

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Szeged. The evaluation took place in 2014, with two site-visits in March and April 2014.

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 IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

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 the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 University of Szeged’s profile

The University of Szeged (USz) is a comprehensive university offering a broad range of academic programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels as well as higher level of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). While the university’s history dates back to 1581, it has undergone several significant changes over the centuries and was created in its present form in the year 2000. In 2007, the Albert Szent-Györgyi Clinical Centre, previously owned by the local government, was integrated into USz, following national reforms of the health care system.

USz is a public university situated in Hungary's third-largest city, Szeged, in Csongrád County. According to the documentation provided, USz caters for the whole Southern Great Plain

region, the largest region in Hungary. Szeged is near to the Romanian and Serbian borders which provide good opportunities for the university to attract students of Hungarian origins in the two neighbouring countries.

The university buildings and faculty facilities are dispersed across the centre of Szeged but within walking distance of each other, except for the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences which is located 25 kilometres away, in Hódmezővásárhely.

It is active in teaching, research and other activities across a broad range of academic fields, with Faculties of Law and Political Sciences; Economics and Business Administration; Medicine; Pharmacy; Dentistry; Health Sciences and Social Studies; Arts; Teacher Training; Agriculture; Engineering; Science and Informatics; and Music. Its research activities are organised in 19 doctoral schools where fundamental, applied and experimental research, technology transfer, innovation, scientific management and other research in support of education are carried out.

USz is the fourth largest university in the country (based on the number of students). In the academic year 2013/2014, USz enrolled 23 697 students, out of which 2 369 are foreign students who carry out their studies in French, English, German, Italian or Hungarian (i.e. for Romanian and Serbian students of Hungarian origin). The Faculty of Science and Informatics was reported as having the largest student population, with 22.83% of all USz students, followed by the Faculty of Arts (15.14%), the Faculty of Teacher Training (13.93%), the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences (11.8%) and the Faculty of Medicine with 10.47%. The smallest of the 12 faculties is the Faculty of Music with 1.03% of the USz student population – 244 students were enrolled in 2013. With regard to international students, the faculties registering the highest rates (related to the percentage of the whole student population of the given faculty) in the academic year 2013/2014 are the Faculty of Medicine (43.31%), the Faculty of Dentistry (42.62%) and the Faculty of Pharmacy (15.85%).

According to the USz self-evaluation report (SER) and annexes, the university counted a total of 2 184 part-time and full-time teaching staff (including also teachers other than the academic teaching staff e.g. language teachers, physical training teachers, teachers at the Sagvari secondary school of the USz) in the 2012/2013 academic year. Of the total number of academic teaching staff, 70% held a scientific degree (PhD, DLA and DSc) in 2012. The team was told that holding a scientific degree is a fundamental requirement only for the tenured positions.

The student/teacher ratio for the academic year 2013/2014, as shown in the documentation provided, averaged 9.38 across USz. There were, however, significant differences between faculties, ranging from 3.70 (Faculty of Music) to 26.95 (Faculty of Engineering).

USz's income is derived from government funding (22.06% of the total budget), student fees, research grants and other earned income – i.e. income from patient care. Representatives of the university leadership pointed out that the government funding had been significantly cut over the past two years, i.e. by 27% without counting the inflation rate. However, the team found evidence of strong financial management clearly focused towards increasing the efficiency of expenditure and attracting new sources of income, which provides confidence for the future of the institution.

USz received state recognition from the Hungarian National Assembly (HNA) and reports to (1) the Ministry of Human Resources responsible for the functioning of the national health care, education and welfare system in Hungary and (2) to the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), responsible for conducting external evaluations leading to the renewal of the national accreditation every 5 years.

As a public Hungarian university, USz abides by the provisions of the higher education legislation and the requirements of HAC but enjoys a certain level of autonomy with respect to managing its own budget, determining its training system, formulating its rules and regulations, setting up its organisational structure, establishing its curricula and educational and research methods for education, research, development and artistic creation, recruiting its staff and guarding the enforcement of the student and community rights (SER p. 6).

In keeping with IEP methodology, the evaluation report analyses the extent to which these objectives are met and proposes recommendations, while taking into account USz's specific context as reported by the university, in particular (1) the difficulties to accommodate several structural changes dictated by the dynamics of the economic and political environment while protecting the highly valued historical tradition; (2) the difficulty to attract new applicants, taking into account the recent legislative amendments leading to a significant decrease of state funded places; and (3) the demographic decline and the constant decrease of government funding which may, in the long run, jeopardise the university's financial stability.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group led by the USz Quality Manager. The group also included the following members:

- Professor Dr. Klara Hernadi, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Informatics;
- Associate Professor Dr. Marton Vilmanyi, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration;
- Associate Professor Dr. Zoltan Vajda, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts;
- Professor Dr. Mihaly Boros, Director of the Institute of Surgical Research, Faculty of Medicine;
- Petra Godor, Coordinator of Institutional Development, Directorate for Strategy and Development;
- Ervin Szollosy, Head of Purchase and Logistic Office, Business and Operation Management;
- Diana Kuk, student representative, Faculty of Arts;
- Zoltan Fabian, Head of Integrated Management System Quality Coordinator, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi Clinical Centre, acting as group secretary;
- Associate Professor Dr. Ildiko Csoka, Faculty of Pharmacy, acting as the chair of the self-evaluation group.

The SER prepared by the group was submitted for approval to a Self-Evaluation Steering Committee. The self-evaluation group mentioned that the process was a good opportunity to raise awareness of some institutional weaknesses and use the SER as a basis for further developing an improvement-oriented action plan. They also reported that the exercise

increased communication between the staff involved and led them to realise the importance of team work in an institution of this size. The team was told that the SER was based to a large extent on the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) 2012/2016 which was elaborated through the collective effort of the whole academic community and updated in 2013.

The evaluation team found the SER to be a comprehensive document and useful as a general presentation of the university, but largely based on existing documentation and lacking relevant quantitative data and self-reflection. This weakened the impact of the SER, which could have been used as an opportunity to analyse more profoundly the university through deeper self-reflection. Furthermore, it was the team's impression that the student input in this exercise was negligible and the findings of the SER had not been widely shared among the academic community.

The USz SER, together with the appendices, was made available for the evaluation team one month before the first site visit. The visits of the evaluation team to USz took place from 16-18 March 2014 and from 27-30 April 2014, respectively. In between the visits, USz provided all the additional documentation requested by the evaluation team.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Júlio Pedrosa, former Rector, University of Aveiro, Portugal, team chair;
- Juan Viñas-Salas, former Rector, Lleida University, Spain;
- Áine Hyland, former Vice-President, University College Cork, Ireland;
- Liliya Ivanova, Master student, University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria;
- Crina Moşneagu, Project Officer, IEP Secretariat, Belgium, team coordinator.

