy* and *Action Plan*.

The IEP team learned that the SER had been developed by a University Quality Commission, appointed by the university's Rector to complete the self-evaluation process. This group included representatives from each of the AUB faculties.

The SER was the product of a series of regular meetings and supporting activities, and included input and data collection from teaching and administrative staff. This process also contributed to the accompanying SWOT analysis. From meetings with staff and students it was apparent to the IEP team that there was a reasonable awareness of the broad nature and purposes of the team's visit to the university, and the team members were warmly and openly received at all levels of AUB's staff and student community.

In its review of the SER, the team formed the view that, while it provided a helpful basis for undertaking the evaluation, and contained useful information and data, there were some matters that required further elaboration. It did however identify pointers to areas where the university wishes to improve. Meetings held with various members of the institutional community during both visits to the university helped the team to make up any shortfall in the written SER. In advance of the second visit, the team requested some additional information and documentation, which was provided in a timely manner.

The two visits to AUB took place from 28 to 30 January, and 9 to 12 April 2018, respectively. The evaluation team (hereinafter named 'the team') consisted of:

- Jürgen Kohler, former Rector, Greifswald University, Germany (Team Chair);
- Melita Kovačević, former Vice-Rector for Research and Technology, University of Zagreb, Croatia;
- Erdal Emel, former Vice-Rector for Student Affairs, Uludağ University, Turkey;
- Silke Kern, student, Vienna University of Technology, Austria (First Visit);
- Gohar Hovhannisyan, student, Armenian State University of Economics, Yerevan, Armenia (Second Visit);
- Jethro Newton, former Dean, Academic Quality Enhancement, University of Chester, UK (Team Coordinator).

The team would like to express its thanks to the Rector of the University, Prof. Dr. Stevo Nikić, for the welcome and hospitality provided during the two visits. Special thanks are also offered to the university's liaison person and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies, Tivat, Assistant Professor Nikola Vukčević, for his excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process and for his kind support throughout. Similarly, the team wishes to thank Dragana Brajak for her invaluable work as the interpreter during both site visits.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Vision, mission and general context

The AUB vision is to grow into a medium-sized leading regional provider of higher education. In support of this, the team noted that the focus of the university's mission is on education and training, scientific research, and its contribution to civic society. The team also noted that in accordance with its mission, vision, and strategic goals, the university wishes to position itself as a modern higher education institution with strong links to the wider European context.

From the perspective of the team, the distinctive strength of AUB is its profile as a university which can provide vocational higher education. For example, it is well placed to respond to the needs of the maritime and tourism sectors and to wider socio-economic development in the region. Despite the university's short history as a private, for-profit institution with full university status, the vocational portfolios and study programmes of AUB's faculties offer a good foundation for working towards its vision and mission.

During their discussions with the university's owners and senior managers and other internal and external stakeholders the team took the opportunity to explore further these matters relating to vision and mission. This included considering the university's links with the labour market, the work being undertaken to reconsider the 'fit' between the curriculum and study programmes and international standards, and future EU links. The team also considered planning and decision-making arrangements for taking forward AUB's aspirations for growing student and staff numbers, and for strengthening its profiles in research and internationalisation.

The team was particularly interested to note that the transition to university status, and the bringing together of each of AUB's faculties under one umbrella organisation, is regarded by the university as bringing clear benefits. These include the ability to offer doctoral programmes, to approve professorships, and to apply for EU projects, such as those for scientific research. The university also wishes to develop cross-university integrated study programmes, which would draw on expertise from its constituent faculties. The team heard that AUB anticipated further benefits such as being able to strengthen quality assurance arrangements. However, the team also paid attention to what the university viewed as some of its current weaknesses, as stated in its SER and in discussions during the site visits. These include: the difficulties of predicting the economic environment; the need to improve the reputation of individual faculties; the absence of a Quality Assurance Unit; the need to modernise the curriculum; the shortage of finance; the need to develop and professionalise the administrative support staff base; the absence of a common and integrated information system; and the need for more international mobility.

From the perspective of the team, this range of perceived weaknesses contributes to a challenging agenda for the university, not least in relation to the viability and future sustainability of AUB's vision and mission. In taking forward their evaluation of the university, this prompted the team to consider a number of underlying issues. These included: whether AUB's model as a new university is to be that of a business organisation or an academic organisation; how successfully it can become a cohesive academic community if it also wishes to protect the independence of its faculties; and, as the ownership of faculties changes hands

in the longer term, whether the business interests of faculties, as legal entities, will prevail over academic interests and purposes.

Addressing future challenges

Given AUB's strategic intention to strengthen its position both regionally and on the wider European stage, and taking into account what may be necessary for the future development and sustainability of the university, in the judgement of the team the university should address the following needs and requirements:

- a business model that is appropriate for an academic institution;
- a sustainable approach to finance and resources;
- an integrated university-wide strategic plan that enables AUB to develop as a cohesive academic organisation with common goals and objectives;
- the need for a holistic approach to teaching, research, and internationalisation;
- and the advantages of building on current strengths in the provision of vocational higher education.

An important factor in addressing these matters is that of AUB's arrangements for governance, management and institutional decision-making.

Governance, management, and institutional decision-making

The university's governance and decision-making arrangements and structures are described in its SER and in other documentation provided to the team, such as its *Statutes, Rule Books*, and also organisational charts. The team was able to explore the operation and effectiveness of these arrangements in a series of helpful meetings with AUB's owners and founders, with senior managers, and with staff, students, and external stakeholders. In its deliberations on arrangements for corporate and academic governance, the team paid attention to the relationship between the university (as the 'centre'), and its faculties (as legal entities). The team considered matters such as: corporate governance and ownership arrangements; the balance between autonomy and accountability; the degree of oversight of faculties exercised by higher level governance bodies; reporting lines; and the general functioning of AUB's devolved model of university governance and finance.

The team noted that for corporate governance purposes, the principal body is the Founders Assembly (FA), whose membership is comprised of the owners of each of AUB's faculties or their nominated representative. This body is responsible for setting the university's strategic direction and for overall financial planning. It also appoints the AUB Rector and provides guidance to the university's Board of Directors (BoD). This latter body, which provides advice on finance and strategy to the FA, has almost identical membership as the FA. Some members of these bodies also hold a position as faculty dean. Indeed, the AUB Rector is a faculty owner, a member of both the FA and BoD, and also a Dean. Though the team queried whether these arrangements led to conflicts of interest, and whether they aligned with international best practice in university governance, this was not a perception shared by the owners or senior managers with whom the team met.

