UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE COLOMBIA

EVALUATION REPORT

July 2011

Team:
Virgilio Meira Soares, chair
Winfried Müller
Carles Solà
Nadja Kiiskinen
Jacqueline Smith, team coordinator

Table of contents

1 - Introduction

2 – Evaluation main findings

3 – Recommendations and conclusions

1 - Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia – hereafter the UN. The evaluation took place in 2011 following an invitation by the Rector, Dr. Moises Wasserman. As the evaluation team understood it, this evaluation process – constituting both of extensive self-evaluation and the external evaluation carried out by the IEP team – is part of the University's aim to reinforce the quality of education provided and achieve greater international visibility.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The evaluation takes its point of departure in the mission and objectives of the university under evaluation. It focuses on the university's capacity to react to the current challenges of higher education and to set changes for improvement, including its strategic planning and its overall quality management. The overall orientation of the evaluation is formative, i.e., it supports the university in its efforts to improve its own strategic and quality management. The strengths and weaknesses of the institution are judged primarily in light of its own mission and not against external criteria.

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? This question refers to the mission of the institution. A clear mission is important in order to decide on priorities, strategic objectives, and the means to reach these objectives.

- How is the institution trying to do it? The evaluation investigates the way in which the institution attempts to fulfil this mission in terms of organisation, governing structures and processes.
- How does it know it works? This question points at the necessity to have sound internal quality arrangements in place. The evaluation team looks at institutional policies and practices regarding quality and other relevant processes, in terms of actors, structures and procedures.
- How does the institution change in order to improve? This is a key question for the IEP. It is the institution's capacity for change and improvement that allows it to deal with a fast-changing environment and to respond to evolving needs.

1.2   The self-evaluation process

An ad hoc group comprised of 11 members representing the various campuses and sectors of the UN academic life led the self-evaluation process. An extensive self-evaluation process had already taken place two years earlier for the institutional accreditation by the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditacion* (CNA). The material collected at that time largely served as a base for the IEP self-evaluation. It was updated in a very democratic process, calling on all members of the university to contribute via a dedicated web page and through regular meetings.

The self-evaluation group delivered its descriptive and analytical self-evaluation report (SER) with a large number of annexes as background information.

1.3   The evaluation team

The self-evaluation report of the UN, along with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team (the Team) in January. In addition, the Team members found further documentation on the university web site which is well developed and well supplied with information for all sorts of users. The visits of the Team took place on 7-11 February and 29 May-03 June, 2011. The first visit included travel to and one day on the Medellin campus and visit of the Bogota campus, the second visit included travel and visit to the Manizales campus., with meetings in each of the three campuses, but most meetings were held in the Bogota campus. In between the visits the University provided some additional documentation as requested by the Team.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Virgílio Meira Soares, former Rector, University of Lisbon, Portugal, team chair;
- Winfried Müller, former Rector, University of Klagenfurt, Austria;
- Carles Solà, former Rector, Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain;
- Nadja Kiiskinen, master of science student, Tampere University of Technology Finland;
- Jacqueline Smith, former OECD/IMHE analyst, team coordinator.

During its two visits, the Team met the UN Rector; Vice-Rectors; the self-evaluation group; external stakeholders; Deans; the Consejo Superior; administrative staff at central and campuses levels; students in each of the three campuses visited (Bogota, Manizales, Medellin), academic staff members in each of the three campuses, student representatives. The Team also visited the campuses, libraries, sport and cultural facilities, laboratories.

The Team would like to thank the UN Rector, Prof. Moises Wasserman, Vice-Rector for Academic affairs Prof. Natalia Ruiz Rodgers, the campuses Vice-Rectors Profs. William Sarache, Ana Reyes and Julio Colmenares, and all the staff, students and external stakeholders for their warm welcome and generous hospitality as well as for useful and open discussions. The Team would particularly like to thank Atticus Pinzón Rodríguez and Andrea Muñoz for their constant, friendly and efficient support in preparation for and during the visits.

1.4   Universidad Nacional de Colombia and the national context

A major expansion characterises higher education in Colombia in the last two decades, with widening access to include more of the middle and lower socio-economic levels poorly represented previously. From 17% of the age group in 1997, the participation rate has increased to 24% in 2002, 32% in 2007 and nearly 37% in 2011. The Government aims for a 50% participation rate by 2013 – a quantum leap in terms of participation. This may be one of the reasons behind the controversial proposal for a new law. While all parties agree that the 1992 law which regulates higher education needs to be revised and updated, the current proposal does not really seem to address funding issues – yet an essential point – and it raises fear of disengagement on the part of the public authorities. The concern on the part of the UN leaders was quite perceptible.

