

MASARYK UNIVERSITY

EVALUATION REPORT

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Contents

1.	Introduction.....	3
1.1	Institutional Evaluation Programme.....	3
1.2	Masaryk University, its history and national contexts.....	3
1.3	The Self Evaluation process	4
1.4	The Evaluation Team and visits	5
1.5	This Report.....	6
1.6	Opportunities and constraints.....	6
2.	Governance and Management.....	7
2.1	General	7
2.2	Organisation and communication	7
2.3	Financial management.....	9
3.	Quality Management and Monitoring	10
3.1	Scope.....	10
3.2	Roles of Office for Academic Qualifications and Quality (AQQO)	10
4.	Study Programmes and teaching	13
4.1	The present situation.....	13
4.2	Student learning and success	13
4.3	Teaching and learning.....	15
5.	Research	17
5.1	Goals	17
5.2	Facilitating and supporting research	18
6.	Internationalisation	20
7.	Summary of recommendations.....	20
8.	Envoi	23

1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. The evaluation took place in 2012 with the visits by the five-person Evaluation Team (hereafter the Team) in March and May. The present Evaluation Report was then drafted and finalised.

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.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme 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 the 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.

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

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

1.2 Masaryk University, its history and national contexts

Masaryk University (MU), founded in 1919, has nearly 45 000 students in nine faculties and a broad mission that covers higher education (HE) up to doctoral levels in education, humanities, law, medicine, sports and in the natural and social sciences. It is the Czech Republic's second largest (public) University and is located in South Moravia in the Republic's second city of Brno (population about 400 000 with as many in an extended urban area). Brno is the seat of judicial authority for the Czech Republic, including the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, and some other national regulatory bodies.

Brno is a large industrial and residential complex spread around a beautiful medieval town centre overlooked by a historic cathedral and the fortress of Špilberk. Brno is the capital of Southern Moravia and *de facto* cultural centre of a much wider area that stretches into parts of western Slovakia.

Apart from research stations, the distribution of the physical facilities of MU reflects to some extent that of the City, with the Rectorate and many of the faculties near or just north of the centre and newer developments related to economics, science, medicine, technology and sports further out, mostly at the new Brno Bohunice campus 5 km to the south west.

MU has grown rapidly over the last 10 years. However, its current Strategic Plan 2011–2015 emphasises quality enhancement over growth and focuses on improving graduate capabilities, increasing research output, greater societal roles and institutional efficiency. This general approach is probably wise given the predicted falling numbers of high school graduates nationally, and increased competition within Czech HE. However, the economic and financial crises in the EU and worldwide, as well as the planned cuts to the Czech National budget for 2013 and following years, could seriously damage the on-going innovative processes at MU.

MU's autonomy within the Czech state is seriously limited with respect to staff appointments and promotions and, although relevant national reforms that could give greater autonomy in these respects are being drafted, some elements of the current reform 'package' are strongly opposed by the National rectors' conference and by student bodies. However, the appointment in May 2012 of an acknowledged expert on higher education and a political neutral (as well as Rector of MU until 2010) as Minister of Education, Youth and Sports indicates that the campaign to reform higher education in the Republic is being re-launched.

This is the second IEP evaluation of MU, the first having been carried out in 2004. MU has developed greatly since then and there have been numerous improvements, but many of the main issues are the same or are such that further improvements are always necessary (e.g. teaching quality, optimisation of resources, interfaculty cooperation and internationalisation).

1.3 The Self Evaluation Process

The self-evaluation process was steered by the Chair, Ladislav Janíček, Vice Rector for Economics, with the support of a secretary Šárka Hrabínová, Head of the Strategy Office. The work of compiling the institutional self-evaluation report (SER) was undertaken by a multi-layered set of representatives overseen by a core team of eight persons made up of the other five Vice-Rectors, the Executive Assistant to the Rector, the Bursar and Academic Senate chairperson. This team acted as the final filter for information to be included in the SER. Another broadly representative team of 12 (four heads of academic departments/teaching staff, three students and five administrative staff) participated in discussions on the documentation presented by the core team. Faculty inputs were via a consultation session with 27 staff and students representing all the faculties. A separate analytical support group made up of five specialists provided technical backup throughout the process and the Rector revised the final SER before approving and signing it. However, the bottom-up aspects of the self-evaluation process appear to have been limited in their general efficacy across the faculties. When individual teaching and administrative staff and students not directly involved were asked by the Team if they had been aware of the self-evaluation process and the SER, few gave a positive response.

The Team found the SER itself to be a valuable and comprehensive general account of MU and its present state, both nationally and internally. Nevertheless, it would have been even more useful if it had contained more quantitative information on some areas including internal review and student feedback processes.

1.4 The Evaluation Team and visits

The self-evaluation report of the University, together with the appendices, was sent to the Team coordinator on 13 February 2012. The first and second visits of the Team to Brno took place on 5 – 6 March and 23–25 May 2012, respectively. In between the visits MU provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation, information and data.

