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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,  
SCIENCE AND SPORT**



# **University of Nova Gorica**

## **EVALUATION REPORT**

June 2015

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**IEP**

EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

**University of Nova Gorica**

***EVALUATION REPORT***

*June 2015*

Team:

Carles Solà, Chair

Lennart Olausson

Marija Vasilevska

Lewis Purser, Team Coordinator

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Nova Gorica (UNG), Slovenia, by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). The evaluation took place in 2015.

### **1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme**

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA). The IEP offers evaluations to support higher education institutions in the ongoing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The 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 the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European 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 on:

- 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 Profile of the University of Nova Gorica**

The University of Nova Gorica is a small, multi-campus university situated at the western border of Slovenia, with seven schools and a number of research centres across various campuses in Nova Gorica, Gorizia (Italy), Ajdovščina and Vipava. A small number of additional UNG research facilities can be found elsewhere in western Slovenia and northern Italy.

The academic areas covered by the schools include applied sciences, arts, engineering and management, environmental sciences, humanities, viticulture and enology, as well as a graduate school for the entire university. Each school has one Bachelor programme only, apart from the School of Humanities which has two, and one Masters programme, apart from the School of Viticulture and Enology which has none and the School of Humanities which has two. The research centres cover environmental research, astroparticle physics, organic physics, materials, multiphase processes, quantum optics, systems and information technologies, humanities, atmospheric research, biomedical sciences and engineering, cognitive science of language and wine research.

According to the UNG self-evaluation report and appendices, student numbers are small, with 500 students in total as of October 2014. The numbers of students in each school range from 20 to 123, split between Bachelor and Masters students, with 82 doctoral students in the graduate school. The number of students in some study programmes is therefore very small (less than ten students). In October 2014 there were 326 members of academic staff employed at UNG, giving a very favourable student:staff ratio of 1.5:1. However, the full-time equivalent (FTE) academic staff count is about half this number, given that many staff are part-time and also hold employment elsewhere, typically at a Slovenian research institute.

The University of Nova Gorica is a private university, founded in 1995 by the Municipality of Nova Gorica and the Jožef Stefan Institute of Ljubljana. In 2003 the Municipality of Ajdovščina and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts joined the original two founders to assist with the further development of the then Nova Gorica Polytechnic, expanding the original focus on environmental sciences to include humanities, and also extending geographically. UNG was granted university status by the Slovenian Council for Higher Education in 2006.

The mission of UNG, as stated in the self-evaluation report, is centred around the creation of new knowledge, the transfer of knowledge to students and the business community, and ensuring the employability of its graduates. These aspects of the UNG mission were all visible to the team. However, the team found that the ethos and profile of UNG were mainly articulated around its research rather than its teaching, despite UNG's small size which allows a close working relationship with students and young researchers that is explicitly highlighted as one of UNG's strengths. The team found that a large amount of high quality research takes place, and the research-oriented character of the university is emphasised in UNG documentation and discourse. Most UNG staff are employed as researchers, with their teaching duties appearing to have secondary status. UNG income comes primarily from

research grants, and UNG teaching programmes and locations are for the most part designed around UNG research strengths.

However, the team learned during the visits that UNG's main current objective is to increase student numbers, and that the overall context for this at present is considered difficult. This implies the need to broaden UNG's original ethos and profile. The team felt that this should be seen as part of the broader challenge of sustainability which UNG is currently facing, which also involves a number of organisational and infrastructural questions.

The team was pleased to note that the UNG leadership is very aware of these challenges and is working hard to address them.

### **1.3 The evaluation process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation steering group led by the chairman of the UNG quality assurance committee. The group also included the quality assurance coordinators of each of the UNG schools who, by their functions, are all members of the UNG Quality Assurance Committee, as well as a student representative. The self-evaluation process, which included a SWOT analysis, was conducted in close contact with the UNG academic and management structures. The self-evaluation report was presented to the rector, the vice-rectors, deans of schools and heads of research centres, and to the UNG student council.

The self-evaluation report and appendices contained a large amount of useful data and information. Quality assurance reports are prepared annually at university and school levels in UNG, and the self-evaluation report drew heavily on these. The SWOT analysis undertaken for the IEP evaluation was, however, a new element, and involved a bottom-up exercise to gather and discuss different perspectives within and across the UNG schools. The IEP team was informed that this had raised awareness within UNG of the challenges the university is facing.

The UNG self-evaluation report, together with the appendices, was made available to the evaluation team in December 2014. The two visits of the evaluation team to UNG took place from 19 to 21 January 2015 and from 16 to 19 March 2015 respectively, and followed the IEP methodology and four main questions as outlined above.

In between the visits, the team requested some additional documentation, mostly in the fields of teaching and learning, student questionnaires, university structures and research projects, which was duly provided by UNG.

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

- Professor Carles Solà, former Rector of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, Chair

- Professor Lennart Olausson, former Rector of Malmö University, Sweden
- Ms Marija Vasilevska, Masters student at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Macedonia
- Mr Lewis Purser, Director of Academic Affairs, Irish Universities Association, Ireland, Team Coordinator

The team would like to thank the Rector, Professor Dr Danilo Zavrtanik, and Professor Dr Iztok Arčon, the UNG liaison person, for their warm welcome and efficient organisation of the visits to UNG, and for the open and constructive discussions which characterised the team visits to the university.

The IEP methodology has a limited capacity to verify facts or statements made in the self-evaluation report. The evaluation process is largely based on verbal information and self-reporting, resulting from two short visits by the IEP evaluation team. The methodology is built on trust, and designed as a process aimed at supporting the university in the continuing development of its strategic management and internal quality culture. This makes it a very different process to accreditation.

Given these limitations, it is not always possible to clarify contradictory or conflicting statements, which may appear in the self-evaluation report or in the other documentation provided, or which arose during the two site visits. If such situations whereby the evaluation team is not able to reach a firm conclusion, despite its best efforts to clarify issues during the series of interviews, do arise, this will be stated in the report and the contradictions/alternatives presented. The UNG should then draw its own conclusions, based on its own internal assessment.

## **2. Governance and institutional decision-making**

### **2.1 Background**

Effective governance and decision-making structures and processes allow a university to set its strategic goals and objectives and work towards these in an effective, efficient and transparent manner, with the support of its various internal and external stakeholders, in overall pursuit of its mission. With the UNG mission centred around knowledge creation, knowledge transfer and the employability of its graduates, it can be expected that the UNG governance and decision-making structures and methods will reflect these priority areas, and that the strategic plan will also build upon these.

