

**UNIVERSITY OF CALABRIA**

***EVALUATION REPORT***

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report is the result of an Institutional Evaluation of the University of Calabria.

In June 2009, the Rector of the University of Calabria (UniCal) in Arcavacata di Rende (Italy), Prof. Giovanni Latorre requested an Institutional Evaluation by the European University Association (EUA). This decision was motivated by the willingness of the current Rector's team to assess the University's internal policy and organisation. The University wanted to analyse to what extent these could be improved.

The evaluation took place on 10-12 March 2010 (preliminary visit) and on 6-9 June 2010 (final and main visit). On the last day of the main visit, the chair of the review team presented the Team's **oral report** to the Rector's team, to the self-evaluation committee and to several other members of the University who decided to attend the session expressly organised for that purpose. This oral report is the basis of the present **review report**, which has resulted from all written information, interviews with various members of the University and the review team's observations and discussions during (and between) the two visits.

In its application for an Institutional Evaluation the University of Calabria asked for a special focus on technology transfer activities and indicated a particular interest in Research and Didactics, which were all carefully taken into account both during the organisation of the visits and in preparing the oral and written reports.

### **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 has been running for 16 years. The total number of universities that have participated in the Programme to date is more than 200, located in 44 European countries, in four Latin American countries, in South Africa and in Japan.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- Strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach

- Improvement oriented
- Focus on the institution as a whole.

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

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic planning
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic planning 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 University trying to do?
- How is the University trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the University change in order to improve itself?

In order to attain those objectives, the IEP uses the following methodology:

- Examination of short and long term objectives
- Examination of external and internal constraints, as well as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Recommendation of strategies to improve the quality of the institution
- No standardised solution nor prescriptive proposals, but support to the institution for improvement.

## **1.2 The University of Calabria and its national context**

The University of Calabria is a rather young university. In 1968 the creation of the University was approved by the national government and in the academic year 1972/73 the University enrolled its first students. UniCal is a very fast growing 38 year-old public university in the Calabria region of Southern Italy and has six faculties and 25 Departments. The University offers Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programmes, and several professionally oriented specialisation courses.

The University of Calabria is located in one of the most underdeveloped Italian regions and this has been a major challenge for the evolution and consolidation of the University, both in terms of training and in terms of research and innovation. Nevertheless, the University has played a very important role in the local and regional economic and social development due to its strong commitment to the local and regional environment. This has contributed to a very positive image for the outside community, which regards the University as a major contributor to the region.

UniCal has some very positive characteristics. It has the distinctive feature of being the only Campus-university in Italy and there is a good atmosphere and collaborative environment inside the institution. The University presents well-kept premises, facilities and equipment and shows a continuous care for infrastructure.

The University of Calabria faces a complex context, as many other Italian universities, due to frequent (and not always consistent) policy changes. This is not very helpful to the strengthening of institutional autonomy and to the development of internal capacity of strategic reflection and planning. Moreover, this tends to nurture a very reactive behaviour from most institutions that tend to respond to external regulatory stimulus, rather than define their priorities and pursue them consistently.

This institutional reflection is particularly relevant due to the recent evolution of the Italian higher education system. The Italian system of higher education has undergone, like many of its European counterparts, a period of intense and rapid massification over the last few decades. This was caused both by social demand and government policies geared towards the improvement of labour force qualifications, national competitiveness and social opportunities. However, in recent years, demographic changes have affected the patterns of demand and therefore there is growing competition for students among universities.

The challenges faced by European universities are not bounded nationally, but have increasingly a European and international dimension. In fact, one of the major driving forces for recent changes in universities has been the process of reform of the European Higher Education Area, of which a major part is the so-called Bologna process. Among the main priorities of the Bologna process mention ought to be made of the structural changes associated with the introduction of the three cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate), the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms, and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study across Europe. The development of this process has led to intense discussions and policy changes in many European countries and Italy is no exception to that. Despite its more peripheral location, UniCal has been developing a vision of a European and national reference university and it has worked to fulfil that objective.