The Team consisted of:

- Henrik Toft-Jensen, former Rector of Roskilde University, Denmark (Chair)
- Lucija Čok, former Minister of Education and former Rector of University of Primorska, Slovenia
- Dieter Timmerman, former Rector of Bielefeld University, Germany
- Dan Derricott, former Student Union Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Lincoln, UK
- James Gosling, former Director of Quality, National University of Ireland – Galway, Ireland (Team coordinator)

The Team greatly appreciated the openness, frankness and sincerity demonstrated in all their interactions with the students, academic and administrative staff, as well as faculty and central managements of MU. The Team thanks, in particular, Mikuláš Bek, Rector of MU, Ladislav Janíček, Chair of Self evaluation process, Šárka Hrabínová, Secretary for the self-evaluation process (and on-line liaison person) and, not least, Iva Zlatušková, Executive Assistant to the Rector and Eva Veselá, Head of the Rector's Secretariat, for having initiated and continued to be closely involved in the whole evaluation process and its associated visits by the Team. The hospitality of the University was also greatly appreciated. The Team's guides, and on the few occasions when it was necessary, translators Petra Judová and Radmila Droběňová, were highly competent and pleasant to work with.

There is a good atmosphere and collaborative environment inside MU. Its leadership is endeavouring to consolidate broad strategic planning and a quality culture that reflects the traditional ethos of the University. The Team greatly valued their visits to the Faculties of Arts, Economic and Administration, Law, Medicine, Science, Social Studies and Sports Studies, and to the Central European Institute of Technology (CEITEC) and thank the deans, staff and students for their help. These visits gave the Team a good understanding of the general student experience at MU, the roles and responsibilities of the faculties, and of the University as a whole. Nevertheless, the Team regrets not having had sufficient time to visit the Faculties of Education and Informatics and at least some of the other productive research centres and groups, such as the Research Centre for Environmental Chemistry and Ecotoxicology (RECETOX), the Institute of Computer Science and the International Institute of Political Science, or the EU funded CESEB, CETOCOEN and CERIT.

The Team was very happy to be able to enjoy a brief but sunny visit to the botanic gardens on the city campus of the Faculty of Science.

1.5 This Report

The oral report presented at the end of the second visit by the Team Chair represented the Team's general impressions and conclusions, ending with some draft recommendations. The extra time for reflection and discussion has allowed for more elaboration. Therefore, this written Report is more detailed, discussional, structured and, hopefully, finely balanced. Care has been taken to acknowledge measures already implemented or proposed in MU's impressive Strategic Plan that correspond or overlap with comments or recommendations in this report and, hopefully, this has been done effectively. Before finalisation, MU had the opportunity to see a draft copy and to point out factual errors. Finally the Report is published on the web sites of both the University and of the IEP.

1.6 Opportunities and constraints

Brno is situated in the east of the country and is well located so as to take advantage of or complement Prague's western location in national initiatives. In the wider European context, Brno is within 300 km of actual/potential partners and competitors in Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Krakow, Lodz and Dresden. Zagreb, Ljubljana, Munich and Nürnberg are not much further away. The local, national and international transport infrastructures work well.

The University is supported exceptionally well by the Regional and City governments who back MU's participation in EU funded programmes that require substantial co-financing. This demonstrates unequivocally a substantial degree of regional coherence and planning and the recognition by local government of the importance of a large prestigious university, particularly one that also has a focus on innovation and on supporting economic development in the region.

Progressively during the two visits, the Team came to recognise in MU a very good traditional 'omnibus' university with some of the best characteristics of such a university:

- A wide variety of disciplines offering many opportunities for interdisciplinarity
- The recognition of the importance of research as an adjunct and prerequisite to good teaching
- Confident staff that are satisfied with their positions and programmes, and proud of their university.

The Team also came to know a university that is willing to take risks to invest substantially in huge infrastructural developments and in important new research initiatives of international as well as national significance. These decisions were possible because of MU's strong tradition of decisive leadership and effective governance. The present leadership is also highly motivated, competent and has a clear vision of the University. The faculties are also clearly capable of acting to solve local and immediate problems. MU has a very effective multi-functional information system that, according to many interviewed, operates in general in a seemingly nearly perfect way.

However, in the relatively near future, both new legal requirements and internally decided strategic developments may contribute to the test of MU's capability to plan and implement substantial changes. In the ongoing and future development of MU, including its fast growing research centres, it is important that leadership and staff always keep in mind that MU is first of all a university, in the full sense of the word, with nearly 45 000 students.

2. Governance and management

2.1 General

Among organisations of equivalent size and complexity (e.g. service industries and businesses), universities are unique in their management structures, not least since they have always had additional modes of governance and forms of employment. For example, when universities such as MU discuss modifications to governance and management, a wider than 'normal' range of terms may be employed. These include 'academic freedom', 'collegiality', 'tenure', 'habilitation' as well as 'academic leadership', 'academic decision making' and 'management'. These terms are used together with (as in many European institutions) 'centralisation', 'rationalisation' and 'decentralisation'. The direct involvement of academic staff (and increasingly of students and administrative staff) in making inputs and decisions is automatic at all levels. Decision-making may tend to be slower and more conservative, but the morale, enthusiasm and autonomy of the many self-motivated intellectual beings, on which a university depends for its success, are protected. A big challenge is to maintain these safeguards while meeting the demands of our fast changing times.

A major issue for any European university at present is uncertainty. Given the current political situation in the Czech Republic with the stop/start process to reform higher education, this may apply even more to the Czech universities. Areas of uncertainty or predicted (negative) change that may affect MU include:

- Precise nature of upcoming national reforms of higher education
- The formula for state funding of higher education and the possible introduction of tuition or registration fees
- Economic growth and prospects for the employment of graduates, given ongoing financial crises in the EU and worldwide
- The continuous shift in universities internationally to higher education through the medium of English (and other key foreign languages).

In addition to these important challenges, the demographic decline in high school leavers is a most serious issue.

