



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
ALMA MATER EUROPAEA, Evropski Center Maribor**

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Abbreviations

AMEU	ALMA MATER EUROPEA Evropski Center Maribor
ASHE	Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EDS	European Diploma Supplement
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ERA	European Research Area
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2009 - 2015)</i>
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
EU	European Union
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LLL	Lifelong Learning
NAKVIS	Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije za kakovost v visokem šolstvu
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QA	Quality Assurance
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SKVC	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
SQAA	Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The review of the ALMA MATER EUROPEA Evropski Center Maribor (AMEU) (referred to below as “AMEU” or “the Institution”) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania, at the request of AMEU. The evaluation was undertaken as a quality improvement review, using the standard SKVC institutional review criteria.
2. AMEU submitted a Self Evaluation Report (SER) with Annexes, and also further documentation as requested by the review team. References to this documentation are made in this report. The review team visited the Institution from 23rd to 26th February 2015 and conducted several meetings, meeting with representatives of all relevant bodies of the Institution. During the visit the review team sought to triangulate information provided in the documentation at the meetings with the different Institution constituencies. Information referred to herein has been verified.
3. An over-arching view of the team is that there could have been a greater amount of analysis and self-reflection in the SER, which in places lacked clarity, hindering the panel in understanding AMEU and its objectives.
4. The expert review team explored four principal areas of the Institution’s activities as set out in SKVC’s *Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education* (referred to below as “the Methodology”): strategic planning and management, academic studies and life-long learning, research, and impact on regional and national development. Within each area of activity the review team made appropriate reference to the criteria set out in the Methodology and took due account of the lists of sub-criteria in offering feedback to AMEU.
5. The review team consisted of team leader *Professor Jethro Newton*, Professor Emeritus University of Chester, former Dean of Academic Quality and Enhancement, University of Chester, UK; and members *Professor Jolita Butkiene*, Director of Quality, ISM University of Management and Economics, Lithuania and; *Dr Jacques Kaat*, Academic Dean, Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands; *Mr Mateusz Celmer*, student, Wroclaw University of Technology, Poland; and review secretary *Dr Tara Ryan*, Educational Partnerships and Student Services Manager, Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Ireland.
6. The review team made a number of general and overarching observations in respect of AMEU and the engagement of the Institution staff with the review panel during the site visit.
 - Staff members were open to discussion and dialogue with the review team.
 - Staff displayed awareness of regional and national challenges and opportunities, and a willingness to address them.
 - Stakeholders, met by the review panel, were very positive about the way in which AMEU has contributed to the local and regional labour market in the occupational and professional areas in which it specialises.
 - The Institution is considerate of students and students’ future careers and employability.
 - AMEU has developed good relations with social partners and with external academics of standing.
 - There is a willingness to explore opportunities for regional and cross-border strategic academic partnerships.
 - Mobility and exchange opportunities are being made available for both staff and students.

However:

- While the President's SWOT analysis contained in the SER was helpful, the SER did not fully do the institution justice. It needed to fully reflect AMEU's current focus and be fully up-to-date. It required a sharper focus on, and more direct assessment of, the key challenges facing AMEU. Some of these important matters were highlighted, some were not.
- There is a need therefore for AMEU to develop self-critical analysis, and self-evaluation skills amongst its staff.
- Nevertheless, the discussions in meetings enabled the review team to develop their understanding of the operation and functioning of AMEU and of achievements and strengths.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION AND ITS FORMAL POSITION WITHIN SLOVENIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

- 7 Alma Mater Europaea – Evropski Center, Maribor (AMEU) is an independent, non-profit, higher education institution, owned by a foundation called Evropska Administrativna Akademija (EAA). EAA was registered as a foundation on 12 April 2005 with Professor Ludvik Toplak as founder and sole director. Its functions are described as research and experimental development on social sciences and humanities.

EAA owns Alma Mater Europaea – Evropski Center, Maribor, which was established in June 2007, and also Alma Mater Europaea – Akademija Za Ples which has an address in Ljubljana. In 2014 Alma Mater Europaea Evropski Center, Maribor acquired a further institute, Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis Fakulteta Za Podiplomski Humanisticni Studij, Ljubljana (ISH). All of these entities are solely owned by Professor Ludvik Toplak. The panel understands that they are each not-for-profit entities with objectives relating to research and training in the social sciences and humanities. The entity AMEU, Maribor was the subject of the review. ISH, now a subsidiary of AMEU, was not reviewed.

AMEU rents premises at Gosposka 1, Maribor; Lendavska 9, Murska Sobota; and in Ljubljana and also maintains a premises in Zagreb, Croatia.

- 8 Higher education (HE) in Slovenia is regulated by the *Higher Education Act*, 2013. Under this legislation all Slovenian higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to be evaluated and accredited by Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije za kakovost v visokem šolstvu (NAKVIS), that is, the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency (SQAA). It is also a requirement that all HE programmes must be accredited by SQAA. The Slovenian Qualifications Framework which is a ten level Framework was referenced in 2014 to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)¹.
- 9 Following the establishment of AMEU in 2007, an application was made to SQAA for institutional accreditation. This was granted in February 2008.
- 10 From June 2008 to date, AMEU has received accreditation from SQAA for 16 higher education programmes across the three Bologna cycles of Bachelor, Master and Doctorate. Students are registered across 11 of these programmes. Five of the programmes have never registered students. Currently all accredited programmes are accredited for the maximum period of 7 years. The fields in which programmes are running are Nursing, Physical Therapy, Health Sciences, Social Gerontology, Archival Studies, Management and Business Studies.
- 11 At February 2015 the Institution had 666 students, of whom 573 were first cycle Bachelor students; 44 were second cycle Master students; and 49 were doctoral candidates.
- 12 The AMEU self-evaluation report of January 2015 broadly covered the period 2012-2014.
- 13 AMEU's stated vision is *to become an international education centre, a centre of excellence in education and research, which will use its strategic and applied research to creatively solve economic, technological, health and socio-political, ecological and climate and intercultural issues of Central Europe, primarily the Danube Region and the Balkans. As an open academic community it will offer, in association with its partners, projects for the economic and*

¹ VERIFY THIS <http://www.nok.si/assets/PDF/Slovensko-ogrodje-kvalifikacij/EN/Final-Report-SI-2014-pk.pdf>

technological development, peace and democracy, sustainable development and the development of an ecological balance in the region, thereby contributing to European reintegration.

- 14 The stated mission of AMEU is to implement top-quality pedagogical and scientific research programmes in various fields, and to serve the community as a university centre promoting the development, spread and use of knowledge in the field of various sciences. AMEU has developed the cooperation with universities in the region and other European countries with the aim of acquiring and implementing new knowledge, and developing the new knowledge in cooperation with other universities in the region. AMEU therefore contributes to the economic and cultural development and the creation of values, and fulfils the local, national and regional mission in the educational, research and cultural fields on the basis of a transnational and interdisciplinary approach.

III. STRATEGIC PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

Positive features

- The current annual work programme provides a helpful basis upon which AMEU can build its future strategic planning.
- The SWOT analysis contained in the SER provides a platform for identifying and addressing strengths and weaknesses and for addressing future challenges.
- First steps have been taken to put in place a structured approach to quality assurance and quality management which includes good opportunities for student representation on formal governance bodies.

