

# AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

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## 3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

### - HEI's self-assessment

#### Quality system supporting the achievement of the objectives set for the core duties and the enhancement of the core duties

The [UL quality assurance \(QA\) system](#) encompasses all key and support activities at UL ([see Article 5](#)). Planning, monitoring and reporting take place annually with the preparation of the [work programme, the business and quality assurance report, and the accounting report](#), first at UL Members and the Rectorate and then in a joint plan and report. Different areas, activities and UL Members supplement the UL indicators and quality assurance system with extra indicators, tools and analyses.

UL encourages responsibility to reflect on areas and to prepare measures for improvements. The following are identified at the end of every chapter of the business report:

- key improvements and good practices within the area and impact on quality;
- key threats and weaknesses and the objectives and proposals for measures associated with them.

UL focuses strongly on the self-evaluation of study programmes (for more, see 1.3), which includes the planning of measures for improvements. The university also encourages quality improvements at organisational level through UL enhancement-led visits, which support UL

Members in their efforts to improve quality (for more, see 3.4).

## Enhancement and dissemination of good practices

When we encounter challenges that need to be addressed at joint level and search for possible solutions, we consider UL experiences, needs and good practices, as well as the experiences of other institutions. In this manner we have developed several tools and approaches within the quality assurance system. UL's aim is to identify, learn from, adapt and upgrade a good practice. The university is attentive to the common points of the wide application of practice as well as whether it is sufficiently flexible and can be adapted/implemented at different UL Members. Therefore, UL emphasises advancement and adaptation of practices in our context before their dissemination.

Some examples:

- UL has developed [monitoring of study programme quality](#) based on an analysis of the situation within UL, case studies from abroad and coordination with UL Members.
- UL has developed [student surveys](#) (2014) in response to initiatives and comments from UL Members and on the basis of the upgrading of the existing survey and the UL EF survey, and other relevant sources. The upgrade proposals were coordinated with faculties and student representatives, and adopted the new [rules \(in Slovenian\)](#), in which we emphasised the use of survey results.
- Monitoring of staff satisfaction: we proceeded from the tools that the UL Members had already developed, and drafted a questionnaire and guidelines that can be used by all UL Members.
- [UL enhancement-led visits](#): The university has applied good practices and cooperative management approaches outside UL, and developed the enhancement-led visits approach with UL Members. These are aimed at improving organisational quality at UL Member level. Based on the positive results of the pilot programme, enhancement-led visits were introduced into the UL quality assurance system.

## Supporting a participatory quality culture and enhancement of our activities

UL works intensively with internal and external stakeholders. Staff and students work together in representative bodies (committees, senates, working groups and other activities). The university encourages a collaborative quality culture at UL, addressing challenges and searching for solutions with UL Members and improving UL activities. To this end we hold regular meetings (for more, see 2.3). In addition to regular meetings, we set up relevant working groups as required (e.g. introduction of SAP, preparation for the Informativa fair, and the NES, teaching excellence, competencies and part-time study working groups, etc.). Cooperation is deepened through joint project work and in joint training programmes, with [UL enhancement-led visits](#) playing a particularly useful role. Through these joint activities, we are developing a common UL identity at

a highly diverse institution.

External stakeholders are involved in quality assurance development and, formally and informally, in regular operations and improvement processes. This provides us with prompt and detailed feedback in R&D, artistic work, study and extracurricular activities, and collaboration in the further development of UL activities.

## Ensuring the quality system meets the objectives set for it

The QA system meets the objectives set in the [Quality System Rules of the UL](#).

- The system facilitates closing the quality loops (PDCA) with the continuous monitoring of all activities on the basis of indicators, evaluation, reporting and improvement measures.
- The system brings together the strategic and implementational dimensions of UL.
- The system operates at various levels, thereby establishing a common framework for different activities/levels within UL. It facilitates links between very diverse UL Members and other units and, with it, a certain degree of comparability.
- At the same time, the system fosters the necessary flexibility by complementing the general framework with the specific.
- The system enables the planning, monitoring and improvement of areas of relevance to the fulfilment of ESG and other important criteria and objectives set out in laws, secondary legislation and at UL.
- The system provides for the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in monitoring and improving activities, and the provision of information to them.
- The system encourages development of a common quality culture.