The CNA functions as a quality assurance agency. Since concerns about national research policy are still nascent in Colombia, Vicerector Natalia Ruiz stated in her paper[1] "in Colombia there has been a significant change in the pursuit of building capacities to do research". As of 2007 Colombia invested about 0.4 % of GDP in research, while the OECD average reached 2.3%[2], but several Latin American countries' investments were in the same range as Colombia or lower. And national policy gives very limited attention to internationalisation in the development of the higher education system.

The UN is a public university with a unique status, defined by a specific article of the 1992 law on higher education and a specific 1993 decree, with a mission to widen access and reach out to remote isolated regions of the country. Thus, besides main campuses in Bogota, Palmira, Medellin and Manizales, several smaller campuses (*sedes de presencia)* in areas with limited cultural and educational opportunities such as the Amazon, the Southern Pacific coast or the

---

[1] Natalia Ruiz Rodgers, 2009, The Role of the Research University in the Third World – A Case Study of the National University of Colombia, paper presented at the 3rd International Conference of World Class Universities, Shanghai, 1-4 November.

[2] OECD Factbook 2010, accessed 21 June http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/factbook-2010-en/07/01/01/index.html?contentType=&itemId=/content/chapter/factbook-2010-54-en&containerItemId=/content/serial/18147364&accessItemIds=&mimeType=text/html

Caribbean islands respond to this mission. However the geographic spread of the 8 campuses implies the very complex structure examined below.

The UN offers a wide access in terms of opportunities, but it remains highly selective: only 8 to 10% of applicants pass the entrance exam. In the words of one student, it gives prestige to attend the UN. In fact, despite the criticism we detected among many members, leaders, academic and administrative staff, students, all express pride in being part of the "*Nacional*", in the three campuses visited. This pride stems from awareness of the quality of the education provided at the UN, the range of fields offered, as well as the intellectual elite dimension. In addition, were it not for the financial support they receive – the social mission of the university – by their own admission some students would not have access to higher education.

The social mission of the university is also expressed through its policy of regional engagement. In addition to its contribution to the overall national mission, each campus collaborates actively with other higher education institutions, authorities, businesses, and society at large, in its local environment. The Team was impressed in particular by the significant cultural impact: it is not often that a university can offer the best concert hall in town.

A striking feature of the UN is the priority given to the welfare of staff and students, *bienestar*, inscribed in its policy choices, development plan and structure. This includes physical and psychological health, sport and cultural opportunities, staff and student support in various ways. Nevertheless, not all services appear evenly distributed among the different campuses.

The UN is going through a stage of transition, focusing on developing research and the qualification of academic staff, internationalisation, and expanding major efforts to set up a comprehensive strategic development plan and improve the management system.

The UN has a strong commitment to higher education in the whole area of Colombia. It has the vision of a national and international reference university and it is certainly a Colombian reference university, highly recognised in Colombian society. This vision is clearly expressed and given prominence in the first stated purpose of the widely available brochure *Your university **Your country***: "to contribute to the national unity and to its addition to the international environment as university center for the intellectual and cultural life...".

2 – Evaluation main findings

2.1   Structure and governance

The Higher Council, *Consejo Superior*, is the policy making body and represents the external dimension organ of the university. Its major importance and influence on the functioning of the institution are such that great care should be given to its structure. However, its composition and terms of membership are set in law. University independence is guaranteed by the law but the high proportion of representatives of the authorities (half of the members) in the council raises doubts about its real autonomy, at least in terms of structure, since the Team was reassured that the current members are very independent-minded indeed. One may question the composition: there is no clear representation of external stakeholders besides the ones appointed by authorities, there is only one student representative as well as one representative of the professors and no representative of the administrative staff. The Team is aware that modifying **the *Consejo* composition** would require a change of law, which may not happen soon. Nevertheless, the Team considers it important to stress that this **is an issue that deserves attention**.

The *Consejo* decides on the rectorship term: three years, renewable once. Considering the complex structure of this university a three-year time span is too short to develop and implement a meaningful policy. The Rector needs a longer time frame in order to stimulate the necessary developmental momentum. For example, in most, often less complex, European universities rectorship terms last 4 or 5 years with one possible re-election. **The Team recommends extending terms of the rector and other high level executives, vice-rectors, deans, and top administrators to more than 3 years, with the possibility of re-election being dependent on the extension of the period. What seems to be important is to give time to the leadership to develop a coherent policy for what cannot be achieved within three years.**

The academic council, *Consejo academico*, deals with internal academic issues and the implementation of the development plan.

