

**UNIVERSIDAD EUROPEA DE MADRID - UEM**  
**EVALUATION REPORT**

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of the evaluation of the European University of Madrid (UEM). The evaluation took place on 10-12 March (first visit) and 26-29 June (second visit) 2011.

On the last day of the second visit, the chair of the IEP team presented the Team's oral report to the Rector's Team and to several other members of the University and Management Team who decided to attend the session expressly organised for that purpose. This oral report is the basis of the present evaluation report, which has resulted from all written information, interviews with various members of the university and the IEP team's observations and discussions during (and between) the two visits.

### **1.1. Institutional Evaluation Programme**

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

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

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

## **1.2. Description of the institution and its national context**

UEM is a young and ambitious private for-profit university and member of the Laureate International Universities Network. Since its creation in the mid-nineties, UEM has concentrated mainly on its teaching mission and has developed a very strong student-centred focus. Over the years, and through a motivated leadership and very committed staff, the university has been able to develop a consolidated model in its teaching mission. The main campus of UEM has very good facilities and well-equipped premises. The other campus in Madrid does not enjoy similar conditions, but it enjoys a very attractive location that serves well the type of activities developed there.

The University has a strong feeling of corporate identity that is reflected throughout its activity. There is a good atmosphere and collaborative environment inside the institution. UEM is a well-organised institution, supported by good information management systems and by sound financial management. The university presents a consolidated planning and quality culture that reflects its institutional ethos.

Today, the higher education landscape is being shaped by profound and rapid transformations. The Spanish higher education system has been following the main European trends and, as a result, Spanish universities also face times of significant changes that challenge their capacity to adapt and fulfil their mission effectively.

An important driving force for those changes has been the development of the European Higher Education Area, of which a major element is the Bologna process. The main purpose underlying this concept was to facilitate the mobility of people, transparency and recognition of qualifications, quality and the European dimension in higher education. The process also aimed at improving the attractiveness of European institutions in the increasing international competition for students, especially from those parts of the world where there is growing demand for qualification due to the fact that those local systems of higher education have developed later and more slowly.

The development of this process has led to intense discussions and policy changes in many European countries and Spain is no exception. Among the major recent changes concerning higher education in Spain the requirement for the accreditation of a certain minimum proportion of the teaching staff and the changes in the process of official recognition of university degrees play a significant part. To these changes should be added the trends of change in research funding.

The complex context faced by UEM, as by many other Spanish universities, is not only due to policy changes, but also to other factors. The Spanish system of higher education has undergone a period of intense and rapid massification during the last decades. This has been pushed by social demand and government policies geared towards the improvement of the qualifications of Spanish labour force, especially of its young cohorts. However, in recent years, demographic changes have affected the patterns of demand and therefore there is growing competition for students among universities. This phenomenon is extremely important in the region of Madrid, where there are signs of stiff competition for new students. This less favourable context on the demand side is even more important in the case of a private university such as UEM, because of the significant difference in tuition fees between public and private institutions.

The context of significant competition among universities has also been enhanced by the recent economic and financial crisis. Higher education is often regarded as a counter-cyclical sector that tends to be spared in times of recession since many individuals take the opportunity of investing in their training at a time that the labour market may not be very promising. Although this may take place in Spain, especially because of the high unemployment rates (particularly so for the younger generation), the scale of the crisis here suggests that higher education will not sail through unscathed. Moreover, this will tend to affect in particular more expensive institutions and programmes, especially in those areas that were often partially financially supported by students' employers (as in professional masters and lifelong learning).

The fact that the pace of expansion has slowed down has also produced serious implications for universities in Spain: institutions will be increasingly competing not only for good students, but also for good staff. The increasing international mobility of students and staff, especially the best ones, means that if universities want to thrive they will have to compete successfully at the international level and be able to position themselves as attractive places for good students and faculty members.

