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FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

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3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Högskolans självvärdering

Using the quality system in the management and implementation of the strategy

In 2020 the UL began drawing up a new strategy, the University of Ljubljana Strategy 2022-2027, which is currently being implemented. The process of preparing the strategy brought together members of the UL academic community, representatives of trade unions and a large number of external stakeholders with the aim of devising development activities that would help consolidate UL as a recognised and established academic institution in Europe. After the new strategy was approved by the UL Senate, UL Members were invited to integrate the UL strategic objectives into their own. An action plan was also prepared as the basis for developing further activities, along with a plan for monitoring implementation and achievement of the objectives.

The quality assurance system covers all key activities at UL. The Work Programme encompasses regular annual UL planning. Business and Quality Assurance Report includes regular annual UL self-evaluation (see Figure 1). Both documents are connected to the strategic objectives and area-specific strategic activities. As part of annual business reporting, UL chiefly monitors fulfilment of the annual plan, which is drawn up on the basis of the strategy guidelines. The self-evaluation findings are included in the Business and Quality Assurance report drafted at each UL Member, at the Rectorate and for the whole UL. At UL level, data is collected from UL Members and other sources (internal and external databases). Using a uniform methodology, this data is converted into indicators for whole UL and for individual UL Members; this ensures that values are measured uniformly and can be compared across UL Members.

Figure 1. Annual self-evaluation process of UL

In UL self-evaluation, special emphasis is placed on monitoring fulfilment of the measures set, and the UL has introduced a UL reporting application to support the monitoring process (for more, see 1.4). UL also provides annual training for staff at the Rectorate and at UL Members on strategic planning and the proper formulation of measures. This further strengthens the planning process (e.g. formulation of measures to improve business processes at UL Members) (in Slovene). Prior to every reporting round, the university organises a workshop for UL Members' contact persons at which we present any changes to the UL self-evaluation process. The planning and self-evaluation process is continuously updated to ensure that the process is coherent and effective.

Interim evaluations of the UL strategy enable us to acquire multiannual insight of the status of fulfilment of the strategy (2012–2016 and 2017–2020 have been evaluated). During this evaluation period, one year after approval of the strategy, a strategic meeting of all UL Member deans was held to identify, for each UL Member: a) how they had contributed to realisation of the UL strategic objectives in the past year; b) which activities they would carry out in support of the realisation of the objectives in the next two years; c) which systemic measures the Rectorate would have to take in support of UL Members' strategic plans.

The establishment of a department for supporting strategic management within the University

Quality Assurance Office and Strategic Management Support in 2023 will ensure that additional focus is placed in future on monitoring strategy implementation at UL level.

Ensuring staff members are aware of the connection between their own work and the university's strategic objectives

The UL strategy has been made public. A variety of stakeholders were involved in formulating the strategy. The Third-Generation Balanced Scorecard method was applied as the basic approach to strategy development. Carefully structured, it began by identifying key stakeholders' expectations. Eighteen interviews were held at the Rectorate (rector, rector's assistants, vice-rectors, chair of the UL Governing Board, secretary-general, secretary-general's assistants and other leading staff), along with 27 interviews with UL Member heads (deans, vice-deans). The analytical findings from the 45 interviews were a starting point for the strategic workshops, which were attended by an average of 30–35 UL Member representatives (deans, vice-deans, secretaries, other representatives). In the initial part of the process, we worked with more than 4,000 stakeholders (staff, students and representatives of the wider society in the humanities, art, education, healthcare, business, agriculture, sport, public administration and R&D) to address some of the most important sustainable challenges (social, environmental and economic). This formed the basis for the production of a materiality matrix, which has played a major role in guiding development of the new strategy. For more information on formulation of the strategy, see UL Strategy 2022–2027 (Annex 1: The process of drawing up the University of Ljubljana Strategy, 2022–2027, page 36).

UL leadership have prepared a workshop for UL Member deans at which agreements on key strategic issues of future UL operations are adopted and a strategy implementation action plan drafted.

Staff are involved in formulating the work programme, which includes strategic objectives in their respective areas; they also take part in self-evaluations of their activities during the preparation of the Business and Quality Assurance Report and of the self-evaluation reports for study programmes. The key points of the strategy will be shown in the UL reporting application and therefore always available to view. Annual reporting will also be aligned with the points of the strategy.