A three-year **development plan** is drawn up as required by law, combining the development plans of the 8 campuses. Based on the information provided between the two visits, the state of implementation of the 2010-2012 plan in mid-term is globally satisfactory. The preparation of the plan involves an extensive democratic process through the different collegial bodies, calling on all members of the academic community. Three years seems too short a horizon, the university leadership would like to extend the planning over a 10 to 12 year period: at any rate it **should be longer than two consecutive rector's terms to ensure continuity**. However this entails a change in mentality and expectations among internal and external partners, and thus will take time. The Team also recommends **involving employers and other external stakeholders** in the elaboration of the strategic plan, and to **elaborate a mid–term strategic plan** accompanied by an action plan and priorities. **The university should be commended for its democratic approach to the process and is encouraged to continue along these lines**.

With 8 campuses widely scattered in the country, a social **and** excellence mission, the UN presents a complex structure. The organisational chart is not easy to understand. There is an

umbrella rectoral team (*nivel nacional*) with vice-rectors for general matters, academic affairs, research, administration and finances, then each campus has its own vice-rector and its own team, but the relations between national and campus levels are not strictly hierarchical: for example, the director for research at campus level does not report to the campus vice-rector but to the national vice-rector for research.

At campus level the same basic organisation is repeated. At faculty level (with very few exceptions) there is a matrix-type structure between departments set up for administrative purposes and schools or institutes – both terms are used, with the same meaning, one in each of parallel faculties, on the same campus! – for academic issues.

These various levels interact within complex – even confusing - networks of administrative and academic relations, which may eventually lead to duplications or even conflicting responsibilities. In addition, the high level of autonomy of the faculties in several campuses, in administrative structure, also leads to wasteful duplication of services and poor use of available staff. **There is a need to clarify the organisational structure and avoid redundancies in multiplying services in campuses, faculties**. **The university could use its autonomy to instil more flexibility** in the management, to delegate responsibilities, to decentralise to a certain extent the decision-making process.

In the Team's judgement, the UN's main problem, and a major handicap, is the overwhelming bureaucracy. Excessive bureaucracy appears to be very common in Colombia, but it seems that the UN has added its own layers of bureaucracy, bringing some actions almost to a halt. The Team was given several examples of good or indeed necessary actions that were abandoned because of procedures that were too bureaucratic.

In such a complex institution, **communication** is particularly important. The UN has put in place several tools: as mentioned above, the website offers an abundance of information, there are dedicated radio and web-based broadcast stations, newspapers, specific newsletters. Several electronic systems, for libraries, administrative functions, student records, research functions, etc., are in use. Unfortunately, it appears that these systems are not always compatible, which defeats their purpose, thus adding to the complexity. The Team believes that these systems could strengthen vertical and horizontal communication. Their combined data could be used to improve the decision-making processes and contribute to reducing bureaucracy. By putting in place the necessary security features and applying the appropriate hardware (e.g. chip cards), a number of the present slow procedures could be performed electronically (e.g. reporting systems on exams, order system and administration of purchases, support systems for learning and teaching). The implementation of the new management system SIstema de MEjor GEstion (SIMEGE) could be the ideal opportunity to carry out modifications to **harmonise the systems and make full use of the possibilities they offer**.

SIMEGE has been in preparation for the last 4 years to try and rationalise administrative processes. The purpose is to improve management by bringing all administrative operations under one comprehensive system, thus ensuring a smoother flow from one sector to another, increase the use of electronic operations thus speeding up processes, eliminate some duplication and delegate authority for some lower level decisions. The UN has systematically

and thoroughly developed SIMEGE, and is now similarly implementing it with abundant information for all and training sessions for the staff. However, SIMEGE must not be used to increase regulations and bureaucracy. **The Team considers SIMEGE a major step towards reduction of the paralysing bureaucracy; however it recommends that the UN goes even further to eliminate duplication of services and delegate responsibility for some decisions.** If it is implemented successfully, SIMEGE will become an essential instrument for efficient management, and it will open up new avenues for development.

Although obviously all members of the university community exhibit a strong feeling of belonging to the UN, further **strengthening of the corporate identity** – spirit of the UN, the logo on all material, design of folders, business cards, internet appearance etc. - could contribute to facilitating the flow of communication. However, a delicate balance between reinforcing the unity of the institution and respecting the distinctive character of each campus needs to be maintained.