As part of the IEP evaluation, the UNG self-evaluation report included, as an appendix, the UNG development plan for the period 2010–2025, as adopted by the UNG Senate in 2009. This includes a more detailed development plan for the period 2010–2015, with specifications for a number of investments in research equipment and research and teaching infrastructure. The development vision for the period 2016–2025 was also included in the overall development plan, with outline plans for the establishment of new study programmes, a new school and new research areas. These development plans are reviewed and discussed annually by university management. While both the 2010–2015 and the 2016–2025 plans covered areas of relevance to the research and – to a less extent – the teaching and employability missions, neither contained any indication of how these would be financed or implemented.

During the visits, the team learned that the current short-term development priorities are to increase the numbers of students in all areas, to improve UNG's general visibility and public awareness of the university, to enhance lifelong learning and e-learning opportunities, and to develop a single UNG campus. These short-term priorities, as noted in the self-evaluation report, were reflected in the team's discussions with a range of internal and external UNG stakeholders, and there was very broad support across UNG for the concept of a single campus. However, the coherence of the links between these short-term priorities and the overall mission and longer-term development plan was not always clear.

The size and structure of UNG are rather specific in both a Slovenian and European context. Being a very small university, with activity fragmented across at least five main sites and a number of additional smaller research sites across two EU member states (Slovenia and Italy), brings a number of challenges in terms of coherence in institutional governance and decision making. However, UNG's small size also facilitates the daily exchange of information between staff and informal contacts between students and staff. The quality of this daily exchange and the importance of these local informal networks were mentioned frequently to the team, including the advantages this can bring in terms of responsiveness to student needs.

In addition to the UNG Governing Board and Senate, UNG has also created an International Advisory Board, composed of experts from a number of well-known European universities

and research facilities. This International Advisory Board meets once every year, and was described to the team as a very useful body, composed of “critical friends”.

## **2.2 Analysis**

The team used the four key questions which guide the IEP methodology as a framework for its analysis of governance and institutional decision-making at UNG. These questions are:

- 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?

Given the small size of the UNG, its private status and its current structure across multiple sites, a tight and coherent decision-making and management process is needed, and in the view of the team is indeed in place. This was described to the team as very much a top-down decision-making process. This top-down approach is justified by UNG’s small overall size and “manageability”, and also by the need to ensure careful management of financial and other resources. It may also result from the fact that many UNG professors and other staff work part-time at the university, and their participation in institutional decision-making processes is therefore lower. This leads to a top-down process at UNG which is felt more strongly – in the experience of the team - than in most other universities.

As a result however, all financial decisions, including the allocation of budgets to schools and services, appear to be taken by the rector, and not by the Governing Board or by schools. The UNG finance office manages the financial affairs of all schools, with no finance offices or even operating budgets apparent at devolved levels, even for minor items of recurrent expenditure. More generally, very little decision-making appears to be devolved to the administrative services, whether these are central (for the whole of UNG) or school-based. As a result, the team heard many examples of where the centralised management and decision-making process was in fact causing unnecessary delays, for example in obtaining routine supplies for various essential services. **The team recommends that a clearer budget allocation process to schools and services be put in place.**

However, the financial control and financial reporting functions for national and international research projects are managed in the university research office, not in the finance office, under the supervision of the vice-rector for research. The team was surprised to note this, given the high importance of research income to the overall UNG financial situation, the limited lifespans of these research projects, and the potential associated risks.

The team also learnt that Slovenian law obliges UNG to have the same governance and decision-making structures as other universities in Slovenia, including at the level of each school and programme. It would appear that these are based on the traditional structures in the larger Slovenian universities, and that they do not necessarily correspond well to the

more specific UNG context. **The team recommends that UNG structures be simplified as much as possible, to correspond best to UNG's own needs.**

However, there are no representatives of administrative services in the governing bodies, which appears unusual to the team. These administrative services perform key functions and as UNG develops and grows, the professional role of these services will become more important. **The team recommends that administrative staff be included in the governance bodies.** Their contribution to the effective and efficient workings of the university should also extend to participation in the relevant governance structures, as in other European universities.

The role of students at every level in these formal structures also appears to be rather limited, from the perspective of the team. While it is true that the small size and friendly atmosphere across UNG allows student concerns to be addressed informally in most cases, without the need to bring these to formal structures, the desired growth and expansion of UNG is likely to change this. Bringing together all the different components of the university into a single campus will also have an impact on current methods of student–staff communication. **The team therefore recommends that increased emphasis be placed on student participation in the decision-making process, that the student voice in governance structures be increased, and that students be encouraged to develop further the positive roles which they already play at each level of governance.**

There are apparent divergences between the UNG teaching and research strategies, with different strategic drivers which do not take UNG in a linear direction. UNG has been conceived and governed as a small, specialised research-intensive institution, based on small teams of high performing scientists who are well networked at home and abroad and who have a successful track record in obtaining research funding. However, UNG now desires – and indeed needs – to recruit more students, most of whom will not be research students. Furthermore, the disciplines where UNG currently has staff and is strong are for the most part not areas of strong undergraduate student demand. **The team recommends that UNG develop increased interaction between its teaching and research strategies, in order to support the sustainable development of the university as a whole.**

If it is to be successful in recruiting significantly larger numbers of students, the team believes that UNG will need to refocus its academic provision on areas of undergraduate student and labour market demand, including areas of high societal “added value” through improved links to the research and innovation agenda, providing programmes of interest and relevance for studies and employment. This would be consistent with the university’s mission, particularly if greater strategic links can be developed between teaching and research.

In its discussions with external and internal stakeholders, it was clear to the team that there was significant potential for UNG to develop its profile to include a broader range of high quality study programmes, offering these where possible through or in combination with international languages, and leading to successful labour market integration for students and greater appreciation of the role of UNG in the region. The team was informed that the student demographics in Slovenia are currently weak, but that the number of young people

will increase again in five years' time. This will allow UNG sufficient time to prepare for such a refocusing of its academic provision. The team also believes that there is scope for a small, flexible university such as UNG to profile itself as an effective, flexible and efficient provider of high quality academic programmes to adult learners who need to increase their skills in order to adapt to a rapidly changing labour market.

An alternative would be to turn UNG into a large graduate school with a strong profile in research and innovation across a number of relevant and attractive fields. However, UNG's research strengths are not necessarily high growth areas, and this would imply more intensive recruitment of research students from within Slovenia, other parts of Europe and indeed worldwide. In the experience of the team, it is becoming increasingly difficult for small specialised universities to develop and maintain a highly attractive profile which can compete for high quality local and international research students. Such an alternative strategy would also have implications for UNG's funding model, since it is not clear how increased numbers of such research students would be financed, and whether the university would necessarily be able to attract them without offering significant financial concessions.

