

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

Tekijät **Marja Sutela, Lena Gumaelius, Damon Mohebbi, Attila Pausits, Marja-Leena Rinkineva, Mirella Nordblad & Mira Huusko. University of Ljubljana self-assessment (eds.) Marina Šučur, Vanja Perovšek & Maja Hosta**

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2.1 Managing societal engagement and impact

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

UL devotes particular attention to keeping the general public informed about its activities and is developing innovative approaches to communicate the mission of a public university. It seeks synergies among the various offices of the Rectorate (responsible for knowledge transfer, students and alumni, research) and addresses various target groups in conjunction with UL Members:

- the domestic and international academic public and professional public (e.g. presentation of achievements, successful projects (ERC) and breakthrough innovations);
- industry (via the alumni network, the Chamber of Commerce, the Knowledge Transfer Office, etc.) (e.g. presentation of results, knowledge transfer etc.) and the local environment;
- politicians, the government, ministries, the national research agency, other decision-makers (e.g. in the form of public events, provision of information and participation in various working bodies of ministries) (purpose: understanding of and support for research, support for expert decision-making);
- young people (e.g. via departments at secondary schools and career guidance) (purpose: stimulating interest in science and art as well as vocational guidance);
- the general public (e.g. via public events, round-table discussions, publications in the daily press and electronic media) (purpose: understanding of and support for science and art, prevention of non-scientific concepts).

Information is also provided daily via the [website](#) and social networks ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and

[LinkedIn](#)), while online events are posted on [YouTube](#).

Repository of the University of Ljubljana

UL develops its study and research programmes and determines the method of their provision in accordance with the principles of open science (more in 2.2). The [Statutes](#) also provide that written final work of studies must be published in electronic form and be publicly available via the [Repository of the UL](#) after the completion of studies. Peer-reviewed publications by teachers and researchers are also publicly accessible in the Repository, along with research data.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 17)

UL is currently preparing a sustainable development strategy since we aim to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals and to raise awareness on sustainability issues. As part of this strategy, we will focus on three pillars of social participation by including content linked to sustainability goals in the educational process, orienting research in the direction of sustainability and placing a particular emphasis on the functioning of UL. At the same time, we wish to influence society through our actions and activities by adequately promoting these activities and highlighting UL's role as an important institution for the raising of awareness about the importance of sustainability.

Impact of changes in the operating environment on the focus of activities

All changes in the operating environment are initially analysed by the competent offices of the Rectorate and then discussed by the College of the Rector, colleges of deans, vice-deans or secretaries, or the competent working bodies and decision-making bodies (UL Senate and/or UL Governing Board). The analyses differ depending on the type of event, e.g. proposals for changes in legislation are analysed with an assessment of the effects of changes on functioning, funding, capacities, etc., after which a response/opinion is drafted. The introduction of new technologies is studied through the competent committees of the UL Senate and potential trial deployment at selected member institutions or the Rectorate; changes and trends in the field of sustainable operation are added to current renovation and operation plans; etc.

Promoting social impact in educational activities

UL addresses the needs of society, industry and the public sector using a variety of approaches (more in 2.2.) and uses the results of these activities to help define its future direction. UL members are constantly encouraged to renew and update curricula so that it is adapted to changes in society. UL is also reinforcing extracurricular activities which enable students to gain ECTS. In this way, we encourage the active participation of students in various fields (for more, see 1.4).

Through two programmes entitled Student Innovation Projects for Social Benefit and Creative

Path to Knowledge, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and the European Social Fund have co-funded the implementation of projects through which students have been given an additional opportunity to gain practical experience while studying. Under the guidance of mentors, they have sought innovative solutions to the challenges of the industrial and non-industrial sectors in local and regional environments. UL has recognised the importance of such interdisciplinary student projects and also supports their implementation under the Development Pillar of Financing (RSF) 2021–2024.

In 2021, alongside student projects whose implementation is co-funded by the ministry under the ESS (European social fund), UL began implementing interdisciplinary Student projects for sustainable development, with the aim of promoting UL's participation and connection with the environment in the field of sustainable development and contributing to the achievement of SDGs, while at the same time giving students the opportunity to gain new knowledge, competences and practical experience during the course of their studies that will enable them to act in accordance with these goals. As part of the Recovery and Resilience plan, a renewal of higher education study programmes that will incorporate content from the field of sustainability is being prepared, as is a complete system of micro-credentials that will be offered by UL (more in 1.1). The system of micro-credentials will take its place alongside the existing three cycles leading to educational qualifications as a fourth pillar of education and will represent lifelong learning (LLL) at UL. More than 20 pilot projects for micro-credential programmes are currently in preparation.

Another current example is cooperation with the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia, on the basis of which military modules have been designed for bachelor's study programmes. Slovenia does not have its own system of military education and training, so as part of an interdepartmental agreement a variety of educational content has been prepared for future members of Slovenia's Armed Forces with a range of qualification profiles.

Among the activities promoting social participation and influence is a project called [Modra fakulteta](#), which offers a variety of educational programmes and intergenerational activities to those over-60 and, with their help, researches age and ageing. In this way UL caters for the inclusion of older people in the social environment.

Strengths

Strengthening the role of experts and scientific arguments in society, disseminating science-based knowledge; giving public responses to issues of societal relevance.

Enhancement areas

Upgrade of the UL's communication through various communication tools: redesigning the UL website.