2.2   Funding and finance issues

The Team was surprised at the public funding mechanism: a level of funding was established with the Law 30/92 on higher education in 1992 and since then the state funding increases in line with the cost of living, but without consideration for increased, diversified, new activities or strategic measures; the new law proposal does not change this mechanism. The UN receives slightly over half of its funding from the state and the rest from its own resources – tuition, projects, sponsoring. However, over the last 5 years for which statistics were provided to the Team that percentage has slowly but steadily declined, from 59% to 54%, while activities may have expanded. This tendency spells increasing difficulties in areas already underfunded, such as certain fields of research, or some support services. Bureaucratic requirements and the absence of full costing can only compound the existing difficulties.

Yet the level of overall funding may not be that low. The UN level of funding per student compares with that of the average for OECD countries.[3] Difficulties arise from the geographic dispersion of the university but **more could be accomplished with** improved financial management**, full costing** for all cost evaluations, **elimination of duplication and bureaucratic requirements**, in essence, **making more use of the (guaranteed) autonomy**.

Another avenue worth exploring would be to extend the **budget planning over several years** with annual updating and careful monitoring of implementation. This is already occurring with the development plan which includes funding planning for each action line, that is for the three years of the plan. The Team **recommends extending this approach to the entire budget planning and systematising it**.

---

[3] See OECD indicators in *Education at a Glance, 2010,*
http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3746,en_2649_35961291_45897844_1_1_1_1,00.html or Fact book 2010 http://www.oecd.org/site/0,3407,en_21571361_34374092_1_1_1_1_1,00.html orhttp://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SE.XPD.TERT.PC.ZS/compare?country=co

2.3   Research

While research has been part of the university for decades, the focus on research is very recent in Colombia. This focus is quite noticeable at the UN: creation of a vice-rectorship for research 6 years ago, project selection and budget allocation through extensive consultations within the university and definition of research agendas (*agendas de conocimiento)*, high priority given to research and excellence in the 2010-2012 development plan; however, in spite of this plan, the division of research funds is still mainly based on the allocation of money *per capita*. At the same time the UN can be proud of its high proportion of PhD level academics, compared to other Colombian higher education institutions, and the number of students engaged in doctoral programmes. The internal trend is very positive: the number of publications has increased; projects are now open to competitive funding, a coherent strategic plan for research has been developed in line with the overall development plan, research agendas cover several years.

We must also underline that the UN is the Colombian University that, by far, awards the majority of PhD degrees.

However, the development of research faces several challenges. It appears that at State level a well-defined research policy is lacking, no major trend is identified. Therefore the UN, and probably other Colombian universities, has difficulties aligning its own research policy with the needs of the country. In Annex X (p. 26) of the SER, the UN itself recognises that "it is necessary to define clear lines of research priorities for the university". In addition Colciencias, the national organ officially established as a Government department in 2009, distributes small scale grants. The large number of research projects at the UN (around 800) could raise questions about dispersion, quasi sprinkling, of resources and efficiency of research teams. It was explained that funding per projects is usually low, thus limiting the scope of a project; and also that the wide variety of teams and projects allowed the university to take advantage quickly of opportunities as they arise. In addition some subjects – e.g. mathematics or philosophy – require only one researcher on a project, but there seems to be too many small laboratories of uneven research quality. The UN could improve its opportunities by **pulling laboratory resources together** creating more synergies and also by **establishing its own research fund and offering seed money** in order to prepare new research projects.

In this area, also, bureaucracy places obstacles in the development of research when it comes to funding mechanisms and supplying research laboratories: a research data centre should be established, procedures need to be simplified, relations between campuses and central level could be streamlined. As Jamil Salmi (quoted by Natalia Ruiz, op. cit.) remarked, cutting edge research requires "appropriate governing characteristics that promote strategic vision, innovation and flexibility, and that enable institutions to make decisions and manage their resources without being hindered by bureaucracy".

Visibility needs to be improved too. The strength of research does not appear in the self-evaluation report. The research policy is not visible. Yet it appears that research at the UN is already very good considering the general situation in Colombia, although in international terms it is below the average impact, and it is probably quite visible within the country, where the UN does already excellent PR-work (see e.g. *UN Periódico* supplement in *El Tiempo* on

February 13, 2011). Efforts could concentrate on international visibility, with expanded collaborative research, and more publications in English. In terms of documents and citable documents Colombia occupies the 56th rank according to SIR 2011[4]. This ranking shows that in spite of the fact that the production of scientific papers has increased, they are, on average, not influential enough. The Team understands that for practical reasons, and considering the Colciencias rating scale, it is often more expedient to publish within Colombia. But the UN has a lot to gain by **increasing its international visibility**, therefore by **encouraging and supporting its researchers to publish in English**.