The team learned that the university's management structures are headed by the Rector, a position which is required by the AUB *Statute* to be an internal appointment. Also at the central

university level, AUB has a General Secretary and a Finance Officer, each of whom provides support and advice to the Rector and to governance bodies.

The team noted that the internal organisation of faculties, each of which has 'legal entity' status, is regulated by faculty *Statutes* and that all study programmes, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, are governed by the relevant *Rules of Study*. Each faculty is managed by a dean who is elected by the Faculty BoD on the recommendation of the FA. The dean has responsibility for business planning, finance, and chairing the Faculty Council. Typically, the organisational structure of each faculty includes a Founders Assembly, a Board of Directors, and a Scientific Teaching Council.

For the purposes of academic governance, the team noted that the main academic and professional body is the AUB Senate, which holds responsibility for the academic direction of the university, for academic rules and regulations, and for new developments such as doctoral programmes. However, in seeking to identify the extent to which the Senate exercises authority and oversight over AUB's faculties, and whether there are clear reporting lines upwards from faculties, the team formed the view that matters relating to the internal accountability of faculties are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, meetings with some senior university representatives indicated that Senate does not exercise direct oversight of faculties. Here, it was emphasised that systems are devolved to faculties, that faculties are autonomous and self-standing in legal terms, and that academic matters are determined by faculty rules and statutes. In contrast, other senior figures indicated to the team that faculties are required to comply with and implement the decisions of central bodies such as Senate and the University Quality Commission.

In discussions with internal stakeholders and through scrutiny of institutional documentation, the team pursued these matters relating to the balance between autonomy and accountability, and the extent to which there has been any degree of integration of the faculties into central AUB structures since the establishment of the new university. The team noted frequent verbal and documented references to 'harmonisation' in matters such as mission, norms and values. The team also noted the emphasis placed on what are in effect decentralised arrangements that reflect and serve the independent legal status of the individual faculties. From the perspective of faculty representatives, this limits any significant degree of centralisation and synchronisation. Though the team noted that some rights, responsibilities and functions are centralised – such as some library provision, development of quality assurance arrangements, international cooperation, and design and delivery of integrated study programmes – owners and founders appear to prefer a devolved model of 'autonomy with responsibility'. From this, the team drew the conclusion that owners seem reluctant to relinquish any notable degree of faculty autonomy, nor do they appear to wish to share resources or income between faculties. The founders have a share in the university in proportion to the value of their investment.

In the view of the team this situation is exacerbated by the nature of decision-making processes and arrangements. For example, from the evidence available to the team, the current degree of alignment between the various management executive bodies and deliberative structures may not be conducive to effective decision-making or communication, whether vertically or horizontally. This may reduce the organisation's capacity for dealing with change and development. Indeed, the team heard from the top of the organisation that the emphasis placed in the AUB *Statute* on the need to reach a 'consensus' amongst faculty owners when decisions are being taken slows down the decision-making process and that instead the

expression 'majority' would be preferable in the context of major decisions taken by the Founders Assembly. The university may wish to reflect on whether its decision-making processes are sufficiently flexible to facilitate the organisational agility required to introduce the changes that AUB wishes to make.

In their assessment of the university's governance arrangements, the team has reflected on other aspects of AUB's devolved organisational model. The team's view is that there is a need for some structural changes to be introduced at the higher levels of the organisation. Through meetings with various internal stakeholders over two site visits, and through scrutiny of documentation, the team was able to gain insights into the extent to which the university is growing and nurturing the next generation of academic and administrative leaders and managers that AUB will need if it is to realise its ambitious goals. These goals relate to cross-university issues and are not faculty-specific. Accordingly, if the university's challenging agenda for organisational growth and academic development is to be taken forward **the team recommends that stronger academic leadership is required at the central level, in areas such as learning and teaching, research, and quality.** Furthermore, **the team also advises that the university should ensure that plans are in place for the professionalisation of administrative support functions.**

Strategic planning and organisational development

The team gave further consideration to the university's capacity for managing change by assessing how far the recently established AUB has travelled in its planning against strategic goals. This included paying close attention to the university's business model, to arrangements for strategic and operational planning, and to resource allocation processes. In recognising the university's ambitious development plans the team took a close interest in how areas of planned growth - such as improved teaching and learning facilities; doctoral provision; and improved impact in scientific research - are to be supported into the future. Here, the team noted the arrangements whereby, in accordance with its for-profit business model, each faculty owner takes a dividend annually.

In reflecting on these matters, the team considered whether this current for-profit model will be sustainable and whether it is fit for purpose for a cohesive academic organisation. The team noted that the present business model is focused on the business interests of faculty owners and that each faculty, as a legal entity, retains financial autonomy. From the team's perspective, this highly personalised model may be appropriate when each owner combines both an academic background as well as a business interest, as is currently the case. However, as implied earlier in this chapter (under *Vision, mission and general context*), this may not be sustainable over the longer term if the circumstances of owners and ownership change and if any future owner has a predominantly business interest. In the view of the team, this apparent tension between the academic and business dimensions is an area of particular concern for the future development of AUB as a mature academic institution. Therefore, **the team recommends that the university may wish to take the opportunity to revisit its business model with a view to ensuring the future sustainability of AUB as a cohesive university that is centrally focused on its academic purposes and mission.**

The team also noted that the recently established university has not yet finalised its strategic plan. The team learned that though it is intended that this should be finalised by the end of 2018, and will cover a seven-year period to 2025, this process is at an early stage. The team

also noted that the strategic plans of each of AUB's constituent faculties pre-date the formation of the new organisation by several years. Though some of these faculty plans were not made available to the team, those that were seen included faculty goals, and some had key performance indicators. Though noting that faculties are themselves legal entities, in the judgement of the team this current lack of alignment and integration in strategic planning between university and faculty levels is not helpful to the future directions that AUB wishes to take. From the perspective of the team, the sequence should be premised on first developing the *AUB Strategic Plan (2018-2025)*, with this being followed soon after by the completion of faculty plans.