Areas for development, it is recommended that:

- In order to avoid any unnecessary risks to its overall strategy and reputation, that AMEU take full account of any potential vulnerability to the legislative and regulatory frameworks in the different national jurisdictions in which AMEU operates or in which it has academic or strategic partnerships, by the development of a risk management and contingency plan in which all potential risks, and the degree of possible impact, can be assessed in a transparent manner.
- During the review process in preparation for a new strategic plan, the range of measurable KPIs should be extended to reflect, more comprehensively, the full range of AMEU's activities and core business.
- To support its overall strategy and vision, the Institution should develop a set of five supporting strategies which clearly identify the priorities that are important to the future of AMEU, i.e. in research; learning and teaching; quality assurance; regional impact; and internationalisation and that each should be led by a senior academic with a clearly defined set of responsibilities.
- AMEU should take the opportunity provided by the imminent publication of a revised *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)* to complete a mapping exercise against each element of guidance for higher education institutions ensuring that this defines the future development of academic quality assurance at AMEU.
- AMEU reflects on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that a mechanism is put in place to inform all students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.
- AMEU should consider adjusting the balance between full-time academic staff and those engaged on a part-time basis as adjunct faculty by creating more full-time academic positions.
- A comprehensive code of conduct for academic ethics should be developed, covering all activities relating to staff and students.

Governance

- 15 During the initial meetings with AMEU the review team sought to understand fully the vision, mission and nature of the Institution. The team noted the transnational plans, the well-articulated commitment to the region (as discussed in section VI), and the commitment to the provision of regionally relevant higher education (HE) programmes.
- 16 A distinctive feature of the Institution is the role of the President who is the owner and founder of AMEU, and who chairs Senate. The President has an ambitious vision and an evident

commitment to higher education and the region. He has a strong central presence in all decision-making processes².

- 17 In considering the ambitious vision and aspirations of AMEU, the team particularly sought to understand the chosen model of governance and the degree of independence and of autonomous decision-making that AMEU wishes to put in place across its deliberative bodies to effectively achieve its mission.
- 18 The review panel was provided with the Articles of Association of AMEU of July 2012 and also a later version of March 9th 2013. The review panel understands that the latter text, of March 2013, is the current, legally-binding document. However, it was noted during the meetings that AMEU staff referred to models or mechanisms of governance that were captured in the 2012 document, but not in the amended 2013 document. For example
 - a. in Article 15.a of the 2013 document the membership of the Management Board is described. In this text a six person board without student representation is established (this is the current legal model). Whereas article 15 of the 2012 text describes a seven person board with a student representative. In meetings with staff the latter model was described. This is also discussed in paragraph 30. (The review panel also observed that the Quality Manual of February 2014 also identified a student representative as a member of the Management Board, p.11)
 - b. in Article 16 of the 2012 text, a requirement to seek the opinion of the Council of Experts prior to Management Board decisions is laid down; but Article 16 of the 2013 text has removed this requirement. Nevertheless references to the Council during the meetings with the review panel caused some unnecessary confusion. The panel notes that the Council has no legal or formal role in decision-making at AMEU.

Furthermore it was noted that AMEU intends to extend permission to use its name to other separate and independent entities in other jurisdictions, but no criteria or process were provided for this provision.

- 19 As AMEU moves towards university status (an objective articulated during the meetings), and in consolidating its position in Slovenian HE while also developing more provision on a transnational basis, the team anticipates that AMEU will wish to avoid any unnecessary risks to its overall strategy and reputation. Therefore, the review team proposes that full account should be taken of any potential vulnerability in its governance model and to the legislative and regulatory frameworks in the different national jurisdictions in which AMEU operates or in which it has academic or strategic partnerships.
- 20 In support of this proposition, the team strongly recommends that the AMEU strategic plan and annual work plan are underpinned by the development of a risk management and contingency plan in which all potential risks, and the degree of possible impact, can be assessed in a transparent manner. Matters requiring focus include, amongst other things, independent decision-making capacities of the deliberative bodies of the Institution; formal provision for student representation; statutory and/or quality agency requirements of transnational HE providers in Croatia and other countries.
- 21 In particular the review team suggests that consideration be given to the use of the designation and title “university” in the Institution’s publications and advertising. It is unclear under

² The panel notes the information provided by the Institution that under Slovenian legislation where a HEI is registered as non-profit organisation, such as AMEU, “ownership” is not deemed important: in practice one speaks about a founder rather than an owner. Legal documents do not refer to an owner, but to a founder, and once a founder establishes an institution of this nature, all property is owned by the institution. For example, on any potential cessation of an institution under the current legislation, the property must be transferred to another institution with related a mission. As a non-profit institution, an independent legal entity with its own assets for a particular purpose, all profits go solely for the development needs of that entity. The Institution is managed by the founder; the owner or the donor does not have any property rights as the “owner”.

Slovenian legislation whether the use of university title and the phrase “the university for leadership” is permitted. The team believes that this may be misleading to the wider public and to potential students, and its use in a transnational context may breach local legislation in given jurisdictions.

- 22 As an overarching observation on AMEU governance, the review panel noted the difficulty in easily achieving a clear understanding both of the legal structures and the nature of the Institution itself (as described in paragraph 7), as well as the Institution’s relationships with various entities referred to, such as European Academic of Science and Arts and the ‘international board’. This lack of clarity may hinder the Institution in effectively establishing itself, pursuing its ambitious mission, and in developing its academic reputation, particularly in a transnational context.

Strategy

- 23 The current annual work programme provides a helpful basis upon which AMEU can build its future strategic planning. The Strategic Plan (Annex Two of the SER, alternatively titled the Work Programme, April 2014) is a helpful and informative planning document. It contains some important indicators. However, the review team noted that this planning document is due to be revised soon. The team recommends that during this review process, the range of measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be extended to reflect, more comprehensively, the full range of AMEU’s activities and core business.
- 24 In conducting this work, it is noted that the SWOT analysis (January 2015) contained in the SER provides a useful platform for identifying and addressing strengths and weaknesses and for addressing future challenges. The style adopted reflected the SKVC review criteria, which are comprehensive and relevant to all higher education institutions. Nevertheless in undertaking a revised SWOT as part of the process to renew the strategic plan, AMEU may wish to ensure all aspects relevant to a HEI in Slovenia, with transnational provision aspirations are appropriately captured. This will ensure a sound basis for the establishment of a more comprehensive set of KPIs as recommended above.
- 25 The review team also noted the vision and mission articulated in the SER. This did not fully align to what was stated during meetings with the review team. In developing the new strategic plan AMEU may wish to reflect on how it wishes to express its vision and mission.
- 26 In reflecting on all of the elements of AMEU’s core business, the team paid attention to ways in which organisational effectiveness might be improved and how strategic leadership and direction could be strengthened. The review team recommends that to support its overall strategy and vision, the Institution should develop a set of five supporting strategies which clearly identify the priorities in the following areas that are important to the future of AMEU. These are
 - a. research
 - b. learning and teaching (to address Intended Learning Outcomes, Student-Centred Learning, to ensure Academic Heads of Department are made aware of the ESG and to ensure that Bologna principles in these areas are fully met)
 - c. quality assurance
 - d. regional impact
 - e. internationalisation (to address mobility, curriculum, transnational education, etc.).The team advises that these documents should be clear and concise, and that each should be led by a senior academic with a clearly defined set of responsibilities, and that ideally this should be a person who is either full-time or with a significant time commitment to AMEU.
- 27 In looking to the future strategy and ways to effectively implement the vision of AMEU, it may be useful to consider the establishment of a local advisory board, to whom the Institution could look for local and regional perspectives on proposed strategies.

