

European University Association

Institutional Evaluation Programme
Prešov University in Prešov
Slovakia

EUA Reviewers' Report

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November 2007

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Introduction

The Evaluation Process

The Association of European Universities (EUA) offers its member universities, which today number nearly 800 higher education institutions in over 45 countries, the opportunity to have their strengths and weaknesses in the area of institutional and quality management reviewed. The reviews are conducted under the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). The IEP evaluations are peer reviews; the members of evaluation teams are all current or former rectors, presidents or other leaders of higher education institutions; hence, they are familiar with the challenges university leaders face and are in a position to ask relevant questions. An EUA-IEP evaluation is a tool designed to assist current university leaders in their efforts to improve their management processes and to promote their university's capacity for change. According to its *Institutional Evaluation Programme Guidelines*, the EUA asks its Review Teams to "examine the following areas:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic planning
- Relevance of internal quality processes and degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic planning as well as perceived gaps in the internal mechanisms [and] processes."

EUA's IEP began twelve years ago and, to date, nearly 180 universities in 36 countries (including from outside Europe) have participated in the programme. EUA does not wish to provide universities with a blueprint for their development; rather, the review process is a consultative, supportive and formative one. The formative feature is underscored by the fact that the cornerstone of a review is a university's self-evaluation, which allows the university staff, as a team, to understand their institution's strengths and weaknesses. EUA anticipates that the growing number of its institutional reviews contributes to the promotion of a culture of quality among its members, and to the dissemination of examples of effective strategic management among European universities.

In Slovakia, the government has undertaken a broad review of its higher education sector. The Ministry of Education in the Slovak Republic, jointly with the Slovak Rectors' Conference, commissioned EUA to evaluate the country's 23 public universities in 2006/07. A final outcome of the project is a sector report on higher education in Slovakia, "highlighting cross-cutting issues and recommendations arising from the institutional evaluations and considering the conditions of research in Slovakia." In keeping with the terms of reference for the project, the evaluations in Slovakia follow EUA's regular evaluation guidelines, according to which "each institution is evaluated against its specific aims and objectives and ... the evaluation is oriented towards offering recommendations for improvement rather than passing summary judgement or ranking institutions."

The preliminary visit to Prešov University in Prešov (PU) took place on 17-21 April 2007 and the main visit on 8-11 October 2007. The members of the EUA Review Team to PU were

- Professor Dr. Jarmo Visakorpi, former Rector of the University of Tampere and former Chair of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council FINHEEC, Finland, Team Chair;
- Johann Gerlach, former Rector of Freie Universität Berlin;
- Stavros Zenios, Rector of the University of Cyprus; and

- Christina Rozsnyai, programme officer at the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and Secretary General of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies, Team secretary.

Between the two visits there was a change in the University's leadership. The Team thus had discussions during the preliminary visit with Rector František Mihina and his team of Vice-Rectors and the Bursar. Then during the main visit the EUA Reviewers met with the new Rector René Matlovič and his new team. Dr. Ivana Cimermanova, who was the Team's liaison person with the University, was elected Vice-Rector for Education in the time between the two visits. The Team found that the change in leadership passed smoothly and did not pose an obstacle in the review process. All in all, the EUA Review Team met PU's top management, including the old and new Vice-Rectors for Research and Doctoral Study; Education; International Relations; and for Development and Informatics. The Team had meetings with the Self-Evaluation Steering Group and the Academic Senate, and a separate lunch meeting during the main visit with the new chair of the Senate, Dr. Václav Kohlmayer. It also interviewed student representatives in the University Senate. A separate meeting was arranged during the main visit with the newly appointed Bursar, who, in addition to managing financial matters, oversees the University administrative staff. The Team visited all eight faculties, which included meetings with students in most of the faculties, and also had an additional meeting with their deans. Moreover, the Team met members of the Board of Trustees and local and regional government during the first visit; and during the main visit there was a separate lunch meeting with the chairman of the Board, Dr. Peter Chudík, and representatives of local institutions. The discussions were open and constructive, encumbered only by the need for interpretation, carried out by very capable staff members, due to a lack of language proficiency among the groups interviewed. A tour of some of the facilities on the PU Campus was organised during the preliminary visit.

The Review Team appreciated that both visits were very well organised, and the Team was awarded most generous hospitality. Vice-Rector Ivana Cimermanova provided untiring support and great efficiency in liaising with the Review Team and in setting up the many interviews.

The university's self evaluation exercise was headed by former Vice-Rector Peter Kuzmišin, with a substantial steering team representing the higher governing bodies of the University: former Rector Mihina, the four Vice-Rectors, the Bursar, the Deans, and the President and Vice-President of the Academic Senate. An eight-member operative team, headed by Vice-Rector Kuzmišin, and Dr. Cimermanova as deputy, oversaw the day-to-day operations of the self-evaluation process. It involved discussions and SWOT analyses (i.e. of PU's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) at various levels, and culminated in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The SER passed through PU's various governing bodies, including the Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees, and was finally and officially accepted by the Rector. It is in line with EUA's suggested guidelines. The EUA Team appreciated that it received the SER in good time before its preliminary visit. The SER contained both descriptive and analytical information and was a surprisingly open description even of the University's problems. At the same time, however, the Team found a number of discrepancies in the figures presented in the SER, indicating that there is room for improvement in the global information system of the University. The SER provided the EUA Team with the necessary background for its first visit. Moreover, during the first visit, the Team asked for, and was provided, additional information, which it received prior to the main visit. The Team heard that this was the first time such a complex self-evaluation process was carried out at PU and that the participants considered it a beneficial process for the University. The Review

Team appreciated this statement because it speaks to the attainment of a major objective of the EUA evaluation process. The Team encourages the PU leadership to disseminate its SER among the entire University community to ensure a sense of ownership and shared reflection among all staff and students.