Strengths	**Enhancement areas**
A modern and methodically thought-out strategy development process.	Increasing the visibility of the UL's strategic goals to employees to further align planning and implementation activities with strategic goals.
An inclusive process for development of the Materiality Matrix, vision and strategy.	Integrating data sources and developing a platform for data collection, analysis and reporting to support strategic management.

Strategic goals are used for annual planning, monitoring and improvement.	Better aligning strategic goals, selection and implementation of development pillar of financing (RSF) projects with the quality system, to achieve greater synergies in implementing activities and pursuing strategic goals.
UL Members follow carefully managed processes to cascade strategic goals.	Stronger alignment of the UL Business and Quality Assurance Report with the Materiality Matrix, Strategic Goals, and Development and Support Areas of the UL Strategy.

3.1 Using the quality system in strategic management

- Auditeringsgruppens bedömning

The university’s quality policy forms a common basis for quality work

The quality system rules of the University of Ljubljana outline the university’s quality policy. The quality policy includes the main principles and objectives, processes, and responsibilities of the quality system. The quality policy is publicly available on the university’s website but could be more clearly highlighted on the web pages. In addition, the university could also further specify the roles and responsibilities related to quality system and enhancement covering the whole institution. The responsibilities of individual staff members in quality enhancement could also be highlighted in the quality system rules.

The university’s annual Business and Quality Assurance Report of 2022 indicated that there is still a need to promote the quality system principles and responsibilities among staff members. Based on the audit visit, the university had already taken steps forward to raise awareness of the quality system among its staff. The university could further build the staff awareness of the university’s quality policy and the idea of quality enhancement being everyone’s responsibility. This requires that the key principles are systematically communicated at various levels of the university especially by the management.

The purpose of the university’s quality system is to ensure that the university meets targets set in its strategy and statues as well as the European (ESG) and national quality assurance standards in place for higher education. The objectives of the quality system include the production of monitoring data and periodic reports on the quality of activities and the achievement of objectives, as well as the implementation of measures to improve these

elements, and the development of a quality culture at the university. The system is based on a framework of continuous improvement, a so-called Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. The system is structured in a way that supports the profile of the university and respects the diversity of faculties and academies**.** Different practices among the UL faculties and academies are allowed when appropriate and when they are in line with the functioning of the quality system. Dedicated instruments, such as the institutional strategic plan and action plans, annual planning, reporting and self-assessment, ensure a systematic institutional approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

The quality system supports the implementation of the university's strategy

The university's strategy for 2022-2027 is ambitious, comprehensive, and detailed. The strategy was prepared with a wide range of stakeholders. Measures have been set out to achieve the objectives of the strategy. Responsible persons, timelines and indicators have been identified for these strategy measures. The quality system is linked to the implementation of the strategy at the levels of the university, faculties, academies, and services.

According to the audit visit, the strategy is a living document integrated in educational provision, research, and societal engagement. Commitment to the implementation of the strategy in the different faculties and units of the university is essential for its realisation. The audit visit underlined that the university's 26 faculties and academies are very autonomous, called "worlds on their own" during the audit visit. On the other hand, staff identified themselves also as part of the university as a whole and not only as part of their respective faculty or academy. There was clear awareness of the strategic objectives of the university among the staff, and the common objectives were considered to unite them all.

Data-based management could be further enhanced

The harmonisation of the information systems within the university is an ongoing process. The different information systems in place in the faculties and academies and the challenges related to them were brought up in interviews with staff and students. The different information systems appear to have created unnecessary boundaries and ineffectiveness in the university. An achievement has been the implementation of a common business information system SAP with links to other internal and external systems in faculties and academies. This has been a very positive development to improve the flow of information and communication at the university, as recognised in interviews and the Annual business and quality assurance report of 2022. In terms of reporting platforms, a UL reporting application for the Annual Work Programme, business reporting, and self-evaluation of study programmes, was introduced for the faculties in 2020. The platform will hopefully further enhance a shared structure, synergies and transparency within the university.

The implementation of the university's strategy needs to be supported by effective knowledge

and data-based management structures and systems. Although the university has identified this as an improvement area in its self-assessment report, the discussions during the audit visit showed relatively little evidence of university-level knowledge management practices except for some indicators. To ensure systematic implementation of the university's strategy and evidence-based decision making, the audit team recommends that the university further develops data management and reporting related to students, staff, research, and societal impact. Common data management practices and integrated data sources would support more coherent approaches and quality management processes. Integrated data sources and reporting would increase transparency and reliability and allow for a systematic review and comparison of faculty activities in the implementation of the university's strategy.