The strategy to develop a single UNG campus provides a timely opportunity to consider and address many of the above challenges for the benefit of all internal and external stakeholders. Bringing together the different UNG schools, and where possible also the research centres, will allow a new dynamic to develop between teaching and research, far greater opportunities for inter-school collaboration which will benefit both students and academics, and greater opportunities for enhanced participation by students and administrative staff in the governance and decision-making processes at their university, all leading to a clearer and possibly simplified UNG structure. **The team supports the concept of a single UNG campus, and recommends that this be used to address other recommendations from the IEP evaluation.**

### **3. Teaching and learning**

The team engaged in informative and stimulating discussions on the topic of teaching and learning with a broad range of groups and actors from across UNG, including students. A focused round-table discussion on teaching and learning was organised at the request of the team, involving a cross-cutting representation of persons with institutional functions in these areas within UNG. These discussions were structured around the key questions of the IEP methodology.

#### **3.1 Mission and objectives: what is the university trying to do?**

Given the mission, structures and current strategic options facing the university, the theme of teaching and learning is a particularly important one, in which all internal and external stakeholders of the university take a strong interest. The team enjoyed stimulating and robust discussions on this topic during its visits, and the data and analyses included in the UNG self-evaluation report was particularly helpful in facilitating these discussions.

The students whom the team met were happy to have chosen UNG as their university, enjoyed good relationships with their professors and the university administration, and were positive about their overall experience. Many students, particularly at Masters level, had chosen UNG because of its smaller size compared to other Slovenian universities and the closer relationship between students and staff, together with UNG's more practical and more interdisciplinary approach to academic programmes. For some students, these comparative strengths only became apparent after they had already spent some time at UNG.

In addition, the team was informed on various occasions that, despite increasing levels of unemployment in Slovenia (in early 2015 this stood at 15.3%, having risen from 10% since 2010), particularly among young people (25% unemployment), recent UNG graduates had the best employment record in the country and that most graduates obtained employment reasonably quickly. This was also referenced by students as an advantage in choosing UNG over other possible study destinations. The team noted the good work of the UNG Careers Centre in this regard, helping effectively to bridge the gap between students, graduates and employers, and providing UNG with valuable graduate employment tracking data. UNG also has a strategic target to increase the graduate employment rate to 80% in the first six months after graduation, and to 90% in the first 12 months after graduation.

It is in this context also that UNG aims to increase the number of students by 20% across all study programmes, according to the self-evaluation report, and by introducing new Bachelor and Master level study programmes across a number of academic disciplines. While UNG needs more students in order to ensure critical mass across many of its activities and to secure its financial situation, it also needs to become more visible at national and cross-border levels and to maintain public funding for those study programmes which currently

receive this. However, the current financial situation in Slovenia means that the government is reducing funding for higher education, especially for study programmes with small numbers of students. Government funding for other activities is also being reduced, for example for doctoral students and postdocs.

International students at UNG are mainly concentrated in the graduate school, where more than 50% of all students come from other countries; there are also small numbers across almost all UNG Bachelor and Masters programmes. The team learned that international students are generally happy with their experience at UNG and appreciate the small groups, the flexibility of approach and the easy contacts which they find there, and that UNG also helps to broaden domestic students' horizons. The team was also informed that UNG had not been as successful in attracting overseas students as it had hoped. It has however been able to hire more foreign lecturers than have other Slovenian universities, thus helping to train students for a broader labour market and postgraduate options than available in western Slovenia. The move towards more joint/double degrees with partner universities at Masters level has likewise facilitated the introduction of more diversity into UNG teaching practices and experiences, with positive benefits, and has also led to some early benchmarking of practice with other universities. It is nevertheless clear that the limitations imposed by Slovenian legislation regarding the use of English and other foreign languages for undergraduate teaching purposes remain an obstacle to further internationalisation at UNG.

The team was also informed of UNG's specific interest in providing higher education and research opportunities for the Slovenian minority across the border in Italy. The university has developed links with Slovenian schools in the region and with the Slovenian Institute in Trieste. The team also learned, however, of the somewhat complicated political landscape in the neighbouring municipalities and region, which resulted in difficulties in attracting students (Slovenian speakers and others) from neighbouring Italy. The team was informed in particular that there were difficulties with the academic and professional recognition of UNG credits, degrees and diplomas across the border, and that this recognition was easier to obtain in the more distant regions of Italy.

### **3.2 Implementation: How is the university trying to do it?**

The team also met and had stimulating discussions with enthusiastic staff and leaders in the various UNG schools, who were starting to develop new approaches to teaching. UNG has always tried to maintain a practical and international orientation in its teaching programmes, with interdisciplinary and research links. These characteristics are appreciated by students, although, as already mentioned, often not well known to those outside the university. However, the team found that a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, along the lines of the Bologna Process principles, is not evident across all parts of UNG, with limited formal interaction and active learning techniques, and limited application of the concept of student workload, learning outcomes and other student-centred methods.

While students are aware that UNG is strongly research-focused, and appreciate the contacts which are facilitated with relevant companies for placements and projects, the team was repeatedly informed that students would like to see more applied methods incorporated into the teaching. This was seen as useful in promoting UNG's existing unique selling points. However, given that most permanent UNG academic staff are recruited on the basis of their research record, and promotion criteria are likewise heavily weighted towards research, UNG will need to take strong pro-active steps in order to ensure that the importance of teaching and learning across the university is enhanced. **In this light, the team recommends that UNG introduce teaching criteria as part of the selection, appointment and promotion process for all professors.** This would accord well with UNG's stated desire to reach a 50:50 balance between research work and pedagogical activity for each member of the academic staff.

Given this situation, and that the UNG research centres are not all aligned with undergraduate teaching programmes, UNG currently contracts significant numbers of part-time associate teaching staff. According to the self-evaluation report, 299 academic staff were employed at UNG in 2012-13, which in full-time equivalents is 121 persons. This means that the average staff member is employed at a 40% rate, i.e. the equivalent of two days per week. The team was informed that many associate and visiting professors come to UNG from institutes in Ljubljana or from other universities, even from other countries, to teach for as little as two hours per week. According to students, and confirmed by other information provided to the team, the organisation and delivery of many UNG teaching programmes – at both undergraduate and Masters levels - appear to be conditioned by the availability of teachers, with block teaching in many cases based on the availability of expert external staff, rather than on the pedagogical needs of students. While it is true that some block teaching periods are organised at the request of students, or intensive two-week sessions are held for joint programmes with universities in another country, the methods and approaches to teaching and student activities need to be carefully planned. In the opinion of the team, over-reliance on this form of organisation of teaching and learning activities is not ideal in terms of pedagogical methods and practice. **The team recommends that, as part of its strategy to increase student numbers, UNG also organise a serious discussion on the optimal conditions (including timetables) for student learning.**

### **3.3 Monitoring: How does the university know it works?**

Given their importance in terms of successful student outcomes, the efficient use of resources and the overall reputation of the university, the team also examined the questions of student completion rates and the time available towards completion. In doing so, the team was informed that students can enter UNG and other Slovenian universities if they complete secondary school, and that no selection process is used unless there is a cap on numbers in a particular programme. At UNG the team was informed that this cap is placed at 40 students per programme. The team also learned that students are keen to maintain the social benefits (subsidised food, accommodation, etc.) which is part of their student status, and for this reason many students appear to put their studies on hold, particularly towards the end of

their programme, in order to start employment. In this way, students can continue to benefit from their student status, while employers pay less since the employee remains a student. For UNG in 2014, the average time for completion of three- year undergraduate programmes of between 3.7 to 6.1 years across UNG schools, with an average of 4.8 years. The team learned that this is a general problem for all universities in Slovenia.