In pursuing these matters, the team gained varying impressions regarding the stages of the overall planning process. The team heard from some internal stakeholders that the planning process would be 'bottom up', with Senate approving faculty plans prior to the development of the AUB plan. In the view of the team the university should be seeking to follow best international practice on these matters, with a 'joined up' planning process which starts at the top of the organisation. The team members were reassured to some extent when it was noted that the Founding Assembly is responsible for setting strategic directions, and that the Rector was content that the university level strategic plan should be developed first, with faculty plans being updated thereafter in line with common expectations that would apply to all faculties. The team noted that a commission team has established by Senate, with representation from each faculty, to advise on the development of the AUB strategic plan and to report back to Senate. **The team advises that early progress is made in finalising the *AUB Strategic Plan (2018-2025)*, and an action plan with SMART objectives, and that when this is completed each faculty should be required to review and update its own strategic plan to ensure alignment with university-level goals, directions, and key performance indicators.**

In continuing their assessment of the university's governance, decision-making and planning arrangements, the team noted that the university is seeking to reach more external stakeholders and to go beyond current arrangements whereby some are employed as teaching staff. In discussions with external stakeholders the team was interested to explore whether they had any input into policy and strategy at the university and whether there is a formal platform for external stakeholders to influence the university on such matters. Some external stakeholders indicated that in the past, at faculty level, contracts have been agreed which formalise cooperation with local business, and that opportunities have been available to assist with the development of study programmes. However, it was evident to the team that there is scope here for AUB, as a new organisation, to strengthen links with external stakeholders with a view to enhancing its own thinking on future strategic directions. Therefore, in the judgement of the team, at this early stage of its development the university would benefit from more formal input from external stakeholders into institutional strategic thinking and decision-making. With this in mind, **the team recommends that AUB's owners establish an Advisory Body, comprised of prominent figures from the public and private sectors, to act as a sounding board on university mission, strategy and future directions.**

Finance and resourcing

The team noted that AUB receives no state funding and that external income generation opportunities are poor. Financial resources are dependent on any contribution that owners make, and on student tuition fees. Each faculty is financially independent and, as noted earlier in this chapter (under *Governance, management and institutional decision-making*), owners do

not share resources between faculties. Furthermore, through discussions with university owners and leaders, it became apparent to the team that, as shareholders, the owners as founders of faculties and of the university do not have plans to fund major changes, such as growth in scientific research. There is, however, a small element of 'top slicing' to cover the costs of the few activities and functions that are delivered centrally. For this purpose, the FA decides how much each faculty will contribute to the central level. The team noted that staff costs are met by each individual faculty in a bottom-up mode, as there is no separate university payroll. Any staff members who hold positions in central functions do so on a part-time basis, and are effectively on loan from their home faculty.

It appeared to the team that there is no process or policy for calculating the full economic cost of educational provision, nor are there any plans to introduce efficiency savings across AUB's faculties, by exploring initiatives such as modularisation of the curriculum. The team was informed that a financial plan is developed at the beginning of the year, at which point the 'top slice' for central services is agreed and approved. The team learned that the FA is responsible for determining the overall university budget and financial plan relating to educational and other activities on the basis of proposals received from the AUB Board of Directors, and that these arrangements are in accordance with the university's *Statute (July 2017)*. Each faculty has its own business plan, and these cover financial matters.

In reflecting on all of these arrangements, the team noted a tension between on the one hand the university's plans for growth in areas such as scientific research and doctoral provision, and on the other hand the strict adherence to financial arrangements whereby individual faculties are financially independent. This apparent tension, between corporate goals and local interests, led the team to query whether these arrangements provide an appropriate basis for a sustainable funding model. This is an important matter if the university's strategic intentions are to be successfully met. These considerations contribute to the earlier recommendation in this chapter regarding the university's business model.

3. Quality culture

The team noted that the university's internal regulatory framework for quality assurance is set out in the *AUB Rule Book for the Quality System (December 2017)*. This document, which is based on the national *Law on Higher Education* had only been approved by Senate as recently as January 2018. Members of the team also took into consideration the functions and purposes of the various committees at university and faculty levels which hold responsibilities for matters relating to quality. At central level the University Quality Commission (UQC) deals directly with university-wide quality matters, while each faculty has its own Faculty Quality Commission (FQC) for discussing matters relating to the quality of study programmes. It appeared to the team that the reporting line from faculty to university level was not especially strong. For example, while the team heard that reports were made by faculty commissions to the UQC, this was not a formal requirement since that would represent a degree of centralisation that was viewed by owners and senior university leaders as undesirable. FQCs therefore are relatively independent in making decisions on quality issues. Even so, these bodies have themselves also been introduced only recently, and it remains to be seen how the relationship between faculty-level quality bodies and the AUB Senate and UQC will evolve in the medium term. Quality matters relating to teaching and academic administration are also discussed at each faculty at meetings of the Scientific Teaching Council, held twice per semester.

As is evident from the above, the development of an AUB quality system and quality assurance infrastructure remains at an early stage. The *AUB Quality Assurance Strategy* and accompanying *Action Plan*, for example, were approved by Senate as recently as December 2017, only one month or so before the team's first site visit. Assessing progress in implementing this strategy was therefore limited by these circumstances. However, it appeared to the team that these documents were quite far-ranging, and though they covered quality procedures they also bore some of the hallmarks of strategic planning documentation, with references to mission, vision and strategic goals. A number of action lines as described in the documents fell short in terms of 'SMART'-ness; i.e. as regards being specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. The team learned that each faculty will also develop its own quality strategy which will link to the *AUB Quality Assurance Strategy*, though these documents had not been completed at the time of the team's visits.

The team noted that while some progress has been made in several areas of quality assurance, some arrangements for quality management reflect the particular fields and specialisms of AUB's faculties and pre-date the establishment of the university. For example, the Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies, Tivat, and the Faculty of Maritime Studies, Bar, have quality management systems in place that are certified by Bureau Veritas and Lloyd's Register which are specific to the maritime field and relate to the training and development of seafarers. These professional accreditation arrangements are in accordance with ISO requirements and standards and reflect the distinctive nature of the vocational education and training provided by these faculties.