Uncertainty promotes stasis and negative trends (even foreseeable ones) can test to the limit the ability of an organisation to change sufficiently in response.

2.2 Organisation and communication

Although faculties in Czech universities have not, for many years, been legal entities capable of granting their own degrees, MU is still in many respects a federal university. For example, the University itself has no essential formal role in the approval or re-

accreditation of its study programmes. The larger faculties, in particular, have considerable autonomy in teaching, research, finance and services. However, it is important that a university today should have a governance system strong enough, and structures flexible enough, to be capable of adapting to a changing environment, as and when necessary. At MU that capability depends on central leadership working cooperatively with faculties that are willing to see all issues from the perspectives of both the faculty and the University. Not least, given increasingly limited resources, structures, services and functions at MU may need to be adjusted significantly to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness.

All large organisations, and not only universities with strong independent-minded faculties, need ways in which to enable and encourage improved practices and procedures and, when they have been tested and proven in specific areas, to ensure mechanisms for their more widespread adoption. MU has already recognised the importance of cooperation between academic disciplines, both in research and in the creation of new inter-disciplinary study programmes. This interdisciplinarity is important both between and within faculties. All of this requires increased 'horizontal communication' across the University with more opportunities and incentives for diverse innovators to meet and work together. The university website 'muni.cz' and the excellently produced 'online.muni.cz' newspapers could have expanded roles in this.

High international standards both in study programmes and in research are feasible only when a critical mass of talented players are in a position to contribute efficiently. In the view of the Team this need is not always met at MU, where many departments have just 4–5 academic staff and where some key disciplines may now be unnecessarily fragmented across faculties, which may have had perfectly valid rationales in previous times.

Also, when reforming or implementing any service or function, detailed consideration is needed. A key question may often be: should it be centralised, decentralised or could a mixture of both be best?

Already, in the interest of efficiency, effectiveness and, not least, risk management, many adjustments to the relative roles of the faculty and central administration at MU are being implemented or are agreed. These include:

- Appointment of a Vice Rector for Academic Affairs
- Study programmes: the University from now on decide on accreditations and re-accreditations
- Quality assessment of teaching and research are promoted by the University's new Academic Qualifications and Quality Office (AQO)
- Central Human Resource management in collaboration with the faculties
- Expansion of internationalisation supported by central initiatives combined with decentralized activities

All of these initiatives are appropriate and timely and fully in line with international good practice. They deserve the support of management and staff in all the faculties, which, if they are to be successful, must sometimes be constructively critical.

Effective leadership and governance may be the key to MU taking maximum advantage of the reform of higher education when the new law is finally agreed. Most importantly, if the collaboration between faculties and central leadership is good this may facilitate the development of improved performance with respect to international standards.

'Feedback' and 'new ideas' are also essential to good management, particularly change management. Academic bodies may ensure contributions from the professoriate but inputs from external stakeholders and (particularly with respect to feedback) from students are also essential. Some universities rely on the external members of governing councils for stakeholder inputs, but many now have advisory bodies primarily to ensure efficient inputs from business and relevant organisations, including important employers of graduates.

The Team points out that it was at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in the Czech Republic in 2001 that a communiqué was agreed which stated that students should be seen "as competent, active and constructive partners[, and] participate in and influence the organisation and content of [their] education". At MU, whilst students have seats on Faculty and University Senates, the effectiveness of student feedback and contributions through representatives may be significantly deficient in two respects:

- The lack of student representation at the levels of academic departments and the management of study programmes
- The lack of a university student union led by student officers with sabbatical leave from their studies, who could make a more effective contribution.

Correcting the first of these would be easier for study programmes with large cohorts of students and for larger departments. With respect to a possible 'University student union', some countries have very good models that could be emulated. The Team were made aware that, in principle, senior management at MU would support such a development, and very much welcomes and praises this. This would be entirely consistent with the student element of MU Strategy 10.3 (Strategic Plan).

2.3 Financial management

Given the ambitions of MU, and the prospect of cuts in government funding for higher education, a number of general approaches to maintain standards and ensure adequate finance in support of quality enhancement and strategic developments could be prioritised. Even before national budgets are set, forward-looking University measures to support the faculties in their own planning could minimize consequences. Priority areas should be protected; saving money should never be a sole criterion for change.

Building on major changes over the last few years, MU needs to continue to diversify its income including seeking additional funds from sources willing to support discrete services or initiatives, including from alumni and alumnae. In other words, there are now extra incentives for MU to develop and enhance systematically its means and ways of fundraising.

The Evaluation Team recommends that MU:

- Continues to value explicitly the support of the regional authorities and external stakeholders including as sources of ideas and feedback

- Enhances strategic planning by keeping the Strategic Plan 2011–2015 under review, perhaps with a substantial revision in 2013. When appropriate, make future Plans and associated objectives more verifiable
- Continues the evolution of relationships between central administration and services and the nine faculties to enhance overall efficiency and effectiveness. Also, additional structures and mechanisms that increase and enhance cross-faculty contacts and cooperations should be identified and encouraged
- Anticipates as much as possible the upcoming national reforms of higher education and begins to explore options in each area
- Improves cooperation and sharing of good practice among academic and administrative units at all levels (inter-faculty, inter-department, inter-research centre)
- Enhances transparency in governance with respect to responsibilities, economic issues and decision-making
- Improves and expands the involvement of students as partners in the governance of MU at all levels including the management of study programmes. This could involve the establishment of a student-staff study group to identify and examine a number of existing models in broadly similar universities across Europe. For example, the University could benefit from an MU student union capable of improving the effectiveness of students' representation and contributing to the enhancement of the student experience
- Continues planning for expected reductions in government funding while seeking additional sources of support. Plans could involve guidance to faculties on identifying and protecting University and faculty priorities.