At the end of the main visit, on 11 October 2007, the chair of the EUA Review Team presented an oral version of the Evaluation Report, with Professor Zenios delivering the section on quality management, to the University leaders and a student representative. The present Evaluation Report was prepared for the University's leadership. Under the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, institutions may choose whether to make the full report public or prefer an executive summary to be published. In the latter case, PU can ask for a summary report, and will be invited to comment on it before it is made public. However, EUA encourages the dissemination of both the SER and the EUA's Evaluation Report to a wide audience in order to reap the rewards of the University's development resulting from the exercise, both among its members and external stakeholders. A discussion of the issues described in the Evaluation Report within the University and with other partners could contribute to strengthening the quality culture at PU. The Review Team hopes that its Report will fulfil the leadership's expectations about the EUA evaluation exercise.

Institutional Context

The history of PU is a crucial factor in understanding the University's present situation and its development. It is discussed in the SER in a critical way. Established in 1997, PU is a very young higher education institution, but the history of its faculties – at least the so-called old Faculties of Arts, Education and the two Theology Faculties – is much older and complex. These faculties were established independently and at different times, without cooperation in research and communications and far from the main sites of the respective mother universities in Prague and Bratislava and later, from 1959, in Košice. The main reason for the establishment of a separate university in Prešov in 1997 was to provide a university in the only self-governing region in Slovakia that did not have one.

The Faculty of Arts was first part of a higher pedagogical school in Bratislava set up in 1953, and in 1959 became the Prešov faculty of the newly established Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. The Faculty of Education was established in 1949 as a branch in Košice of the University in Bratislava, moved to Prešov in 1952, became a Higher Pedagogical School in 1959, and a faculty of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice in 1964. The Faculty of Orthodox Theology was originally a Seminary of Divinity established in Karlovy Vary in 1948. It moved to Prague in 1949, was established as a Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Prague with its seat in Prešov in 1950, and attached to Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice in 1990. The Faculty of Greek-Catholic Theology has the longest history among PU's faculties, founded by the Bishop of Prešov as the Academia Theologica in 1880. It was closed down by the Communist regime in 1950, and re-established in 1990 as the Greek-Catholic Theological Faculty of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. The theological faculties are the only ones of their kind in Slovakia, and the Orthodox Faculty serves also the Czech Republic. In 1997, Prešov University in Prešov was founded from these four faculties, with a new Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences splitting from the Faculty of Education. The Faculty of Health Care was set up in 2002. The Faculty of Sports was added to PU as an independent faculty in 2004 from two sports departments at the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Education, although the department at the latter faculty looks back to a history of over fifty years. The Faculty of Management was also established in 2004.

Traditionally, university faculties in Slovakia were independent legal entities, even when they were operating at the same location and within a university. The Higher Education Act of 2002 changed the faculties' legal status and established universities as the main legal entities.

PU also runs nine structural units: the University Library; the Computing Centre; the Institute of Regional and Ethnic Minorities Studies; the Rectorate; the Student Services Centre; the Institute of Digital Competencies; the Centre for Life-Long Education (at the Faculty of Arts); the Institute of Language Competencies (at the Faculty of Arts); and the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology (at the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences). Nine special-purpose facilities, including the dormitories and sports facilities, two theological seminaries and a number of research units, special laboratories and institutes mostly attached to a faculty are also part of the University.

Mission and Strategic Plan

The first question EUA review teams examine in the course of their evaluations is, "What is the university trying to do?" The university's mission statement and its strategic goals described in its SER, and presented in the interviews, should provide the background for the answer. Ideally, a mission statement, in addition to identifying the role a university sets for itself as a knowledge institution and a player in society, also provides some specific features of the particular university. A more general mission statement has to be coupled with a university's strategic objectives in order to describe adequately the institution's specific characteristics.

PU's mission statement mainly describes the general values of the University in terms of "noble values" set down in the Slovak Higher Education Act,

"The mission of the University is to develop a harmonious personality, knowledge, wisdom, goodness and creativity in man and to contribute to the development of education, science, culture and health for the welfare and benefit of the whole society."

The University's tasks are set down in five points that describe its activities in teaching on all three levels and further education, research and international activities, and responsibilities

"for the development of education in the sense of national, humanistic, Christian, democratic and ethical traditions and values."

Fundamental principles of the University are equally along the lines of the "noble values", as are the strategic vision and the strategic aims that form part of the chapter in the SER on "Institutional Norms and Values". The Review Team does not disagree with the values set down in this chapter, but PU has to hone in on a more practical mission statement with strategic objectives, which is a necessary instrument for governing the University and for developing it. The key features the Review Team identified from the SER among the University's aims are

1. to become classified as a research university in Slovakia,
2. to prepare its students with the best competences, which means that it wants to provide high quality teaching and learning adapted to the needs of society, and
3. to establish effective connections with the European Research Area, i.e. Europeanisation.