Another challenge that has become increasingly important in recent years for most European universities is a much greater emphasis on research activities and outputs. Universities are called to improve their performance in this respect, with a growing pressure for universities to enlarge and diversify their research budgets through innovative and dynamic initiatives.

The challenges faced by many European universities are also increasingly associated with the capacity to develop activities that are economically and socially relevant for its local, regional, and national environment. UniCal feels this very strongly due to the aforementioned local and

regional context and it is clear that the University regards the economic and social relevance of the activities developed as an essential part of its mission.

Altogether, these trends ask for more responsive universities that are able to reflect on their mission and to define their major priorities. However, universities often face significant constraints regarding their capacity to live up to those challenges. On the one hand, for many European universities this has only recently become a major issue of concern and they are still adapting to those changing times. On the other hand, many European universities also have a limited degree of institutional autonomy, though this has improved in recent decades.

Overall, the convergence of these international, national and regional challenges, make this an opportune time to reflect on the current situation of the University of Calabria, the challenges ahead and to propose some possible initiatives to overcome them successfully. Despite the above-mentioned constraints, the Team believes that the University should explore its present autonomy more, in order to be less law-driven and more proactive and hopes this evaluation process may be an important contribution in this respect.

## **1.2 The Self Evaluation Process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the Steering Committee for the University of Calabria which comprises 10 representatives of the academic community. The Self Evaluation Group chaired by Prof. Prof. Lucio Grandinetti, Pro-Rector, and included the following members: Prof. Pietro Brandmayr, President of the Residential Centre; Prof. Nicola Vittorio, President of the University's Evaluation Board; Prof. Marcello Maggiolini, President of the Coordination and Programming Council; Mr. Salvatore Modaffari, President of the Student's Board; Mrs. Bruna Adamo, Managing Director; Prof. Riccardo Barberi, Rector's Delegate for Research and Technology Transfer; Prof. Alfio Cariola, Rector's Delegate for University's Strategic Plan, Evaluation and Quality; Prof. Angela Costabile, Rector's Delegate for the Students' Orientation Programs; Prof. Maria Laura Luchi, Rector's Delegate for the Quality of Teaching; Prof. Galileo Violini, Rector's Delegate for Internationalisation; Mrs. Sonia Gallo, Responsible for the Support Office of the University's Evaluation Board; and Mrs. Sara Laurita, Responsible for the Statistics Office.

The Team is grateful for the significant effort that they all made to develop the Self Evaluation Report (SER), which has been an important first step in building a self-evaluation culture. The preparation of the SER resulted from an extensive process which was widely disseminated within UniCal and the self-evaluation process helped UniCal to develop a better degree of self knowledge through discussion of the actual situation and collection of important data.

The review team considered the SER as a very good and helpful analysis of the current situation and an important first step in building a self-evaluation culture. The Team is aware that the

University has started to develop strategic planning. Nonetheless, the Team noted that a vision and the expectations of UniCal for the future were not fully articulated.

The Team believes that this evaluation process has helped the University of Calabria to understand more fully that quality improvement is a continuous process of gathering and analysing information.

### **1.3 The evaluation team**

The self-evaluation report of the University of Calabria along with the appendices was sent to the evaluation team on 15 February 2010. The visits of the evaluation team to the University of Calabria took place on 10-12 March 2010 (preliminary visit) and on 6-9 June 2010 (main visit). In between the visits the University of Calabria provided the evaluation team with additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- **Winfried Müller**, former Rector, University of Klagenfurt, Austria, as chair
- **Pedro Teixeira**, Professor of Economics, University of Porto and Director of CIPES – Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies
- **Áine Hyland**, former Vice-Rector, University College Cork, Ireland
- **Nejat Erk**, former Vice-Rector, Cukurova University, Turkey
- **Karina Ufert**, European Student Union Executive Committee and Vilnius University, Lithuania

During the two visits, the review team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of UniCal with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders. Throughout the evaluation process there were intense and in depth discussions with the Rector of UniCal, Prof. Giovanni Latorre, as well as with the Self-Evaluation Group and with the Head of Administration Mrs. Bruna Adamo.