3. Quality Management and Monitoring

3.1 Scope

As with other aspects of organisational management, 'quality' comes with many associated words such as 'assurance', 'enhancement', 'performance', 'satisfaction' and 'control'. There is also the issue of scope and, related to this, the roles and location in the overall management structure of a function to oversee quality related activities. In universities teaching is of course a central concern, and MU is also clearly intent on improving the way quality of research is assessed. However, management and administration also need (self) assessment and enhancement. If a quality function's scope of activity, titles (of bodies and officers) and reporting lines are well defined from the start, implementation may be a great deal easier.

3.2 Roles of Office for Academic Qualifications and Quality (AQO)

The Team greatly appreciated the information in the 7-page University document describing the scope and activities of MU's AQO and is confident that the new appointments of Vice Rector for Academic Affairs and Head of the Office will continue with the planned activities and build on what has already been achieved. The important

complementary role of the Strategy Office in carrying out a range of highly relevant surveys is also noted.

However, the present scope or list of activities of the AQQO as presented in the above document is extremely wide and, given the size of MU and the range of needs directly related to qualifications and quality, may simply be too great for the Office to implement satisfactorily. In practice, perhaps, many of the functions listed for the AQQO, such as management of doctoral studies, habilitation procedures, Scientific Board agendas and honorary degrees etc. are actually responsibilities of the broader Vice Rectorate for Academic Affairs. In addition, some of the other listed functions might be suitably transferred to the Research Vice Rectorate or to Human Resources.

This could leave the AQQO (quoting selectively from all the lists in the same document) with:

- “Coordinates the complex evaluation of MU activities [] in the field of research and development,
- Management and administration of internal evaluation processes at MU,
- Monitors foreign and local trends in the sphere of quality monitoring,
- Controls the development and methodological support of internal mechanisms [],
- Manages relations and communication [] in the area of introducing new mechanisms and measures,
- Plans and coordinates [] processes of quality monitoring and assurance.
- Provides [] support in internal mechanisms of MU educational processes quality evaluation,
- Provides communication with faculties [on] new mechanisms and measures,
- Plans, coordinates and organises activities related to the process of educational processes quality monitoring and assurance.”

In addition (while recognising that much may have been lost in translation from the original Czech and from changes of context), the Team suggest that the wording of these 10 remaining responsibilities may be insufficient in clarifying the necessary sharing of responsibilities and activities between the AQQO and the faculties. Such sharing may be essential to ensure local ownership of quality processes and feasibility for the AQQO.

Moreover, given the AQQO’s remit with respect to qualifications, it is surprising that there is no mention or hint to these central parameters to the Bologna Process: curricular design or reform, or the anticipated national qualifications framework, although many of these do figure significantly later in the document under ‘Current activities’. The Team also notes that: ‘Degree programme focus and diversification’, ‘Supporting a student-centred approach’ and ‘Developing a common Masaryk University graduate profile’ are agreed strategies in section 1 of MU’s Strategic Plan for 2011–2015.

The lack of procedures for internal quality assessment of management and administration (both central and in faculties, etc.) is certainly not unique to MU but common to universities across Europe. However, finding ways to enhance important aspects of management and administration could be very valuable and demonstrate to all staff that

quality assessment applies everywhere at MU. The question could be asked as to whether this could be an additional function of the Strategy Office at MU.

However, MU through the AQQO is deeply engaged in a range of important and highly relevant projects, including:

- As from 2012, the internal quality evaluation process will be obligatory for all study fields applying for a re-accreditation or renewal of accreditation
- As from 2013, the self-evaluation process will be obligatory for all study fields in bachelor, master and doctoral degree studies at MU
- The introduction of four-year evaluation periods starting in 2013. Based on schedules developed in the faculties, all study fields that MU offers will be evaluated within each cycle
- Active participation in the National Qualifications Framework for tertiary education, which is prepared by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports within the Q-RAM project
- Establishment of a representative working group to draft the concept of research evaluation (deadline?)

MU should push forward with its ongoing and planned projects for quality management and with complementary initiatives. The Team found some evidence indicating that academic standards and outcomes might not always comply at least with the spirit of the Bologna reforms and part 1 of the ESG.

The Team noted general satisfaction in the SER and during conversations with some in the management with the Information System's student feedback mechanism. On the other hand, in conversations with students and probing discussions with staff, it became quite clear that it is seriously flawed in its form and implementation, and its potential for bringing about improvements in teaching practices. (This will be further discussed below.)

The Evaluation Team recommends that MU should:

- Provide the new Vice Rector for Academic Affairs with an opportunity to review the roles of the AQQ Office, and ensure that resources are adequate for the revised roles
- In line with its Strategic Plan, establish a qualifications framework and academic standards at Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral levels and ensure that all programmes comply fully with these when submitted to the new evaluation and (re-) accreditation processes
- Have (an) external quality expert(s) evaluate the processes and outcomes of the 11 initial evaluations of study fields and implement adjustments to ensure that these processes are effective
- Ensure that faculties take deliberate steps to engage students more as partners and should complement this by using student opinion more to inform university

decisions, eventually in co-operation with the students' union if and when it is established

- Reform the system for student feedback on teaching to ensure that relevant aggregated data is available to faculty and university management.