The team would like to thank the Rector, Professor Gábor Szabó, and his team for the warm welcome and hospitality and for the frank discussions during the visits to the university. Special thanks are due to Professor Ildiko Csoka, USz Quality Manager, for her valuable support, for the thorough preparation of the visits and for facilitating the team's work.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The SER presents USz's mission as "to perform academic work and to conduct research at an internationally competitive level, to be characterised as a prominent research university in Hungary." More importantly, the university strives "to become an intellectual, educational centre for areas inhabited by Hungarians outside Hungary", aiming to achieve "recognition and support from the local society and the public in broader terms." (SER, p. 7).

This chapter will present the governance and management of USz and will discuss the processes and the strategy set up to fulfil this mission.

2.1 Main structures and decision-making bodies at the university level

2.1.1 University decision-making bodies

The main university decision-making bodies at USz are the Senate, the rector and the Deans' College, which have the following main responsibilities:

- The university Senate is the supreme decision-making body of the institution with an all-encompassing representation of internal and external stakeholders. It is the forum where all university policies and strategies, ranging from academic to administrative issues (including budgeting and staffing) are discussed and decided. It is composed of 52 members which include: 24 representatives of the faculties (2 elected members per faculty), 6 representatives of the fields of science (5 elected by the Doctoral Council for each field and 1 elected by the Clinical Centre), 2 lecturers without leadership roles, 14 student representatives – one from each faculty, the president of the university student self-government and the representative of the PhD students, 2 representatives of the administrative staff and 2 representatives of the trade unions. In organising its work, the Senate created 19 standing committees dealing with specific economic, educational, academic and managerial issues. Monthly meetings are held and the topics discussed are those submitted for consideration by the faculties and other organisational units in a spirit of full involvement and democratic decision-making.
- The rector represents the institution, being responsible for its general management. He/she issues instructions and decides on appropriate measures in areas that do not fall under the responsibility of the Senate, as defined in the Organisational and Operational Regulations which act as the University Charter.
- The Deans' College, comprising the deans of the 12 faculties, meets every month, one week before the Senate meeting, and decides on issues to be brought to the attention of the Senate for further approval. Although rather an operational management structure, the Deans' College sets the framework for discussions and negotiations between faculties and has an important role in facilitating the Senate decision-making processes.

In addition, it is worth noting that the rector is nominated by the Senate, confirmed by the Minister of National Resources and inaugurated by the President of the State; he/she can be revoked by the Senate members with a two-thirds majority vote, provided that the 60% quorum is reached (Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, chapter III, sections 12 and 13).

The rector and the business and operation manager hold membership with voting rights in the Senate, by virtue of their office, with the Senate evaluating the managerial activities of the rector.

The rector organises monthly meetings with the members of the Deans' College in an attempt to steer cooperation and maintain a balance between the interests of different faculties, thus minimising possible conflicts of interest during the Senate meetings.

The monthly meetings of the Senate are also attended by permanently invited members in their advisory capacity, representing operational units at central level and various stakeholders, listed in the SER (p.11).

2.1.2. Operational governance and management structures

The university has a very complex organisational structure, both at operational and academic level. This is partly due to its highly valued and preserved historical heritage, and partly to provisions of the Law for National Higher Education prescribing the setting of certain units – i.e. the Social Council acting as an advisory board for the Senate and formed by representatives of local mayors, executives and other stakeholders, or the Economic Committee whose members, delegated by the state and the institution in equal proportions, have certain attributions in controlling the asset management and financial transactions at central level.

At operational level, the rector is assisted in his work by 4 vice-rectors (general affairs; education; science, research and innovation; foreign affairs and public relations) and by the head of business and operations management. They represent the university and substitute the rector on certain occasions when delegated to do so, for example, at various meetings and events, negotiations on specific matters in their areas of responsibility, etc. They are responsible for conducting, organising and supervising the overall activities in their specific area.

The vice-rectors, as well as the head of business and operations management are assigned with specific coordination duties in their respective areas, i.e. general affairs, education, research and innovation, foreign affairs and public relations, economy and finances.

The directorates, headed by a director, support the vice-rectors in their activity and control a complex and fragmented network of offices, institutes, councils and other units engaged in providing services for the university staff, students and other internal and external partners.

At the academic level, the university in its current organisation is a fairly young institution. A Governmental Decision was issued in January 2000 with the aim to restructure the system of state-funded institutions on a regional basis. The Decision set the framework for a significant

number of mergers, leading to a decrease in the total number of universities at national level while the number of faculties, schools and departments continued to rise.

The integration of several higher education institutions led to a complex structure with a certain tendency towards duplication of units and of work. The institution seems preoccupied to improve the coordination of institutional activities and to balance the share of internal tasks between the faculties and the central and service units (SER, p.8).

The university has 12 faculties, four of which are former colleges, one clinical centre and 19 doctoral schools. It was repeatedly emphasised during the interviews that the faculties enjoy financial, scientific, didactic and administrative autonomy. While the financial resources are allocated by the Senate, the faculties can decide independently how to spend their available funds and how to manage their own budgets. Research topics are chosen by the faculties but for bigger grants the applications are organised at university level through faculty collaboration.

The Faculty Council is the decision-making body at faculty level. The deans have both a scientific role and an executive management function, being responsible for education and research but also for coordinating the activities of different departments, ensuring the financial resources and the necessary facilities for teaching activities.

Faculties are divided into several institutes and departments which can also apply for grants independently and make use of the resources they attract provided that they return 40% of the overheads to the faculty. The departments are the smallest units and the criterion to form a new department is to have at least 50% teaching staff with a PhD diploma.

The decision-making process between the departments and the faculties is bottom-up:

- Issues are discussed during the department meetings;
- Decisions are taken by the heads of department and discussed at institute level;
- The decisions then go for approval to the Faculty Council which includes the heads of institutes, student representatives and elected members from the administrative staff;
- If necessary these decisions go up to the university Senate (i.e. on issues regarding the promotion of staff and accreditation).

Another cornerstone in the restructuring of the university was the integration of the Albert Szent-Gyorgyi Clinical Centre in 2007, following an agreement with the local government. The team was told that this was a political decision, taking into account reforms at national level and the reorganisation of the health care system.

The integration of the Clinical Centre gave the university access to the National Health Insurance Fund – one third of the university budget is financed through this fund. However, the clinic brought a significant deficit to the university's overall budget, posing a serious threat to its financial stability. As a consequence, the clinic's financial independence has been restricted, compared to other university structures, and the revenues and expenditure of the clinic are closely monitored by the USz financial officer.

Although part of the Faculty of Medicine, the Clinical Centre has a double subordination – the president of the clinic is one of the vice-deans of the Faculty of Medicine and is invited to the management meetings at faculty level. The president is also directly subordinated to the rector. He is nominated by the Council of the Clinic and approved by the rector. The Council's financial decisions are endorsed by the Economic and Financial Directorate at the level of the university.

2.1.3 Analysis and recommendations

The team notes that the rector provides strong leadership for an ambitious and successful university, mediating and stimulating the communication between the centre and the faculties in an effort to unify the institution and increase the efficiency of the decision-making process within the Senate.