During the two visits the evaluation team had extensive meetings at the Central Office, at the Faculties, at the Departments, and with external partners of the University. At the central level, during both visits, the Evaluation Team had meetings with the Rector, the self-evaluation steering group, and with several of the centres and offices. During the second visit, the Team had also a meeting with members of the University's Senate that included representatives from all internal stakeholders.

As regards the central management of the University, in the first visit the Team had an introductory meeting with the University's Administrative Director and several Administrative Officers. However, due to the time limitations of that meeting, during the second visit the Team

met with the University's Administrative Director, which was extremely valuable in order to get a better grasp of the University's organisation and management.

In order to have a better knowledge of the various missions pursued by the University of Calabria, in the first visit the Team had a meeting with a delegation of the Board of Department Directors and the Delegate to Research and Technology Transfer. In the final visit the Team also met with the University's Technology Transfer group, which was very relevant since this was one of the aspects that the University of Calabria had asked receive particular attention during the evaluation process.

Several installations, such as the main library, were visited already during the preliminary visit. A comprehensive campus tour was made during the main visit.

It was also important to obtain as much knowledge as possible, bearing in mind the time constraints, of the Faculties and Departments that are part of the university. The Team visited all 6 Faculties. In the first visit the Team had meetings with members of the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences, and the Faculty of Economics. During the second visit, the Team had meetings with members of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Nutritional Sciences and the Faculty of Political Science. There are 25 Departments, which are mainly focused on research. The Team had a meeting with representatives of the Directors of Departments, and those present were members of the Board of the Council of Heads of Department. During the second visit there were also meetings with members of two Departments (the Department of Statistics and Economics and the Department of Physics) to discuss in more detail the current situation regarding research activities. .

Besides the meeting with students from each of the Faculties, the Team had meetings with student representatives in the Senate and at the Faculty level, with regular students, and with international researchers and international postgraduate students. These meetings were very fruitful and helped the Team to develop a better awareness of the University, not only as regards teaching and learning activities, but also of student life in the University.

The Team had meetings with external partners to discuss the degree and types of interaction of the University of Calabria with its environment. During the first visit the Team had meetings with 5 external partners representing different stakeholders such as a Representative of the Province of Cosenza, a local representative of the Italian Industrial Association, a representative of the Chamber of Commerce, and two representatives from the Cities of Cosenza and Rende (which share the activities of UniCal). All of them had the experience of interacting with the University of Calabria, though, whereas some of those representatives have had long-time and varied relationships with the University, others had more limited or recent collaborations.

The discussions with the members of the University of Calabria greatly helped the Evaluation Team to understand better some aspects of the University's internal organisation, its history and its dynamics. The participation of all involved in the evaluation was very positive. The current report has benefited greatly from the engagement of the various internal and external stakeholders of the University in participating in those meetings.

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

Special thank goes to Mrs. Maria Teresa Guaglianone who was the UniCal liaison person with the review team and who was responsible for the efficient organisation of all the meetings and discussions.

## **2. MISSION STATEMENT**

The multiple and complex challenges that universities face nowadays require them to have a clear perception of their purpose, of the constituencies they are trying to serve and how they are trying to serve them. This requires from universities a much more intense process of discussion and determination of their institutional mission. In the case of the University of Calabria, the Team found a nice but somewhat vague mission statement. The Team believes that the definition of a clear institutional mission is important and that it should be a clear starting point for the definition of institutional policies and strategies.

The Team considers that the lack of a more clear mission statement may be a result of the University's traditional response to external demands, especially governmental regulations.

In order to develop a clearer mission statement, the University needs to nurture a stronger commitment to self-analysis. In fact, the definition of an institutional mission requires strong participation and commitment from the whole university and it may contribute to developing a stronger institutional identity.