4. Study Programmes and Teaching

4.1 The present situation

MU is a highly popular choice for applicant students and the students who spoke to the Evaluation Team expressed high levels of general satisfaction with their experience at MU. However, there are also clear indications from a range of sources that a number of reforms may be needed. These include a revision of the range of study programmes offered, improvements to individual study programmes, how they are taught and how teaching and programme delivery are assessed. Both the strategic plan and the SER show that the University is very aware of at least some of these needs:

- Educational Mission is discussed [] in MU Strategic Plan 2011–15, Strategies 1.1, 1.3, 1.5 and 1.6.
- Seven out of 15 weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis carried out for the SER (pages 29 and 30) are relevant in this connection.

In addition, the following points became apparent to the Team:

- Puzzlement among many academic staff during discussions on 'expected learning outcomes' in relation to curricula, teaching and assessment
- High and increasing dropout rates, not only in first year of bachelor studies.
- The apparent general acceptance by many staff in at least some faculties that very high dropout rates in the first year are acceptable
- Students in a number of faculties (some in vocational programmes), while recognising the high quality of the theoretical knowledge they may acquire, want more opportunities to learn practical skills
- The current implementation of the ECTS system, with some programmes having some "one unit courses", indicates poor or ineffective guidelines and rules regarding its application.
- The general opinion among students is that the feedback process on the Information System can be very tedious to use, as there is a full form to be completed, even for one-ECTS-unit courses, and that it does not lead to improvements in teaching (see also above)

4.2 Student learning and success

The University's portfolio of study programmes

After substantial reading and many questions the Team came to realise the richness of the list of bachelor and masters programmes that may be 'read' at MU. Provided their quality is high and even, this is admirable and the Team easily accepts that even loss-making study

programmes may be fully justified if they are in line with the strategic priorities of a faculty or the University. However, every HEI should be aware of all its 'competitors' and that multiple provisions of programmes in minor disciplines or disciplines across the Czech higher education sector could be very difficult to justify. Moreover, ideally every university programme should be taught in the context of a vigorous research environment.

Non-completion

Although some students 'drift' into higher education and others may even choose the easy life of the disengaged student to avoid the realities of the labour market, the great majority embark on their studies with hope and ambition. In addition, changing direction only after or during the first year may be the correct choice for many students with their subsequent choices proving to be wise and successful. Until recently, there was a financial incentive for Czech public universities to admit many students but this appears to be changing to 'the more students *completing* the more money'. Moreover and most importantly, very high non-completion rates surely imply high human costs for many of the dejected or rejected students. These are young people who may doubt their own value and potential and therefore there may be a significant contribution to that group (growing in times of economic retrenchment) of young people 'without hope'.

An effective, balanced response for MU could involve:

- More rigorous selection of entrants through reformed entrance examinations and selection criteria
- Better/innovative/more varied teaching to improve student engagement, learning and academic success
- Tracing/tracking, surveying students to understand better why entrants do not complete their courses

In any case both University-wide and faculty specific measures may be essential.

High numbers of students in the first year (accepted in anticipation of 'inevitable' losses) have affected the teaching they receive with, for example, first year students of Chemistry no longer having practical classes. This creates high student/staff ratios, teaching without close relationships between teachers and students, crowded educational spaces, reduced practical instruction, resources and equipment and therefore no easy solutions. However, pilot programmes on improved pedagogy are underway in Chemistry and Sports Studies and knowledge of any successes arising from these should be made available across all faculties. Other measures discussed below may also be relevant.

As in all other HEIs, counting students who enter a programme or year, or those who have completed a year and then subtracting, is an ineffective measurement of student non-completion. Tracking or tracing every individual from entrance to exit is more difficult but essential to accuracy.

The student experience and graduate competencies

A number of expressions used in the Strategic Plan, the SER, and by the Rector and others struck the Team as indicative of a general and strong will at MU to improve and expand

student learning and graduate competencies. These include: “student centred approach”, “favourable study environment”, “common graduate profile”, “most efficient learning methods”, “quality of instruction”, “underdeveloped collaboration”, “pedagogical competence”, “formative assessment methods”, “assessment standards and criteria”, and “a warmer environment for students”. These concepts and sentiments are central to the commonly needed (or only recently achieved) reforms to teaching and learning in most universities in Europe. Learning by experience and generic skills such as writing, speaking in public, foreign languages, teamwork and leadership also figure prominently in current reforms of higher education programmes at all levels. All of these require ongoing curricular reform, careful monitoring and rigorous periodic review in line with the ESG, suitable resources and widespread uptake of substantial pedagogical training.

Assessment of teaching and programme delivery

While students were generally highly sceptical of the central course evaluation process (see above), some students reported that some of their teachers requested feedback early in their courses and consequently made adjustments in response. This is important as it indicates that the timing of feedback is important and that a single ‘good’ system is insufficient; there need to be multiple ways (including class representatives) by which students can support good teaching and dissuade poor practices and processes.

The Team agrees with AQO staff that the central course evaluation questionnaire should be revised to make it more effective as a measure of good teaching, perhaps consisting of both common and faculty specific (but centrally approved) elements. Its effectiveness and student response rates will also depend on the abolition or aggregation of very small ECTS unit courses with an upper limit set on the number of forms to be completed by any student per semester. As stated above, the accessibility of aggregated data should also be widened to make excellent or poor performing study fields, departments and faculties visible and to guide relevant decision-making at faculty and University levels.