Human Resources

- 28 The team noted that most academic staff, including the Heads of Academic Department, are engaged on a part-time basis as adjunct faculty. In Annex 12 where 2012/13 staff numbers are provided, it is indicated that there are two full-time lecturers, and all other teaching staff are designated as 'contractual', with none designated as part-time. Two heads of study programmes are listed as 'external' staff rather than as 'part-time' (see document, Employed Staff Work Responsibilities). In the view of the team, these staffing arrangements restrict opportunities for such staff to engage in and contribute fully to the development activities of the Institution, and thus support institutional opportunities for consolidation and secure growth. This is particularly important in areas such as quality assurance, learning and teaching enhancement, and research, where AMEU is seeking to engage with all major developments in the European Higher Education Area, as well as in providing leadership to academic departments. Therefore, the team recommends that AMEU should consider adjusting the balance by creating more full-time academic positions and that a phased plan is put in place to achieve this.
- 29 The review panel also noted that staff members indicated that they had clear job descriptions for the roles they fulfil, as is good practice. Nevertheless where staff members undertake a variety of roles, this can be challenging, and the review team recommends that an opportunity be taken to review the appropriateness of the descriptions. This review may be complemented by an enhancement of the appraisal model that is currently in place, whereby the President meets annually with individual members of staff. This useful meeting may be enhanced through the establishment of a more formal appraisal system. This is discussed in paragraph 63 in the Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning section.

Quality

- 30 A commitment to engage with the Bologna process and the agenda for modernisation of higher education has been articulated by AMEU. The panel also notes that the first steps have been taken to put in place a structured approach to quality assurance and quality management and that a Quality Manual has been developed. The quality management model also includes good opportunities for student representation on formal governance bodies. (Although the review panel draws the attention of AMEU to the anomaly between the 2012 Memorandum of Association and the 2013 Memorandum as already mentioned in paragraph 18. In meetings with both staff and students the 2012 model seemed to be the model adopted in practice, a more inclusive and student-aware model. This matter needs clarification by the Institution for the benefit of its various stakeholders.)
- 31 Students with whom the review panel met were positive and supportive of AMEU and the educational experience they are receiving. Nevertheless there are opportunities for the enhancement of student engagement. Due to the part-time and blended learning model of provision there can be low attendance at lectures. Amongst other things, the planning of group work is more difficult with low numbers and low attendance.
- 32 In view of the imminent publication of the revised *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)*³, the team recommends that the opportunity should be taken to complete a mapping exercise against each of the ten elements of guidance for higher education institutions provided in section one. This should be used to define the future development of academic quality assurance at AMEU and is an activity that should be undertaken under the oversight of the Commission for Quality Assurance⁴. The Institution

³ See http://issuu.com/revisiões/docs/esg_-_draft_endorsed_by_bfug

⁴ The panel noted the varied use of the term 'commission' and 'committee' in documentation. Either term is fine, but it may assist the Institution if a set of fixed English language terminology is adopted that is used consistently. This may aid any future review or the clarity of AMEU's policies and procedures published in English.

should ensure that there are clear internal quality assurance policies and procedures in respect of all of the ten elements discussed in the *ESG*. A national focus by SQAA on strengthening models of internal quality assurance may also be anticipated in light of the review of SQAA for inclusion on the European Quality Agency Register (EQAR)⁵.

- 33 In its work on updating its quality infrastructure, and in light of AMEU's desires to develop transnational provision, the review panel suggests AMEU make use of the range of helpful guidance documents which originate from the context of the Lisbon Recognition Convention⁶.
- 34 A further development in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to be noted by AMEU is the revision of the ECTS Guide⁷. The document provides some useful guidance on amongst other things, the calculation of workload. This may be of particular assistance to AMEU in the development of its model of blended learning and part-time provision. This is also discussed in paragraph 57 in Section IV on Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning.
- 35 The review panel also notes that AMEU's engagement in the "Quality Project", which is being funded by the Slovenian government, and under which this review took place, represents an organisational commitment to developing and enhancing institutional quality assurance.

Student evaluation

- 36 The review team welcomes the opportunities made available to students for the evaluation of teachers, and the evaluation of study programmes and courses. The positive role played by student representatives in this process was also noted; however, the team advises AMEU to reflect on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that a mechanism is put in place for informing all students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide. For example this can be achieved by a 'You Said, We Did' procedure for advertising the main issues that have been addressed in response to student concerns, and how these concerns will be addressed.
- 37 Response rates to the surveys may also be increased by measures such as linking the return of assessment results to the completion of student surveys, which is possible through Moodle, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used by AMEU.

Financial Management & Resources

- 38 As indicated in paragraph 7, AMEU is an independent, non-profit, higher education institution which receives no direct state funding. Students who attend programmes at AMEU do not receive any state tuition support: they pay tuition fees.
- 39 AMEU's main income lines are tuition fees; research projects - EU and national; and donations. The initial funding to establish AMEU has been provided directly by the founder and President.
- 40 The finances of AMEU are managed by the President, and the Management Board approves the annual financial plan. A centralised budgetary model is in place; there are no devolved departmental budgets for example. Given the scale and model of AMEU's current operation this seems appropriate. The review panel noted that an annual audit is conducted by an external firm of auditors on the instruction of the President.

⁵ See https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/SQAA_External_Review_Report.pdf

⁶ Useful documents to consult include: *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher education in the European region, Lisbon (1997)*; *the Committee of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Recommendation the Recognition of Joint Degrees, Strasbourg (2004)*; *the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education (2005)*; and *the UNESCO/COUNCIL OF EUROPE Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2007)*; *The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions Practical guidelines for credential evaluators and admissions officers to provide fair and flexible recognition of foreign qualifications and periods of study abroad*, pp.117-120, Nuffic (2014).

⁷ See http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/1_2015/125002.pdf

- 41 AMEU rents premises at Gosposka 1, Maribor; Lendavska 9, Murska Sobota; and in Ljubljana and also maintains a premises in Zagreb, Croatia. It has also retained an additional premises in Maribor which is about to be refurbished as a teaching space.

Risk Analysis

- 42 As indicated above, in paragraph 20, the review panel recommends that a formal risk analysis process to be established. In addition to the matters identified above, the risk analysis process should include detail on financial risks and associated contingency plans. Issues such as market unpredictability and economic decline make the establishment of a risk management plan and strategy essential.

Ethics

- 43 The Team noted that AMEU has in place procedures for ethical approval in the area of research. However, the team recommends that a comprehensive code of conduct for academic ethics is developed, covering all activities relating to staff and students.

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Positive features

- AMEU has commenced a process for the modernisation of academic programmes, taking account of external (national and European) frameworks.
- Opportunities for international mobility through the Erasmus programme are well-publicised and well understood.
- The Institution is engaging with the Lifelong Learning agenda and is taking practical steps to make progress in this area; for example, through its vocational provision and through making available opportunities for the recognition of prior learning.

Some Areas for Development, it is recommended that:

- Greater use can be made of the principles and practices associated with the Bologna Process, in areas such as student centred learning, and in developing innovative approaches to academic practice.
- Steps should be taken to ensure that for each course/unit/module and each study programme, intended learning outcomes are identified which are: aligned to assessment strategies; are appropriate in type, number and level; can be assessed; and are transparent to all students.
- Appropriate entry standards should be set that facilitate successful student completion of study programmes.
- The Institution reflects on its practices in relation to the oversight of assessment, ensuring the establishment of an examination board and any other necessary arrangements for the oversight of all assessment processes, outcomes and for the conferring of academic awards.
- Heads of Study Programmes/ Heads of Academic Departments should be required to take responsibility for ensuring that all teaching staff engage fully with the task of implementing best practice in learning and teaching, as outlined in the *European Standards and Guidelines*, and in the wider context of the Bologna Process.
- A procedure should be adopted that enables all teaching staff to benefit from peer evaluation of teaching, thus enabling the sharing and exchange of good practice.
- If AMEU wishes to continue to make progress in internationalisation, including mobility and the internationalisation of the curriculum, steps should be taken to make more courses available in languages such as English, but that this should be supported by language testing for students and staff using internationally recognised standards and procedures.
- AMEU explore with local and regional employers and other stakeholders, the opportunities for providing CPD and advanced training programmes, and professional updating through short courses tailored to local needs.
- A review is undertaken of the information on the AMEU website to ensure it includes information for each study programme and each course, such as entry requirements (including language proficiency in each relevant language) assessment requirements, learning and teaching methods, and intended learning outcomes and employment opportunities, NFQ and EQF levels.