## Developing the quality system

UL largely developed the QA system during the [KUL \(Quality at the University of Ljubljana\)](#) (in Slovene), where the university renewed, supplemented and tried to make sense of the existing basis, redesigned existing tools and added new ones. In accordance with the KUL project, the university computerised the student survey. The university has recently supported the monitoring of study programmes with an application, and used that application to also support UL Members' annual planning and reporting. UL is gradually increasing the range of available data important for the self-evaluation of UL Members and study programmes (for more, see 1.3).

UL is also planning to redesign the student survey and the monitoring of graduates' employment outcomes. Enhancement-led visits at UL Members help develop the quality assurance system (for more, see 3.4). One of the four topics addressed during a visit relates to the development of the quality assurance system at the UL Member.

While the quality assurance system is a good basis for achieving the objectives set, continued and extended consideration must be given to the way it works, with information-provision and the inclusion of different groups in its operation. Over the last decade UL has developed and

upgraded the system significantly, which has helped the university to start establishing a common quality culture at a highly diverse university.

It is important that the tools and processes of the quality assurance system continue to be improved and simplified where possible (e.g. annual self-evaluations, student surveys) to make participation in its operation easier.

### **Strengths**

A common framework for a quality system at university level which also enables sufficient flexibility.

Developing the quality system and new tools in dialogue with UL members and stakeholders. Therefore, in the decentralised university context, we develop common processes and tools that also provide sufficient flexibility for the diversity of UL Members.

Development and implementation of UL enhancement-led visits, which strengthen constructive communication among the participants and create a more collaborative and constructive quality culture at the UL, using participatory management methods and taking advantage of otherwise unused potential.

### **Enhancement areas**

Greater involvement of diverse groups of staff, students, and external stakeholders in the functioning of the quality system.

The quality system should be more integrated into the ongoing activities and improvement of the activities of UL members and the UL, and the following steps can be made to achieve this:

- make self-evaluations more meaningful and involve different groups in reflection and improvement actions;
- improve the availability and relevance of information to stakeholders (e.g., responses to student and staff feedback, informing about the conclusions to analyses, information on implemented and planned improvements, meetings with UL Members, etc.);
- development of an integrated quality mindset and quality culture;
- monitoring, reflecting and improving activities and the organisation as part of regular operations (ownership), rather than as something external to the department, UL Member, etc.

Broadening the use of collaborative and constructive approaches in UL enhancement-led visits, which can be done in the following ways:

- addressing common UL challenges, including in setting up innovative learning environments and dynamic collaboration with the community;
- at UL Members;
- at the Rectorate.

Broadening participatory and reflective self-evaluation practices: conducting self-evaluations (e.g. study programmes or areas) as a collaborative and shared effort (e.g., of a department, UL Member), that engages various relevant groups in relevant ways in the reflection and improvement planning phase, in addition to incorporating their feedback into the process.

Increasing the use of the evaluation results for further improvement measures; any planned activities should mainly be derived from the self-evaluation results.

## 3.3 Functionality and development of the quality system

### - Assessment of the audit team

#### The university's quality system ensures a systematic approach to quality management

The UL has a comprehensive quality system, including the university level, faculties and academies, and services. There are established and clear annual processes to identify objectives and development priorities, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation covering both the university and faculty levels. At the core of the process are the university's mission, vision and strategic objectives, and the annual priorities and targets set in the Annual Work Programme.

The UL and its faculties and academies annually self-assess the progress made in implementing the strategy and the annual plan. All study programmes also carry out a self-assessment annually or at least biannually (see also the discussion in chapter 1.3). The annual process in place, with self-assessment and openly highlighting improvements and successes as well as threats, weaknesses, and measures in connection with those in the annual Business and Quality Assurance Report is to be commended.