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| Proactive, strategic, and creative planning and implementation of the UL's communications activities (press conferences, publications, events, guided tours, etc.) | Integrated, consistent, relevant, and effective communication from the UL, UL Members and staff to the community: develop an editorial policy for UL website and social media, redesign the UL's overall graphic identity. |
| Establishing and improving structures and work processes and coordinating PR activities within the Rectorate and UL Members. | Scientific and expertise-based activities in science communication. |
| Strengthening the UL network with external stakeholders (NGOs, European and international partners) | Systematic and comprehensive follow-up of UL's contribution to the SDGs and development of a strategy in this area. |

2.1 Managing the societal engagement and impact

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The University of Ljubljana is well integrated into society

As the largest university in Slovenia, the University of Ljubljana (UL) plays a pivotal role in contributing to societal reforms, specifically through its commitment to education, research, and the active promotion of third mission activities. The UL's strategy 2022-2027 states that the university wants to be a recognised and established academic institution in Europe. Two of its five strategic objectives and related development areas address social engagement and impact. The UL strives to enhance the transfer of knowledge and the arts in all spheres of social life and the university's social role and position in the national and global social dialogue. The strategy includes performance indicators for the strategic objectives and respective development areas. The UL has also prepared a materiality matrix where it has determined the most important challenges and goals relating to social, environmental, and economic sustainability, which the UL will address as part of its mission and strategy. The matrix that was prepared with an extensive number of stakeholders identifies the most important challenges the UL needs to address to contribute to the progress and prosperity of society. According to the self-assessment report, the UL focuses on the three pillars of societal engagement by integrating the content of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the educational process, by orienting research towards sustainable development and by placing particular emphasis on the different activities of the UL.

Based on the audit visit, the UL is well integrated into society on a local and national level. The university is enhancing its societal engagement and impact in many ways, and its interaction with society is versatile and active. The UL's flexibility in addressing societal challenges is evident

through its needs-oriented methodologies. The audit team heard about a wide array of activities initiated by different faculties, academies, university management, and units that facilitate engagement with society, demonstrating the university's responsiveness to social needs and priorities. The multitude of activities also creates a vibrant academic and research environment, which enriches the student experience and provides numerous avenues for academic exploration and societal contribution. Special emphasis is placed on connecting the arts, sciences and social sciences and cooperation with external partners.

The university is prominently featured at various events in the city of Ljubljana, on social media, and in the media across the country on an almost daily basis. As highlighted during the audit interviews, the experts of the UL are frequently quoted and interviewed in the media, including continuous appearances in science programme broadcasts by a national television station.

With its 40,000 students and 6,500 employees, the UL has an influential role within the city of Ljubljana. A new agreement and regular meetings with the city of Ljubljana will further systematise the already active cooperation. At the national level, an agreement on strategic cooperation for technological development and innovation breakthroughs has also been signed by representatives of the government and other parties. The UL is a trusted partner in many areas such as preparing new legislation. The audit team commends all this.

In terms of the management of societal engagement and impact at the university level, the university has a vice rector of knowledge transfer, digitalisation, and sustainable development, as well as the Knowledge Transfer Office established in the previous strategy period.

Information from the operating environment has an impact on activities in the faculties

Based on the audit visit, the faculties and academies have close connections and active cooperation with external stakeholders, i.e. industry and organisations in their field. Most of the faculties have advisory boards with external stakeholders. With this interaction, the faculties and academies seem to have the ability to react to the new needs arising from industry and overall changes in their operating environment with examples especially related to the educational provision.

However, a more systematic approach to societal engagement would help the UL to be more proactive concerning the needs of society at large and as one university. With a strategic- and future-oriented analysis of changes in its operating environment the UL would be better positioned to be one step ahead. This would entail exploring issues that may not yet be on the business agenda and which may contribute to the future of the operating environment.

The UL would benefit from clearer goals and the measurement of societal

engagement and impact

The annual operational planning (Annual Work Programme) with monitoring, self-assessment and reporting (Business and Quality Assurance Report) at the faculty and university levels ensure a systematic approach in terms of management, implementation and follow up of the university's strategic objectives also linked to societal engagement and impact. There are several university-level quantitative indicators linked to the strategic objectives such as the number of newly established spin-out companies, the number of popular publications on scientific research in the general media, the number of musical productions and exhibitions carried out, the percentage of employees at the UL included in the consultative and decision-making bodies on the national and international levels, the percentage of positive media publications about the UL, the number projects in which students have been solving current social-economic issues, the number of research-development and advisory projects carried out with the business sector or other national/foreign users of knowledge etc.

On the other hand, based on the audit visit, the understanding of what societal engagement and impact meant for the UL was fragmented. Some faculties viewed societal impact narrowly, i.e. only in terms of media coverage, the measurement of reactions in the media, industry connections, or patents. It was not fully clear to the audit team how the achievements corresponded to the set goals or were based on an analysis linked to the UL's operating environment. The audit team was exposed to a wide range of impressive activities in the faculties. It was quite clear that the university's societal impact was much broader than its current indicators were able to demonstrate. The UL could shift its emphasis from mainly tracking activities to measuring results and impact more diligently. Except for the annual operational planning and reporting process, monitoring of the societal engagement activities was mostly left to the UL faculties and academies. The more specific goals for societal engagement and impact and a data-driven improvement of societal engagement and impact remained unclear.

Societal engagement and impact are broad concepts and thus challenging to define and measure accurately. The UL should have a clear understanding of what societal impact means for the university, as well as the more specific goals for the coming years and how to monitor the achievement of these goals. The audit team recommends that the university further develops university-wide goals for societal engagement and impact linked to activities, follow-up and measurement of activities and a stronger connection to the university-level management system. The UL is also recommended to develop and implement qualitative indicators, in addition to the quantitative ones, to assess and express its societal engagement effectively.

The collaboration with stakeholders at the faculty level should also contribute to a coherent engagement strategy for the UL, in which roles and contributions of key support units could be more clearly defined. It would be beneficial for the university to have a framework for societal engagement incentives in place. Societal engagement criteria should also be incorporated into the academic progression model, such as the habilitation process, or into the researchers' evaluation practices.