Recommendations:

- *Relations to the European Research Area and international contacts, which are mentioned in the SER, are important, but the university was founded to be a regional institution. Therefore, the Review Team recommends that PU should discuss its regional relations and the needs of the region in its strategic plan.*
- *PU has not presented any strategies concerning its academic areas, the so-called branch orientation, which means that it is satisfied with the situation as it is presently. There is, however, a mention about the University wanting to develop new programmes to fill the changing needs of society. This is an important strategy, and it should be analysed carefully. There is also mention about the University wanting to increase the share of the natural sciences but there is no statement whether this is really a generally agreed strategic objective or not. The Review Team recommends that such discussions take place in order to achieve a clear strategy and mission.*
- *Once this is achieved, the University's mission statement should reflect its particular aims in addition to its general values.*
- *The Team has learned that there is a faculty in Prešov that is not part of PU but of the Technical University in Košice. The Team heard some discussion on the integration of this technical faculty into PU, but found no strategic plans on this point. The expansion of PU with a technical faculty would constitute a major development and the Team would encourage the administration of PU to continue negotiations on the issue, even though they seem to have stalled at this point. The expansion of the natural and technical sciences would indeed secure the status of PU as an all-round university, but must be preceded by an analysis of strategic and regional feasibility and need.*

Main External Constraints

There are commonly two main external constraints for fulfilling a university's strategic objectives, namely limitations to autonomy and insufficient funding.

Autonomy

The institutional autonomy of universities is well recognised in the current new Slovak Higher Education Act, and PU seems to be satisfied with the situation as it stands. There are, however, several examples of regulatory limitations to autonomy, which, to the Team, appear futile. On the other hand, the Slovak Republic is continuously developing its legislation on higher education. This, along with the EUA project in Slovakia, holds out the possibility of a less prescriptive policy towards the sector.

Funding

University funding comes almost entirely from the state budget (96.4%). This may go in line with the circumscribed autonomy of the University on the one hand, and the relatively broad autonomy of the faculties on the other. Nevertheless, state financing in most countries has been decreasing, and universities are more and more expected to secure additional income.

Obviously aware of this, PU states in its SER that it would like to develop multi-source financing. European Union funds, available to Slovakia as a new EU country since May 2004, hold out the possibility for a variety of funding. At the same time, PU does not have many

possibilities to get funds from innovative projects, and it writes in its SER that innovative processes are not a priority for the University. In its aim to expand its funding sources, PU's new Faculty of Management could be tapped to work out an appropriate plan. Another funding source could come from life-long learning and adult education programmes – via the Centre for Life-Long Learning – as well as the services of some of the University's other structural units, such as the Institute of Digital Competencies, which could provide courses also for the external community. The Team has learned that some projects of this kind are already running, but there is still room for exploring the full financial possibilities in this respect.

A separate section on funding follows later in this report.

Attainment of the Main Strategic Goals

Teaching and Learning

Providing education is clearly the main function of PU. This is grounded in the University's history. The training of priests and teachers were the origins of higher education in Prešov and the training of nurses and business professionals were educational fields that were added more recently. It is evident that the University wants to educate its students not only for these professions but also for different academic fields with scientific competence. Generally speaking, the teaching at PU is well organised and delivered, and the students interviewed appeared to be satisfied with it. This is corroborated by the fact that the dropout rate of students seems quite modest, but the figures show a slight increase, which could be cause for concern in the future.

The Review Team noted that the normal semester length is twelve teaching weeks, but there are plans, mentioned in an interview, to extend the standard length to 15 weeks. The Team supports this move, which would comply with European norms and could be used to even out the teaching load of the academic staff, while introducing more independent study schemes for students.

Educational Programmes

PU teaches over one thousand different accredited study programmes, roughly 50% are Bachelor level, 45% Master level and 5% doctoral level. The high number of programmes is due to the Slovakian regulation that even combinations of programmes of different study fields have to be accredited as new programmes. Such double majors are requisite in the teacher training fields, but the national requirement that separate accreditation is needed because they do not provide the full content of a full single major seems, to the Team, overly bureaucratic.¹ A quality evaluation focus – both external and internal – on the continuous development of study programmes in every field could better serve to assure educational provision relevant to changing societal needs.

A great majority of PU's students study in programmes preparing for higher vocational employment. The graduates are teachers (40%), nurses (9%), priests (14%), and business and public managers (12%). Several of PU's degree programmes are unique in the country and the region. These include the Greek-Catholic and Orthodox fields, and the programmes in special pedagogy for disadvantaged groups, chiefly Roma children, and ethnic minorities, primarily

¹ The University commented on the Report that new legislation to be passed in autumn 2007 calls for the accreditation of double majors in broader fields, leading to the reduction in the number of programmes.

the Ruthenian ethnic group. In its SER and interviews, PU stresses that it seeks to strengthen its provision in the natural sciences and mathematics, as already mentioned in the chapter “Mission and Strategic Plan”.