The most prominent feature of internal quality assurance arrangements is the use made of student evaluation and surveys. The use of these surveys, which are based on a common template provided by the national Council for Higher Education, is required by the *Law on Higher Education*. The surveys invite feedback from students on their experience of the quality of teaching on their study programme. This is also a requirement of the AUB Senate and Board

of Directors. Following distribution and analysis of the feedback obtained summary reports are made to faculty Scientific Teaching Councils (STCs) and from this the STCs take a view on the quality of teaching and teachers. The team heard that the Dean of Faculty receives the results and that the Board of Directors and Senate considers faculty reports on the outcomes and the ratings from this process. The team also heard from students some examples of changes being introduced as a consequence. In reflecting on these procedures, the team noted that the surveys invite comments on teaching and on the study programme but not on student learning. Also, there is no opportunity in these or any other survey for students to comment on wider aspects of the student experience or the student life cycle generally. Furthermore, while scores and 'best grades' information are made publicly available and while some individual professors provide students with some feedback on issues raised, there did not appear to be a formal procedural requirement for ensuring that all students had access to information on actions being taken as a result of issues they raise.

In undertaking their assessment of progress being made in quality assurance and quality management, the Team noted that, to date, much of the university's efforts have been devoted to meeting the external licensing, accreditation, and regulatory requirements of the Ministry of Education, the Council for Higher Education, and AUB's obligations under the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)*. For example, under the Articles of the *Law of Higher Education*, the university is required to conduct student evaluations of teaching, and to submit self-evaluation reports to both the Ministry of Education and the national agency responsible for higher education programmes. Standardised forms for the purposes of external accreditation and re-accreditation are also provided when the university and its faculties complete such processes, with both qualitative and quantitative data being gathered to meet the necessary requirements. Therefore the majority of what AUB and its faculties implement across the entire area of quality assurance is undertaken for external purposes. Indeed the AUB SER states that the university's *Quality Assurance Strategy* was adopted by the Board of Directors to meet the requirements of external evaluation.

From the perspective of the team, therefore, if the university is to work towards building a quality culture and to develop a greater degree of self-regulation there is more work to be done by university authorities in achieving a better balance between external quality assurance (EQA) and internal quality assurance (IQA). In the view of the team, this may be achieved by putting in place much clearer reporting lines from faculty deliberative bodies and commissions to the deliberative and decision-making bodies at the level of the university, such as the Senate and the University Quality Commission. Indeed, the team learned that, at the present time, such higher level bodies are described as being only advisory, and as making 'suggestions' or as only providing 'guidance'. In the judgement of the IEP team, while noting the degree of autonomy currently enjoyed by AUB's faculties, without clear and strong lines of accountability for quality and academic standards the road towards greater maturity in quality assurance matters is likely to be quite a long one. In connection with these matters, and in their evaluation generally of AUB's IQA infrastructure, the team was interested to learn of plans to put in place a central Quality Assurance Unit that would provide a focal point for integration on quality assurance matters with and between all of AUB's faculties. The team views this as an important development in supporting the organisational cohesion of the recently established university. Therefore, **the team advises that early progress is made towards the establishment of an AUB Quality Assurance Unit, with a broad remit for the quality assurance of teaching, research and external affairs, and for providing oversight, regulatory guidance, and enhancement support for the university's faculties.**

In the judgement of the team, the university should take additional steps to strengthen its arrangements for IQA. While the SER makes reference to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, the team could find little concrete evidence of any use made of or of any engagement with the principles or standards of the ESG. Indeed, when pursuing this issue in discussions with university staff, the team was on each occasion referred to the need for AUB to meet the standards and regulatory requirements of national bodies. The team recognises that this is an important obligation for the university. Even so, Objective 1 of the national *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)* is quite explicit in requiring Montenegrin higher education institutions to harmonise with the ESG. In reflecting on this matter, the team believes that the university's framework for IQA can be strengthened by making use of the standards listed in the ESG. Therefore, **the team recommends that the AUB Senate should request the University Quality Commission to undertake a mapping exercise and 'gap analysis' against each of the standards in Part 1 of the ESG, and to benchmark the university's own quality assurance arrangements against these.**

In concluding their deliberations on quality assurance and quality culture, the team considered the university's arrangements for student representation and involvement in institutional processes and governance. The team noted that there is student representation on all of the university's academic governance bodies, at both university and faculty levels. At faculty level this includes the Scientific Teaching Council, Board of Directors, and Faculty Quality Commission. At university level students are represented on the Board of Directors, Senate, and the University Quality Commission. In the case of the latter however, student representation, which is to be drawn from the Student Parliament, is yet to be finalised. The team also learned that the functions and composition of the Student Parliament are defined in the relevant statute. Though that document was only finalised in December 2017 it serves a valuable function in protecting student rights and interests. There is also a Vice Chancellor for Students, with responsibilities for addressing student issues.

The team notes the progress being made in the area of student representation and involvement but concluded that further steps can be taken. In particular it was apparent from discussions with students that any advice or guidance provided to student representatives on their role in that regard is at best informal and *ad hoc*. Therefore, **the team recommends that to strengthen support for student engagement in institutional processes, and to ensure the independence of students, training should be provided for all student representatives on governance bodies at university and faculty levels and that this should include guidance on what is expected of them in terms of roles and responsibilities.**

4. Learning and teaching

The team noted that study programmes are accredited by the relevant national authorities and are designed in accordance with the national *Law of Higher Education*. Internal regulatory requirements for programmes are stipulated in various *Rule Books*. These study rules take account of ECTS requirements and of a learning outcomes approach to curriculum design and delivery. The team learned that each faculty is responsible for curriculum development and for examinations and assessment, and that faculties retained the legal rights attributed to them prior to the merger that led to the establishment of AUB.

The team noted that each faculty is organised on a semester basis but that they currently operate according to different academic calendars. The team was informed that this is under review and that consideration is being given to the introduction of common administrative processes, such as standard academic calendars and examination timetables across all faculties. The team also explored the apparent duplication of elements of study programmes across and between AUB's faculties, such as programme content. The team was informed that this duplication arises because of historical reasons and is unavoidable due to the distances between faculties and differences in local needs. However, the team also noted the established practice whereby some teaching staff work at and travel between different faculties. In view of this the team wished to know if the university had any plans to introduce some form of modularisation with, for example, some core modules and options leading to different awards. The university's response was that this was not being pursued since this would lead to centralisation and would undermine faculty autonomy. In reflecting on this, the team's judgement is that in view of the advantages that modularisation offers in terms of efficiency savings, this may be a matter that AUB may wish to re-visit at some point in the future.