Data collected in this way may not be suitable evidence of teaching ability for direct input to decisions on promotions. In these situations student opinions are very important but as one of a number of sources of information on the effectiveness of a teacher.

4.3 Teaching and learning

A centre for the enhancement of teaching & learning

For many reasons discussed above, but also because the Czech higher education sector will become more competitive with the impending ‘demographic decline’, it is essential that MU invest substantially to support its teachers in their efforts to facilitate student learning, especially in the early stages of their careers. It is clear to the Team from many meetings during both visits that, despite very productive working relationships between staff and students, the quality of teaching and learning at MU is sometimes less than satisfactory, and teachers have no centre or service to turn to for support when looking to develop their pedagogic understanding and practice. Optimally such a centre should have staff who are experts in higher education practice; combine support for more traditional pedagogy *and* new technologies; conduct activities at the Centre *and* locally in the faculties; publish

research findings in national and international journals; and *never* be seen as a place where only poor teachers go, or are sent. In other universities, such centres:

- are sources of advice and guidance to central and faculty management and to the equivalent of the AQO, and participate in strategic planning processes
- work with and support directors of study fields on curricular design, compilation and use of intended learning outcomes, learning and assessment strategies etc.
- give advice to individual teachers wishing to improve their teaching and student learning or plan their professional development as teachers
- offer a rich mix of activities that together are capable of bringing about the degrees of improvement and maintenance of quality deemed necessary, including:
 - Regular (and regularly repeated) workshops and discrete training events of limited duration (half day, one day, etc.) on generic skills and specific topics led by experts internal to the Centre or from the faculties or other Czech institutions
 - Semester or year-long part-time courses with associated formal qualifications in 'teaching and learning in higher education', leading eventually but not necessarily to a masters level degree, as well as supervision and support for PhD students working on relevant projects
 - Frequent 'conversations on teaching and learning' seminars, in other words informal lunchtime (or evening) presentations and discussions open to all staff where they are able to share ideas, experiences and information
- organise conferences (annual series and/or occasional) with external contributors and open to national and international participation.

Celebration of good teaching

When the subject was raised, academic staff could not cite examples of being recognised or rewarded for excellent teaching, whereas they found that good performance research was often acknowledged. The Team suggests that bringing about a culture at MU which recognises and admires good teaching could partly be achieved by publicly celebrating good teaching and the best teachers. It is of course for MU and individual faculties to determine the most appropriate ways of achieving this celebration. There are many examples elsewhere. These include students nominating their teachers for awards which could be presented at a special evening event ('Oscar style') or at a graduation ceremony.

The Evaluation Team recommends that MU should:

- Support its diversity of study fields as much as possible as it becomes necessary to rationalise them to meet budgetary targets and comply with the relevant sections of any new national law. Protect programmes that are in line with faculty and university strategic priorities and supported by a cohort of staff active in relevant research areas
- Revise criteria for enrolment to improve the identification of entrants with good prospects of success and reduce the massive dropout of students during the first year of studies

- Devise and implement strategies to enhance first year motivation, learning and retention
- Enhance the measurement of student non-completion, and develop a University and complementary faculty strategies to improve overall student retention
- Develop new rules on ECTS that will apply to all faculties including minimum and standard sizes of modules/courses
- Prioritise University-wide curricular reform with integrated intended learning outcomes. There is a clear and great need to enhance practical & generic skills among graduates
- Pursue vigorously proposed structures and processes for University accreditation of all study programmes
- Revise the student feedback system and include incentives to ensure the implementation of necessary improvements to teaching. Prepare aggregated reports that can be used to inform faculty and university management decisions. Promote complementary feedback channels via teacher and 'field of study' initiatives and student class representatives
- Establish a Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning
- Recognise exceptional teaching, including a system by which students can nominate teachers for an awards process

5. Research

5.1 Goals

With some 'pauses', MU has been developing as a significant centre for research since its establishment. This has accelerated in the last five to ten years, especially since the large investment in the new University Campus Bohunice, where construction began in 2004. At the same time, after Czech accession to the EU, substantial European structural and other funds became available. However, such investments can also carry heavy risks in the case of poor performance or mal-administration. The Rector is clearly aware of this and deserves strong and consistent support in acting to maintain high standards and meeting challenges.

The Evaluation Team developed its understanding of the further development of research at MU through reading the Strategic Plan and other documentation, during many faculty interviews with staff and deans, and through discussions with the Rector and the Vice Rector for Research. The Rector distilled MU's ambitions with respect to research and the future of MU into three very general and complementary goals:

1. Developing an internal climate with greatly improved lateral communication and cooperation within and between the faculties, characterised by empathy and professionalism.
2. Opening MU to the international scientific community and the world far beyond the levels that have been achieved so far.

3. Making Masaryk University a source of knowledge that is valued and much more visible throughout Europe and beyond.

Clearly these goals, as they are being attained, will also involve the enhancement of the teaching mission of the University, which is the focus of Section 4 above. Lateral cooperation linked to fields of study gives opportunities for staff to identify opportunities with respect to joint research (and vice versa). In many universities this has been a prime rationale for the creation of bigger units through the reform of faculty and departmental structures. Another way in which research and teaching can be mutually supportive is through contributions by researchers to teaching. The Team supports the MU (and CEITEC) policy in this respect.