Social and market requirements are important considerations for designing study programmes. The University seems to be successful in this respect because the employability of its graduates seems to be good, almost 100%. In this respect the University seems to be among the most successful ones in Slovakia.

Teaching Innovations

PU appears to be proficient in developing key competencies in its students. At the same time, however, there seems to be an excessive load of lectures and other traditional forms of teaching in the form of contact hours, while learning methods have not been much discussed. Only e-learning and computer assisted learning were mentioned, although their proportion is evidently very low compared to the traditional forms. The same can be said for other non-traditional forms of teaching and learning, which, although mentioned among the employed didactic methods in the SER, are not yet widely used, as revealed in the interviews with students. The Team feels that the international trends, and hence the requirement to ensure the competitiveness of PU’s graduates, make modernisation in teaching provision at PU necessary. This would mean on the one hand the introduction of a variety of innovative subjects, a greater exploitation than is currently the case of the flexibility offered by the credit system allowing students to tailor class and subject choices to their individual needs, a continuously updated selection of interdisciplinary courses and programmes, and on the other hand more project-based and independent as well as team learning.

Bologna Process

Although the Review Team met students at many faculties who were in their final years of traditional long-stream university programmes, the new programme offer has been changed to comply with the Bologna structure, whereby study programmes at PU are now taught on Bachelor, Master and/or PhD levels. In keeping national-level accreditation decisions, some programmes in the Theology Faculties continue as single-cycle 5 to 6-year programmes, which the Higher Education Act allows. Nursing programmes at the Faculty of Health Care so far offer mostly Bachelor-level programmes of three years, but a few Master programmes have also been launched.

Faculties have introduced an ECTS-based credit system, and students have some choice in selecting courses from electives. Credit transfer from other universities to PU is possible, although some students mentioned that this has not happened smoothly in every case. By law, the Diploma Supplement is also provided in a foreign language to students on request. This will also be discussed in the section on International Relations.

Recommendations:

- *The Team was pleased to learn that PU has a unique profile in a number of areas, such as minority studies. It recommends that PU identify several such areas and build up its teaching profile around them. This would ensure PU’s competitiveness not only in Prešov but the larger region, and possibly internationally in the long term.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU keep an eye on dropout rates in order to be prepared to act if the trend becomes a cause for concern.*

- *For the ongoing development of new and old study programmes, PU needs to evaluate systematically the current ones, while also considering the opinions of students and staff.*
- *More flexibility within programmes is needed, including interdisciplinarity also by exploring possibilities for interfaculty exchanges.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU develop more student-centred learning schemes in all faculties, which is also in line with the Bologna process. The number of contact hours should be decreased in favour of individual learning schemes.*
- *At the same time, the Team recommends that different learning methodologies be developed and academic staff be encouraged to advance their didactic and pedagogical skills, which should be managed and implemented at the central level of the University.*
- *For this purpose, the Team recommends that a didactic centre for teaching skills be set up. It could serve as a further-education centre for the academic staff of PU, but could also be developed into a service centre for teachers in the external community and thereby a source of additional funding for PU.*
- *The Team also recommends that teaching excellence should be identified and rewarded by setting up a special prize.*
- *The Review Team supports the plan to extend the number of semester-weeks of teaching. Alternative forms of teaching and learning could be introduced in connection with implementing the longer semester.*
- *The Team recommends that PU take advantage of the flexibility offered by the credit system and expand the possibilities for course selection within study programmes.*
- *At the same time, the Team recommends that the acceptance of credits for studies abroad or at other institutions should be streamlined. Academic staff should make full use of learning agreements with students and partner institutions.*

Research

The first strategic objective of PU is that it wants to attain the status of a research university. The Team believes that this is a very ambitious goal for PU. The University is carefully monitoring its indicators with regard to the number of publications of its academic staff and research grants. The indicators reveal that research activity is low at PU, for which some obvious explanations offer themselves.

1. The main science areas in the University, such as humanities and theological sciences, follow traditional publishing patterns, i.e. focusing on monographs and books, which are very difficult to evaluate with the same indicators as those for referred journals common in the natural sciences. Therefore, comparing scientific output with that of other universities may leave PU's achievements behind these.
2. The majority of other academic areas at PU are such that they are generally more practice oriented and less research-intensive, e.g. educational sciences, nursing science, and sport science.
3. The University itself has found that a serious constraint for development of research is the lack of co-operation between faculties and the difficulties regarding the setting up of larger, interdisciplinary research centres.
4. One of the main concerns of the University leaders in Prešov is the relatively weak motivation of the teaching staff for research. The workload allocation

currently favours teaching over research by 80% to 20%, which is a very low proportion.

Research Strategy

In spite of the described difficulties the University has clear plans for its research strategy, and has identified its research priorities as follows:

- Regional studies
- Ethnic minorities studies, i.e. Roma, Ruthenians, etc.
- Educational technologies.

These are all very viable topics that may draw also international interest.

In addition, PU operates some scientifically top laboratories such as

- molecular anthropology
- geoinformatics
- phonetics,

which could serve as a good basis for research centres. The laboratories operate under the respective disciplinary departments.