The team also learned of AUB's intention to introduce integrated study programmes which would be designed, owned, and delivered at university level, thereby representing a departure from faculty-owned study programmes. These programmes would be designed on an interdisciplinary basis, but at the time of the team's visit, no progress had been made in developing these plans, and no *Rule Book for Integrated Study Programmes* had been designed. The team learned that the teaching staff for these programmes would be drawn from professors located in AUB's faculties who would travel to the delivery site. The team was informed that a new student-focused Integrated Studies Office would be established, and that provision would be located in a proposed new building in the municipality of Bar. While noting these proposed developments, the team urges the university to ensure that, when developed, any such study programmes are compliant with the three-cycle model of the Bologna Process.

The team also took the opportunity to explore with students their experience of various aspects of learning and teaching. The team learned that a system of academic advisors is in operation at faculty level, and that staff are generally accessible and open when a student seeks advice and guidance on academic matters. Students receive course guides which include information on the syllabus, assessment, and learning outcomes, and they are examined both by formal timed examinations and by oral examinations. The team noted while the university's Ethics Board has student representation, the *AUB Code of Ethics* makes no mention of academic plagiarism by students. However, the team was reassured to learn that use is made by all faculties of plagiarism detection software, and that this is a requirement under the Ministry of Education licence agreement. Another matter explored by the team included student awareness of research. There appeared to be little awareness of staff research and no provision

is made for a research methods course for undergraduate students. In view of the university's aspirations in scientific research and the introduction of doctoral studies, these may be matters upon which AUB may wish to reflect.

The team noted that study programmes correspond with the institutional focus on vocational education and student employability, and that the curriculum is profiled to reflect this. By contrast, other overarching educational objectives emphasised in the Bologna Process are not explicitly pursued, such as developing students' research capacities, and educating for democratic citizenship. The teaching process emphasises both theory and applied knowledge and practical learning. The team also explored the various ways in which AUB's faculties encourage practical training, internships, and work-related learning. From their meetings held during both site visits, the team learned that these arrangements are highly valued by students and by external stakeholders.

The team noted, however, that AUB does not use a common model for internships and other work-related learning opportunities since this is decided by, and varies between, each of AUB's constituent faculties. For example, whereas the Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies (FMBS), Tivat, has no legal requirement or obligation to provide student practice placement opportunities, in contrast the Faculty of Business Economics (FBE), Bar, has a Centre for Practical Education, and well-established arrangements to support students, teachers, mentors, and workplace managers. Students at Herceg Novi undertake practical training during May each year, while students at the Faculty of Business and Tourism (FBT), Bar, complete an internship which attracts 2 ECTS credits. Students at FBT Bar also receive a 'Practicum Internship' handbook. In contrast, and reflecting the type of education, training, and study programmes it delivers, the Faculty of Maritime Studies (FMS), Bar, provides practical training leading to certification for students and staff in accordance with licensing arrangements with the Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs and other accreditation bodies.

In furthering their enquiries, the team explored in detail the progress being made by AUB and its faculties in addressing the principles and requirements of the Bologna Convention as they relate to learning and teaching. Here, the team took account of the objectives of the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)* which make clear reference to the expectations placed upon Montenegrin higher education institutions in respect of the Bologna Declaration, on matters such as the three-cycle model, student-centred learning (SCL), lifelong learning, and the adoption of a learning outcomes approach to curriculum reform.

The team noted that the AUB SER states that the university's *Rules of Study* for academic programmes have been drawn up in accordance with the recommendations of the Bologna Process and that the use made of the ECTS system, the assessment and grading of student work, and the definition of learning outcomes for study programmes and modules, provide illustrations of this. However, the team noted that the university continues to deliver Specialist Studies at Masters level and that this does not meet the requirements of the Bologna Declaration in respect of the three-cycle model. However, the team learned that Article 94 of the *Law on Higher Education* has now been deleted, signalling the requirement at national level for the cessation of Specialist Studies and two-year Masters degrees by the academic year 2020/2021, and a change to the National Qualifications Framework. The university assured the team that plans are in place for phasing out this provision in accordance with the stipulated timescale.

The team also considered progress in the area of student-centred learning, and noted that, in the broader picture, the university and its faculties were in the process of modernising teaching processes and undertaking review and reform of the curriculum. Progress is being made in the adoption of an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design, which includes the assessment of learning outcomes, and this is in accordance with the national law. However, as is discussed chapter 6 of this report (*Service to Society*), the university should take steps to explore the potential for developing its life-long learning provision. Similarly, though the team heard examples, from both students and staff, of academic practice that is student-focused, such as group work, work-related learning, assessment of oral presentations, and the use of technology to enhance learning, there is no central capability or unit to act as a focal point and driving force for providing leadership and training for this modernisation agenda in teaching and learning and in continuous professional development (CPD) for teaching staff.

However, the team noted that the university has recognised the need to make further progress in embedding the principles and practices of the Bologna Process, and the standards of the ESG, on matters such as a learning outcomes approach to curriculum design and assessment, the emphasis on student skills and competences, and the introduction of innovative and student-centred approaches to pedagogy and learning. Accordingly, **the team recommends that to facilitate progress the university should establish a Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, which provides a focal point for round table discussions and pedagogic training for improvement and innovation in learning and teaching, and for the sharing of best practice.**

In concluding their enquiries into learning and teaching, the team explored the provision made within AUB for student support services. From the team's perspective, this took on a particular significance given the distributed nature of the university's organisation, and the relatively decentralised model based around AUB's faculties. The team noted that some services and functions, such as a Library Office and some electronic library provision, are provided centrally. Otherwise, for the most part, enrolment for studies, information on study programmes and study regulations, access to library services and learning resources, clubs and societies, and welfare advice and support, are provided at faculty level. There is no provision for student living accommodation, nor is there a central or faculty-based office for student careers and employability.