Programmes, Institutional Strategy and the National Environment

- 44 As indicated in paragraph 10, AMEU provides programmes in the fields of Nursing, Physical Therapy, Health Sciences, Social Gerontology, Archival Studies, Management and Business

Studies. AMEU has also gained accreditation for programmes in Ecology and in Financial Services (a Bachelor and Master for each field), but they are not currently being offered. The particular programmes have been chosen to address local employment needs and skills shortages. The review panel acknowledges that they do address national needs and are vocationally relevant, and are offering employment opportunities to graduates.

- 45 In light of the stated institutional strategy to only provide programmes which offer learners significant employment opportunities on graduation, and that AMEU advises that all its graduates to date are in employment, the panel recognises the appropriateness of the selection of programmes being offered for the labour market. The panel also recognises the aspirations and vision of the Institution in accrediting a programme in Ecology, to offer learning opportunities to those who may wish to work in various dimensions of environment management relevant to the particular geographical region in which AMEU is based. Nevertheless it is noted that this programme and that of Financial Services have not enrolled any students due to the current economic downturn. In this context the review panel recommends that AMEU engages in very careful planning to ensure the effective use of resources in the future and that academic planning be accompanied by both in-depth research and the appropriate marketing of programmes. This is also relevant for the programmes which are currently running and where low student numbers may significantly impact on the efficacy of the learning environment as referred to previously in paragraph 31. For example in 2014/15 there are only 2 students registered for the degree in Nursing in second year; there are 3 students registered for the professional Bachelor in Management in year one, and 1 student in year two. It is unclear whether this context can ensure a solid learning experience for students.

Programme Development and Programme Management

- 46 Programme oversight and review is managed through the departmental structure of the Institution. Dedicated programme committees are not currently in place. The previous procedure of an annual self-evaluation of programmes has been replaced by a report which looks at all departmental programmes at a Department level. This means that the locus of the annual review is further away from the point of delivery and of the student experience. It is also worthy of note (as indicated in Section III) that the staffing at Department level may make the oversight of programme provision difficult. For example five chairs exist (Nursing, Physical Therapy, Health Sciences, Social Gerontology and Business Studies), but there are seven organisational units/faculties (Annex 1, Organisational Structure with Business units).

The review panel draws the attention of AMEU to the recommendations of the *ESG*, where it is advised that the ownership of programme monitoring and review be directly at programme level, involving all teachers and student representatives on a systematic basis. However to implement such a model, robust programme teams would need to be in place. In light of the recommendation in paragraph 33, where a review of all AMEU Quality Assurance policies and procedures be conducted to ensure alignment with the *ESG*, the panel suggests that this be a specific item addressed during the revision and/or complementing of the Quality Manual with more robust processes.

- 47 Further processes for which it is essential to have developed, internal, integrated models are programme development and programme approval – the latter prior to any involvement with SQAA. As noted in paragraph 32 it is important that a HEI have its own internal Quality Assurance processes. Currently programme design and approval is driven by the SQAA process; it is necessary to complement this with an internal design and approval process such as recommended in the *ESG*, and it is critical that it clearly incorporates formal resource planning and curriculum development. The review proposed here, and the mapping to the *ESG* of internal

quality processes, is a project on which the Quality Commission could lead, but it would be important that the academic community are fully consulted.

- 48 Specifically, the review team recommends that the Institution reflects on its practices in relation to the oversight of assessment. Currently there is no examination board in place, nor is there any form of external moderation other than at Master or Doctoral thesis stage. There are no arrangements in place for the institutional oversight of all assessment processes, outcomes and for conferring academic awards. The Quality Manual makes no provision for this important area. The task of monitoring of assessment practice is allocated to the President, but in an organisation wishing to scale and emulate good practice in the European Higher Education Area a more robust and criterion-based process, engaging the relevant academic teams, is more appropriate⁸. Consideration should also be made of how independence or externality can be built into the model.

Assessment Appeals

- 49 It is also noted that AMEU needs to establish formal processes and good practice around assessment appeals, which has not been undertaken to date. This is very important to ensure fairness and transparency of process and ensure that a criterion-based system is in operation.

Bologna and the Modernisation of HE Agenda

Qualifications

- 50 AMEU has commenced a process for the modernisation of academic programmes, taking account of external (national and European) frameworks. The review panel noted the transitional nature of Slovenian qualifications where, with the introduction of the Slovenian Qualifications Framework, new models of qualifications are replacing old ones, and that currently AMEU provides both 'old' and 'new' qualifications⁹. It is noted also that the programmes are across the three Bologna cycles of Bachelor, Master and Doctorate and include both academic and professional qualifications at cycle 1. Doctoral studies will be discussed in Section V, under Research.

The Bachelor degrees in Nursing, Physical Therapy and Management are all professional diplomas. AMEU offers both a professional Bachelor and an academic Bachelor in Social Gerontology, with 103 and 13 students registered on the respective programmes in 2014/15. It is recommended that future publications, in all formats, refer also to the Level of each qualification on the Slovenian Qualifications Framework (SQF)¹⁰, and also with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), following the completion of its formal referencing with the SQF. Given the institutional aspirations to attract students from neighbouring countries, and to offer employment opportunities in those countries, and that AMEU used the word

⁸ There are many useful texts across the EHEA; one such text is a UK publication from the Higher Education Academy A marked improvement: *Transforming assessment in higher education - Assessment review tool* http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/assets/Documents/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf. It can assist an organisation in reflecting on its assessment practices.

⁹ "The reform and introduction of study programmes in accordance with the guidelines of the Bologna Declaration has taken place gradually in Slovenia. The old, pre-Bologna courses were last advertised in the 2008/2009 academic year, and students in these courses must complete their studies no later than in the 2015/2016 academic year. Starting with the 2009/2010 academic year, only new study programmes for all three cycles were advertised. Students entering higher education after the 2009/2010 academic year thus pursue their education in courses of the first, second and third cycles in line with the guidelines of the Bologna Declaration and later declarations, which have been adopted at the international (European) level by ministers competent for higher education." *Referencing the Slovenian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area Final Report ; Slovenia, p.19, 2014*

¹⁰ See <http://www.nok.si/en>

“Europe” in its institutional title, it is critically important that there is engagement with the full range of transparency tools available under Bologna.