Co-operation

The Team has heard repeatedly about the important role in research in Slovakia of the Academy of Sciences. Yet PU does not mention co-operations with other universities or the laboratories of the Academy of Sciences. To the Team this would appear to be an important link and basis for research development at PU. Co-operation in publishing with the Institute of Social Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Košice is mentioned, however, which to the Team looks to be a good model for similar links with other entities.

Doctoral Studies

PhD education is one of the most important ways to promote university research. This has been well recognised at PU which has successfully redesigned its doctoral studies according to the Bologna model. The PhD students the Team met seemed very happy to be participating in the third cycle studies at PU. The Team also commends that PhD students gain teaching experience by holding classes four hours a week.

Research Management Service

Research management services provide support to all research personnel. This kind of university-wide office is more and more important. It could guide academic units to develop strategies, negotiate grants and contracts, manage donations and fundraising, arrange the securing of intellectual property rights, and assist in ethical issues. Such an office is under development at PU, and setting it up at university level should be supported.

Entrepreneurial Activities

Entrepreneurial activities are not a priority for PU, as expressed in its SER. However, the Review Team heard in interviews that there is active interest in such activities and a project manager working under the Rectorate is involving the University in numerous projects of this kind.

Recommendations:

- *The Review Team suggests that PU compare its indicators with those of universities of similar profile in order to get a clear picture of its research standing.*

- *The Review Team believes that PU should aim to conduct internationally relevant research. It should prioritise and identify niches in the scientific market, such as the study of ethnic minorities and their teaching, which is a key issue in the world today and where PU may become known even internationally. Linked to that, the Team recommends that PU market its prioritised areas in every forum possible and more vigorously than it has done so far.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU establish multidisciplinary research centres in areas in which it could achieve scientific excellence. These centres could operate in the departments and they would not need to be permanent but could be established for the lifetime of a given project. A University Institute for Regional and National Studies, as a separate unit operating directly under the Rector, would also be a good enterprise.*
- *The Review Team recommends that in order to increase research activity among its academic staff, PU develop various methods for rewarding its active scientist, such as sabbaticals for research, changes in the teaching-load in favour of research in research-intensive periods, and special university funds and prizes.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU make efforts to stimulate its academic and research staff to publish with internationally recognised scholarly publishers.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU raise the research performance level of the Faculties of Health Care, Sports, and Management.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU further expand its PhD programme offer and increase the number of PhD programmes in all faculties, including the Health Care Faculty.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU set up a Research Management Office at University level.*
- *The Review Team recommends that the University build up its entrepreneurial activities towards the region and society and strengthen project managerial functions towards this end.*

International Relations

Internationalisation and especially Europeanisation have been mentioned among the strategic objectives of the University. During the past few years, specifically since 2004, there has been a clear increase in student and teacher mobility, and there is a balance between incoming and outgoing students to and from PU. Nevertheless, these numbers are still low as compared to most European countries.

The poor knowledge of foreign languages among academic staff and students is one of the main impediments to mobility. It prevents the organisation of courses in foreign languages and it is certainly an obstacle in the participation of its scholars and scientists in international conferences and exchanges. However, the Team heard in interviews that some modules that are being taught in English and Russian courses are under further development. It considers this a positive initiative that should be supported and expanded.

There are foreign students who want to study in PU and also want to learn Slovakian. They need language teaching in addition to other study programmes, i.e. Slovak language courses for foreigners.

Recommendations:

- *The Team believes that many more resources should be directed to teaching foreign languages. This should be*
 - *part of all academic programmes and adapted to the special needs of the programme,*
 - *part of the continuous training of the academic staff.*
- *The Team believes that the best way to advance language teaching at PU is to expand the already existing Institute for Language Competencies. However, the Institute needs more resources and an independent position under the Rector as a service unit for the whole University, and as such should not be administratively under a department of a faculty.*
- *To reach the goals in internationalisation at PU, the Team recommends that more resources be devoted to, and more actions undertaken by the International Relations office at the University level.*
- *For exchange students, a smoothly functioning European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) that facilitates student mobility is essential. Equally important is that higher education institutions and employers understand and use the Diploma Supplement. The Review Team recommends that PU publicise the value of the Diploma Supplement to its students and the employers in the region.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU explore the possibility of participating with foreign partners in the delivery of studies within the framework of joint degrees, which are also supported by the Erasmus Mundus programme.*

Governance and Management

Central Governance

The governing structure of universities is generally defined in the university laws, which is the case also in the Republic of Slovakia.

The central governing bodies at PU are the Academic Senate with four permanent subcommittees, the Scientific Council and the Disciplinary Board for students. All these bodies are large with respect to operative effectiveness, although in many southern European countries they exceed those of PU in size, so they can be functional if the issues are well prepared in the subcommittees.

The highest and most important legislative board is the Academic Senate, which also elects the Rector. The Senate is composed of three members from each faculty, including one student representative, as Slovak law requires one third of the members to be students. According to this set-up, the Academic Senate entirely represents the interests of the faculties.

The Rector is the chief executive of the University. He nominates his – currently four – Vice-Rectors, who are approved by the Senate. The Rector's leadership position and governing role are set down in the Higher Education Act. It is clear from the act and also in practice that the faculties, through the governing and managing committees, provide checks and balances to the power of the Rector. An important managing committee is the Rector's Board, composed of the managerial team of the Rector and all the Deans. This, again, results in a faculty majority in this committee.