From the perspective of the team, student non-progression (drop-out) rates are also high at UNG, with only 58.6% of students overall completing their studies in 2014. This rate ranges from 100% of students completing their course in some programmes, to less than 25% in others. The team was informed that some students believe that studying at UNG will be easier than in other more traditional universities, although this was not the case. The team heard that the lack of student fees leads to low levels of student commitment, but while there may be some truth in this opinion, the broad variations in progression rates across schools and study programmes show that this is not necessarily the situation. It was also pointed out to the team – by both staff and students – that UNG staff is very willing to assist with additional support for students as required, providing additional tutoring or assistance where requested.

It was however surprising for the team to learn that there does not appear to be any internal process at UNG (or indeed through national governmental funding) to incentivise UNG schools and/or the university itself to retain students and ensure they graduate successfully. This is surprising given the high non-completion rates and the relatively long time many students take to reach graduation, as mentioned above.

From the team's perspective, these are not desirable outcomes for the university, or necessarily the state, as such students are not active in the university and benefit from resources which might be better used on *bona fide* students. In addition, this inefficiency represents a significant additional cost for all parties involved but with no rendering of any real service. **In order to reinforce UNG's attractiveness and strengthen its ability to increase student numbers, the team recommends that the university examine what steps can be taken to address the issues of student dropout rate and the long time spent to reach graduation.**

However, the team also learned that, at the same time, there is currently a difficult demographic situation in Slovenia with a decline in the number of persons who would normally be in the student age bracket. The team also learned that student profiles are changing, and that there are non-traditional student cohorts who need higher levels of education and who could benefit from the programmes offered at UNG. UNG has been active in this regard, and has put together a series of concerted actions to attract more students, involving staff and students from various UNG schools addressing secondary level schoolchildren, their parents and their teachers to inform them of their experience at UNG and the work of the university. The team met UNG staff and students who had been involved in these outreach activities, and who reported that many parents and prospective students were not aware of some of UNG's main strengths, such as the practical profile of its study programmes and its ability to focus on individual students and their learning needs, or the

fact that many of UNG's study programmes do not have tuition fees. It was clear that further work was necessary so as to raise UNG's profile in western Slovenia, and indeed more broadly throughout the country, as an alternative destination to some of the more traditional universities.

While improved communications will certainly help raise awareness among potential students and other interested stakeholders regarding UNG and its specific profile, the underlying attractiveness and competitive advantage of any university must be based on the quality of its academic and other activities, including the quality of its teaching and of its learning infrastructure. In this regard, while students informed the team that they were generally happy with the teaching they received, the team did not hear of many opportunities for UNG staff development or incentives in the areas of pedagogics and teaching methods. It also appeared to the team that little attention was being paid to the organisation of teaching, with very divergent teaching policies across different UNG schools, and the widespread use of inappropriate block teaching by visiting staff.

While new teaching methods were adopted as a UNG priority in 2014, and the introduction of Moodle in some schools will help with distance learning, staff development and training in these and other related areas should be a continuous concern of UNG's, including the development of entrepreneurial and innovative attitudes among students and staff. The team learned of some good work in this area, for example in the School of Environmental Sciences, and of regular lab seminars where staff members present their work to colleagues. The team was also told that the introduction of a project-based learning methodology was a priority, as was encouraging students to read and prepare in advance of their contact hours with professors, so that these can be used for discussion and exchange rather than for traditional teaching. This desired change in student behaviour will also require a new approach by teachers in preparing and delivering their lectures. **The team therefore recommends that UNG put in place a comprehensive staff development programme to support the enhancement of teaching and learning across the university, including pedagogical innovation, building on the development of a more explicit student-centred approach, and using this to reinforce the recommended new teaching criteria in staff selection, appointment and promotion processes.**

One major challenge facing the university, however, in terms of its profile and attractiveness, but also in ensuring the overall quality of the learning environment, is the lack of a sense of student community and student life. These are directly linked to the low student numbers overall, and the fact that these small numbers are further divided across different sites. The lack of direct public transport links for students between Vipava and Nova Gorica, and the poor transport links generally between different parts of UNG are also problematic. This results in uneven access for students to certain university services, for example the library, and means that most students need to organise their own private transport, which may not be possible for them all. The team was informed that ensuring sufficient student accommodation for those coming from other parts of Slovenia or abroad was also problematic. These challenges will certainly be addressed through the plans for a single UNG

campus, but in the meanwhile, the university faces an immediate challenge to alleviate these problems to the greatest extent possible, in a combined way across the different schools, centres and services, as part of its strategy to attract and retain more students.

This discussion and analysis of teaching and learning at UNG is intended to assist the university with IEP's fourth methodological question: **How does the university change in order to improve?** The team is aware that a number of initiatives in this area already exist across UNG schools, and would like to support these. There is, however, a strong case to be made for UNG to use the current situation, including the exciting prospect of preparing for a new single UNG campus, and building on existing good examples, to develop a university-wide student-centred teaching and learning strategy to help UNG meet its main strategic challenges. Furthermore, the team would like to encourage the university to prepare for change in terms of the current funding environment. Given developments across other European higher education systems, it is highly likely that in Slovenia public funding will also pay closer attention to issues such as student non-completion, or slow completion, very low numbers of students in certain programmes, the need to attract non-traditional learners and different profiles of school leavers, and generally move towards an outcomes-based approach to the public funding of higher education. As a small, student-friendly, well organised and flexible university, UNG is well placed to benefit from such developments, but may need to re-examine some of its current structures and practices in order to do so.

## **4. Research**

During its two visits, the team engaged in in-depth discussions on the topic of research with a broad range of academics, students and administrators from across UNG and its research centres and laboratories. Productive discussions were also held with representatives of UNG's external stakeholders, including employers and partners in various fields, and with members of the UNG Senate. A round-table meeting was also organised at the request of the team, focusing on the topics of research and outreach to society and involving the key UNG players in these areas. These discussions were structured around the key questions of the IEP methodology.