The academic and management teams of UEM have a vision of becoming a national and international reference private university. Nonetheless, it is also clear for them that UEM, like the other Spanish universities, is facing a more challenging regulatory framework that stimulates the university to aim higher than it has so far. The convergence of these international, national and regional trends, make this a timely opportunity to reflect on the current situation of UEM, the challenges ahead and to propose some possible initiatives to overcome these successfully.

### **1.3. The Self-Evaluation Process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a group that included several senior representatives of the academic structure (including 3 Vice-Rectors and 2 Deans) and of the management team. The preparation of the SER benefited from UEM's previous experience with quality assessment at the national and international levels. Students were not directly involved in the process, though their views about the university and its activities were considered through the mechanisms that the UEM has in place to gather their feedback. This seems to reflect the prevailing view among the university of students mainly as customers and less as partners in the education process.

The Evaluation Team considered the SER, together with the additional information received, as a good and helpful analysis of the current situation. In those documents the Team could identify a clearly articulated vision about UEM's mission and its expectations for the future. Some of the relevant information requested by the Team was considered by the university to be business-sensitive, possibly reflecting its for-profit orientation, so much of that information was provided orally to the Team in the meetings that took place during the second visit.

The documents also showed that UEM has a clear mission, as well as clear institutional policies and priorities. This clear institutional focus regarding its mission has been helped by UEM's commitment to

strategic planning since its onset. Moreover, this also reflects a strong business orientation, which is also very present in shaping the content of its mission.

In the discussions that the Team had during the visits, namely with the SEG, the Team believes that the self-evaluation process has helped UEM to improve its degree of self-knowledge through the discussion of its current strategy and a reflection about possible future developments.

#### **1.4. The evaluation team**

The self-evaluation report of UEM along with the appendices was sent to the evaluation team on 8 February 2011. The visits of the evaluation team to UEM took place on 10-12 March and 26-29 June 2011, respectively. In between the visits UEM provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- **Finn Junge-Jensen**, former President, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, as chair
- **Pedro Teixeira**, Professor of Economics, University of Porto and Director of CIPES – Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, Portugal, as coordinator
- **Malcolm Cook**, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Exeter University, England
- **Lucija Čok**, former Rector and former Minister of Higher Education, University of Primoska, Slovenia
- **Melinda Szabó**, European Students' Union and Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

The Team wants to express its gratitude to all participants of the interviews for the openness and willingness to discuss all the issues concerning the university during the meetings.

Special thanks go to Ms. Raquel Andrés who was UEM's liaison person with the Evaluation Team and who was responsible for the efficient organisation of all the meetings and discussions.

Finally, the Evaluation Team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector Prof. Águeda Benito and to UEM for the generous hospitality.

## **2. Teaching**

UEM presents an innovative approach and a strong commitment to teaching and there is a substantive awareness of changes in teaching and learning promoted by the Bologna process. This is visible in several instances such as the efforts to include classes taught in English, small group teaching, and close interaction between students and the academic staff (both in presence and through virtual learning mechanisms). There is a significant orientation towards continuous assessment and improvement, which seems to reflect positively on the quality of the teaching offered by the university.

UEM has also been trying to enhance the degree of internationalisation of its teaching activities. It has been promoting more teaching and learning in foreign languages, notably in English, with all programmes including at least one compulsory course in English and some programmes being fully delivered in that language. The Team also noticed that the very well-equipped and guided Centre for Languages meets the interest of numerous students. This is also particularly relevant bearing in mind the university's ambitions to improve its international visibility and attractiveness.

The Team was able to identify a general appreciation by students of the dedication of the teaching staff. However, there is the perception that this is only possible through a very demanding working schedule. Although the Team found that the teaching staff was very motivated and committed, there were also some worrying signs. The situation is also worsened by an apparent dispersion of the teaching load across disparate disciplines and by reported frequent annual changes in the courses to be taught by each professor, both situations representing additional challenges for many members of the teaching staff. Although the Team can understand the management rationale of keeping significant flexibility in the allocation of teaching, there are clear advantages in balancing that with a certain degree of specialisation and stability in the teaching of most faculty members.