The Board of Trustees does not appear in the law as one of a university's governing authorities, but rather in a separate subsequent section. The Board of Trustees originally had only an advisory role whose main task was to strengthen the links between the university and society. With this, it has a very important function regarding the regional role of the University and holds the possibility of linking the University with the external community for bringing in diverse funding sources. With the newest amendment to the law, however, the Board of Trustees has been given a governing authority in that it has to accept the University budget together with the Senate.

According to the "Glasgow Declaration" of EUA, universities are strengthened if they are "committed to improving their governing structures and leadership competence so as to increase their efficiency and innovative capacity." This kind of development can be reached by having a governing body, which represents not only the interests of the faculties but also the whole university and society.

The Review Team believes that decisions on central governance at PU are determined by the interests of the individual faculties. That stands in the way of an overarching strategy for the University, which again would be necessary for creating a strong institution with flexibility to stand up to national and international competition. The Team recognises that, historically, faculties were independent entities in Slovak universities, and the majority of PU members does not realise that a strong university as an institution is a great advantage for faculties, all University employees and students.

Recommendations:

- *The Review Team believes that it would be of advantage to PU if the Academic Senate members, as employees and students of the University, were not all elected by the faculties but elected in a University-wide general election. This would ensure that the Senate is not another level of Faculty representation but would look to the interests of the University as a whole. The Team believes that the newly amended Higher Education Act makes it possible to compose the Senate in this way.²*
- *Universities in many western European countries now follow the U.S. model in setting up their boards of trustees, where the majority in this highest governing university body consists of persons from outside the university. The Team believes that the Slovak Republic is moving in this direction, and that PU could take advantage of the possibilities inherent in the new law to advance this development.*

Faculty Governance and Management

At faculty level the governing system reflects that of the central University management, including a Faculty Senate with a Chairman who is not the Dean, and the Dean with Vice-Deans, holding executive power in the faculties. Detailed regulations regarding faculty governance are set down in the Higher Education Act, even though universities are declared to have autonomy in their internal affairs. It is understandable that faculty administration is very large especially in the "old" faculties, with almost all the same functions as the

² The University commented on the Report that "according to the law 131/2002 - section 8(1) 'The Academic Senate of a public higher education institution is composed of elected representatives of the academic community of a higher education institution; it has at least fifteen members of which students constitute not less than one third. The Academic Senate of a public higher education institution that is divided into faculties, shall be elected in such a way as to represent each faculty by equal number of members.'"

university level administration. Faculties are obviously satisfied with this rather complicated structure, although a system with only one faculty committee, chaired by the dean, works well in many countries.

Recommendation:

- *The Team believes that it is good and practical that faculties should have considerable decision-making power in academic affairs concerning just the faculty. Nevertheless, many of the functions of administrative officers at faculty level, such as finances and accounting, international affairs and human resources, could be managed in the central office of the University with better competence and using fewer human resources.*

The Structure of Faculties: Departments and Institutes

Faculties are divided into departments and, at the Faculty of Arts, also into institutes. The number of departments is very high, altogether 75 in the whole University. The high number of departments is due to the fact that they have been created on the basis of disciplinary fields, which is an old academic tradition. Moreover, the Faculty of Arts has established a kind of merger of its units by combining 25 departments into 14 institutes in related disciplines, but then subdividing the institutes into departments.

If the technical faculty from the Technical University in Košice were to be integrated into PU, it would have an impact on PU's faculty structure, especially with regard to the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences.

Recommendations:

- *The Team recommends that the restructuring of the academic units of the University be continued, by combining departments into units large enough to have a critical mass for teaching and research, by having different disciplines but at the same time embracing the main areas of the given science.*
- *The Team believes that while the Faculty of Art could serve as a model for internal restructuring, it is counterproductive to have both departments and institutes. Only one level would be enough. The term "department" is the internationally recognised designation for such a unit, while institutes are usually more or less independent units.*
- *The Team recommends that the number of departments be reduced considerably, e.g. by merging similar departments in different faculties, such as English philology in two faculties, into a single department. This would also reduce the administrative workload.*
- *The Team believes that the substance and composition of each faculty should be reconsidered, especially in planning the role of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences. The role of the Faculty of Education should also be reconsidered, in that it should take in all pedagogical and didactical departments.*
- *If the integration of the Technical Faculty from the Technical University in Košice were to take place, PU should reconsider its total faculty and department arrangement, and especially that of the Humanities and Natural Sciences, which is likely to be most affected.*

Funding and Financial Management

The higher education funding system in the Slovak Republic changed fundamentally with the 2002 law. Now the Ministry provides the budget to the University in the form of a contract and on the basis of certain indicators for success in teaching and research. The indicators and other details are regulated in the “Methodology of allocation of the state budget subsidies to public higher education institutions”. At the time of the EUA Team’s visit, 80% of the budget was based on indicators for education and 20% for research, with the aim, the Team learned, of reaching a 70% to 30% ratio in 2008.

PU is vulnerable in its secured income since almost all its budget comes from the state. According to the University’s SER, in 2004 this was 97.62%, and slightly less in 2005 at 96.48%. The trend can be expected to continue with new legislation allowing universities to charge tuition fees for non-full-time students.