While acknowledging this effort, it appears to the team that further actions can still be taken towards a deeper integration and a successful completion of the merger initiated 14 years ago. Presently, the university seems to be unnecessarily fragmented and layered, operating with a certain lack of articulation and adequate allocation of responsibilities between services provided centrally and those provided at faculty level.

Thus, the evaluation team notes the following:

- At central level, the Directorate for Research Development and Innovation could benefit, for example, from the merger of the Doctoral Council, the Scientific Council and the Habilitation Council into one single council with a broader area of responsibility.
- Reinforced capacity would be justified in the office for grants applications, currently lacking enough sufficient staff members assigned to provide the faculties with support during the application process with respect to content, and not only administration.
- The merger of the Media Centre with the Directorate of Marketing and Communication appears as another example of rationalisation at central level.
- The faculties seem to mirror the complexity of the central management structure although the organisation of their internal governing and operational units varies from one faculty to another. While it was sometimes difficult to understand the rationale underlying the internal structures of the faculties, the team was told that the preference for a high degree of fragmentation is linked to the idea of power – the more departments a faculty has, the stronger its voice within the university.
- Certain services provided at central level are sometimes duplicated at faculty level. Some faculties have their own offices or committees for grant applications and tenders, international relations, or career counselling. This also points towards the need for considering the rationalisation of such services as a priority area for action at all levels in the university. Such an action should be conducted with the aim of integrating structures comprising the institution's distinct levels of operation.

The team was repeatedly told that this complexity is partly rooted in the tradition and culture, and partly as a response to legislative requirements. Regardless of the cause, it is at the cost

of the university's effectiveness and efficiency. In fact, the very complex management structure at the operational level leads to inefficient communication between certain units and raises the question of clarity in the distribution of funds and human resources.

By law, the Senate has the power to decide on the further restructuring and merger of units across the university. However, a certain preference for maintaining a decentralised faculty system was expressed during the interviews, being perceived as a stimulus for competition and, consequently, for increased efficiency in the provision of services inter-faculty. At the same time, a vision for a university without borders, a "Schengen area at institutional level", was acknowledged as the right setting for promoting interdisciplinarity and for a better use of human and financial resources.

The team believes that it is of strategic importance for the university to seek greater clarity and to initiate a debate about its overall future organisational structure while keeping in mind the need to rationalise and strengthen some of the central organisational structures, enabling them to provide additional support, where required, at faculty level.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Enhance communication between the central and the faculty level, as well as across faculties.*
- *Reorganise and reinforce the central service units covering areas such as grants, knowledge transfer and innovation, international mobility, marketing and media, with the view to providing enhanced support to faculties, articulated with a similar reorganisation and reinforcement at faculty level.*
- *Accompany such developments by appropriate reallocation and re-training of staff.*
- *Initiate a debate about the overall future organisational structure of the university with the mind-set to seek greater clarity and explore every permissible path towards its simplification.*
- *Rationalise and strengthen the services provided across the university with consideration towards reaching a deeper level of cohesion, alignment in institutional mission and purposes, offering additional support where required at central and faculty level.*

2.2 Students' involvement in governance

The self-evaluation report explains that USz respects national legislation in relation to the students' involvement in the university and provides the following details:

- Students are present in the deliberative bodies and have a right to vote. They make up 25% of the Senate (p. 11). The proportion is maintained in the Faculty Councils, as indicated during the site visit meetings.
- Student representatives in the Senate are organised in the Student Self-Government Office and the PhD Student Self-Government Office.

- USz has a number of structures aimed at enriching its students' experience on campus, for example the Talent Point or the Scientific Students' Association that offers support for conference participation at national and international level (p.17). However, these are structures created at institutional level in line with the goal of fostering talented students, rather than associative student bodies.

The site visit meetings yielded additional information:

- Each faculty has a student union, whose members are elected by the student community in the faculty. The members of the student union elect their president who is delegated to represent the faculties in the Senate. Their mandate is renewed every year until graduation.
- The funding of the student association is determined by the state as a percentage of the university budget and thus could fluctuate from year to year.
- The student Self-Government Office is involved in the management of the dormitories and in the Senate's decision with regard to the system of criteria for awarding merit and social scholarships. It also brings forward to the university leadership any complaints that may be raised through the student unions.
- The members of the student self-government bodies feel involved in the decision-making process and reported to be treated as equal partners in the Senate debates.
- The results of the student satisfaction surveys are collected through the Student Self-Government Office.
- The Student Service Office set up at institutional level legitimates every financial decision of the student self-government.
- The student Self-Government Office has a special committee in charge of organising cultural events and other social activities for students.

The team acknowledges and commends the involvement of students in university governance and in university life. It also notes certain differences across faculties with regard to the level of satisfaction of the student community towards its leadership. While in some faculties the students are happy with the support they receive from the student union, in others they feel misrepresented but seem to lack the motivation to change the *status quo*. Complaints about the quality of the dormitories and other student facilities were mentioned on several occasions but when confronted with this, the members of the student self-government structures, although happy about their status of partner in decision-making, invoked boundaries and limitations to initiating an improvement.

In the context of a decentralised system with a high level of faculty autonomy, it is a question for the university to consider whether a certain lack of cohesion between the central level and the faculties also translates towards the students – between the student association at institutional level and the student unions at faculty level.

The team found, without exception, a very happy and enthusiastic student community, taking pride in their belonging to the campus. Increasing their sense of responsibility and nurturing the emergence of a stronger, more responsible student leadership can be but beneficial for the USz's further strategic development.

Recommendation:

- *In the overall debate about the future organisational structure of the university, consider the need for encouraging students' involvement, stimulate them to act collectively and strengthen their stakeholder role.*

2.3 Staffing

The SER shows that there are 1 563 full-time academic staff at the university of whom nearly 70% hold a scientific degree (SER, Annex 14). The total number of staff is fluctuant partly due to retirement and partly due to short-term project-based contracts remunerated from various funds. It was also mentioned that the number of lecturers/researchers at the individual faculties varies depending on the number of students and the specific educational activities that exist. The percentage of full-time lecturers/researchers is highest in the fields of Natural Sciences, Medicine and Arts.

15% of the university non-academic staff perform purely administrative functions but the interviews revealed that teaching staff are also involved to a considerable extent in carrying out administrative duties, sometimes more than 50%, especially in positions at senior level – i.e. in the management of central units (education, quality management, etc.)

The staff recruitment is carried out at the level of the faculties with the approval of the dean up to the beginning of the tenure track and, from then on, at university level with the approval of the rector. Full professor nominations are approved by the Senate and the files are reviewed by HAC. Their contracts are signed by the President of the State. A tendency towards inbreeding was noted by the team in that approximately half of the doctoral degree graduates of the university remain employed by USz (SER, p. 14).