### **4.1 Objectives: what is the institution trying to do?**

The role of research and the creation of new knowledge is central to UNG's mission and vision. From its origins as the Faculty of Environmental Sciences with the first international postgraduate school in Slovenia, its strong structural and operational links to the Jožef Stefan Institute of Ljubljana and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as strong collaboration with many other well-respected national and international research institutes and universities, it is obvious that research activity has been at the core of UNG's development and plays a major part in its current ambitions.

This research base, which is linked to UNG's origins, is most strongly evident in the experimental sciences. 80% of the university's research activity can be found in the experimental sciences, and 51% more specifically is in physics. UNG publications and citations are also dominated by the experimental sciences. In addition, UNG has a policy that all researchers should also contribute to teaching. The benefits of this were evident to the team, particularly in UNG's Masters programmes and the graduate school.

The importance of research at UNG can also be seen in the breakdown of its income. According to the figures provided as part of the self-evaluation report, 58% of UNG's total revenue in 2013 came from research, mostly through competitive funding from national and international research agencies, with a small amount from private research contracts. In addition, this research income as a share of total UNG revenue has become relatively more important since 2011, as the income from government to support teaching activities has decreased.

As part of its strategy for the coming period, UNG has identified three main research strengths for further growth. These are environmental sciences, one of the founding areas which remains central to UNG's research performance; advanced materials, which in recent years has developed to include a critical mass of researchers and infrastructure; and biomedicine and life sciences, which although still in an embryonic phase is seen as an important strategic orientation due to the global importance of these topics. The fact that high-energy physics, one of UNG's landmark research areas which has performed highly over

many years, is no longer seen as a cross-cutting research priority, is a sign that UNG is able to take difficult strategic decisions and to develop new opportunities. However, in a situation where UNG research activity is already highly concentrated in the experimental sciences, **the team recommends that the UNG research strategy needs to support research across the entire university, in order to avoid longer-term disparities across different parts of UNG.**

The team was informed that, as part of its strategy, UNG is keen for more of its research work to be linked to industry in a variety of ways. This is proved through the recent creation of the Industrial Liaison Office, which is discussed below. A consequence of this strategic direction is that UNG's priority research areas will need to consider how they can become more applied, and UNG may need to invest in this area (staff capacity, training and incentives) in order for it to bear fruit.

#### **4.2 Implementation: How is the institution trying to do it?**

UNG implements the research aspects of its mission in a number of ways. The most important of these concerns the recruitment of staff at UNG. The team has already noted that most permanent UNG academic staff is recruited on the basis of their research record, and that promotion criteria are likewise heavily weighted towards research. The team also learned that all staff on research contracts as well as PhD students, is recruited on an international basis, thus favouring the regular refreshment of ideas, approaches and experiences within the research centres. All researchers are also required to undertake some teaching, often at postgraduate level. As the team has already noted, this raises a number of challenges for the teaching portfolio, but helps ensure that teaching at UNG is informed by research and that students are exposed to new ideas, methods and opportunities.

The UNG research budget is built almost exclusively through external funding, and the research centres rely on this stream of project funding to employ staff and cover their operating costs. UNG researchers have been successful in obtaining support from EU Framework Programme funding streams, EU cohesion funds, Central European and Alps-Adria programmes, and a number of cross-border funding programmes. The university also has a successful record in obtaining regular long-term funding from various competitive Slovenian research funding streams.

However, there is no internal UNG research fund, and the team was informed that as a result it was difficult to begin new areas of research, since no in-house seed funding was available. The university has an overheads policy, and seeks to obtain 30% of overheads from each project, where this is allowed by the funder. However, the team learned that so far it had proved difficult to apply this to industry research contracts, and indeed to put any money aside from overheads. **The team recommends that UNG should develop an internal research budget which can be used to stimulate new research opportunities.**

Due to UNG's largest European-funded project, the university has been able to put in place a basic research support infrastructure. UNG now has a research project office of two persons, who work mostly on the financial administration of UNG's range of EU projects. The team was

told that UNG is considering strengthening this function in the future, in particular to assist researchers with the identification of possible new opportunities.

The graduate school is a major element in UNG's implementation of its mission, both in terms of research and teaching. Because of its links with the research centres, the graduate school is discussed in this section of the team's report. It was founded in 2006, with the aim to link doctoral studies more closely to the research centres, rather than with the various UNG schools where they had been previously situated. While PhD studies are now organised in seven different programmes within the research centres, the students are enrolled in the graduate school, which ensures that the requirements of each PhD programme are at an equivalent level.

According to legislation the official duration of PhD studies in Slovenia, and therefore also at UNG, is 3 years. However, PhD students supported through the national research agency receive funding for 3.5 years to allow them time to defend their thesis. The team noted that the data provided in the self-evaluation report showed considerably better completion rates among PhD students across most of the seven programmes than in almost all of the other schools, as well as relatively satisfactory time-limits to reach graduation. All students take up to 60 credits over their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years from a number of courses that are taught in English, although there was some confusion among the PhD students whom the team met regarding whether the seminars organised as part of these courses were obligatory. The students found that the multi-disciplinary approach on these courses, as well as the variety of students from different backgrounds, including other universities and countries, was positive. The courses are typically organised by the relevant PhD programme, and some of them are shared across programmes. Some courses have shared elements with partner universities or institutes in Italy and Slovenia. The directors of each UNG PhD programme ensure the quality of course elements and monitor the doctoral research projects. The course directors must also approve/assist as required if other elements of course work are needed which must be sourced from outside UNG. Each programme has an advisory group or scientific council of approximately five persons, mostly - but not always - internal to UNG.

The team noted that many PhD students are also teaching assistants at UNG, as is the case in other universities. It was however surprised to be informed by students that there were no reductions in the teaching loads for these PhD students who are in the final phase of preparing their doctoral thesis. This may also contribute to the frequent extension of the regulatory period for a PhD at UNG.