Under the contract type distribution system, PU underwent a reduction of the state subsidy for education and science in the year 2006. While there are various reasons that precipitated the decline in state subsidy, the most prominent one is that only PU’s older faculties are academically well established and their indicators show them to be successful, while the younger faculties also conduct research but their academic backgrounds are less developed, and one faculty has not yet had enough time to produce MA and PhD graduates. The distribution of the budget by the state does not take into consideration these institutional differences; rather, it is a lump sum.

The distribution of the lump-sum budget received from the state is an autonomous decision of every university in Slovakia. PU distributes its budget internally using similar formulas as those used by the state, with a fixed part of the money retained for the central administration. Faculties receive a lump sum from the University budget, which includes the salaries. The distribution of the budget is approved by the Academic Senate, but adjustments are made in favour of the younger and weaker faculties on a solidarity basis.

Only one faculty, the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, distributes the budget in the same way to its departments, based on each department’s various performance indicators – including research, publications, impact on society in the region, and entrepreneurial activity – in relation to the total performance of the Faculty. The Faculty’s aim is to stimulate quality performance and financial transparency. It reports that this distribution to the departments stimulates an active responsibility for the budget with the departments. This could be a good example for other faculties.

Recommendations:

- *The Review Team believes that the new structure of budget distribution to and within the University, outlined in the recent legislation, could advance financial responsibility of the University and its units in accordance with institutional autonomy. This concept is also in line with the OECD report on “Funding Systems and their Effects on Higher Education Systems” in various countries, including Slovakia.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU continue the trend of persistently reducing the ratio of its overall income from the state budget and to establish a variety of funding streams (including entrepreneurial activities, such as services to the external community, mentioned elsewhere in this report).*

- *The Team also recommends that the central administration retain enough of University income to allow for developments that need to be managed at the central level, such as a University-wide quality management system.*
- *The Team believes that the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences provides a feasible and strategically oriented model for internal budget distribution that could stimulate similar innovations at other faculties.*

Development of Human Resources

Human resources are the most important resource in every university and therefore special attention has to be paid to them. The number of teachers at PU seems to be satisfactory in spite of funding difficulties. The student/teacher ratio was 15 or 16 (there are different figures) in 2005, when the OECD average for 2003 was 15.5. It must be noted that the study fields at PU are mainly of the kind where fewer teachers are needed than in such fields as engineering, natural sciences and especially medicine. Thus the 15-16:1 student/teacher ratio is rather good if related to similar universities only. However, the Team learned that the teaching workload is very high at PU.

The number of non-academic staff is about the same as academic teaching staff, which is a relatively high number as compared to the European average.

The documentation the Team was given shows that roughly 36% of the academic staff do not hold a doctoral degree. However, the majority of them have started PhD studies, which means that the percentage is improving. The number of full professors varies in the so-called old faculties. The Faculty of Arts leads by far with 22 professorial positions, the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences is second with 6 positions, and the rest of the faculties have between 4, at the Faculty of Sports, and 0 professorial positions, at the Faculty of Health Care.

The promotion of academic staff based on pedagogic qualifications seems to be difficult, since teaching performance is only randomly evaluated and does not figure among promotion criteria. The Team heard at least at one faculty, however, that teachers were relieved of classes in response to negative student evaluations.

Recommendations:

- *As PU develops a complex quality management system, this should include student evaluations of teachers as a mandatory element, under the responsibility of the Deans and ultimately the Rector. It should also include follow-up actions involving discussions of results also with students.*
- *The Team recommends that teaching performance should be considered among the factors for academic staff promotion, whereby portfolio methods – tracking individual performance based on indicators – could be instrumental.*
- *Staff development should be among the indicators for individual performance, where various units of PU could offer courses also for the external community in foreign languages, up-to-date educational skills, computer proficiency, etc.*
- *The Team recommends that the University assign a staff member at the central level to oversee human resource development as an ongoing quality development function of PU.*

Services

Internal and External Information Services

The data system of PU needs to be developed further, as is identified in the action plan in the SER. This is necessary not only for a future quality assurance system for the whole University, but in general to have an up-to-date picture of various aspects of the University for various purposes.

The fact that PU is the second largest employer in the Prešov area makes it a major actor in the region, yet no formal external communication strategy exists. The “branding” of the University, which means building on its strengths, staking out its image, and raising awareness of these in the regional and broader community, is important. It would serve not only to attract high-quality students and staff but also for the self-image of the existing internal community: the University’s management, staff and students. PU’s cultural and scientific activities reaching the public are part of its mission as a player in society and should be exploited in its branding.

Library

The University library seems to be very good considering accessibility via modern electronic communication. The main library will soon get additional space. Students interviewed noted that they were satisfied with library services. The availability of special-subject books at department libraries rather than in the central library was seen as helpful.

Computer Technology

The Review Team had the impression that the number of computers and Internet connections was considered generally sufficient, although some students mentioned that while all students have e-mail addresses, computer access was not always easy.

Dormitories and Student Recreation

Although there is no student union in the University for organising recreational activities, students noted that they were pleased with the services provided by PU on the campus and in the dormitories, as well as with cultural and sports activities available to them.