In reflecting on these arrangements for the provision of student services, the team also took into consideration matters relating to student progression, achievement, and completion. From the evidence and data made available to them, the members of the team noted that indicators of student academic achievement, such as graduate completion and failure rates, showed variations between faculties and study programmes. With this in mind, **the team advises that a review is undertaken of the student support service provision in each of AUB's faculties to ensure that there is equivalence and balance in the student experience irrespective of the study programme on which a student is enrolled.**

5. Research

The team noted both from institutional documentation and from meetings with AUB's owners, senior managers and academic staff, the strategic aspirations to seek growth in scientific

research and to establish doctoral programmes. The team learned from the national *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)* that only universities are permitted to offer doctoral studies. However, that document also states that there is currently a limited number of doctoral students and limited research activity in the Montenegrin higher education system. Nor is Montenegro fully integrated into the European Research Area (ERA). From the perspective of the team, although attaining university status is viewed by AUB as offering opportunities for accessing European project opportunities in the field of scientific research by being part of a wider research community, and as enabling the development of doctoral studies, this presents significant challenges for the university. These challenges include building capacity, developing a suitable staff base, and identifying internal and external sources of funding.

Regarding the latter, the team learned that in its SER the university acknowledges that while each of AUB's faculties is licensed for research work by the Ministry of Education, there are insufficient funds for scientific research. This posed the question for the team as to how the university would take forward its plans for research and doctoral provision. In pursuing this matter with university authorities, it was noted that some funding is available nationally for doctoral candidates, and that from time to time the Ministry of Education announces calls for research that is funded at national level. However, should these calls be in areas of specialism not covered by AUB, then the eligibility of its faculties would be reduced. Similarly, as the team reminded the university, competition for involvement in EU projects such as Horizon 2020, is highly competitive and the success rate for applications is low.

Bearing in mind such challenges and constraints, the team sought to clarify the university's vision for research and to identify its precise strategy. However, it was evident to the members of the team that, beyond the intention to connect with the wider European research community and to develop doctoral provision, AUB's thinking, planning, and action on these matters are at quite an early stage. For example, it was apparent to the team that apart from some discussion at Senate, there is no common forum that brings together the faculties for strategic brainstorming on these important matters, nor is there an internal scheme for funding or stimulating research. Moreover, while outward-facing activity such as networking through involvement in the EU-funded COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) programme is valuable, this does not of itself provide any guarantees of securing involvement in funded projects.

In pursuing their enquiries on these matters, the team explored with university representatives, including a group of active researchers, the type of research which is or will be being prioritised by AUB. The team sought to obtain some understanding of whether future directions in research would be based on fundamental research, or applied research and knowledge transfer, and also what the balance might be between personal research for publication and project-based research. However, at the present time it appears that such matters are dependent upon the preferences and profiles of each separate AUB faculty. From discussions with academic staff, however, there was a recognition that research should be related to the local and coastal economy and labour market, and that applied research presented fewer demands than fundamental research. From this the team concluded that researchers leaned towards applied research, but the team also heard from some staff that this was a matter that is yet to be resolved at university level.

The external stakeholders with whom the team met also stressed the importance of securing strong links between the economic sector and the academic and research directions that the university follows. They also made reference to possible opportunities for commissioned research focused on problem solving and business solutions. From the evidence available, therefore, including the views expressed by external stakeholders, the team formed the view that there is untapped potential in the area of applied research and knowledge transfer work that could be undertaken in partnership with local and regional business and commerce. This is also reflected in the discussion in chapter 6 of this report (*Service to Society*).

The team also took the opportunity to explore the present and emerging situation regarding doctoral studies. The team noted that two faculties have put forward proposals for doctoral programmes. These are the Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies (FMBS), Tivat, in the area of nautical tourism, and the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE), Bar, in the field of economics. Following in-principle approval at the respective Faculty Councils, and approval of each outline proposal by the AUB Senate, applications for licensing and accreditation for doctoral studies have been submitted to the Ministry of Education. The first stage entails approval of the doctoral title and qualification. If granted, the university will then be invited to submit an application in which the proposal for a doctoral programme will be fully elaborated. This will be followed by the formation of an accreditation commission by the Higher Education Commission to review each application for accreditation. However, the team noted that at the time of their second site visit, the timescales for this remain uncertain. Due to the relatively recent establishment of the national Agency for Higher Education, it is not known when that body will commence the accreditation process for considering any AUB applications.

The team noted that in support of its plans to introduce doctoral programmes an appointment has been made to the position of Head of Doctoral Studies, and that the post-holder has the status of Emeritus Professor. The team also learned that a *Rule Book for Doctoral Studies* was approved in October 2017. This document reflects ECTS requirements and describes matters such as the duration, enrolment arrangements and structure of a doctoral programme. However, it does not provide any information on processes, such as the monitoring of student progress, or oversight of the quality of supervision. The team noted that Senate will appoint a mentor for each student, though it was not clear what the supervision criteria are or whether supervision of doctoral dissertations would be undertaken by an individual or by a supervision team. The team noted that enrolment and delivery of programmes would take place at faculty level.

From the perspective of the team, these matters relating to plans for doctoral studies, and the prioritisation of future research directions, raise important issues regarding the research environment, research capacity, research culture, and the depth and breadth of experience in research at AUB and its constituent faculties. As has been noted, even at national level, in Montenegro's more established universities, the research orientation is not strong. The team learned that while some AUB staff have previous experience of doctoral supervision and doctoral completions, this is not extensive. This relative lack of a track record was acknowledged in meetings with university staff, where it was indicated that the introduction of doctoral programmes would be used to improve the human resource base and capacity in research, and that staff training would be provided. The team was also informed that some capacity would be imported through international partnerships. In the view of the team, this still left open various issues relating to capacity and preparedness in areas such as facilities, learning resources, and the needs of the local and coastal regions with regard to the supply of

doctoral students. For example, though the provision of a portfolio of doctoral programmes is conventionally based on a sound platform of research, the team noted that the publications record of AUB staff is quite modest, that external project work is limited, and that the availability of technical resources and electronic databases is low. Further, it was not apparent to the team that any research capacity indicators have been identified or whether the development of doctoral studies provision, which is known to be expensive, has been fully costed.

On the basis of the foregoing assessment of AUB's research-related plans the team puts forward two recommendations.