The team observed that the staff was committed to their students and engaged in university decision-making, at least to the extent that staff members took part in different bodies and committees.

The university seems committed to the continuous training of staff and the development of their skills. As such, the staff is offered language courses at a reduced cost, management and other internal trainings, as well as support for attending conferences and study trips, especially at international level. In terms of staff mobility, the SER reports 647 outgoing academic staff in the period of 2012 – 2013 (SER, p. 14).

Relevant data with respect to teaching loads was not made available to the team, except for the limits set by the law. But the team notes that the large size of the university results in teachers being able to teach inside their speciality at different faculties, setting the premises for inter-faculty cooperation. Regardless of their teaching load, the academic staff seemed fully engaged in research across the university, with a high success rate in attracting research grants. Nearly 26% of the university funding comes from various tenders and research grants.

Heavy workloads and low salary levels were hinted at in several meetings but it remained unclear to the team what kind of incentive measures are in place at USz. In the context of limited government funding, USz is constrained to hire project-based staff, in full awareness of how its long-term planning and further strategic development may be affected.

Recommendation:

- *In striving towards long term strategic development, consider reducing the staff fluctuations and strengthening the core of permanent staff through an adequate system of incentives based on performance and further development opportunities.*

2.4 Funding

According to the SER, 22% of USz funding comes from the state and 78% from the university's own resources. It was reported that the state funding dropped significantly in recent years due to the economic crisis (by 27%, as pointed out in section 1.2) and was replaced to some extent by performance-oriented subsidies, i.e. excellence grants available through application.

The budget preparation and the management of investments are conducted at institutional level. The faculties manage their income and expenditure independently, except for the Clinical Centre (as noted in section 2.1.3). Following the integration of the Clinical Centre, the university can access an alternative state funding source – 35% of the funds come from the National Health Insurance Fund and approximately 13% come from the education fund. The salaries of nurses, young doctors and patient care staff are covered by the health fund while the salaries of teaching hospital doctors and senior academic staff are covered by the education fund.

The university proved to be proficient in coping with the decline of state funding, despite the significant deficit of the Clinical Centre that raised a serious threat for the USz overall budget as well as a challenge to its financial stability in the long-term. On the one hand, USz was able to avoid mass layoffs – from 2010 onwards the number of staff was reduced by 300 but in a subtle way, by suppressing the positions of staff reaching retirement age or else hired on a limited term upon completion of their contracts. On the other hand, the team found evidence of efforts made towards saving costs by introducing environmental and energy saving measures, i.e. the Green University project.

In terms of diversifying their resources, USz demonstrated being extremely efficient in attracting alternative funding. Apart from tuition fees and research and development activities, a large part of their funding derives from project activities and various grants that they were able to secure.

For example, the university successfully contracted a new grant of 40 million EUR for the re-organisation of the hospital. These funds will be invested in the modernisation of the infrastructure. However, it was highlighted by the university leadership that the operational optimisation of the clinic is still an important item on the priority list in order to prevent another budgetary deficit in the coming years. Aside from the operational optimisation, another pre-emptive measure that the team advises the university to consider is involving

medical staff in the implementation of the strategy chosen for achieving balanced financial results in the Clinical Centre.

The ratio of state-funded students compared to self-funded students varies across the university (i.e. at the Faculty of Arts the situation is 50% - 50%) and the annual tuition fees range between 1 000 and 1 500 EUR for Hungarian students, depending on the specialisation, while for international students the fees can go up to 7 600 EUR. The team was told that the distribution of students on sponsored places is merit-based and self-funded students can access sponsored places in future years, based on their results. Fee paying students may also receive some form of scholarship if they fulfil the criteria for social scholarships. Student credits are available with low levels of interest which is a national measure with the aim to ease the overall reduction of state-funded places.

The team learnt during the interviews conducted that the university receives the state funding based on its historical budget – taking into account the number of students, the number of permanent staff and non-permanent staff, and the cost of maintenance of the previous year. After retaining its share for overheads, USz redistributes the governmental subsidies while keeping the historical budget as a model of internal allocation. The financial result of the previous year and the number of students and teaching staff are taken into consideration when establishing the yearly budgets of the faculties. The calculation is carried out by the Business and Operation Management unit at university level and the budget is approved by the Senate.

From the institution's own resources a certain percentage is used to establish a fund at central level used to subsidise faculties that register a deficit due to special circumstances in certain years. The team finds noteworthy the solidarity among members of the academic community, who pointed out that operating in a challenging context in terms of financial and human resources pushes the faculties to work better together and increase the synergy across the university.

In the light of the analysis above, the team is concerned about the impact of such a serious decrease in public funding and commends the university for maintaining a positive financial balance at institutional level in spite of this reduction. The capacity of the university to mobilise additional funding from a variety of sources, especially research grants, is impressive.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Continue in its determination to ensure that balanced financial results are achieved by each and every unit.*
- *Involve medical staff in the implementation of the strategy chosen for achieving balanced financial results in the Clinical Centre.*
- *Pursue the dialogue with national authorities to guarantee the recognition of the value of the university's investment in finding additional resources and achieving balanced results.*

2.5 Institutional development plan

“The institutional development plan for the period 2012/2016 identifies 1 general goal, 4 specific goals and 24 main goals.” (SER, p. 8) In the additional documentation provided it is mentioned that these 24 main goals are further broken down into “71 objectives and 141 sub-objectives”.

According to this plan, USz’s general goal is to become “an internationally competitive institution that is sustainable, quality-oriented and closely linked to the local economy” (SER, p. 8). The four specific goals are directed to the four pillars on which USz’s distinct philosophy and ethos are built: education, research, health care and service to society (third mission). In addition, a list of 16 strategic goals is introduced in the SER (Annex 5). These are a combination of actions that reflect the university’s priorities in the four strategic areas (e.g. development of internationally competitive research fields) and are accompanied by performance indicators and targets to be met yearly during the validity period of the IDP. It was not made possible for the team to assess how the IDP further unfolds into main goals, objectives and sub-objectives.

The team learnt that this strategic document has a pre-determined structure and content, in compliance with the Ministry’s strict requirements. The team understood that two processes were in place to develop the IDP:

- An external process with the Ministry informing the institutions about the goals, timing and expected contents of the strategic plans;
- An internal process involving all relevant structures (faculties, directorates, organisational units) in which strategic goals are formulated and forwarded to the Directorate for Strategy and Development, centralised and submitted to the Senate’s approval.

While it is clear that USz is compelled to abide by this strategic plan in response to national regulations, the team notes the lack of yearly action plans at institutional level. Such plans seem to exist only as part of the faculty strategies, which may be another indicator for a certain lack of cohesion and coordination between the central level and the faculties, the latter also having distinct missions.

It was explained to the team that in the national context, the university has a double mission –to be a research university and a community university. Although a “University of National Excellence”, USz must strive to be inclusive. This is why, in maintaining their fitness for purpose, different faculties have different missions, and all the more so as some of the faculties are former colleges. In keeping distinct, specific missions for colleges, USz’s strategy is to encourage them to strive for excellence in what they already do well rather than setting overambitious goals.