- 51 The review panel also recommends that where relevant occupational standards are in place, they should be explicitly referenced, as well the professional standing of any programme with its relationship to any national or international professional, statutory, or regulatory body. For example, whilst AMEU has made reference to its Nursing degree being recognised under Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (namely professions of nurse responsible for general care, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, midwife, architect, pharmacist and doctor), yet no additional information has been provided on any rights of graduates to professional registration with The Slovenian Nurses and Midwives Association or other professional bodies. This should be addressed.
- 52 A further matter for consideration, as indicated in paragraphs 19 and 20, is the regulatory context in which AMEU provides access to its programmes in other countries. The review panel notes in particular that the SQAA accredited professional degree in Management is provided by a blended learning model with an outreach centre in Zagreb, Croatia. Whilst AMEU is of the view that this is in keeping with national policies of both Slovenia and Croatia and no explicit licence or approval is required from the Croatian national authorities, the review panel strongly recommends that AMEU liaise directly with the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) to confirm that this is the case.
- 53 The review panel noted that the use of ECTS and the European Diploma Supplement are standard practice at AMEU. (Workload and the use of ECTS are commented on in paragraph 57.)

Teaching and Learning

- 54 The review team noted that there are opportunities for the Institution to enhance learning and teaching. But greater use can be made of the principles and practices associated with the Bologna Process, in areas such as student-centred learning, the articulation of intended learning outcomes, the explicit mapping of assessment to learning outcomes, and in developing innovative approaches to academic practice, assignment of workload, etc. This is relevant also to matters discussed in paragraph 47 regarding the establishment of a programme design and approval process. It is important that the internal approval process sets explicit criteria around the matters mentioned here (articulation of learning outcomes; mapping to appropriate assessment; allocation of workload; pedagogical practices, etc.) as well as programme standards, qualification descriptors for the Slovenian Qualifications Framework, and occupational standards, etc.
- 55 Specifically, the team advises that steps should be taken to ensure that for each course and for each study programme, intended learning outcomes are identified which are: explicitly aligned to assessment strategies; are appropriate in type, number and level; can be assessed; and are transparent to all students. A full range of assessment tools should be utilised, ensuring that students are neither over-assessed nor repeatedly assessed for the same learning. Equally, consideration should be made to ensure that each intended learning outcome, whether at course or programme level, is appropriately assessed.
- 56 It is further recommended that appropriate entry standards are set for all programmes. The entry level for a programme should be fair and transparent, ensuring that entrants to a programme have sufficient, requisite, prior learning that they can reasonably successfully complete the programme. Where a learner is offered a place on a programme, that person should have a reasonable expectation of being able to successfully complete the programme with a reasonable workload. For example the review panel noted the challenges experienced by some learners on the Masters Degree in Archival Studies, where they are entering the programme without a lower qualification in a cognate area. Where this is the case the Masters programme should either be designed for that profile of learner, or for reasons of fairness such a learner should not be enrolled on the programme.

- 57 The review panel are cognisant of the unique provision model developed by AMEU, whereby all of its programmes are provided on a part-time, blended learning basis. This is a model which assists learners in accessing the programmes, and doing so at their own times; this is a positive feature for students. Nevertheless the review panel has considerable concerns about the appropriateness of the workload allocation to learners. A full-time workload is deemed to be 60 ECTS for an academic year. The model of ECTS fundamentally resides in a view that a typical working week is 40 hours, and that a typical student works attends a HEI between 30 and 40 weeks of the year. This is deemed to be full-time and equivalent to 60 ECTS. If AMEU expects its part-time learners, some of whom are also full-time workers, to carry a workload during one academic year of 60 ECTS a number of serious questions are raised: is this fair, or reasonable for students?; if students are able to undertake this workload whilst working full-time and meet the requirements, one inevitably has to ask is there really 60 ECTS of workload involved in the programme? In light of the publication of the new ECTS Guide in 2015, the review panel strongly recommends that AMEU reflect on the workload allocation metrics and student learning models described therein and, where necessary, revise its programmes to more accurately reflect workload and/or limit the number of ECTS that a part-time student can take in one academic year.
- 58 In light of feedback during the meetings the review panel also recommends reflection on the nature of learning resources being utilised by students in practice. If students are heavily dependent on learning materials and resources provided by staff (e.g. hand-outs, document packs, etc.) and if they are not accessing supplementary materials, as seemed to be the case, this does not encourage independent learning, problem-solving and research skills.
- 59 As part of the staff development processes referred to below, the Quality Commission might take a lead on disseminating a deeper understanding of the Bologna process and its processes and principles.
- 60 The review team recognises the positive use of technology and Moodle by AMEU and that the video-capture of lectures can be a useful tool to make lectures more accessible. However a more active pedagogy, or innovative use of technology, may assist in improving student-centred learning. Training should be provided to lecturers on these areas and the technological possibilities to support and enhance student learning.

Staff Development

- 61 Staff development and personal development is positively supported by AMEU. The Institution has a good track record in providing support to its staff, and staff members are appreciative of this. AMEU may wish to ensure that future support is more strategically directed to ensure the organisation's learning needs are addressed. This is particularly relevant to supporting academic staff in fully appreciating the concepts and practices associated with the modernisation agenda of HE. Many European institutions require academic staff members to undertake programmes relating to Teaching and Learning. Typically such courses provide participants with the opportunity to participate in dialogue on good pedagogy - teaching, learning and assessment as a community of scholars; the design of programmes and courses based on principles of student-centred learning, and assessable intended learning outcomes; critique planning and teaching practice in the light of student learning/feedback; enhancing research skills; engaging with technology enhanced learning; gaining an in-depth understanding of assessment and evaluation, mentoring, and inclusive practices, e.g. universal design, etc..
- 62 It may be of assistance to AMEU if, as part of the strategic planning process and the appointment of staff, a training and development plan be established. This could be captured under the human resources dimension of strategic planning.
- 63 The review panel noted that the SER indicates that the President meets annually with teachers for the purpose of completing an annual appraisal of performance and to discuss results of student

evaluations. However, the team recommends that a procedure should be adopted that enables all teaching staff to benefit from peer evaluation of teaching. In such a process, each teacher should be observed by a peer colleague for development purposes, thus enabling the sharing and exchange of good practice.

- 64 As indicated above, the Quality Commission may find it a worthwhile task to take the Bologna concepts and principles and translate them into a deeper pedagogical framework with which staff could more meaningfully engage.

Internationalisation

- 65 As previously commented, the outward-looking perspective of AMEU is a positive feature of the organisation. The aspirations to contribute to the region in cross-border initiatives and in the provision of transnational education may be exciting ventures, though with the caveats already stated.
- 66 The review panel noted that opportunities for international mobility through the Erasmus programme are well-publicised and well understood within AMEU, and that AMEU has had an Erasmus Charter in place since 2009, indicating that a commitment to mobility has been in place since the beginning of the Institution.

Lifelong Learning

- 67 The Institution is engaging with the Lifelong Learning agenda and is taking practical steps to make progress in this area; for example, through its vocational provision and through making available opportunities for the recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- 68 The review panel considers the Institution's commitment to and use of a model of RPL is important to create access to higher education, and progression through it, for a wide variety of learners in diverse life situations and with varied educational needs. Nevertheless care needs to be taken to ensure that recognition for learning is appropriately granted, taking due consideration of the achievement of learning outcomes and the volume and level of learning amongst other things. A clear criterion-based process needs to be in place to ensure learners benefit from the RPL model in place.
- 69 In consideration of lifelong learning broadly, the team noted that most students study on a part-time basis, that blended learning is available, and that a high proportion are in employment. However, the team has concluded that there may be as yet untapped potential for AMEU to explore with local and regional employers and other stakeholders. For example, there may be opportunities to provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD), advanced training programmes, and professional updating through short courses tailored to local needs. This form of education and training may also include HE provision at Masters level.