PhD students at UNG usually have one or two supervisors, depending on the programme. These supervisors may be from outside UNG, as required. PhD students who have come from outside Slovenia also benefit from lecturers and a tutor, in addition to their supervisor. The student's research work is monitored and examined at the end of every year. Each thesis evaluation panel is nominated by the UNG Senate, and must include at least one panel member from outside Slovenia. The team learned that students can also undertake their research at external facilities and be supervised by external supervisors. The PhD course

directors whom the team met noted that they could be surprised by the differences arising as a result of this external supervision. In addition, while colleagues from the various programmes and scientific councils provide informal advice and support for their younger supervisor colleagues, the team learned that there is no training programme in place for supervisors or potential supervisors. **The team therefore recommends that a formal training process be put in place for all PhD supervisors at UNG, to ensure common approaches and standards.**

The team learned that all PhD students are obliged to undertake a short part of their training in a commercial environment, to help them prepare for careers outside academia. There is also a short one-day course available on how to start a business. These elements correspond well with the knowledge transfer element of UNG's mission, and the university's strategic aim to link more closely with relevant stakeholders, and to ensure the high employability of its graduates. However, the team found that these positive UNG developments appeared to be ongoing without broader awareness of similar reforms taking place across Europe. More specifically, the course directors whom the team met were not aware of the relevant Salzburg Declarations concerning doctoral education in Europe, and the very concrete work which is already well-advanced in many countries towards the development of broader PhD graduate competences. Greater awareness of these developments would, in the team's opinion, be useful for UNG's own strategic development. For example, the team found that the UNG careers centre does not contribute to the advising/mentoring of PhD students regarding the development of competences which might be useful in subsequent employment.

As far as the graduate school is concerned, the staff it employs are mostly part-time and external to the school. The data contained in the self-evaluation report shows that, in 2012-13, 77 staff were employed by the graduate school but this translated into only 14 full-time equivalents. The graduate school has a quality assurance officer, who works with the QA officers from the other schools as part of UNG's quality assurance processes.

When queried by the team, the added-value of the graduate school, beyond what is provided through the individual programmes themselves, was not immediately clear to either the graduate school staff or the PhD students themselves. The team also learned that there were few systematic opportunities for students from different programmes to get to know each other and share their experiences, although those students who had managed to do this found it useful. This feedback suggests to the team that the higher-level objectives for doctoral education at UNG need to be emphasised and made more visible, as through the graduate school these can be realised and implemented in a coherent and effective way for all students across the different programmes. **The team therefore recommends that the graduate school be further developed into a more tangible structure, offering high-level training opportunities for PhD students across a range of generic and transferable skills to assist with their scientific and professional development.**

The Industrial Liaison Office represents another element of UNG's infrastructure to support the implementation of its research mission and strategy. Established within the last three

years, the Industrial Liaison Office works to bring UNG services, research opportunities and patents to the market, conducts market research to identify companies which need assistance, and seeks to make UNG infrastructure and equipment available to industrial partners. These roles are obviously designed to support the university's strategic priorities in terms of closer cooperation with industry, and the team was informed of a number of successful concrete examples in these areas.

The office has developed an inventory for each of the research centres, covering their fields of expertise which may be of interest to industrial partners. However, the team was informed that the research underway in several of the existing research units was of little current interest to the market, and that some researchers were slow to engage with the Industrial Liaison Office. The team was informed that UNG has a strategy and policy for managing intellectual property, patents, etc., where UNG retains primary ownership of the patent, but that at the time of the visits no UNG start-up companies had yet emerged. When collaborative opportunities are identified and agreed, contracts with the industrial partner are signed by the rector and the head of the respective research centre or laboratory. However, the team learned that there is no consolidated financial report for all the industrial liaison work underway, so the benefits of these activities to the university are not widely known outside each specific laboratory or centre.

As in other universities, developing a culture of industrial liaison among researchers takes time, researchers need to learn how to work and communicate effectively with commercial partners, and university leaders need to facilitate and encourage such activity. This often requires some way of incentivising researchers. The team was informed that previously there had not been any incentives for researchers to participate in knowledge transfer activities, but that UNG had recently decided to change this and was considering how best to do so. The team also learned that UNG had decided to invest in improving its information-gathering and lobbying activities in Brussels, in order to improve its chances of obtaining funding for relevant projects with industrial and other research partners.

As in many universities across Europe, the quality assurance structures and methods applied to research activities at UNG are somewhat different to those applied to teaching and other activities. According to the self-evaluation report, the evaluation of research activity at UNG is conducted at the university level, and the main output of this is the annual research report, which covers the activities and results of all research units across the university, the bibliographic outputs, national and international research programmes, cooperation, etc. This report is published in Slovenian. It was suggested by the team that, given the international nature of UNG research activity, staff, students and partners, it might also be useful to make the report available in English. This could also be used extensively by other regional and national development agencies to raise awareness of UNG and opportunities for new academic and industrial partnerships, as well as to encourage investment in western Slovenia.

Given the insecurity of EU funding streams, UNG has sensibly insisted on strict rules for the recruitment of new staff using research funding. The team was informed that those staff who

are hired using project funds know that any contract extensions will depend on their successfully obtaining further project funding. It would appear that there are a small number of exceptions to this rule, and some funded researchers will be offered permanent contracts as they are already undertaking teaching roles in key areas of UNG's strategic development.

However, it is apparent that UNG is at a delicate stage in its development, in that it is no longer small enough to be able to continue as in the past by seeking a series of small research projects, and that it is not yet sufficiently large and established to bridge a gap if the pipeline of such projects is broken and there is a gap in research funding. Moving past this critical stage will require a clear vision for UNG's future, and strategic leadership to bring the university and its community forward in a sustainable way.

## **5. Service to society**

Service to society is implicitly included in UNG's mission through the concepts of knowledge transfer and providing for the high employability of its graduates. These concepts were covered in the team's discussions with the many internal and external groups which took place during the two visits to UNG. As can be seen from previous sections of this report regarding teaching and learning and research, the reality of these aspects of UNG's mission was highlighted to the team by both internal and external stakeholders, and the positive economic and social impact of UNG on its region was mentioned.

In particular, the strong political support which UNG receives from its regional founders, the municipalities of Nova Gorica and Ajdovščina, and from the municipality of Vipava, is evidence of the importance of UNG from their perspectives, and the added-value which UNG brings to these towns. The team was therefore somewhat surprised not to hear more general discussion during its meetings with internal UNG groups regarding services provided, either directly or indirectly by the university, to these towns and their populations.

As has already been discussed, UNG graduates are getting jobs, and contributing through this to the economic development of the local and regional environment. The UNG careers centre supports student internships and practical placements, again strengthening student employability and providing for early opportunities for knowledge exchange and transfer between the university and its stakeholders. There is scope to expand this by greater integration of these elements into all study programmes, and improved communication between UNG and a broader range of local and regional companies and organisations.

In addition, by attracting international students and staff to Nova Gorica and other university facilities, UNG is supporting the internationalisation of the local economic, social and cultural environment through these exchange opportunities, where people from a variety of backgrounds bring different experiences and ideas to UNG and its surrounding communities which can stimulate innovation, development and investment.