The team acknowledges the usefulness of the IDP in stimulating the university to surpass itself. However, it invites the university to consider developing a tailor-made institutional strategy that can be explained in one or two pages, directly linked to the institution’s vision and mission, and integrated yearly action plans at institutional level.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Reinforce and strengthen the cooperation between and across faculties, building on existing synergies and good practices.*
- *Consider discussing and clarifying within the Senate the specific missions of faculties and colleges.*
- *Consider developing a tailor-made strategic plan directly linked to the institution's vision and mission and yearly action plans with specific objectives, clear milestones, conditions and timeframe to meet these goals.*

3. Teaching and learning

USz's objectives in education are set out in the institutional development plan and laid out as part of the four pillars supporting the university's general goal:

- "harmonise mass and elite training, exploit inter-faculty synergies and provide education at international standards, meeting the demands of both student and labour market";
- "increase the number of foreign students greatly by developing and improving the foreign language programmes" (SER, p. 7).

In terms of priorities set out in pursuit of these objectives, the SER notes (p.9) that USz aims to:

- Better exploit the potential of international cooperation and increase the number of joint degree or dual degree programmes with international partner institutions;
- Further develop training in the areas of Agricultural Sciences, Information Technology, Technical Sciences, Medical and Health Care, Pedagogical Sciences and Natural Sciences;
- Further enhance master and PhD level training;
- Focus on the student-centred learning and develop tools for fostering talented students;
- Further develop electronic tools in support of educational processes.

In keeping with these objectives, the evaluation team notes that USz is a university committed to quality and standards. It offers a large variety of study programmes and the small size of student groups translates into favourable staff to student ratio in many departments. The staff whom the team met appeared motivated and very caring. Students seemed happy and motivated and some of them choose to follow a 2nd degree (i.e. Faculty of Arts). They expressed satisfaction particularly because of their close link to their teachers. Flexibility in holding examinations or tutoring via Skype for certain subjects was also highlighted during interviews.

The university is making an effort to provide specific support to its most gifted students. As such the Scientific Students Association is listed as a facilitator for fostering talented students and provides support for conference participation. The Talent Point is a service created to encourage all students to reach better results and develop their talents. A List of Excellence is put together under the coordination of the Talent Point and in cooperation with the Szeged Council for High Ability in order to honour and reward the talented students with the most outstanding results. It should be noted that the team did not have the opportunity to meet any of these students and discuss their specific experience.

Student support services are in place: a career office for student counselling, the psychological and counselling centre and office for students with disabilities, the committee for securing equal opportunities among students.

Special attention is given to the implementation of modern tools and electronic platforms, given that USz offers a number of correspondence courses and Szeged is a campus city with faculties dispersed among different locations. The electronic tools seem to be well developed. The Uniform Student Administration System and the Coospace are platforms that provide a large training spectrum and examination procedures, online administration and publication of study materials, channels for student-student, student-lecturer and lecturer-lecturer communication. An on-line student secretariat at university level is in place through the Modulo electronic platform.

The university seems committed to develop the multi-linguistic skills of students. Courses in German, Italian, English and French are offered and the study programmes in foreign languages are equally open for Hungarian students. In developing its educational offer, USz also pays attention to the issue of interdisciplinarity through joint courses, cross-teaching, inter-faculty research groups and cross-faculty projects.

The team also notes ambitious projects for modernising the infrastructure. Aside from the modernisation of the hospital and the Biopolis Science Park (see sections 4 and 5), attention is given to maintenance of the faculty buildings and constant improvement of the learning facilities. Among these, a valuable asset of USz is the Klebelsberg Library, an impressive and modern facility opened in 2004, with holdings of nearly 2 million volumes, special collections, and areas for study with a capacity of over a thousand students. It was noted, however, that some infrastructures, such as dormitories and sport facilities require further improvement (see section 2.2.).

USz's strengths in teaching and learning can be further developed if proper attention is given to some significant weaknesses. First, the implementation of the Bologna reforms has not gone beyond the re-organisation of study cycles and the introduction of ECTS. The team could not find strong evidence of student-centred learning, adjustment of pedagogical methods or use of learning outcomes in the design and implementation of study programmes. In interviews with the academic staff the team was told that following national reforms linked to the introduction of the Bologna Process in 2006, competencies are set by the ministry and the institutions have limited flexibility to shape them in learning outcomes at university level. In pursuit of its internationalisation goals, the team advises USz to seek the right avenue towards deepening the implementation of the Bologna Process despite existing controversies related to the way the reforms have been carried out to date at national level.

Furthermore, despite the available student support services, the dropout rate in the first year seems to be high, although this depends on the discipline and study programme. As pointed out later on, in section 6, at least with regard to international students, this may be linked to procedures in place for student assessment. However, while efforts to pinpoint the reasons for dropout among international students are noted, the team did not grasp the same level of concern with regard to Hungarian students. The team advises USz to address the issue of the dropout rate because it is fundamental to its educational mission. The first step should be to document why students drop out and, second, to develop targeted solutions.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Further improve the infrastructure to enhance the experience of students in the university – e.g. sports facilities, dormitories.*
- *Develop strategies to address what appears to be a high dropout rate in some existing study programmes.*
- *Further implement the Bologna Process, namely student-centred learning, innovative pedagogical methods, learning outcomes, multi-disciplinary programmes and transferable skills.*

4. Research

USz's goals in research are set out in the institutional development plan and laid out as part of the four pillars supporting the university's mission, as follows:

- to become a determinant actor in knowledge management;
- to provide relevant scientific profiles matching the local economic demands;
- to perform multi- and interdisciplinary research at international standards.

Further to these goals, USz set the following priorities:

- R&D capacity improvement linked to Laser Physics – increase of publications and number of joint research projects with a partner organisation;
- Development of internationally competitive research fields and development of “missing” disciplines matching regional needs;
- increased number of joint research projects with partner organisations (from 26 currently to 32 in 2016).

Following these goals, USz accomplished a commendable series of actions, holding an impressive portfolio of research projects and initiatives for both fundamental and applied research. The team notes USz's attention towards enhancing existing partnerships and creating new ones as well as the very high rate of success in attracting research grants, accountable for a significant share of the university budget.