Recommendations:

- *The Team recommends that PU develop further its data system to allow for information retrieval at all levels of the University.*
- *The Team recommends that an internal communication should become part of the IT system, which should have various levels of accessibility, from management to faculty to students.*
- *The Team recommends that an updated website with useful information for anyone interested in the University, including detailed programme descriptions for prospective students also from abroad, be elaborated.*
- *The Team recommends that PU work out a public relations strategy that would include the branding of the University.*

Quality Culture

The issue of quality repeatedly came up in the discussions between the Review Team and members of PU, and it was also mentioned in the SER. Cultivating a culture of quality is of primary strategic importance for universities today, of which the leadership of PU is well aware. However, specifics about plans for developing a coherent quality culture were not elaborated. Rather, the University described its intention to pursue ISO certification. This

decision indicates that PU is becoming increasingly aware of the need to improve administrative structures and processes. In the Team's opinion the implementation of such steps should be a priority and they have the potential of significantly improving the University.

However, the Team would like to raise the issue that pursuing ISO certification would put PU on a course of change that may be beyond its current capacity. ISO standards can be very technical, burdensome to implement, and it is not clear how they apply to a broad segment of University activities. The Team would like to urge the PU leadership to take a more balanced and integrated perspective of their needs for a quality culture and in particular for improving the quality for administrative services.

It is recognised today that the quality of services is achieved by the human resources of an institution through the fostering of strategic alliances, the effective utilisation of available limited resources and the continuous improvement of processes. PU efforts should consider the simultaneous improvement of processes, the improvement of the leadership structures at the top administrative levels, and the support of personnel at the front lines. Two specific areas for improvement were obvious to the Team.

1. The need for auditing the highly decentralised administrative structure. This would identify duplications and inefficiencies and lead to the creation of a more lean administrative system. A more centralised administrative structure would not only improve the efficiency and effectiveness of administration but would also allow the University leadership to have a global view of University affairs and thus improve its strategic capabilities. For instance, it would be to the benefit of the study programmes if course scheduling were co-ordinated centrally using information technology. Also, a centralised information system would ensure reliability of data and contribute to effective strategic planning. In the same vein, part of the budget should be reserved for strategic initiatives at the University level and not be totally redirected to the Faculties.
2. The need for more carefully auditing the teaching process. This can be done by implementing more widely the student questionnaires, analysing the replies, and using them in a feedback mechanism for updating and improving the study programmes. This internal procedure for quality control would supplement the external procedure for programme (and the newly introduced complex) accreditation. Questionnaires should be used in all courses, students should be encouraged to complete them (the response rates of 10%, 40% or 60%, as the Team was told by some Faculties, is rather low) and students should get a clear signal that their comments are taken into consideration.

Collaboration with institutions such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) could provide the necessary support and assist PU in developing a concrete agenda for continuous improvements, for developing a quality culture, and for managing the process of change.

A prerequisite for these efforts to succeed is the strong commitment of the University leadership – the Board of Trustees, the Rector – to promoting a culture of quality. Furthermore, PU needs the determination of its constituents, especially the Deans and Faculties, in pursuing a course of action that would put the long-term interests of the University above the interests of individual Faculties.

Recommendations:

- *The Review Team recommends that PU look into the possibility of employing an external agent to counsel on improving its quality. The Team realises that the costs may be prohibitive for PU at this point, but certainly a comprehensive, total quality management model would serve the development of the University.*
- *The Review Team recommends that PU appoint a vice-rector to be in charge of quality management supported by a high-level quality management team. Perhaps the Vice-Rector for Development and Informatics could be, by virtue of his current portfolio, well poised to undertake this task.*
- *The Review Team recommends that the University consult the EUA resources made available through the Quality Culture Project.*
- *The Review Team recommends that the University tap into the knowledge and experience of the University available through the Faculty of Management.*

Strategic Management and Change

The Review Team did not get a clear picture about how far PU has the capacity to change in response to the changing trends in European Higher Education Area. It did note the commendable self-analysis in the SER, including a detailed action plan with assigned responsibilities. The optimisation of the decision-making powers between the Rectorate and the University Faculties is important.

Recommendations:

- *The Review Team believes that the optimisation of the decision-making powers between the Rectorate and faculties is a key factor in PU's strategic development, along the lines described in the section on "Central Governance..."*
- *The Team believes that the development of a global quality management system as described in the previous section, along with a re-analysis of PU's strategic and action plans, can provide the necessary instruments for change.*

Final Words

The Review Team understands the difficulties the new leadership of PU is facing, but it also notes that the leadership has many new ideas for strategic development. The Team has discussed some of these ideas with Rector Matlovič and supports him in their implementation. The Review Team hopes that the University will find its comments and recommendations worthwhile for discussion and consideration. Implementing them, or at least some of them, will add to the success of the University of Prešov in fulfilling its role as the provider of high-quality higher education in the Prešov region, and as an agent for sustainable regional development.

By participating in this review, PU is automatically eligible for a follow-up review in two-three years, which can prove useful for measuring the University's progress. The internal and external developments will likely decide this question. PU is now also a member of EUA's Alumni Forum, which meets on the occasion of major EUA conferences, where representatives of all reviewed universities can discuss common problems of strategic management, general European university trends, and related topics.