As previously mentioned, UNG has begun to work systematically with secondary level schools across the region, mainly to improve awareness regarding the university among students, their parents and teachers in order to increase recruitment. In this context, the team suggests that students could be UNG's best ambassadors. In the opinion of the team, there is scope to expand this work, in partnership with, for example, the municipalities and other organisations, looking at additional ways in which UNG can support educational outcomes in the schools for all learners, thus also providing substantial long-term benefits to society. **The team therefore recommends the UNG explore how it can broaden its cooperation with secondary schools, beyond the current recruitment efforts.**

As already discussed, the Industrial Liaison Office has recently been established to strengthen links with regional industry and economic partners, and is in the process of identifying and promoting opportunities for UNG and services which UNG could offer. The team however

noted that during its two visits and many meetings with internal and external players, there was little mention of consultancy services provided by UNG, or by units within UNG, to possible external partners. This is certainly an area for further development, as part of a possible expanded brief for the Industrial Liaison Office.

Given the current strategic priorities of the university, and the emerging needs of its founders and local supporters, **the team recommends that UNG further develop the student careers centre and the Industrial Liaison Office to offer a broader range of services to students, staff and society, including making UNG's expertise available for consulting services.**

The team was pleased to note that some UNG schools, for example the School of Humanities, were also working with local civil society organisations across a range of cultural and educational projects, providing valuable support to cultural development, social cohesion and cross-border cooperation. There is certainly scope to make such cooperation more explicit and better recognised, with mutual benefits for all partners. For example, as part of its planned expansion and greater internationalisation, UNG will need improved access to sports and cultural facilities for its students but, in return, could, through its staff and students, provide a range of innovative services of benefit to other organisations as well as the local population. **The team therefore recommends that UNG work more closely with civil society organisations and municipalities for mutual benefit.**

In planning for and providing mutually beneficial services to a range of societal organisations, effective communication is paramount. It was clear to the team that regular communication does indeed take place at many levels between the university and a range of external stakeholders. However, given the current priorities for UNG strategic development, **the team recommends that a more comprehensive communication plan be put in place and implemented, covering all major areas of UNG activity, with targeted messages for certain audiences, in support of the full range of UNG's objectives.**

## **6. Quality culture**

As a private university which depends on the income it generates from its own activities, including state support for a number of its study programmes, the quality of these activities and study programmes are paramount, as is the quality culture across the university needed to sustain these. This is particularly so when student numbers and state funding are under pressure, and the competition for research funding is increasing. The team therefore explored the central theme of quality culture as part of its discussions across all the other thematic areas, and with all the main groups of actors, both internal and external. These discussions were framed around the four key questions of the IEP methodology, as mentioned previously:

- 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?

In terms of the question “What is UNG trying to do?”, the team observed that UNG takes a relatively formal approach to quality assurance and quality culture. Formal QA structures exist at UNG which correspond to national requirements. UNG is a signatory to the 2012 resolution of the Slovenian Rectors’ Conference on the commitment of Slovenian universities to develop a quality culture. In 2013, the UNG Senate adopted a series of strategies, methodologies and procedures for the monitoring, assessment and assurance of quality, which are contained in the UNG Quality Assurance Manual. As stated in the self-evaluation report, these meet the requirements of the Slovenian quality agency for higher education (SQAA), and are in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG).

Quality management at UNG is seen as part of the overall university management process, and the UNG Quality Assurance Committee is a standing committee of the Senate. The chair of this committee is the dean of the graduate school, and members of the committee are the quality coordinators from each of the UNG schools and a student representative. These committee members provide the link from the UNG QA Committee through to the UNG schools, including the Senates and administrative staff of these schools, while the student member works in close contact with the student council, which has two students from each school. An annual self-evaluation report is prepared by the quality coordinator for each school, and these reports are brought together to draft the UNG self-evaluation report.

While the team understood that certain structures were probably needed because of national requirements, they found it hard to accept that these should be applied in the same way to all sizes and types of university, irrespective of what might be optimal or most effective for the university in question. In this context, given that UNG is a very small university, and following the discussion in Section 2 of this report regarding governance and management, **the team recommends that UNG examine these internal structures and committees,**

**including its QA organisation, and determine whether they could be simplified and ensure they are optimal for its own purposes.**

While the evaluation of UNG research work and the annual UNG research report have been discussed in Section 4 of this report, the system for the internal quality assurance of teaching at UNG is designed around a system of five student questionnaires. These are the course evaluation questionnaire, the study programme evaluation questionnaire, the practical training evaluation questionnaire, the questionnaire on the provision of information to candidates prior to enrolment, and the student work evaluation form. Since 2014, these surveys have been carried out via the internet in an attempt to increase the efficiency of data collection and to automate the analysis of feedback. These questionnaires are the same across different UNG schools, so that low response rates within any school can be compensated by aggregation at UNG level.

During the course of the team's meetings, they were informed by students and staff that the student questionnaires were both too long and too many in number, as students were asked to complete a questionnaire for each member of staff across each course and programme. Furthermore, students were not sure how their feedback was used. The team heard that the annual QA reports are composed mainly of statistics, with little qualitative analysis and information regarding what steps had been taken as a result of the feedback obtained. The students met by the team were generally sceptical regarding the value of these questionnaires.

The team noted that this system of questionnaires was rather onerous, especially for students but also in terms of operating an effective QA process. The team also noted that the questionnaires cover only some areas linked to teaching. Furthermore, it became apparent during the team's meetings that the response rates were low or very low, that students rarely received the results of these surveys, and that some lecturers had bypassed the system and developed methods more useful for themselves and for their students which they used locally within their particular course, with approval from their dean. Some staff have also organised discussion feedback sessions at the end of the course. The team heard that although these shorter questionnaires obtained far better response rates than the official questionnaires, the school was nevertheless obliged to give the official questionnaires to all students, in addition to whatever local feedback mechanisms individual lecturers may have put in place.

The team was pleased to hear that the UNG QA committee had begun to work on the entire approach to gathering student feedback, and was considering the redesign of all questionnaires. **The team supports this move, and recommends that the university reform the system of questionnaires to make them more useful for staff and students, and that they provide qualitative data which can be used for the enhancement of quality at UNG.**

As a result of the extensive discussions during its two visits, the team came to the conclusion that, while the formal QA procedures are followed in schools regarding teaching process, the overall quality culture at UNG appears to be weak. The team found, for example, little evidence of internal QA and quality enhancement processes for other areas, such as research and administration. **The team therefore recommends that UNG develop and promote an**

**overarching quality culture, aimed at improving the quality of what it provides for the benefit of its main internal and external stakeholders, with less emphasis on meeting externally imposed formal requirements.**

One step that would be helpful in this process is to benchmark key qualitative indicators. **The team did not find any evidence of systematic work in this area so far, and recommends that UNG put in place a system of benchmarking across schools and with other relevant peer universities.**

It is important also that staff learn from the results of the student and other evaluations. However, the team could not find examples of seminars or other supports in place for staff to discuss these results, learn from them and put in place plans for improvement. **The team therefore recommends that staff development opportunities be created, which should follow areas identified for improvement.** This links back to the discussion and recommendations in Section 3 regarding the need for staff development in teaching and learning for all academics, and also in Section 4 regarding training for all PhD supervisors.