There seems to be a dilemma between the distribution of teaching loads and the promotion of an innovative and effective approach towards teaching. The development of interesting and up-to-date teaching materials requires significant preparation and the current teaching load seems unlikely to be compatible with it. Although in the short term this may be sustained through the visible commitment of the teaching staff, in the longer term this may undermine UEM's commitment to innovative and effective teaching.

### **2.1. Recommendations**

UEM should

- reflect on the business and academic sustainability of the current model of allocation of teaching
- strengthen further the competences in English of students and teaching staff
- reflect more carefully about the costs associated with the great dispersion and variability of subjects allocated to many members of the teaching staff

- strengthen and enhance the opportunities for multi-faculty collaboration in teaching projects, including at the Doctoral level (e.g., through interfaculty and international joint degrees following external courses and mobility).

### **3. Student Issues**

The Team observed that UEM uses considerable marketing resources to attract students, both nationally and internationally. This is a clear consequence of the fact that the university is a private for-profit institution that is financially dependent on tuition fees. Moreover, as a rather recent university, UEM has been working hard to forge a good reputation in an increasingly competitive market for good students.

During the evaluation process, the Team could see that students show a high degree of satisfaction with the institution, its facilities, and with the teaching staff. Although many students did not see UEM initially as their first option, especially due to the cost differential with publicly subsidised and long-established universities, they were satisfied with their choice and with the education that was being provided to them. One of the aspects that has been positively assessed in this regard is the support by Personal Tutoring that seems to be widely available.

The Team noted that the university seems to provide good opportunities for motivated students. This includes the growing international emphasis, visible not only through the teaching in English of some courses and some programmes, but also in the large number of opportunities for international mobility (notably with other universities that are also part of the Laureate Group).

UEM has also tried to place significant emphasis on a learning environment which is strongly linked to professional orientation. This is reflected in the organisation of the curriculum and schedules and in the recruitment of a significant part of the academic staff. The student body presents a significant number of mature and working students, which is in line with the university organisation.

The professional orientation of the university is also very clear in the significant efforts developed by UEM to secure internships for all its students. This is regarded as a relevant and very positive feature by many students, since it helps them greatly not only in their training, but also in the transition to the labour market (which is particularly difficult in Spain). Altogether, this has very positive consequences in the relatively good employability of UEM's graduates.

One of the areas in students' welfare that should attract greater attention of UEM is that of international students. These students require particular attention in their academic and personal integration in the life of the university. This seems particularly relevant in view of UEM's ambition to increase its international attractiveness.

#### **3.1. Recommendations**

- The university should stimulate students, regarding themselves also as partners (and not only consumers) in the educational process.
- The development of postgraduate programmes should be followed by the creation of adequate mechanisms of representation and feedback.

- The university should stimulate further involvement of students with extra-curricular activities, since this fits UEM's commitment to social responsibility and innovation.
- The university should pay more attention to the needs of international students.

#### **4. Research**

UEM is quite a recent institution and from the start it has tended to place a much greater emphasis on teaching within its mission. Thus, the Team could see that there seems to be a relatively weak research orientation. Although, as a private for-profit institution, it is understandable that UEM is not likely to become a Research University, it is expected that it develop a visible research activity in order to attain a significant external reputation.

The very limited research activity has been also hindered by the way resources have been allocated. As has been discussed above, the current teaching load is very high on average and this is clearly detrimental for the development of a visible research activity. This situation is certainly aggravated by the dispersion and variability in the distribution of teaching responsibilities. Although in recent years the university has tried to reduce the teaching load of some of its senior researchers, the number of faculty benefiting from this reduction is very small and unlikely to have a major impact on the overall research production of the university. As a result, the teaching effort required from faculty members seems too high to allow for the development of a significant research activity.

The research activity is also clearly hindered by insufficient internal and external funding. The data provided by UEM show that the funds allocated by the university to research activities are very small and unlikely to promote any significant research activity, especially in the more expensive areas. Moreover, this limited internal funding has not been compensated by external funds. As a recent institution and a private one, UEM has been unable to attract a large portion of national research funds. Nor has it developed significant attempts to attract European research funding, which could be a potential interesting source for some of its areas with greater research potential.