In support of the above, the following achievements and practices are noteworthy:

- USz was awarded the title of Research University of National Excellence and strives to maintain it. Basic and applied research activities at USz seem balanced. Major research fields are: neuroscience, laser application in diagnosis, biotechnology, medical diagnostic system, pharmaceutical substance development, phytochemistry, environment technology, science of substances.
- Applied research activity is significant and it raised up to 3.5 million EUR per year over the last three years.
- Currently, 46 patents have been registered, several of which are being utilised in practice via licence agreements and spin-off companies established for this purpose. Relevant examples are listed in the SER (p.18).
- A balance between independence for scientific research and centralised co-ordination was reported both at central level and at faculty level. Faculties can independently apply for grants and return 20% overheads to the university while the major grant applications are centrally coordinated. The Vice-Rector for Science and Innovation coordinates the research related activities within the university.
- A significant share of research is carried out by research groups in fruitful cooperation with the Hungarian Academy of Science (20 research groups in total out of which 12 are financed by the Academy).
- A great deal of emphasis is placed on customer-centred and result-oriented operations – i.e. joint research developed with private companies which have a special interest in exploiting the geodesic importance of the Pannonia Plane; targeted

support from the local administration: the Biopolis Park, aimed at facilitating the development of a strong basis for the emerging biotechnology industry in the region.

The team commends Usz for these initiatives and for its tenacity in reaching its set goals. However, further consideration might be given to certain aspects. As such, the team notes, in the light of the analysis set out in section 2, given the high level of faculty autonomy and the challenging financial context in which the university operates, there is a tendency for the faculties and the university as a whole to choose research topics and apply for grants driven by financial priorities, leading to opportunistic approaches when looking for additional funding. This may lead towards lack of sustainability in using certain equipment at the end of grant contracts and fluctuations in staff that hinder long-term planning. Furthermore, a strategic rather than an empirical approach towards research is an opportunity to foster increased interdisciplinarity and rationalise the organisation of doctoral schools, taking advantage of the potential of cooperative inter-faculty projects.

At the same time, in light of the multi-layered and highly fragmented academic structure, the question of efficiency in allocation of resources is raised again – laboratories, equipment, chemical substances could be better rationalised if consideration is given to developing a consolidated research strategy at institutional level.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Take a more strategic approach towards research.*
- *Rationalise and increase efficiency in using the research facilities – laboratories, special equipment and resources.*
- *Identify priority areas for stimulating interdisciplinarity to enable pro-activity in the approach towards financing opportunities.*
- *Review and rationalises the organisation of doctoral schools taking advantage of the potential for interdisciplinarity and cooperative inter-faculty projects.*

5. Service to society

USz's positioning with regard to its third mission is set out in the institutional development plan as follows: "to harmonise social and market knowledge transfer, by facilitating knowledge-sharing between the academic community and the local society."

As such, there are ongoing efforts to respond to local and regional needs through research activities, educational offers, knowledge transfer initiatives and some consultancy activities.

The university also offers a range of cultural activities through the USz Culture Office. Events such as "Visitors' Day" or "Researchers' Night" are regularly organised by the university, as well as open lectures for the local community in the framework of "University of All Knowledge" events. Another laudable initiative is the Green University Project, aimed not only at increasing USz's sustainability by introducing energy saving measures, but also at educating the local community towards becoming more environmentally friendly.

The team found strong evidence of strategic cooperation between the university and the Local Government of the City of Szeged – from small projects such as providing the local government with chemical substances to clean the graffiti paintings in the city to large investment projects such as the takeover of the municipal hospital, now the Albert Szent-Györgyi Clinical Centre of USz. At the same time, the municipality investment in research development projects was reported to raise up to 3 million EUR - i.e. the Biopolis Science Park (see section 4), or the investment in the infrastructure modernisation of the Clinical Centre, formally the municipal hospital.

Partnerships with private companies for applied research projects are worth noting (see Section 4). Equally, USz students and graduates are offered internships and seem to be appreciated by the local employers. The statistics provided to the team show that 75% of USz graduates, and with very little variation during the past 5 years, are integrated in the labour market within 3 months of graduation. However, a lack of managerial skills was reported during the team's meeting with stakeholders.

A dialogue between the university and the major stakeholders does exist but it was not clear to the team that the feedback of stakeholders regarding curriculum design is taken into account at USz. Personal relations seem to prevail in facilitating the various collaborations between USz and some external stakeholders.

The team noted an impressive engagement with Alumni networks involved in the private sector which can be further exploited. In keeping with the option of maintaining a different mission for the former colleges and stimulating them to strive at excellence in what they already do well (see Section 2), the team encourages USz to develop a coherent strategy with strong involvement of these colleges for the further development of the third mission through cooperation and joint projects with economic partners.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Further develop its third mission through cooperation and joint projects with economic, cultural and social partners based on a coherent strategy with strong involvement of colleges.*
- *Strengthen the involvement of external stakeholders in curriculum design and development, student placement and analysis of employability issues.*

6. Internationalisation

The internationalisation policy, which is clearly defined as a priority area in the SER, is centred on a high level of engagement across the university. USz was awarded the title of University of National Excellence in February 2013 for a three-year period and, in this capacity, it plays a more important role in meeting the national strategic objectives which place considerable emphasis on demonstrated excellence in international student mobility and position in international higher education rankings. Thus developing a strategy for internationalisation became a priority for USz as a means to preserve its title beyond 2016.

USz defines its mission with regard to internationalisation as “to carry out internationally competitive scientific and research activities”. The international dimension is incorporated in the four specific goals of the IDP (see section 2.5) laid out as strategic goals in the IDP for 2012 – 2016. With regard to education and research, the strategies are shaped towards gaining international recognition and, with regard to medicine and the third mission, the geographical position – in close vicinity to the Serbian and the Romanian borders – creates opportunities for providing cross-border medical care and expansion of technological transfer.

Although currently lacking a distinct strategy for internationalisation, specific objectives, targets and indicators are embedded in the IDP for this particular priority area. The extent to which these are fulfilled is monitored by the Directorate for Strategic Development. The Directorate for Foreign Affairs and Public Relations plays, however, a major role in carrying out all the activities related to internationalisation and maintaining the international relations of the university.

With regard to structures and initiatives offering support to international mobility and examples of engagement in line with this priority area, the team notes the following:

- Several units with various functions and roles in strengthening the international relations are set up at central level: the International Mobility Centre which is active in centralising opportunities offered by CEEPUS, Erasmus, Campus Hungary and other international organisations for the USz students, researchers, lecturers and administrative staff; the Francophone University Centre; the Confucius Institute; the Institute of International and Regional Studies; the Educational Centre for Foreign Students, the Institute for Communication in Foreign Languages.
- A number of materials, brochures, student guides and information about the educational offer are available in English on the USz webpage. However, the team believes there is room for further improvement, not only with regard to the information provided but with regard to the use of available communication tools as well. For example, the university is active on social media, which is a laudable initiative in the attempt of attracting more international students, but its information feed is limited to the Hungarian language.
- Priority support for the international mobility of teachers and non-teaching staff is provided from the university’s own resources and other programmes such as Campus Hungary and Erasmus. An international mobility fund is set up to provide matching

funds for outgoing students with an Erasmus grant and additional support for the students who received foreign scholarships or internships with partial financing.