Work Placement

- 70 As part of its commitment to the provision of vocationally relevant education and training AMEU has credit bearing work placements on a number of its programmes. With regard to the programmes in Nursing and in Physical Therapy, there are professional requirements for the completion of certain numbers of hours of practice-based work.
- 71 It is also noted that in other disciplines some internships organised and that it is possible to obtain credit for them in some instances. Also, in light of the nature of AMEU's provision, whereby its students are part-time learners, many are currently employed and they are able to use their work setting to complete 'job experience' or work-based projects.

Student Support and Career Guidance

- 72 The Institution provides careers support to students and is very proud of the number of its graduates who are currently in employment. The review team suggests caution around this metric given the relatively recent cohorts of graduates, the fact that most students were in employment prior to commencing the programme with AMEU, and the very significant challenges to maintain a high rate of graduate employment given the current European context.
- 73 Careers support provided includes the provision of employment seminars, assistance in sourcing employers and applying for work. Students indicated that they found the careers support provided helpful.
- 74 As an Institution which charges fees for its programmes, accommodations are made for students to facilitate ease of payment of the tuition fee through the provision of instalment options. It is also noted that in some exceptional cases fee waivers were given to students. Sports scholarships are also available from the Institution.
- 75 The Institution is open to supporting students with disabilities, and both staff and students cited specific positive examples and accommodations made for individuals. Accommodations include physical interventions as well as reasonable accommodations in assessment practices, where a student's individual needs are considered when appropriate evidence is provided to support a request for support.
- 76 As indicated in paragraph 41, AMEU is currently refurbishing additional premises in Maribor which will be utilised as a teaching space. Adequate office space is in place to support the current level of AMEU activity. The VLE referred to in paragraph 37 is Moodle, and students indicated satisfaction with it as a supportive learning tool. With the constant technological advances and greater innovation in pedagogy there may yet be aspects of this tool that AMEU could further exploit. The video-capture of lectures on the digital library of Moodle and its usefulness for students has already been mentioned.
- 77 Currently students have electronic access to libraries with which AMEU has concluded contracts of cooperation, namely *Co-operative Online Bibliographic System & Services (COBIS)*. There are two sets of resources available through this arrangement; one for Maribor and one for Murska Sobota. The review team also noted that access to the resources of the University of Maribor could be secured by any student for a fee of €20 per annum.
- 78 The review panel also noted the surveys distributed to students and the collection of feedback. Whilst there are the beginnings of good practice in this process, it would benefit from greater clarity – neither students nor staff could clearly indicate the number of surveys being used, nor their nature; it was also evident that there was a low response rate. As suggested in paragraph 37 the completion of surveys can be linked to the return of assessment results. Focus groups and other forms of student engagement may be options for AMEU to enhance its understanding of the student experience.

Alumni

- 79 The review panel noted that an Alumni club is nominally in place and that there is a low level of activity associated with it. This reflects the youth of the Institution and the geographical spread of the graduates. There is an annual get-together facilitated by AMEU, normally held at Christmas time. Generally the Alumni Club offers graduates social and networking opportunities. To date it has not been consulted in strategic decision-making or informing future planning.

Public Information

- 80 The review team took the opportunity to examine the information made available publicly to potential students and other stakeholders through the AMEU website. In the view of the team,

this information falls short of what can be expected of a modern European higher education institution. Therefore, it is recommended that a review is undertaken of the information on the AMEU website, and that this should include information for each study programme and each course, such as entry requirements, assessment requirements, learning and teaching methods, and intended learning outcomes and employment opportunities, framework levels – National/EQF, professional recognition, type of qualification, national accreditation agencies, etc.. Clear information should be provided on the language of tuition, and appropriate proficiency levels for entry to the various programmes offered in Slovenian, Croatian, German, Italian, etc.. Additionally on some section of the website it may be helpful to provide detail with regard to the legal entity of AMEU, its ownership and its relationships with other legal entities as discussed in paragraph 22.

- 81 The provision of such information will also assist in AMEU's international recruitment and in providing helpful information to current and prospective students on the nature of their qualification and study programme.
- 82 The review panel reiterates its comment made in paragraph 21 in respect of university title. It is very important from the point of view of providing clear and accurate public information that this matter be addressed.

Stakeholder Involvement: Cooperation with Academic, Social and Business Partners

- 83 The review team met with a number of employer representatives and noted the very positive feedback provided by the representatives in respect of AMEU students and graduates. Whilst it is not possible to establish clearly the unique characteristics of AMEU students and graduates from the employer perspective, employers were clearly happy with the programmes and the positivity of the students. To date limited use has been made of systematic employer or stakeholder feedback in designing and reviewing the study programmes.

V. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Positive features

- Work is underway to extend the number of nationally accredited doctoral programmes in order to realise AMEU's aspiration to achieve university status.
- There is a determination to grow capacity in research and to explore opportunities to enable this to happen.

Some Areas for Development, it is recommended that:

- In considering research and consultancy in the broadest sense, including the Third Mission responsibilities of AMEU, attention should be paid to identifying potential opportunities for new types of income-generating, knowledge transfer and consultancy activities, and applied research links, with regional enterprises, the municipality, NGOs, and civil society more broadly.
- In light of current arrangements and capacity for the supervision of doctoral students a review should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity of this area to ensure that the supervision load for each principal supervisor is set at a level that does not put at risk the quality of supervision for each individual doctoral student, and that appointed supervisors meet acceptable standards for appointment.
- Current doctoral research practices are benchmarked against best practice in the European Research Area.

- 84 In its Self-Evaluation Report, AMEU described itself as a research institution and provided information on a range of research projects in which some of its staff members are engaged. Five funded projects were described in the SER in disparate areas. The team noted that much research activity is focused on national and EU projects, and that AMEU will continue to pursue such opportunities in partnership with external organisations.
- 85 Understandably for a young Institution many of the research projects have arisen through the seizing of an opportunity rather than through the strategic targeting of fields or the involvement in particular research groups. As a corollary of this, much of the research is dependent on project income and there is little consultancy. AMEU is dependent on part-time staff with research interests based in other HEIs. For example in listing publications, AMEU provided information that staff have published in such diverse journals as *American Journal of Potato Research*; *Physical Review*; *Journal of Theoretical Biology*; etc.. Whilst the individual researchers may be significant contributors to their respective fields of study, their research interests are not necessarily aligned to the mission and vision of AMEU.
- 86 As indicated in Section III Strategic Planning and Management, paragraphs 28-19, the engagement of staff on a part-time basis as adjunct faculty restricts opportunities for such staff to engage in, and contribute fully to, a range of activities including research. The quality, scale and depth of research would be significantly enhanced by the presence of some full-time research active staff. Also the recommendation in paragraph 26 to create a 'sub' strategy for research would assist in the development of a focussed research agenda with core interests and the framework by which *institutional* capacity can be developed.
- 87 In working on the research strategy, and in taking opportunities available for funded-projects as they arise, AMEU should consider the European Research Area (ERA) objectives under Europe 2020 which are as follows:

- a. Maximising investment in Research
 - b. Strengthening cross-border links
 - c. Open market for researchers
 - d. Gender equality
 - e. Accessing scientific knowledge
 - f. Joint Programming
- 88 The team also noted that where the primary work of members of staff involves work at another HEI (e.g., an AMEU lecturer is a Dean at another HEI, and many others hold roles in various institutions), there may be potential for a conflict of interest. AMEU may find it helpful to consider a way to manage this situation and consider this during the creation of the research strategy.

Project Office

- 89 AMEU has a Project Office whose function is to monitor funding opportunities both at a national and international level. The office assists in preparing proposals and in the management of the projects. In light of staff feedback on p.62 of the *Self-Evaluation Report for the 2012-13 Study Year*, the review team encourages AMEU in any plans to enhance the service provided by this unit.