Nonetheless, the Team recognises the existence of recent attempts to identify and develop potential areas of research excellence. Among these, the Team considers that the centre of excellence in Educational Innovation may have special significance for UEM's teaching model and its development should be strengthened by bearing in mind that potential contribution for the university as a whole.

UEM should aim at stimulating a pattern of competition among the various research groups. Hence, the existing areas of excellence should not regard their position as permanently protected, nor should other areas be discouraged from attaining a degree of excellence.

The increasing attention of UEM to enhance research in its mission is also present in PhD programmes. Until recently, the university has paid limited attention to these programmes, which enrolled a very small number of students, many of which are faculty members. Although we appreciate the opportunities created for staff to pursue a PhD alongside their teaching activities, this seems to be done mainly through local programmes (thus, with significant in-breeding in the filling of senior professorial positions). Thus, the Team welcomes the university's current restructuring of its PhD programmes and practices and the willingness to rethink the way it has been qualifying its faculty members through internal mechanisms.

#### **4.1. Recommendations**

The university should:

- rethink the allocation of resources in order to reflect a greater attention to research
- set aside substantial seed-money to encourage broad research activities and enhance its own research staff (especially the younger researchers) in order to develop an effective platform
- develop more visible efforts to attract external funding for research activities, notably by strengthening support for applications for external funding, namely EU programmes
- align its Doctoral Programmes with the Bologna guidelines, including the development of a code of practice for research students, supervisors and programme directors
- make an effort to allocate additional resources to improve access to bibliographic databases and online resources.

## **5. Relationship with External Stakeholders**

Although UEM is a rather young institution, it is perceived as making a positive contribution to the local environment and this is regarded as having improved over the years. During the evaluation the Team could see that UEM's teaching model, with strong emphasis on practical learning and the commitment that all students have access to an internship, has helped UEM to forge strong links with the business world.

These links with employers have also resulted in a few interesting developments in research. Although the research activity of UEM as a whole is not very significant, there are a few examples of applied research developed with businesses. These should be explored further by UEM, especially because it may help the university to overcome the limitations regarding the funding of some research activities.

One of the areas that seemed to be insufficiently explored was that of Alumni. The strong customer orientation seems to have infused a view among many of the graduates that the relationship with the university is essentially finished when they complete their degrees. Nonetheless, they are an important source of resources for any university and could help UEM to fulfil its strategic objectives more effectively.

The relationship of UEM with external stakeholders would benefit from being strengthened not only because of the potential benefits associated with it (in aspects such as reputation or funding resources), but also because it fits the institution's ethos and its strong commitment to values of social responsibility.

### **5.1. Recommendations**

- The university should explore its relationship with Alumni more effectively.
- The university could explore its relationship with businesses as potential sponsors for research activities.
- There seems to be clear room for growth in the partnerships with local and regional governments.

## **6. Internationalisation**

UEM mentions in its SER that internationalisation is one of its main strategic objectives. Moreover, the university regards it as a potential competitive advantage over other local and national universities.

In fact, the university shows a significant commitment to internationalisation in its teaching activities. All the programmes include at least one course taught in English and there are a few programmes fully delivered in English. This is reflected in the recruitment of some English-speaking Professors.

The objectives of increasing internationalisation of UEM's activities have been also reflected in the mobility programmes. The university has been trying to take advantage of its participation within the Laureate Network, which represents a very important part of its mobility activity and is a great opportunity for exchange activities for students and staff, especially outside Europe.

Nonetheless, the mobility activities present some weaknesses. There is a clear imbalance between outgoing and incoming mobility flows, with far more incoming students than UEM's students going abroad. This seems to be explained by a certain resistance of students to go abroad, apparently widespread in Spanish universities, though the university feels that it needs to address that problem if it wants to fulfil its internationalisation aims. Moreover, this may be an important source for the differentiation of its graduates in the labour market.