The low proportion of international staff in MU is cited as a weakness in the SWOT section of the SER. It is also clear from the plans for CEITEC, and recent appointments to senior positions there, that increasing the proportion of researchers with international backgrounds and records of performance is a major objective. National law and habilitation procedures can be barriers and MU should vigorously seek reform of these where it sees it as necessary for its own internationalisation.

While Goal 3 above is a worthy and complementary objective, its achievement will depend on quality, output and reputation. This is why the ongoing development of a 'research assessment system' and related incentives and processes (Strategic Plan 4.1) are so important.

5.2 Facilitating and supporting research

Roles of research centres:

In 2012 research at MU falls into two very broad categories:

- Department-based small research teams and individual researchers, and
- Projects in larger research centres receiving substantial national and international funding.

Although almost all staff in all faculties visited by the Team expressed support for the large-scale CEITEC enterprise, there are clearly some tensions between the above facets of research at MU. This is not at all unusual in universities internationally and presents a challenge to management in planning, and balancing wisely and fairly, investments, recognition and rewards. Many in the humanities and social sciences and professions might argue that strategic priority should be given also to selected areas directly relevant to Czech society. The Team urges groups of researchers or individuals in the humanities, social sciences and related areas to come forward with ambitious projects to test MU's commitment to 'support new thematic research areas' (Strategic Plan 4.1). In addition, while supporting research groups with 'critical mass', MU also needs to continue to support smaller groups and individual academic staff performing (or, for new staff, with the clear potential to perform) high level research.

Moreover, the new structures for research that are being developed in the large research centres are seen as a driving force for change at MU because they are also valuable as models and test beds for the potential of inter-institutional and interfaculty cooperation,

interdisciplinarity, inputs from returned emigrants and foreigners, and management innovations and styles.

Doctoral programmes

The Team also met a number of PhD students and young researchers and were impressed by their enthusiasm, the variety of their projects and their loyalty to MU. Structured PhD programmes, with systematic opportunities to acquire and improve research-related and generic skills, constitute a relatively new approach that has a strong rationale and is the international trend. For postgraduate students who contribute to teaching, this approach also allows for training in related teaching competences.

Moving on to leadership

The Team congratulates MU researchers for their growing success in winning EU research funds as important partners in international and multi-institutional projects, but notes that MU is the lead institution for very few of these. This is a challenge that may be met more effectively by targeting already successful areas and continuously revising the forms of MU's support to applicants via the Vice Rectorate for Research. Benchmarking with another equivalent university with a track record of expanding its research leadership could be useful in identifying effective measures. The management of funds within research groups and projects is another area where learning from others could be invaluable.

The Evaluation Team recommends that MU should:

- Continue to strengthen University research administration, grant management and performance management to ensure universal compliance with regulations, deadlines and the meeting of targets.
- Exploit relevant reforms in the new law, continue to work through the Rectors' Conference and, if considered necessary, make direct representations to the relevant ministers to remove or circumvent barriers to the employment and career progression of returning emigrants or foreign nationals.
- Continue to develop the 'research assessment system' and related incentives and processes in support of a general research philosophy with high standards and a dynamic research culture, including criteria that ensure awareness by University management of research units not meeting agreed targets.
- As a comprehensive University, ensure a balanced research enterprise by seeking to further develop or establish a small number of interdisciplinary research centres in the humanities / societal studies / legal areas / other disciplines, with ambitions, prospects and, progressively, the resources necessary for achieving an international profile.
- Ensure that its PhD programmes (in their structure and the attention given to high level generic and research skills) comply with developing international forms and standards. In other large universities this has been facilitated through a small number of cross-faculty doctoral schools.

- Continue to develop professional and material support for applicants for research funding, including cooperative applications for which MU would be the lead institution in areas where MU researchers already have good track records.
- In line with the many excellent objectives and provisions of the Strategic Plan 4.1 and 4.2, establish a special scheme to motivate and reward young researchers.

6. Internationalisation

It is clear that, for MU, increased internationalisation, in all its broadly accepted aspects, is fundamental to its strategic ambitions. Success in this depends on change and innovation in all aspects and at all levels of the University. While English is already the *lingua franca* of global higher education and research, significant advantages could arise through the further development of one or two other languages among staff and students, particularly in support of bilateral relations and exchanges. Language supports are already in place but may not be adequate in capacity or suitability in the face of parallel developments and of additional encouragements that may (and perhaps should) be introduced.

Student exchanges are already considerable and there are many thousands of foreign degree students. The very large numbers of Slovak students attending MU should be seen more explicitly as an important asset, the potential of which has perhaps not been explored sufficiently. No matter what the country of origin of the students may be, fees are payable for all study programmes delivered in English. The Team considered whether the marketing of these could be expanded or improved.

The Team had fruitful meetings with the staff of the International Office as well as with both incoming students and students returning to MU. The foreign students, one after the other, expressed pleasant surprise at how MU had greatly exceeded their expectations. Therefore, perhaps if potential foreign students who are only barely aware of MU, or who decide not to choose MU over alternative universities, knew more about MU, Brno and southern Moravia and of the experiences of the students the Team met, this aspect of internationalisation could be greatly expanded.

The Evaluation Team recommends that MU:

- Continues to support the International Office in meeting the growing mission of the University in all related respects
- Measures regularly the effectiveness of language policies and supports
- Reviews all information sources targeted at foreign students with a view to increasing their accessibility and distribution, and improving their ability to convey full information on the offerings and attractions of MU, Brno and southern Moravia.