Doctoral studies

- 90 The review team acknowledged the significant amount of work which is underway to extend the number of nationally accredited doctoral programmes in order to meet the national criteria for the establishment of a university. There is a determination to grow capacity in research and to explore opportunities to enable this to happen.
- 91 Noting that Doctoral provision is an area where AMEU wishes to grow, the team considered the arrangements and current capacity for the supervision of doctoral students and came to the view that these were not satisfactory, and that they are neither sufficient nor appropriate.
- 92 The review team strongly advises that a review is undertaken of this matter at the earliest opportunity, and that current practice is benchmarked against best practice in the European Research Area. This is to ensure that, firstly, care is taken that the criteria for the approval of supervisors and supervision teams meet international conventions and standards and are implemented accordingly; and secondly, that the supervision load for each principal supervisor is set at a level that does not put at risk the quality of supervision for each individual doctoral student.
- 93 Arrangements for the external examining of doctoral candidates should also conform to such standards, which typically involve the assessment to explicit criteria; an oral examination; the appointment of an extern who has no conflicts of interest with the institution or the candidate or the candidate's supervisor; the appointment of an internal examiner; the appointment of an independent chairperson; the preparation of a written report; and the consideration of the report at a board of examiners.
- 94 Notwithstanding the serious concerns expressed in paragraphs 92-93, the review team notes that the students with whom the team met were positive about their experience at AMEU. New facilities might provide greater opportunities for sharing of research interests and output as well as for interaction amongst doctoral students and research staff.

Ethical Committee

- 95 The recent establishment of an Ethical Committee, a sub-committee of Senate, for the approval of student research proposals, is to be welcomed. Also to be welcomed is the appointment of Professor Dr. Zmago Turk, who, as an experienced researcher, can be of assistance to the Institution in the development of good practices.

Networks

- 96 AMEU also has the opportunity to benefit from a strong relationship with the European Academy of Science and Arts, and the many scholars associated with that network. Already the development of local relationships, such as those with medical personnel, drawing on Slovenian-resident members of EASA, is working to strengthen AMEU.
- 97 The review panel also noted the running of an annual conference focussed on the research interests of adjunct faculty, which is a useful staff development event, and AMEU is encouraged to adopt key focuses which align to its mission.
- 98 Such mission alignment can be evidenced in student conferences which offer students a platform to share their work. The review panel noted the provision of some research skills courses at undergraduate as well as postgraduate level.

Third Mission – community engagement

- 99 However, in considering research and consultancy in the broadest sense, including the Third Mission responsibilities of AMEU, the review team recommends that attention should be paid to identifying potential opportunities for new types of income-generating, knowledge transfer and consultancy activities, and applied research links, with regional enterprises, the municipality, NGOs, and civil society more broadly. This is also relevant to Section VI Impact on Regional and National Development.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Positive features

- From the evidence available, including feedback from external stakeholders, it is apparent that AMEU is making a positive impact at local and regional level in terms of employment and educational provision in vocational areas of the curriculum, such as Nursing, Physical Therapy and Social Gerontology.
- It is apparent that AMEU staff and students participate in and contribute in various ways to community and voluntary service activities.

Some Areas for Development, it is recommended that:

- AMEU documents evidence of the outputs from external stakeholder engagement.
- Impact measures should be developed to enable a transparent institutional assessment to be made of AMEU's contribution regionally and nationally.
- Full use should be made of such indicators and measures to involve external partners and stakeholders in the process of monitoring progress (including at study programme level), perhaps by establishing an advisory board drawn from local and regional stakeholders.

Mission & Strategic Plan – Engaging with the Community

- 100 From the evidence available, including the feedback from external stakeholders provided during the meetings in Maribor, it is apparent that AMEU is making a positive impact at local and regional level in terms of employment and educational provision in vocational areas of the curriculum, such as Nursing, Physical Therapy and Social Gerontology.
- 101 During the meetings with employers the review panel had the opportunity to meet with staff of various hospitals who take Nursing and Physical Therapy students on placement. The hospital staff indicated that they were very happy with the AMEU students and very glad that AMEU is providing programmes provision in Nursing and Physical Therapy, which they see as fields of work for which more graduates are required. The good relationship with AMEU was very evident in the dialogue with the particular representatives met by the review panel.
- 102 With regard to the engagement of the business programmes with the local community, the President of the Maribor Human Resources Association, who is also involved with the Chamber of Commerce, is a part-time lecturer at AMEU, and brings many opportunities for local business connections. The review panel noted the commitment to AMEU of those persons with whom they met.
- 103 The review panel fully recognises the motivation, articulated at various meeting with AMEU staff, whereby the provision of programmes in areas such as Social Gerontology, Ecology and Physical Therapy is being undertaken from a sense of social responsibility. Nevertheless this sense of community engagement and social responsibility is not fully reflected in the stated values and mission of the Institution as presented to the panel in the SER. Attending to this matter might assist the Institution in projecting its brand in the niche areas in which it is focussing.
- 104 The review panel also noted the plentiful and diverse employment opportunities available to graduates of the health-related programmes in the Spas which are prevalent in the region across Austria, Slovenia and Croatia in the immediate hinterland of Maribor. The panel suggests that there may be an opportunity for the development of a particular educational or consultancy relationship with this sector and AMEU may wish to explore this idea.

- 105 As indicated in paragraph 99 there may be many unexplored consultancy or knowledge transfer opportunities. In the development of its educational profile AMEU may benefit from specifically considering these dimensions of its activities.

Voluntary Work

- 106 Both staff and students provided evidence of involvement in voluntary activities, in service to the community. Specific examples cited included the establishment of an elder day-care centre by a Social Gerontology student; the teaching of computer skills to the elderly; and the offering of physical therapy to care centres on a pro bono basis.

Impact Measures

- 107 In order to more clearly establish and illustrate the impact AMEU has on the region, the review team encourages the Institution to make full use of indicators and measures relating to knowledge transfer, the provision of consultancy, the provision of CPD, etc., and to involve external partners and stakeholders in the process of monitoring progress (including at study programme level). This may perhaps be achieved by establishing an advisory board drawn from local and regional stakeholders. This board could look at both curriculum planning and dimensions of AMEU community engagement. It may also offer AMEU an opportunity to source effective persons to participate in programme committees.
- 108 Greater documentation of evidence of the outputs from external stakeholder engagement would assist AMEU in telling a more robust story of its role in the region and its impact. The development of impact measures will enable a transparent institutional assessment to be made of AMEU's contribution regionally and nationally.

VII. SOME POSITIVE FEATURES AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of positive features of AMEU were identified by the review panel and they have been highlighted in the Report. These are as follows:

- The current annual work programme provides a helpful basis upon which AMEU can build its future strategic planning.
- The SWOT analysis contained in the SER provides a platform for identifying and addressing strengths and weaknesses and for addressing future challenges.
- First steps have been taken to put in place a structured approach to quality assurance and quality management which includes good opportunities for student representation on formal governance bodies.
- AMEU has commenced a process for the modernisation of academic programmes, taking account of external (national and European) frameworks.
- Opportunities for international mobility through the Erasmus programme are well-publicised and well understood.
- The Institution is engaging with the Lifelong Learning agenda and is taking practical steps to make progress in this area; for example, through its vocational provision and through making available opportunities for the recognition of prior learning.
- Work is underway to extend the number of nationally accredited doctoral programmes in order to realise AMEU's aspiration to achieve university status.
- There is a determination to grow capacity in research and to explore opportunities to enable this to happen.
- From the evidence available, including feedback from external stakeholders, it is apparent that AMEU is making a positive impact at local and regional level in terms of employment and educational provision in vocational areas of the curriculum, such as Nursing, Physical therapy and Social Gerontology.
- It is apparent that AMEU staff and students participate in and contribute in various ways to community and voluntary service activities.