Staff mobility also seems to be quite low. Although this is often the case in many institutions, the current teaching demands also reflect negatively in this respect, hindering the development of greater staff mobility.

Nevertheless, UEM seems to have not only the opportunities to improve that situation, through its international partners, but it has also good motives to increase faculties' international mobility significantly. This could be used as an important vehicle to enhance the research experience of many of its academic staff members. A similar reasoning could be applied to its doctoral programmes and students.

UEM could develop efforts to increase the number of international scholars visiting the university. This could be an instrument to promote regular short-term academic visits by top international academics or could even become an intermediate step to attract some of them on a more permanent basis. This type of programme could be an effective instrument to develop the kind of partnerships mentioned above in the section on research.

### **6.1. Recommendations**

The university should

- improve further the proficiency in English of students and staff
- ensure a more balanced mobility flow by enhancing support for its students to study abroad

- promote internationalisation in doctoral training, namely through partnerships with good institutions
- create better conditions to promote greater mobility of staff
- use internationalisation as a potential leverage for greater research intensity
- develop a programme of Visiting Professorships to attract good scholars from foreign universities.

## **7. Human Resources Management**

The institutional business culture of UEM has significant impact on its practices regarding human resources' management. On the positive side, the Team could identify a clear strategy of recruitment that fits the university's mission and its strategic objectives. Moreover, UEM presents a visible commitment to the mentoring of staff and to career development plans that are often lacking in many higher education contexts. There is also an annual performance assessment and the overall perception among staff members is that it is clear and consistent with the institutional objectives.

Nonetheless, the strong business orientation also reflects heavily on the demands that the university places on its academic and non-academic staff. Although the Team could regularly find strong levels of commitment on both the academic and the non-academic staff members, there were various motives for concern about the medium- and long-term effects of the current situation.

It should be noted that this was recognised by the academic and managerial leaderships of UEM. In fact, both the academic and the management teams of the university also show a very strong commitment to the institution and sympathise with the general situation of the staff. Moreover, the staff felt in general that the leadership of the institution recognised and appreciated their high degree of commitment and dedication to the university. The institutional reflection about this situation seems even more pertinent in view of UEM's ambition to enhance its international reputation and attractiveness.

### **7.1. Recommendations**

UEM should reflect on

- the academic and managerial sustainability of its current demands on both the academic and non-academic staff
- the rate of turnover among academic staff by creating more attractive conditions (notably regarding research)
- the challenges involved in the recruitment of highly competent international academic staff.

## **8. Organisational Issues**

As it was mentioned in the description of UEM, at the beginning of this Report, the university is well-organised. The UEM institutional ethos is also reflected in its organisation, with a centralised and much consolidated decision-making process. The perception of the Team is that this has helped the information to flow quite effectively and that the institution's priorities and actions are well understood across the university.

The effectiveness of UEM's current organisational structure has also been well served by the institution's commitment to strategic planning. There is an annual improvement plan, which reflects a strong corporate culture. For instance, new programmes are developed through a business plan, which incorporate multiple inputs at various levels of the institution. These benefit from the multiple surveys and reports that are regularly done across the university.

The good organisation of UEM also reflects positively on its institutional environment. The Team could identify an atmosphere that encourages dialogue between the decision-making structure and staff and students.

However, despite its current effective organisation, UEM could benefit from stimulating a more critical reflection across the institution. Academic institutions are often characterised as organised anarchies and need constantly to stimulate reflection, analysis and criticism in order to promote the development of new and better ideas. UEM's commitment to innovation would certainly benefit from promoting more internal reflection across the institution which may be beneficial to its teaching and research activities.

### **8.1. Recommendations**

- The innovative capacity of the university's consolidated decision-making process could benefit from promoting opportunities for critical reflection and brainstorming.
- UEM should encourage the flow of new ideas for teaching and research from below the central level of decision-making.
- The university should foster a more intensive dialogue between the academic units and the Marketing Department in the development of new programmes.