Firstly, **the team recommends that progress will be best supported by the development at university level of a research strategy which sets directions for AUB and provides guidance and parameters for its constituent faculties. This strategy should set priorities, define the type of research, enable capacity building, and identify internal and external sources of finance. Furthermore, research methods and research informed teaching should be built into curriculum design at Bachelor and Master levels.**

Secondly, with reference to doctoral provision, the team suggests a cautious and realistic approach that is premised on achieving critical mass, which is a pre-requisite for developing doctoral education. Therefore, before making further progress with plans for the introduction of doctoral programmes **the team advises that a benchmarking exercise should be undertaken and that this should be accompanied by a feasibility study that provides a robust assessment of available resources (e.g. human resources and facilities) and quality assurance requirements. Building specific and sufficient resources, both in terms of academic staff and material resources, needs to take priority before launching doctoral programmes. Any future doctoral programmes should be located in a well-resourced doctoral school.**

6. Service to society

In evaluating the AUB's outward-facing activities the team examined how the university and its faculties are positioned in relation to its civic mission as well as exploring various matters relating to community engagement and service to society at AUB. Of particular interest was how external and internal stakeholders contribute to the development of the institution.

The team noted that there are various ways in which staff of the university engage in civic activities on a voluntary basis. Although such engagement is expected of staff, it does not contribute to university or faculty criteria for promotion. The examples identified by the team included participation in public events, cultural activities, and involvement in local municipalities. The team also noted that the university has schemes for supporting disadvantaged students, such as scholarships and fee waivers. Community links are two-way since local businesses provide many opportunities for internships and work experience, and members of the business community and public bodies are also involved in teaching at the university's faculties.

The evidence available to the team indicated that support from the municipalities and the coastal region generally is strong, and that the level of interest amongst the business and civic communities, the professions, and public and private organisations, is positive. Even so, in the judgement of the team, although its constituent faculties are well known, as a newly formed university, work is required to establish the corporate identity and 'brand' of the Adriatic University, Bar.

In this regard, the meeting with external stakeholders was especially valuable for the team. The stakeholders with whom the team met were drawn from a wide cross-section of public and private sectors, and the municipalities and economy of the coastal region. Some are also engaged as teachers and faculty members. The views of this group provided helpful insights into the link between education, work, and society and an external view on current and future contributions to society and economy on the part of the newly established university and its constituent faculties. Though the team highlighted AUB's aspirations on matters such as scientific research and the development of doctoral programmes, it was evident to members of the team that the university should give careful consideration to external perspectives. External stakeholders took the view that while research and doctoral provision may have a place in AUB, priority should be given to applied research and to building a 'vocational university' model with strong links between academic provision and the economic sector.

In reflecting further on this external perspective, and on other evidence, such as the SER and discussions with internal stakeholders, the team formed the view that close attention should be paid to the local economy and the local market. This view was reinforced by external stakeholders who noted that while the university's ability to supply graduates for the local market and local economy is an AUB strength, the potential labour market is not a large one and cannot guarantee to absorb all graduates at any one time. There is also a significant level of unemployment in the region and nationally. From the team's perspective, the newly established AUB will wish to build its future reputation and portfolio in such a way that the labour market will value the graduates from the faculties of a private for-profit university. A key message emerging from the team's deliberations, and the discussions held during their visits, is that the university will need to be agile, flexible, and entrepreneurial as it responds to the market.

With regard to these matters, the team noted that the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)* draws attention, for example, to the underdevelopment of lifelong learning provision in Montenegro, and to the need to improve technology transfer links with private companies. This national-level perspective aligns well with the view of the team and with the views expressed by external stakeholders. Accordingly, in formulating its approach to service to society and to future priorities, in the judgement of the team the

university may benefit from assessing the potential of its faculties for focusing on lifelong learning provision. This might include advanced training courses, higher-skills updating through short courses, continuous professional development (CPD) provision, and other such income-generating opportunities. The scope for developing applied research commissioned by local businesses and private companies on a problem-solving and business solutions basis could also be explored.

On the basis of the above, the team concluded that the specialist focus on areas such as nautical tourism, marina development, and business and management, should serve the university well going forward. Nevertheless, in the judgement of the team, AUB will need to take steps to review and to build on existing connections with the coastal region and local communities and municipalities. Therefore, **the team recommends that the university should, periodically, undertake a survey of external stakeholders and use the information obtained to complete a needs analysis of employer and business requirements in the areas of advanced training and lifelong learning.** From the perspective of the team, this recommendation aligns well with the earlier recommendation, under chapter 2 of this report (*Governance and institutional decision-making*), regarding the desirability of establishing an advisory body comprised of prominent external stakeholders.

Finally, an additional consideration in relation to AUB's civic mission and the university's future engagement with its operating environment relates to links with alumni. The team was interested to learn that a national-level tracer study had been initiated by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of tracking graduates from Montenegrin higher education institutions. The team was informed that AUB is awaiting information from that project on the destinations and experiences of the graduates of its individual faculties from the period 2009-2013. The team also noted that, at this point in time, the university has indicated no plans to undertake its own survey of the destinations and experiences of AUB graduates. From the perspective of the team this is a matter upon which the university may wish to reflect. This prompted the team to consider how the university could strengthen its links with its graduates and how this might assist in raising the profile of the newly formed university. Accordingly, **the team recommends that an Adriatic University Alumni Association should be established to assist in the promotion of the AUB brand and to support the university in, for example, providing internships, career opportunities and sponsoring.**

7. Internationalisation

The team noted the emphasis being placed by AUB on its internationalisation agenda. This includes the desire to improve student and staff mobility as well as to seek opportunities for involvement in scientific project work, as mentioned earlier in this report. These aspirations point to the importance the university attaches to the wider European and international context. During meetings with staff at all levels, the team heard that such developments were seen as being amongst the benefits offered by university status that had not previously been available to institutions with faculty status. The team was told that possibilities for academic exchange, under Erasmus+ and Tempus schemes, were only open to higher education institutions with university status in Montenegro. The team also learned that the internationalisation of higher education through mobility and exchange is one of the strategic objectives listed in the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Montenegro (2016-2020)* and that the Ministry of Education provides the university with information on scholarships and funds available to support staff and student exchanges. The team noted that a national agency has been established to facilitate mobility.

In considering these matters, the team noted, that although the university can now take advantage of the advice provided by the National Erasmus+ Office in the area of cooperation with higher education institutions in the European Union, currently the number and type of international partnerships and formal agreements is small. While existing links with Serbia, Croatia, and Russia for example, and the emerging link with Zheijiang Wanli University in China, are all valued by the university, it is acknowledged that there is work to be done if there is to be growth in this area.

The team observed a similar picture for mobility and exchange. University staff pointed to recent developments at postgraduate level with the possibility of incoming students from Turkey, and of both incoming and outgoing exchanges at undergraduate level with a UK university. However, the team learned while there is an Erasmus link with Split in Croatia, AUB itself does not have an Erasmus Charter.