The following is a summary of the review panel's recommendations:

1. Strategic Planning and Management

It is recommended that:

- In order to avoid any unnecessary risks to its overall strategy and reputation, that AMEU take full account of any potential vulnerability to the legislative and regulatory frameworks in the different national jurisdictions in which AMEU operates or in which it has academic or strategic partnerships, by the development of a risk management and contingency plan in which all potential risks, and the degree of possible impact, can be assessed in a transparent manner.
- During the review process in preparation for a new strategic plan, the range of measurable KPIs should be extended to reflect, more comprehensively, the full range of AMEU's activities and core business.
- To support its overall strategy and vision, the Institution should develop a set of five supporting strategies which clearly identify the priorities that are important to the future of AMEU, i.e. in research; learning and teaching; quality assurance; regional impact; and internationalisation and that each should be led by a senior academic with a clearly defined set of responsibilities.
- AMEU should take the opportunity provided by the imminent publication of a revised *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)* to complete a

mapping exercise against each element of guidance for higher education institutions ensuring that this defines the future development of academic quality assurance at AMEU.

- AMEU reflects on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that a mechanism is put in place to inform all students of actions taken to “close the loop” in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.
- AMEU should consider adjusting the balance between full-time academic staff and those engaged on a part-time basis as adjunct faculty by creating more full-time academic positions.
- A comprehensive code of conduct for academic ethics should be developed, covering all activities relating to staff and students.

2. Academic Studies & Lifelong Learning

It is recommended that:

- Greater use can be made of the principles and practices associated with the Bologna Process, in areas such as student centred learning, and in developing innovative approaches to academic practice.
- Steps should be taken to ensure that for each course/unit/module and each study programme, intended learning outcomes are identified which are: aligned to assessment strategies; are appropriate in type, number and level; can be assessed; and are transparent to all students.
- Appropriate entry standards should be set that facilitate successful student completion of study programmes.
- The Institution reflects on its practices in relation to the oversight of assessment, ensuring the establishment of an examination board and any other necessary arrangements for the oversight of all assessment processes, outcomes and for the conferring of academic awards.
- Heads of Study Programmes/ Heads of Academic Departments should be required to take responsibility for ensuring that all teaching staff engage fully with the task of implementing best practice in learning and teaching, as outlined in the *European Standards and Guidelines*, and in the wider context of the Bologna Process.
- A procedure should be adopted that enables all teaching staff to benefit from peer evaluation of teaching, thus enabling the sharing and exchange of good practice.
- If AMEU wishes to continue to make progress in internationalisation, including mobility and the internationalisation of the curriculum, steps should be taken to make more courses available in languages such as English, but that this should be supported by language testing for students and staff using internationally recognised standards and procedures.
- AMEU explore with local and regional employers and other stakeholders, the opportunities for providing CPD and advanced training programmes, and professional updating through short courses tailored to local needs.
- A review is undertaken of the information on the AMEU website to ensure it includes information for each study programme and each course, such as entry requirements (including language proficiency in each relevant language) assessment requirements, learning and teaching methods, and intended learning outcomes and employment opportunities, NFQ and EQF levels.

3. Research Activities

It is recommended that:

- In considering research and consultancy in the broadest sense, including the Third Mission responsibilities of AMEU, attention should be paid to identifying potential opportunities for new types of income-generating, knowledge transfer and consultancy activities, and applied research links, with regional enterprises, the municipality, NGOs, and civil society more broadly.

- In light of current arrangements and capacity for the supervision of doctoral students a review should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity of this area to ensure that the supervision load for each principal supervisor is set at a level that does not put at risk the quality of supervision for each individual doctoral student, and that appointed supervisors meet acceptable standards for appointment.
- Current doctoral research practices are benchmarked against best practice in the European Research Area.

4. Regional

It is recommended that:

- AMEU documents evidence of the outputs from external stakeholder engagement.
- Impact measures should be developed to enable a transparent institutional assessment to be made of AMEU's contribution regionally and nationally.
- Full use should be made of such indicators and measures to involve external partners and stakeholders in the process of monitoring progress (including at study programme level), perhaps by establishing an advisory board drawn from local and regional stakeholders.

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Maribor, 26.3.2015



ALMA MATER
EUROPAEA
ECM
THE UNIVERSITY FOR LEADERSHIP

Dear Agne,

AMEU ECM would again like to thank you and the team for your kind hard work during the international evaluation of the business programmes of AMEU ECM.

We would also like to thank you for a very detailed report you have prepared, and which we will consider.

Regarding the report, there is perhaps one general remark: according to the Slovene jurisdiction, a higher education institution, registered as institution (foundation) is a non-profit institution. As stated in the Memorandum of AMEU ECM, the possible profit is entirely dedicated to the development of the basic mission and programmes.

HEIs that are registered as non-profit organisations (such as AMEU ECM) – the ownership is not important. One only talks about the founder.

According to Slovenian law, a non-profit institution is an independent legal entity with its own assets for a particular purpose. All profits go solely for the development needs of the institution. The institution is managed by the founder, however, the owner or the donor does not have any property rights as the owner. Therefore, the law does not talk about the owner, since ownership is irrelevant. Once someone gives his/her property to the institution, the property is owned by the institution. What matters now is the management of the institution in accordance with the law. Even after the abolition of the institution under the current legislation, as well as the articles of association, the rest of the property goes to another institution with related programs (hence the "ownership" is irrelevant, we only speak about the "founder").

Another general remark: AMEU ECM has been developing and growing very fast; this also refers to adjustments to the needs of the market and expectations of the employers. We have therefore cancelled some of the programmes, but on the other hand developed other programmes very fast. The Self-evaluation report and some other documents we have sent to you might be older in their production; some perhaps referring to the accreditation from 7 years ago (study plans and syllabi). Therefore the apparent discrepancy between the original documents and the current situation, but those changes were mostly promptly legalized by the competent authorities.

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Could we perhaps also ask you to use the abbreviation AMEU (or AMEU ECM) instead of AME?

As to factual mistakes- just for reference:

- Adobe Vox is mentioned in the Management report. This word "Vox" should probably be replaced with Adobe Connect. Vox is a Slovenian nickname for Adobe Connect (our ministry calls it Vox and consequently we all call it Vox but the correct name is Adobe Connect) – this one must have been instigated by us and our usage of the nickname.

- Page 12, section Financial management / Point 40:

- AMEU ECM does not employ a full-time accountant: Ms Dijana Stiglic, Chef de Cabinet, is the liaison for accounting and financial issues between AMEU ECM and **external accounting service**. The lady you spoke to, Tanja Zerjav, is the head of the two person external accounting team (company Abeceda) that is responsible for accounting and audit of AMEU ECM finances. These two ladies come to AMEU ECM on two days in a week.

- Also under item 40: the Slovene jurisdiction does not require independent HEI to submit any financial reports because we do not receive any funding from the government.

- Item 51 on page 17: there are no Slovene occupational standards for health professions except of Nursing, which is handled by the EU directive 2005/36/EC.

No other factual misunderstandings were noted.

We look forward to receiving the final report and wish to thank you again for all your efforts.

Kind regards,

Dr. Tanja Angleitner Sagadin

Vodja mednarodne in projektne pisarne

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