## **7. Internationalisation**

Internationalisation has been a central element of UNG's activities since its foundation in 1995 as a small international graduate school in the environmental sciences. This reality has continued over the years, and the self-evaluation report contained evidence of this internationalisation, as seen in two separate international profiling / ranking reports. The team also noted a number of highly internationalised research areas, the open staff recruitment policies at UNG resulting in relatively high proportions of international staff (c. 20% of total staff numbers) and staff with international experience, the good mix of national and international research income, and the numbers of papers produced by UNG researchers in international teams.

UNG has an International Advisory Board, comprised of distinguished experts across a range of disciplines from well-known universities or research institutes from other European countries and from Slovenia.

The team was informed that quality is the principal driver at UNG for international cooperation in research. This has been done to date with no geographic targeting, and with no priority university partners, as all international partnerships for research projects are identified by the individual UNG research teams. There has been some orientation towards China and India in attracting doctoral students, but not at the exclusion of other areas.

As already discussed in earlier sections, an average of 25% of UNG students are international, with greater proportions at Masters level, and particularly in the graduate school, where over 50% of PhD students are international. These doctoral students can be attracted through research contacts and international projects, whereas the team was informed that it has proved more difficult to recruit international undergraduate students to UNG without significant internal investment.

The team found general recognition across UNG that given its profile, size and location, the university needed to be more international than other Slovenian universities. Given the level of internationalisation to which the university is already operating, and awareness regarding its importance, the team was somewhat surprised to note that there is no explicit mention of this in the UNG mission, or in the 2010-2015 development plan. There is a broader statement of UNG's pan-regional scope in the 2016-2025 development vision, but no internationalisation statement or strategy, and little reference in any documents provided to the team of the cross-border, multi-lingual daily reality for many UNG staff and students. This daily reality is, however, what makes UNG different in European higher education, and could be used as a unique selling point to attract more students and staff to the university. **The team therefore recommends that the university should develop a practical internationalisation strategy, covering all its activities, and use this to further promote the quality of the university's activities and the outcomes for UNG students.**

The team met a number of international students at each level of studies, who stated that they and their colleagues were generally pleased with their experience at UNG, and appreciated the small groups, the flexibility of approach, and the easy contacts with academic and administrative staff.

The creation of the International Office nearly 10 years ago has resulted in a steady and significant increase in the number of exchange opportunities for students, and in the number of mobile students and staff. About 20 outgoing students are financed through the Erasmus programme every year, and the team was informed that more places would be available if demand was higher. UNG received seven incoming Erasmus students this year, and the university takes part in two Erasmus Mundus programmes. A limiting factor in attracting international undergraduate students is the national requirement that Bachelor programmes are taught in the Slovenian language. However, UNG students and graduates need to be functional in English and other languages, and **the team recommends that UNG examine all opportunities to increase the number of courses taught in English, and to increase the exposure of its undergraduate students to the English language.**

The team was also informed that many Slovenian students did not appear to be interested in participating in international opportunities. This is a challenge which the International Office is attempting to address. In the opinion of the team, UNG as a whole needs to encourage a broader international outlook among its students, and greater international mobility among its undergraduate students. Ensuring a high degree of internationalisation in its own range of programmes, with strong employment outcomes and an enhanced use of international languages, will also be important in promoting UNG's profile as a university with high-quality programmes of interest and relevance to the labour market. **The team recommends that UNG invest further in the International Office to make more use of Erasmus+ and other international training and exchange opportunities for both students and staff.** In the opinion of the team, this will bring benefits for each of the elements of UNG's mission and its strategic priorities.

## **8. Conclusion**

The team would like to thank all those staff and students at UNG and its external partners and stakeholders whom they met during their visits, and who helped the team understand the current context, challenges and opportunities UNG is currently facing. The team found a small, young, active and enthusiastic university, with happy and satisfied students with a substantial amount of high quality research.

The team also found that UNG is confronted with a number of challenges, both organisational and infrastructural, that need addressing. In particular, sustainability was an open question for the team, at several levels across UNG's structures and activities.

The team found, however, that the UNG leadership team was very aware of these issues, and has been working on them in order to continue UNG's mission of creating new knowledge, transferring knowledge and ensuring the high employability of its students in western Slovenia and more broadly.

The team hopes that this IEP evaluation, both from the discussions during the team's visits and this report, will be useful in addressing these challenges in the period to come.

The following is a brief summary of the main recommendations made by the team, for consideration by the university.

### **Governance and decision-making:**

- The team supports the concept of a single UNG campus, and recommends that this be used to address other recommendations from the IEP evaluation.
- Develop increased interaction between teaching and research strategies.
- Increase student participation across governing structures.
- Include administrative staff in governance bodies.
- Simplify UNG structure as much as possible.
- Provide a clearer budget allocation process to schools and services.

### **Teaching and Learning:**

- Develop a UNG-wide student-centred teaching and learning strategy, building on good existing examples.
- Put in place a comprehensive staff development programme to support this move.

- Organise a serious discussion on optimal conditions (including timetables) for student learning.
- Address issues of student dropout.
- Introduce teaching criteria in the selection, appointment and promotion process for all professors.

**Research:**

- Develop UNG's own budget to stimulate new research opportunities.
- The UNG research strategy needs to support research across the entire university.
- Develop the graduate school into a real structure, offering training and development for PhD students.
- All PhD supervisors need a formal training process.

**Service to society:**

- Develop the student careers centre and the Industrial Liaison Office to offer a broader range of services to students, staff and society, including making UNG's expertise available for consulting services.
- Work more closely with civil society and municipalities for mutual benefit, e.g. sports, cultural events, etc.
- Develop a comprehensive communication plan.
- Broaden cooperation with secondary schools beyond recruitment efforts.

**Quality culture:**

- Simplify UNG structures as far as possible, so that these are optimal for the university's own purposes.
- Reform the system of questionnaires to make them more useful for staff and students.
- Benchmark across schools and peer universities.
- Promote an overarching quality culture.
- Put in place staff development opportunities which follow those areas identified for improvement during the QA process.

**Internationalisation:**

- Develop a practical UNG internationalisation strategy to cover all UNG activities.
- Increase the number of courses taught in English.
- Invest in the International Office to make more use of Erasmus+ and other international training and exchange opportunities, for both students and staff.
- Stimulate a broader international outlook among students.