- There is demonstrated effort to develop the educational offer for international students – there are 55 degree programmes in foreign languages at all levels in various fields. USz takes particular pride in its medical training provided in English and German. In addition, study programmes are offered in French, English, German, Spanish and Italian by other faculties, such as law and political sciences, economics and business administration, science and informatics, agriculture.
- Particular attention is paid to internationalisation in research. The membership in international scientific organisations and the involvement in international networks, participation in international conferences, research and development contracts with international partners, the number of international patents are monitored separately and used in adjusting the targets and specific objectives. Some indicators for international activity (publications, membership in editorial boards of international journals, study trips, etc.) are used as criteria in the assessment and promotion of the academic staff.
- The Institute of Communication in Foreign Language is where courses of English, French, Latin, German, Italian, Russian, Romanian and Spanish are offered to students, researchers and lecturers of the university, in order to prepare them for effective internationalisation of activities. In this context, the teaching staff is incentivised to pursue such courses and develop their language skills.
- The establishment of an International Admission Office is planned to be set up in 2014 to support foreign students attending USz for various lengths of time.

The team commends the USz for these initiatives and encourages it to continue channelling its efforts in this direction. Based on the documentation provided, the team also notes USz's self-awareness with regard to the areas which require further development, in particular with respect to building a harmonised internationalisation strategy at institutional level. As pointed out in Section 2, a certain dissonance and lack of coordination between the centre and the faculties may also arise with respect to internationalisation. Some faculties act as drivers for internationalisation while others are less active in this regard. Given their autonomy, there are differences and variations with respect to data collection and monitoring systems between faculties, which may hinder the assessment of international activities at institutional level. Setting up a centralised information management system would ease the university's efforts towards monitoring its progress, reaching and reshaping its internationalisation goals.

In terms of mobility, USz reported a total of 341 outgoing students and 227 outgoing academic staff in the academic year 2012/2013, out of which the Erasmus mobility has a share of 96.48% for both students and academic staff. The number of Erasmus partner universities has increased steadily over the years, reaching 408 in the academic year 2012/2013, while 817 bilateral agreements were registered in 2013, with the Faculty of Arts holding the highest share (26%). With respect to incoming mobility, USz recorded 253 incoming students in the academic year 2012/2013 out of which 92% are Erasmus students. In 2013/2014, 10% of the USz students are reported to be foreign students.

In the statistics provided by USz, the team notes the constant increase of mobility over the last three years as well as the rising trend in the number of degree programmes offered in a foreign language and commends the university for its proven tenacity in keeping the targets set. Moreover, in its efforts to enhance the internationalisation at home, USz reported to invite guest lecturers from foreign universities on a regular basis (Institutional Self-Evaluation in Internationalisation Report, p. 94). However, the team was told that the differences between wages in Hungary and abroad stand out as a serious challenge in employing international teaching staff.

The team also notes a certain imbalance between the incoming and outgoing mobility and recommends that USz should analyse the differences and address the barriers which have contributed to this imbalance. In this regard, it is the team's opinion that a fuller implementation of the Bologna Process, as recommended in section 3, will facilitate greatly the further development of internationalisation.

Furthermore, it was pointed out to the team during the interviews that in some faculties the examination is very strict for international students who are forced to repeat a year if they do not pass a threshold of 70% out of the maximum mark. This may be linked to the fact that USz reported an increased trend of migration fraud in the past years, having to deal with a number of applicants who are more interested in obtaining a student visa than following the study programme for which they applied. Regardless of the cause, the team encourages USz to monitor and analyse the causes leading to dropout among international students, an initiative already taken on board by the International Mobility Centre, and use the collected data to streamline the applicable regulations and procedures with regard to recruitment and examination, where deemed necessary.

Overall, the team finds USz to be successful in keeping with its internationalisation goals among which a high priority is given to attracting more and better prepared international students. The efforts to expand the geographical area of coverage of the partnership agreements beyond Europe – in Asia, Latin America, USA, Canada and Africa are laudable and contributed to a 20% increase in the number of foreign students in the past years. Initiatives to organise international conferences and to invite guest foreign lecturers show USz's openness towards fostering internationalisation at home. This success is endorsed by the students, who perceive USz as "a melting pot" of various cultures, which they highlighted during the interviews as one of the reasons for choosing to study in Szeged.

The team also notes USz's high degree of self-awareness with regard to the areas where further improvement is needed, which are very well explained in the Institutional Self-Evaluation in Internationalisation report which was provided to the team after the first site-visit. In addressing a number of weaknesses identified in this report, the team believes that building a distinct internationalisation strategy, aligned with the IDP main goals, would stimulate the inter-faculty dialogue and increase the cohesion at central level and the cooperation in finding answers to questions such as: *Why internationalise? Which are the geographical targets? Which are the topics? How to secure a competitive advantage in the region? How to develop research capacity through internationalisation? Who should lead these developments and how to monitor them? What language policy would support this*

internationalisation strategy? In building up such a strategy, USz could seize the opportunity to identify specific areas where the educational offer and international partnerships can be developed further in order to secure the university's uniqueness in the country and withstand the competitors in the region – i.e. a programme for Higher Education Policy and Management at MA and PhD level.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Analyse the differences between incoming and outgoing Erasmus students and address any barriers which have contributed to the imbalance in Erasmus mobility.*
- *Further develop the information in English targeted at incoming students and make better use of available communication tools to attract international students.*
- *Develop an internationalisation strategy that would increase the synergy and the coordination between the centre and the faculties in reaching the internationalisation goals.*

7. Quality culture

USz's mission with regard to quality is defined in the SER as "to become an internationally competitive institution that is sustainable, quality-oriented and is closely linked to the local economy" (SER, p.8). In fulfilling its mission, USz has in place a quality management system designed to monitor achievement of the strategic goals, assess the operational efficiency of the institution and identify strengths and areas for improvement. As such, the team notes the following processes and structures:

- An Office for Quality Improvement at central level and committees of quality control at faculty level.
- A set of regulations regarding the quality assessment methods which define all areas of operations.
- The systematic review of strengths and weaknesses serves as basis for the design of a Quality Improvement Programme at university level.
- A Department of Internal Audit within the Rector's Office which checks the compliance of the internal systems of control with all the laws and regulations as well as their cost effectiveness and efficiency.
- Specific indicators for monitoring the achievement of strategic objectives.
- Online staff satisfaction surveys among teaching and non-teaching staff; the results are analysed by the Quality Improvement Office and disseminated at faculty level through the Quality Policy Committee.
- Student evaluation of teaching staff which involves the evaluation of the content and methodology of work performed by the teaching and pedagogical staff. The surveys are carried out by the faculties and for each course.
- Satisfaction surveys among active students are performed bi-annually and collected electronically by the Students' Service Office and the Quality Improvement Office at university level. The results are analysed by a professional research team and are shared with the faculties through the Quality Policy Committee and via internal platforms of the university. Recommendations for the methodological improvement of the process are included in the feedback.
- A graduate career tracking system has been in place since 2004 (SER, p. 23). The team was told that this was further developed in response to national requirements in 2010. The data provided show that the employment rate of the USz graduates in 2013 was 85% at university level, with some variations at faculty level but the response rate did not exceed 20%.
- Some of the central service units (i.e. Business and Operation Management, the Clinical Centre, the Klebelsberg Library) operate on the basis of ISO 9001 standard and have their system certified. The university intends to align the ISO-based systems operating in the service units, harmonise and adapt them to the institutional model.
- An institutional self-evaluation is carried out every three years following an external requirement of HAC.
- The Plan – Do – Check – Act (PDCA) cycle is reported to be functional, in the sense that the results of the development programmes (IDP and Quality Improvement Programme) are evaluated in the Annual Management Reports and the conclusions

are communicated back to the sites of operation, thus closing the feedback loop and triggering improvement actions and procedures for change.