Finally, the UN could further improve its research, and make more use of its potential, by involving outside experts in the classification of projects, a common practice in OECD countries. And the university would make more thorough use of its resources, both human and financial, if it **identified areas of strengths and concentrated on these**.

2.4 Teaching and learning

Among its strong points the UN offers a wide choice of study fields, possibly the widest in Colombia considering the size of the institution and its mission. In fact, in various fields – examples were cited in architecture and in literature – some courses are offered only at the UN. Furthermore, the outlying campuses implement courses or syllabi in domains especially relevant to their geographical areas, in which they can develop their expertise, for example Amazonian forestry in Leticia (Amazon region) or sustainable development in relation to the natural resources of the archipelago in the Caribbean campus.

In terms of methods, according to the leading team the pedagogy is evolving towards a more didactic approach, the aim being to develop a capacity for analysis and initiative to enable students to become professionals who can think critically and assume responsibilities. While this commendable trend should be encouraged, the Team thinks that the teaching approach is still far from what in Europe is commonly understood under the Bologna ideas (moving the main focus from teaching to the learning process, supporting autonomous learning of students, observing learning outcomes and employability, supporting mobility of students and staff). Actual teaching methodologies still seem to remain fairly traditional. On the positive side, the Team notes the wide use of modern technologies, on site and for distance education with virtual education platforms.

As not uncommon in Colombia, and maybe South America in general, but unusual in Europe, the UN offers medical studies but has no university hospital. Until now the UN only has agreements with different hospitals in Bogota – as many as 230 agreements, which means a huge number of bureaucratic procedures and practical hurdles for individuals involved. The university has bought land and has now the conditions to establish its own hospital. It is

---

[4] In the SIR 2011 the UN is #56 (#25 of Latin American Universities): the most significant figures are CI (international cooperation papers): 40.7% but 2% lower than in the previous ranking/ CCP 0,60 meaning that UN is cited 40% less than the world average.

hoped that this project can be finally completed, to make medical studies more integrated and more coherent.

For various reasons – e.g. failing a grade, temporary dropout for lack of financial resources, changing field of studies, organisational problems of the study offer, need to work and study at the same time – the actual length of studies extends well beyond the designed length of 4 to 5 years at undergraduate level, and similarly for the designed length at post graduate level. Via the *bienestar* services, the university is already providing remedial educational support to some students, with positive results. However the Team doubts that the current measures will be sufficient to reduce significantly the length of studies. The UN is encouraged **to pursue a thorough analysis of the factors that influence the actual study time and to devise additional measures to reduce the length**.

Another area which could be improved is that of **foreign language as standard requirement of studies**. English in particular is necessary for international mobility and in research for documentation, publishing, and international cooperation. In fact foreign language teaching along with internationalisation of the curriculum and expansion of mobility should be reinforced by a policy of internationalisation (see below).

The staffing situation is examined below under human resources. But in terms of teaching resources one notes that **there are not enough academics** to cover all the teaching needs. This may lead to cancellation of courses, or a high turnover of teaching staff, hampering continuity of studies for undergraduates; some of them pointed it out as a problem in their studies. Post graduate students are sometimes assigned to carry a teaching load. While this is common practice in many universities worldwide, at the UN this also appears to be a deliberate measure to respond to the need for more doctoral level staff. Students may thus carry loads that prevent them from doing their own research. Besides, this approach contributes to the turnover of teaching staff. Unfortunately no satisfactory solution can be foreseen for the near future, but **this concern should remain high on the university agenda for improvements**.

A shift from undergraduate to postgraduate level studies appears to be taking place: according to the figures in the annexes to the SER, the number of undergraduates declined while the number of postgraduates increased between 2005 and 2009, which means that **more resources – new or reallocated – need to be defined for postgraduate education**. This trend has to be seen in parallel with the fact that the UN is training a high percentage of the doctoral level academics for Colombian higher education.

2.5   Human resources

The UN has the highest percentage of academics and researchers of doctoral level among Colombian universities, and in fact many of its graduates form doctoral level staff of other universities. That percentage has steadily risen from 19% in 2005 to 31% in 2009 according to figures provided to the Team. The university gives high priority to constantly raising the level of qualification of its academic staff, by encouraging master level staff to prepare their

doctorate, for example. In recent years staffing policy has focused on increasing the number of doctoral level academics - but not so much on post descriptions. A detailed hiring procedure is in place, as well as an academic staff development policy.