For students, the reference point for advice on mobility matters was at the level of the faculty, not the university. Furthermore, while students with whom the team met indicated that they had work, internship, and travel opportunities, in the USA for example, these did not relate directly to their programme of study. Indeed, students indicated that mobility and student exchange opportunities is a weak feature of their university and faculty experience.

From the perspective of the team, a key aspect of the university's intentions for internationalisation is the progress yet to be made in English language provision. During their enquiries the team noted that the picture across the AUB and its faculties was rather varied, but that in any case provision is generally currently limited. Students with whom the team met described varying experiences. The team was informed that all students at undergraduate level can access English Language as a subject in either year one or year two, though for specialist postgraduate students there appears to be no such provision. In the field of business and economics, some students can choose 'English for Business' as a third year option. The team learned that one faculty organises a summer school with international partners, under a project sponsored by the Ministry of Education, and that a proportion of that activity is taught in English. However, no study programme or course is delivered in the English language at any of the AUB faculties.

Senior staff with whom the IEP team met confirmed that the lack of English language delivery and support, along with cooperation with international partners for the purpose of both mobility and research, were notable weaknesses facing AUB and its faculties. It was also indicated that any English language delivery would raise accreditation and licensing issues for both the proposed provision and for the teaching staff. The team also noted that while senior managers indicated that quite a number of staff were capable of teaching in English, this was not reflected in the language capabilities of the academic staff with whom the team met.

While the team wishes to encourage the university to pursue its goals on these matters, it formed the view that if AUB's internationalisation agenda is to be taken forward successfully it will require careful planning and prioritisation. In order to gain value-added benefits and to indirectly enhance its capacity, AUB should consider how to align its internationalisation aspirations with its intended developments in academic programmes, including its approach to practice-based study elements, and in research. Consequently, **the team recommends that the university should develop an International Strategy with clear and achievable targets to enable it to realise its plans for student and staff mobility, English language provision, and access to European scientific research projects. To enable this to be taken forward, resources should be found to establish an International Office.**

8. Conclusion

The team enjoyed learning about the aspirations and ambitions of the newly established Adriatic University and its owners and founders, and also the distinctive characteristics of each of its constituent faculties. The team has paid close attention to the directions the university wishes to follow, in both the regional and wider European contexts.

It has been an interesting experience to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders the challenges faced by AUB and the university's efforts to explore future opportunities. The team believes the university has the potential to make progress in its next stage of development.

The recommendations of the team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the university's future success and strategic development, and the aims of AUB to grow into a medium-sized leading regional provider of higher education and to position itself as a modern higher education institution with strong links to the wider European context. The team's recommendations have been reached after full consideration of the existing and emerging structures and processes which inform the operation of the university and its faculties, its plans for change, and its capacity for taking forward successful change.

Governance and institutional decision-making

- If the university's challenging agenda for organisational growth and academic development is to be taken forward the team recommends that stronger academic leadership is required at the central level, in areas such as learning and teaching, research, and quality;
- The team also advises that the university should ensure that plans are in place for the professionalisation of administrative support functions;
- The team recommends that the university may wish to take the opportunity to revisit its business model with a view to ensuring the future sustainability of AUB as a cohesive university that is centrally focused on its academic purposes and mission;
- The team advises that early progress is made in finalising the *AUB Strategic Plan (2018-2025)*, and an action plan with SMART objectives, and that when this is completed each faculty should be required to review and update its own strategic plan to ensure alignment with university-level goals, directions, and key performance indicators;
- At this early stage of its development the university would benefit from more formal input from external stakeholders into institutional strategic thinking and decision-making. With this in mind the team recommends that AUB's owners establish an Advisory Body, comprised of prominent figures from the public and private sectors, to act as a sounding board on university mission, strategy and future directions.

Quality culture

- The team advises that early progress is made towards the establishment of an AUB Quality Assurance Unit, with a broad remit for the quality assurance of teaching, research, and external affairs and for providing oversight, regulatory guidance, and enhancement support for the university's faculties;
- The team recommends that the AUB Senate should request the University Quality Commission to undertake a mapping exercise and 'gap analysis' against each of the standards in Part 1 of the ESG and to benchmark the university's quality assurance arrangements against these;

- The team recommends that to strengthen support for student engagement in institutional processes, and to ensure the independence of students, training should be provided for all student representatives on governance bodies at university and faculty levels and that this should include guidance on what is expected of them in terms of roles and responsibilities.

Learning and teaching

- The team recommends that to facilitate progress in embedding the standards of the ESG and the principles and practices of the Bologna Process, the university should establish a Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, which provides a focal point for round table discussions and pedagogic training for improvement and innovation in learning and teaching, and for the sharing of best practice;
- The team advises that a review is undertaken of the student support service provision in each of AUB's faculties to ensure that there is equivalence and balance in the student experience irrespective of the study programme on which a student is enrolled.

Research

- The team recommends that progress with research-related plans will be best supported by the development at university level of a research strategy which sets directions for AUB and provides guidance and parameters for its constituent faculties. This strategy should set priorities, define the type of research, enable capacity building, and identify internal and external sources of finance. Furthermore, research methods and research informed teaching should be built into curriculum design at Bachelor and Master levels;
- Before making further progress with plans for the introduction of doctoral programmes the team advises that prior to launching doctoral programmes a benchmarking exercise should be undertaken and that this should be accompanied by a feasibility study that provides a robust assessment of available resources (e.g. human resources and facilities) and quality assurance requirements. Building specific and sufficient resources, both in terms of academic staff and material resources, needs to take priority before launching doctoral programmes. Any future doctoral programmes should be located in a well-resourced doctoral school.

Service to society

- The team recommends that the university should, periodically, undertake a survey of external stakeholders and use this information obtained to complete a needs analysis of employer and business requirements in the areas of advanced training and lifelong learning;
- The team advises that an Adriatic University Alumni Association should be established to assist in the promotion of the AUB brand and to support the university in, for example, providing internships, career opportunities and sponsoring.

Internationalisation

- The team recommends that the university should develop an International Strategy with clear and achievable targets to enable it to realise its plans for student and staff mobility, English language provision, and access to European scientific research projects. To enable this to be taken forward resources should be found to establish an International Office.