While the team commends USz's commitment to consolidate and develop structures and processes for quality management and quality assurance, it did not gain the impression of shared ownership for the policy, strategy, system and processes adopted or that a quality culture is embedded in the university. In this respect, the team notes the following:

- Although ISO 9001 norms are possibly a sound choice for the quality assurance of the university's support and administrative activities, they may be less suitable for core educational processes in teaching and learning and in research.
- The response rate to student satisfaction surveys is rather low: 2% – 3% for electronic surveys and about 70% for paper-based surveys. Students reported that they are not aware of the way that the results are used and whether they lead to improvements. Many of them pointed out the availability of their professors to discuss and address problems directly.
- It is not clear if the results of staff evaluations are integrated into salary or promotion discussions, and whether performance incentives are offered based on these surveys.
- USz clearly lacks a unified and coherent data management system at central level. The faculties use their own systems for data collection and monitoring which may work efficiently at faculty level but are not always compatible and do not return relevant results at institutional level. This not only hinders the data analysis at central level, but it also casts some doubt on the extent to which the aggregated results of surveys and evaluations are fed back into the university strategy and operational plans.
- While there is a good communication between the Office for Quality Improvement at central level and the quality units set up at faculty level, there is a clear need for additional reinforcement of the human resources in the central office to facilitate further harmonisation of the quality assurance system and processes in place across the university.
- Further improvement may be considered to develop user-friendly tools and processes for quality assurance (QA) – i.e. relevant questionnaires and which are easy to understand. Equally, explaining how survey results are used not only top-down, in the implementation process, but also bottom-up in the decision-making at institutional level, may increase participation and ease the harmonisation of the QA system across the university.

Recommendations:

The team recommends that USz:

- *Consolidate and further develop the quality assurance system and strategy which have been established in the university; develop user-friendly QA tools and processes.*
- *Consider further initiatives towards fostering an embedded quality culture – close the feedback loops by incorporating the results of surveys and evaluations into the*

university strategy and operational plans and explain to the extended academic community how this contributed to generate further improvements.

- *Establish an efficient, coherent and relevant management information system across the university at central level.*

8. Conclusion

USz is a University of National Excellence, an institution with a long and rich history, with a clear and ambitious mission which it is highly committed to achieve. Its strong leadership is determined to maintain and reinforce the university's capacity and attractiveness.

The team notes that the evaluation was performed at a time of significant legislative changes when many activities in terms of governance and strategic planning were frozen in the wait of new regulations. Regardless, the team hopes that the analysis presented in this report will help USz to build on its strengths and consolidate its position and reputation at the international level. Moreover, it hopes to be a useful instrument in its dialogue with the national government, for stressing the fact that in spite of significant public financial cuts the university has succeeded in achieving balanced financial results while at the same time maintaining its academic and scientific standards. Furthermore, the team acknowledges that there is a need for a stable legal framework, reinforcing institutions' capacity for having autonomous and accountable governance, and for a level of staff remuneration which will make the universities in Hungary attractive in the labour market.

Summary of recommendations:

- Enhance communication between the central and the faculty level, as well as across faculties.
- Reorganise and reinforce the central service units covering areas such as grants, knowledge transfer and innovation, international mobility, marketing and media, with the view to providing enhanced support to faculties, articulated with a similar reorganisation and reinforcement at faculty level.
- Accompany such developments by appropriate reallocation and retraining of staff.
- Initiate a debate about the overall future organisational structure of the university with the mind-set to seek greater clarity and explore every permissible path towards its simplification.
- Rationalise and strengthen the services provided across the university with consideration towards reaching a deeper level of cohesion, alignment in institutional mission and purposes, offering additional support where required, at central and faculty level.
- In the overall debate about the future organisational structure of the university, consider the need to encourage students' involvement, stimulate them to act collectively and strengthen their stakeholder role.
- In striving towards long-term strategic development, consider reducing the staff fluctuations and strengthening the core of permanent staff through an adequate system of incentives based on performance and further development opportunities.
- Continue in its determination to ensure that balanced financial results are achieved by each and every unit.
- Involve medical staff in the implementation of the strategy chosen for achieving balanced financial results in the Clinical Centre.
- Pursue the dialogue with national authorities to guarantee the recognition of the value of the investment of the University in finding additional resources and achieving balanced results.

- Reinforce and strengthen the cooperation between and across faculties, building on existing synergies and good practices.
- Consider discussing and clarifying within the Senate the specific missions of faculties and colleges.
- Consider developing a tailor-made strategic plan directly linked to the institution's vision and mission and yearly action plans with specific objectives, clear milestones, conditions and timeframe to meet these goals.
- Further improve the infrastructure to enhance the experience of students in the university - e.g. sports facilities, dormitories.
- Develop strategies to address what appears to be a high level of dropout in some existing study programmes.
- Further implement the Bologna Process, namely student-centred learning, innovative pedagogical methods, learning outcomes, multi-disciplinary programmes and transferable skills.
- Take a more strategic approach towards research.
- Rationalise and increase efficiency in using the research facilities – laboratories, special equipment and resources.
- Identify priority areas for stimulating interdisciplinarity to enable proactivity in the approach towards financing opportunities.
- Review and rationalise the organisation of doctoral schools taking advantage of the potential for interdisciplinarity and cooperative inter-faculty projects.
- Further develop its third mission through cooperation and joint projects with economic, cultural and social partners based on a coherent strategy with strong involvement of colleges.
- Strengthen the involvement of external stakeholders in curriculum design and development, student placement and analysis of employability issues.
- Analyse the differences between incoming and outgoing Erasmus students and address any barriers which have contributed to the imbalance in Erasmus mobility.
- Further develop the information in English targeted at incoming students and make better use of available communication tools to attract international students.
- Develop an internationalisation strategy that would increase the synergy and the coordination between the centre and the faculties in reaching the internationalisation goals.
- Consolidate and further develop the quality assurance system and strategy which have been established in the university; develop user-friendly QA tools and processes.
- Consider further initiatives towards fostering an embedded quality culture – close the feedback loops by incorporating the results of surveys and evaluations into the university strategy and operational plans and explain to the extended academic community how this contributed to generate further improvements.
- Establish an efficient, coherent and relevant management information system across the university at central level.