Staffing problems arise from the fact that the government has imposed a freeze on hiring new staff in established Colombian universities, apparently in order to staff the expanding higher education system in newer institutions. The UN resorts to several only partially satisfying solutions to meet academic staffing needs: invite visiting foreign professors, but bureaucratic requirements complicate the invitation process or sometimes even prevent it from being carried out; assign teaching load to graduate students, but the load is sometimes too heavy and these students can no longer devote the necessary time to their research. As indicated above these compensatory measures are not always sufficient to meet the need to fill empty positions, thus courses may have to be cancelled, impacting negatively on study plans; and they carry with them a high turnover which leads to lack of continuity. Besides, there is a potential risk of endogamy with a policy of internal recruitment of academic staff, a problem which could be partially offset if external professors took part in the hiring committees. The UN leaders are well aware of the problems. They have devised several stop-gap measures for which they deserve encouragement. But **what may be needed is a more pro-active hiring policy without too many bureaucratic obstacles**.

More difficulties appeared for middle level administrative staff, perhaps related to the freeze on hiring. Several categories of employment co-exist, one of them "provisional" on short term contracts. This is common practice everywhere to meet temporarily unmet needs. However at the UN it appears that a large proportion of administrative staff falls into that category (nearly 50%) with short term contracts renewed over and over again over long periods of time. Ten years of regularly renewed 3 months contracts is not uncommon according to some interviewees. In addition, hiring and promotion procedures did not appear clear to those concerned, skills improvement opportunities seemed at times incoherent, and working loads were perceived as increasing while administrative staff numbers were decreasing. Under those conditions there is danger of demotivation on the part of these staff members. Already a sense of frustration could clearly be perceived. **Every opportunity should be taken to give more permanent contracts** to these persons. Staff development was available for all administrative staff, but **mainly** as training for the implementation of SIMEGE. While some resistance may arise to using a new system which requires a different way of thinking about one's work, hopefully SIMEGE will eventually relieve the pressure of cumulative administrative tasks.

Two more points deserve mentioning.

The mere mention of unions seemed to raise the fear of politicisation, a sensitive issue. There are however some complaint and recourse mechanisms. The Team did not have the opportunity to study these mechanisms but trust that they are known and effective when needed.

No gender policy seems to be in effect in the university. Although the UN hosts a higher proportion of males – contrary to many European universities, there are twice as many male students as female students, and the ratio is even more skewed for academics – gender

equity did not emerge as an issue. The Team realises that there are cultural and societal issues affecting the gender balance of the applicants to the UN, but encourages the UN to take action in promoting equality in society, according to its mission. If the current international trend affects Colombia in the future, the UN will have to examine what measures could be taken to start correcting the gender imbalance and devise actions to attract more female students. **The university could anticipate by setting up a study group**, as it has done successfully for other issues.

In summary, the UN can be complimented for its efforts to raise its academic staff qualification level and for the level of success already reached along this line. The middle level administrative staff experience difficulties and frustration that need attention. In particular, the university should try to reduce the proportion of "short term" temporary staff and to grant them longer term contracts whenever possible. The UN would benefit from a well developed overall human resources policy.

2.6   Students

UN students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, a high percentage (80%) of them from the less privileged 1 to 3 economic levels of society. This reflects the university's responsibility towards the Colombian society. It is a source of strength: students in particular appreciate the varied social environment. It is interesting to note that students have developed a strong sense of membership to the Universidad Nacional, the "Nacional", over the particular campus they attend. This also stems from a feeling of belonging to an elite, being among the 8% to 10% few to have been accepted from the large pool of candidates who already represent a certain selection.

On another hand this wide range implies greater support for students coming from underprivileged backgrounds: scholarships, other financial support, tutorials; these are all part of the welfare policy although this does not seem to be uniformly applied. In this area again the bureaucracy places obstacles on the path of efficient functioning: the Team was given examples of delays in scholarship payments, or availability of diplomas which affects foreign students as well. Most student grievances focus on lack of or poor communication of information and on all the bureaucratic hurdles that can lead to Kafkaesque situations.

Students unions are usually part of European and most other countries' universities, but no such association is established at the UN. While they have a number of specific grievances, the students that the Team met seemed to feel that they belong to an elite, that they have the benefit of good teaching staff and the best education available in the country; they did not show particular interest in a union. There is student representation though, chosen through a democratic election process and at least one student representative sits on each department, faculty, campus or university council. These representatives take their responsibilities to heart, but sometimes function under difficult conditions. Student representation is inscribed in the university statutes. However these statutes make only scant mention of any formal organisation of this representation, thus reducing the efficiency of its impact and hindering the use of facilities to which any organised structure is entitled.