The process covers education, research and development, artistic activities, transfer and application of knowledge, other operations, and quality system management and development. There is evidence that the process supports the university in meeting its strategic ambitions and enhancing its activities. The process engages various levels and actors as well as the numerous bodies of the university. There was also evidence of systematic follow-up and a continuous cycle

of improvement in line with the PDCA. As the core process of the quality system, this succeeds in creating a common structure, setting priorities and targets, and following up activities in an otherwise diverse and decentralised organisation.

Other key processes of the quality system include different surveys (students, graduates, employees), internal enhancement-led visits, as well as external national and international institutional and programme accreditations and evaluations. The enhancement-led visits with their aim to support the UL faculties in their efforts to boost quality, exchange of practices and strengthening cooperation within the UL appear as a very positive initiative. As a process it could also respond to some of the needs highlighted in this report to enhance collaboration and cross-faculty learning. The enhancement-led visits were, however, little mentioned during the audit visit, indicating that their role in the quality system could be strengthened and better communicated. The enhancement-led visits could also engage staff more widely in the faculties and academies.

The university's quality system covers the education and teaching of the university well. Research and societal engagement and impact could be more clearly incorporated in the description of the quality system which is now more focused on education. Especially the area of societal engagement and impact needs to be better incorporated in the management and quality system, as discussed in Chapter 2.1.

While the quality system and the information produced by it helps the university to recognise development needs and to enhance its activities in a goal-oriented manner, there were indications of shortcomings not always picked up by the system. In terms of the overall quality system of the university, the Act-phase and the subsequent follow up of actions taken needs to be improved in the PDCA cycle.

## The university's structure challenges the effectiveness of the common quality system

As mentioned previously in this report, the UL faculties and academies are very autonomous. The fragmented nature of the university organisation challenges the effectiveness of the common quality system. There is a complex committee structure with meeting heaviness and mirrored systems at the faculty and university levels. Due to the organisation of the university, there is overlap in quality management at different levels creating ineffectiveness in the system in terms of decision-making, resources used and quality management in general. Based on the audit visit, it was not always clear who is responsible for institutional-level shortcomings and challenges in relation to the quality of activities. At the faculty level, the system can appear burdensome, although the quality system allows for different practices and faculty-specific applications.

The audit team recommends that the university looks for synergies in its existing structures, processes and responsibilities related to quality assurance and enhancement to overcome overlaps and to some extent inefficiency in its use of resources. By clarifying the organisational

structure, common quality system, responsibilities, and by streamlining processes the university could make its quality system more effective. Leaner structures would allow more resources in faculties and academies to be used for the core activities of research and education. At the same time, it is important to ensure that the strengths of the system, that is, its flexibility in meeting the needs of the diverse faculties and the broad engagement of staff and students in the processes, is guarded.

## Quality culture of the university is participatory and open

The university shows maturity in its capabilities for self-reflection, not being afraid of highlighting its weaknesses and areas for enhancement openly. The audit visit confirmed that there is a strong desire for development at different levels of the university. The individuals met by the audit team expressed confidence in the university's status as an excellent university, and there was a shared ambition to stay at the cutting edge and take the university forward.

One of the key objectives of the UL's quality system has been to strengthen the quality culture at the university. The UL has, among others, used training, self-assessments, and enhancement-led approaches to support the faculties and staff members in this. The university appeared to have embraced many of the key principles of the enhancement-led approach in its quality work, such as engagement, ownership, interaction, and collaboration. The university has provided good opportunities for staff, students, and external stakeholders to engage in quality enhancement of the university's activities through various formal and informal structures. According to the audit visit, students' voices are well heard at the university and faculty levels. Students are well represented in the official bodies of the university and their opinions are also heard, for instance, in the habilitation processes.

The university has several quality committees, and the deans meet regularly with the university management. The advisory boards of the faculties have an important role in bringing external insights. Their presence ensures that a wide range of perspectives and expertise is integrated into the decision-making processes. The audit team recommends that advisory boards are established in every faculty.

The university's quality system has been developed in a systematic manner. As mentioned in the self-assessment report, the university has developed and upgraded the quality system significantly over the last decade. The audit visit confirmed that the university is flexible and receptive to feedback from the faculties and academies, staff, and students, and is continuously trying to improve its quality processes to meet the needs at different levels of the university where possible.