## **9. Quality Culture**

UEM has a visible and solid quality culture, which is strongly anchored in its robust business orientation. Various aspects already reflected in this report have contributed to strengthen this quality culture, namely its good organisation, a clear decision-making process, the commitment to strategic planning, and a consistent attention to student satisfaction. Moreover, the Team could identify several effective mechanisms for assessing outcomes and collecting feedback both internal and external to the university

Nonetheless, and in line with these observations, the Team believes that UEM's quality culture could be strengthened by promoting more critical reflection about the university's priorities and practices. The Team considers that the good atmosphere existing in the institution and the degree of commitment of staff can be used to enhance a greater involvement of the whole organisation in the continuous improvement of its activities.

This strengthening of UEM's quality system should also be directed towards the university's greater international ambitions.

### **9.1. Recommendations**

The university should promote

- more critical reflection across the institution in order to enhance its commitment to continuous improvement
- greater benchmarking vis-à-vis international competitors.

## **10. Expansion Plans**

During the second visit to UEM, the Team became aware of the current expansion plans that aim at doubling the size of the university over 5 years. These plans for expansion struck the Team as being very ambitious. After some lengthy discussions with the leadership, the Team was not entirely convinced about the strategic reasons which underpin the expansion plans. The Team fears that the university may be underestimating the risks associated with an expansion of such magnitude and in such a short time scale.

The Team considers that the expansion plans pose significant challenges. One of the leading ones will be to maintain the quality of incoming students. This is particularly relevant bearing in mind the context mentioned in the beginning of this report, namely the demographic and financial factors that stimulate significant competition for students in Spanish higher education. Furthermore, such a rapid expansion may endanger UEM's educational model by creating significant difficulties in securing a sufficient number of good internships and entrepreneurship projects.

The challenges associated with expansion seem particularly relevant when it comes to international students, since the plans include an even greater expansion in the number of international students. We think that UEM has the potential to attract more international students, notably due to its location, but we are also aware that there is tough international competition for good students. Moreover, as was noted in the section devoted to Student Issues, the Team feels that the university still has room for improvement in its integration of international students at the present time. We are not convinced that it will be possible to recruit and integrate such a rapidly expanding cohort of international students.

Another very important challenge in doubling the enrolment of UEM is the additional staff required. The current situation, already extensively analysed in previous sections of this report, pointed out that UEM seems, in many ways, overstretched in its use of academic and non-academic staff. Hence, there is no slack and the university would need to attract a significant number of good academic and non-academic staff members, who would then have to be effectively integrated into the organisation, in teaching teams and in research groups. However, not only is there growing competition, both nationally and internationally, for qualified and talented staff, but this represents a massive challenge for any organisation, let alone an academic one.

Moreover, the timing of the expansion creates tensions with the university's ambition to strengthen its research profile. At a time when the university is trying to develop a more intense research activity, it would seem to just complicate matters to expand the activities of the university at such a fast pace.

The planned expansion seems to represent a massive academic and organisational challenge and it may endanger the exceptional relationship between staff and students in the educational activities. Although the Team welcomes the ambition of UEM, this should be done in a way that strengthens the university and does not undermine its business and academic sustainability.

### **10.1. Recommendations**

- The Team encourages UEM to reflect further on the pace and scale of the planned expansion.
- The university should pay particular attention to the degree of compatibility of the expansion plans with other major strategic objectives such as strengthening its research profile and its degree of internationalisation.
- The university should reflect upon the impact of the planned expansion on the quality of the students enrolled, the effectiveness of its teaching model, and the quality and performance of the academic and non-academic staff.

## **11. Conclusions**

To sum up, the Team is convinced that UEM is a promising private university that in a relatively short period has been able to develop its educational model successfully. The significant achievements of the university have been made possible through an effective leadership and a motivated and committed academic and non-academic staff.

The Team concurs with UEM's willingness to become more ambitious. The Team strongly supports the university's interest in strengthening its research profile. The Team also agrees with the university's ambition to enhance its international visibility and to attract good international students and faculty.

The Team would encourage UEM to expand at a pace that is sustainable from both a business and an academic perspective.