The Team recommends that the UN monitors the smooth and equal implementation of the welfare policy measures, includes in the statutes of the representation of students a formal structure, provision for a specific budget, for permanent location and for the use of facilities so the mission can smoothly be discharged. It recommends also the installation of an ombudsman for mediation and solution of conflicts and complaints.

The Team encourages all members (authorities, staff, students) to pursue on their path to making the UN a place for open dialogue and a learning space for peaceful democratic developments.

2.7   Internationalisation

Internationalisation as a policy choice is an essential element of successful higher education development. However it is one of the weakest points at the UN at the moment, partly because of a lack of government policy in this area. In 2005, Isabel Cristina Jaramillo wrote, "The Colombian university has traditionally looked inwards rather than explore new ways of working in an academic world without borders. Despite this, since the 1990s, the internationalisation process has expressed itself in diverse ways. A series of poorly structured activities have taken place that have not been guided by a planning process or by government or institutional policies, as internationalisation of higher education has received very little attention from the government. As a result, efforts have been inadequate and uneven. Colombia's higher education system has not been fully integrated into the global context, and its actors have not internationalised the nature of the process."[5] This may still be the case. The implementation of the Development Plan 2010-2012 reflects this weak point: internationalisation is one of the 6 lines of action, which highlights the importance now given to it, but of these 6 action lines internationalisation is by far the least implemented.

With the *Oficina de Relaciones Internacionales e Interinstitucionales* (ORI) the UN is trying to change this situation and in fact aims to gain more international visibility. ORI is working on developing a strategic plan, taking various dimensions of internationalisation into account: mobility programmes – students, teachers, incoming, outgoing – language policy, content of curricula, joint study programmes, double degree programmes, collaborative research, conference attendance, membership in higher education organisations, and others. Statistics show that agreements for international and inter-institutional cooperation have significantly increased in the last ten years, with a peak in 2009.

---

[5] Isabel Cristina Jaramillo (2005) in Hans de Wit, Isabel Cristina Jaramillo, Jocelyne Gacel-Avila, Jane Knight (editors) « Internationalization of Higher Education in Colombia" in *Higher Education in Latin America: the International Dimension,* World Bank, p. 174 accessed 21 June 2011, http://books.google.fr/books?hl=fr&lr=&id=sO7HcEtCJZUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=World+Bank,+internationalization+of+higher+education&ots=BcRh2l--MW&sig=Gq92wYPRG7Mul0Q4KgGHcfsOuOM#v=onepage&q=World%20Bank%2C%20internationalization%20of%20higher%20education&f=false

While there is definitely a positive trend in the development of internationalisation, some problems remain at the implementation level. According to several interviewees information concerning conferences and supportive programmes such as DAAD is not always available, or easily accessible, extensive paper-work is required, long delays occur frequently; some students actually gave up on mobility programmes for going abroad because of the difficulties in meeting all the procedural requirements. Again, the bureaucracy impacts negatively on proper functioning. Students and staff should be advised and assisted with respect to visas, travel arrangements and visits to foreign countries.

It is **recommended that the UN pursues its positive trend and continues to develop internationalisation in its various aspects**. It is also highly recommended **that the UN implements as soon as possible all the measures that do not require a policy decision**, such as intensified dissemination of information, speeding up internal procedures, eliminating or at least reducing bureaucratic obstacles, further encouraging the study of foreign languages, internationalising curricula, encouraging publications in English, and others.

2.8   Quality assurance

CNA has granted the UN institutional accreditation for 10 years; the UN is the only Colombian university to be accredited at this level, for which it must be congratulated. This is already an indication of the high quality of the education offered within the country, although not all programmes are accredited yet; the process has started but is not completed yet, and new programmes need to wait until the first wave of students graduate.

The UN has put in place a number of quality assurance measures: entrance exams, the steps involved in hiring procedures, research project selection process, remedial support mechanisms for students. Course evaluation takes student questionnaires and faculty evaluation into account. However the Team heard that the results were not published and apparently not used. It seems that the University has a good documentation of its activities but it is not clear how the collected data influence strategic decisions. Therefore it is **recommended to define clear procedures and actions following the evaluation process and the collection of data**.

Some shortcomings concern selection procedures for research projects and hiring procedures. To give more weight, possibly even more relevance to UN research, to increase the institution's reputation in this area, international experts should be part of the research projects selection process. For hiring, the current procedure does not include academics from other higher education institutions; thus the process is not transparent and there is a risk that it may increase endogamy.