7. Summary of recommendations

In summary, the Evaluation Team recommends that MU:

With respect to Governance and Management

- Continues to value explicitly the support of the regional authorities and external stakeholders including as sources of ideas and feedback
- Enhances strategic planning by keeping the Strategic Plan 2011–2015 under review, perhaps with a substantial revision in 2013. When appropriate, make future Plans and associated objectives more verifiable
- Continues the evolution of relationships between central administration and services and the nine faculties to enhance overall efficiency and effectiveness. Also, additional structures and mechanisms that increase and enhance cross-faculty contacts and cooperations should be identified and encouraged
- Anticipates as much as feasible the upcoming national reforms of higher education and begin exploring options in each area
- Improves cooperation and sharing of good practice among academic and administrative units at all levels (inter-faculty, inter-department, inter-research centre)
- Enhances transparency in governance with respect to responsibilities, economic issues and decision-making
- Improves and expands the involvement of students as partners in the governance of MU at all levels including the management of study programmes. This could involve the establishment of a student-staff study group to identify and examine a number of existing models in broadly similar universities across Europe. For example, the University could benefit from an MU student union capable of improving the effectiveness of students' representation and contributing to the enhancement of the student experience
- Continues planning for expected reductions in government funding while seeking additional sources of support. Plans could involve guidance to faculties on identifying and protecting University and faculty priorities.

With respect to Quality Management and Monitoring

- Provides the new Vice Rector for Academic Affairs with an opportunity to review the roles of the AQQ Office, and ensure that resources are adequate for the revised roles
- In line with its Strategic Plan, establishes a qualifications framework and academic standards at Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral levels and ensure that all programmes comply fully with these when submitted to the new evaluation and (re-) accreditation processes
- Has (an) external quality expert(s) to evaluate the processes and outcomes of the 11 initial evaluations of study fields and implement adjustments to ensure that these processes are effective
- Ensures that faculties take deliberate steps to engage students more as partners and should complement this by using student opinion more to inform university

decisions, eventually in co-operation with the students' union if and when it is established

- Reforms the system for student feedback on teaching to ensure that relevant aggregated data are available to faculty and university management.

With respect to Study Programmes and teaching

- Supports its diversity of study fields as much as possible as it becomes necessary to rationalise them to meet budgetary targets and comply with the relevant sections of any new national law. Protect programmes that are in line with faculty and university strategic priorities and supported by a cohort of staff active in relevant research areas
- Revises criteria for enrolment to improve the identification of entrants with good prospects of success and reduce the massive dropout of students during the first year of studies
- Devises and implements strategies to enhance first year motivation, learning and retention
- Enhances the measurement of student non-completion, and develops a University and complementary faculty strategies to improve overall student retention
- Develops new rules on ECTS that will apply to all faculties including minimum and standard sizes of modules/courses
- Prioritises University-wide curricular reform with integrated intended learning outcomes. There is a clear and great need to enhance practical and generic skills among graduates
- Pursues vigorously proposed structures and processes for University accreditation of all study programmes
- Revises the student feedback system and includes incentives to ensure the implementation of necessary improvements to teaching. Prepares aggregated reports that can be used to inform faculty and university management decisions. Promotes complementary feedback channels via teacher and 'field of study' initiatives and student class representatives
- Establishes a Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning
- Recognises exceptional teaching, including a system by which students can nominate teachers for an awards process.

With respect to Research

- Continues to strengthen University research administration, grant management and performance management to ensure universal compliance with regulations, deadlines and the meeting of targets
- Exploits relevant reforms in the new law, continue to work through the Rectors' Conference and, if considered necessary, makes direct representations to the

relevant ministers to remove or circumvent barriers to the employment and career progression of returning emigrants or foreign nationals

- Continues to develop the 'research assessment system' and related incentives and processes in support of a general research philosophy with high standards and a dynamic research culture, including criteria that ensure awareness by University management of research units not meeting agreed targets
- As a comprehensive University, ensures a balanced research enterprise by seeking to further develop or establish a small number of interdisciplinary research centres in the humanities / societal studies / legal areas / other disciplines, with ambitions, prospects and, progressively, the resources necessary for achieving an international profile
- Ensures that its PhD programmes (in their structure and the attention given to high level generic and research skills) comply with developing international forms and standards. In other large universities this has been facilitated through a small number of cross-faculty doctoral schools
- Continues to develop professional and material support for applicants for research funding, including cooperative applications for which MU would be the lead institution in areas where MU researchers already have good track records
- In line with the many excellent objectives and provisions of the Strategic Plan 4.1 and 4.2, establishes a special scheme to motivate and reward young researchers.

With respect to Internationalisation

- Continues to support the International Office in meeting the growing mission of the University in all related respects
- Measures regularly the effectiveness of language policies and supports
- Reviews all information sources targeted at foreign students with a view to increasing their accessibility and distribution, and improving their ability to convey full information on the offerings and attractions of MU, Brno and southern Moravia.

8. Envoi

The overall impression of the Team is that Masaryk University is a most impressive and multi-faceted institution. MU is already great in the Czech context and its challenge is to become clearly visible on the international stage. Some of the necessary changes may not be easy to implement or immediately welcomed by all, as actually realising the potential and capability of MU may require:

- Wise and open recruitment free from unnecessary restrictions
- Rationalisation of structures and study programmes
- Sound investments in rigorously selected and monitored areas of research and
- A universal recognition that only high standards are good enough.

The potential and capability are certainly present, but they can only be realised by the combined and coordinated efforts of staff, students, management and external stakeholders.