The SIMEGE can contribute to and reinforce the quality of all the university activities by streamlining procedures and avoiding redundancies. It is a major tool to expand a quality culture, thus it should be carefully implemented as no doubt the university is already doing.

3 – Recommendations and conclusions

3.1   Summary of recommendations

This section only regroups the key recommendations, by topic covered in this report.

Governance and structure:

- Continue implementing SIMEGE with confidence

- Clarify the organisation structure and avoid redundancies caused by duplication of services in campuses, faculties, schools

- Remain vigilant about the *Consejo Superior* composition, try to enlarge representation if and as soon as it becomes possible

- Extend the term of the Rector and of other executives to more than three years

- Increase the length of the period covered by the development plan

- Elaborate a mid-term plan with action lines and priorities, and include input from external stakeholders

- Harmonise the communication systems, make full use of their possibilities to reinforce horizontal and vertical internal communication

- Strengthen the university corporate identity while respecting each campus's specificity

Funding and finance

- Use full costing for all cost evaluations

- Eliminate duplication and unnecessary bureaucratic requirements

- Adopt a rolling budget approach and extend budget planning to several years

Research

- Increase the visibility of research results

- Identify areas of strength and concentrate research efforts on these

- Use synergies by pulling some laboratory resources together

- Encourage publishing in English

- Include foreign experts in the project selection committees

Teaching and learning

- Carry out without delay the plan to build a university hospital

- Analyse factors that impact on the length of studies and devise additional measures to shorten it

- Make the study of a foreign language a standard requirement

- Internationalise curricula

- Define more resources for post graduate level

- Ensure continuity of studies by minimising cancellations of courses and changes in study schedules

Human resources

- Define a policy and measures to ensure that the results of course evaluations are known and serve further improvement

- Extend staff development programmes and try to give more permanent contracts to administrative staff

- Develop a gender policy (for students as well)

- Devise a more pro-active hiring approach within an overall human resources policy

Students

- Monitor a smooth and equal implementation of welfare policy measures

- Include in the statutes a specific reference to establishing a formal structure of student representation with the right of budget and use of facilities

- Open a space for dialogue to facilitate democratic activities

- Establish an ombudsman "protector of the university community" position

Internationalisation

- Continue to develop and intensify internationalisation in its various aspects

- Implement, as soon as possible, measures that do not require policy decisions: increase assistance for mobility programmes, extend foreign language practice, encourage publishing in English

- Define a strategy for international institutional collaboration

Quality assurance and quality culture

- Define clear procedures of action as follow up to the evaluation process and collection of data

- Ensure a systematic implementation of the SIMEGE.

3.2   Conclusion

The IEP evaluation aimed to help the Universidad Nacional de Colombia identify avenues for further development on its path to improvement. Thus the Team has pointed out a number of weaknesses or problem areas. In fact the strategic analysis included as a preamble to the development plan represents a sort of self-evaluation: it has already identified several of the problems mentioned in the present report and, in part, is the basis for the planned action lines. The most significant of these problem areas is that of an almost paralysing and wasteful bureaucracy.

However, the Team considers that the various shortcomings described should not distract from the fact that the UN offers very good education and research activities, and **compares favourably with many public European universities**. It fulfils missions of excellence and outreach to all parts of the country. It offers some unique features. All its members exhibit a strong sense of membership. The different actions undertaken in the last decade to develop research, internationalisation and to improve management demonstrate that this institution has the capacity to change as needed or even to anticipate and be proactive. With its eight campuses, the UN has a major impact on the development in Colombia, in their geographical regions. Its forte is the highly motivated members of its community: the leaders, academics, students, and administrative staff.

The Team would like to state our total agreement with the objectives of the UN, as they are expressed in the mission, and all aspects of its social responsibility and the education of students. We agree that a student has the right to a complete education that does not ignore his/her responsibility towards the society in which he/she lives. The mission is "to bring up free citizens and promote democratic values of tolerance and commitment to civil duties and human rights" and to educate future citizens in a spirit of democratic citizenship. We spoke to more than a hundred students who, for the most part, prove that they have assimilated this spirit. Certainly the UN has contributed to this very positive attitude. We hope that the changes underway will not overlook this important part of the university mission, especially at a time when in many parts of the world violence replaces dialogue, and the violation of human rights occurs.

We trust that the development and improvement process that the UN has undertaken will not end with this institutional evaluation. Hopefully this evaluation will help the Universidad Nacional de Colombia on its path towards improvement, to reinforce its areas of excellence, to determine priorities, aiming for high quality and wide international visibility.