This process of self-analysis needs to be coordinated in order to be effective. The Team suggests that a good option would be to define a small and diverse group of motivated and knowledgeable people. Both the size and the composition of that group are important, since the process needs to combine effectiveness and cohesiveness with representativeness and legitimacy. The group should reflect and engage actors with different views about the University.

The definition of a more clear institutional mission statement will help the University to have a better perception of its priorities. The definition of these priorities should be coordinated by the Leadership of the University, but with significant degree of reflection and participation at the various levels of UniCal.

Apart from a precise mission statement a strategic planning process accompanied by a concrete action plan will play a major role in initiating a common communication language within the institution and facilitate a common conception of the University.

### **3. TEACHING**

In the various meetings that the Team had during the institutional visits, it identified a general appreciation from students of the dedication of the teaching staff. This is particularly important since the Team also recognises that the University has significant teacher' shortages. The dedication and effort of the teaching staff is therefore an asset that the University should preserve and nourish.

The Team also recognises that the University faces significant constraints in remedying those shortages and that most of them are related to national regulations.

Nonetheless, the Team thinks that the University practices seem to pay too much attention to teaching and insufficient attention to learning. The Team was struck by the existing poor knowledge of substantive changes promoted by the developing EHEA, noticing that most of the recent changes were rather formal and hardly challenged traditional views about teaching methods and assessment practices.

The Team considers that the University should develop greater commitment regarding pedagogical innovativeness and effectiveness. Despite the existing constraints, the Team believes that the University has the capacity to make visible improvements, namely by relying less on classical models of knowledge transmission and by emphasising more the learning of students in training and professional environments.

This classical method leads to several imbalances regarding teaching. One of those imbalances refers to continuous assessment. This seems to be insufficiently present across the University and the assessment of students' work seems to be concentrated too much at the end of the semester. Assessment practices continue to be too focused on written and oral examinations. This is even more striking bearing in mind the fact that the University faces a very worrying situation on the levels of drop-out and retention, as shown by the University's own data.

Moreover, and as regards assessment, the multiple opportunities for students to undertake examinations worsen the above-mentioned teacher shortages by taking up a disproportionate amount of teachers' time. This not only has a negative impact on various dimensions on the University's activity, but seems to provide a very negative incentive for many students in the way they approach assessment.

Although the Team recognises that these problems are not unique to this University, but are common within the Italian context, and that several of them are exogenously imposed by national regulations, it sincerely believes that this is a clear case in which the University could and should be less passive and more pro-active. For instance, the University should ensure that all Faculties develop good practices regarding coordination between courses and assessment, stimulating innovation in teaching and assessment methods and enabling successful examples to be spread across the whole University.

#### **4. RESEARCH**

As was said in the beginning of the report, Italian universities, like their European counterparts, are aware that research, in recent years, has increased in importance in their institutional mission. More recently established universities such as UniCal need to work hard to establish a reputation in a highly competitive environment, to attract the most qualified human resources and to obtain the financial resources necessary to support that greater research intensity. In this regard, the Team appreciates that the University has been struggling with a more adverse situation due to its location.

On the basis of the analysis of the SER and of the various discussions that took place during the institutional visits, the Team formed the opinion that the University has apparently defined several policies regarding research. The Team recognises that a great deal of progress has taken place and that there are important pockets of research excellence within UniCal. The Team is also aware that several staff appreciate efforts being made to provide support for research activities, in particular through good library and hardware access.

However, the Team found little evidence of established practices of assessment of their effectiveness and it also noted the lack of evaluation of the various research units regarding outcomes vis-à-vis resources. Furthermore, the Team noticed an uneven situation regarding the efforts to attract external funding for research, with some units being clearly more proactive than others. The Team also observed that research intensity seems to vary across fields, without significant agreement about how to assess research progress.

One of the main concerns regarding the development of the University's research activity is linked to an issue raised in the previous section on Teaching. The amount of teaching staff time dedicated to research seems to be negatively influenced by the current examination practices. Although we are aware that the University faces some limitations, the Team believes that the University could and should be more proactive also on this issue. A promising possibility would seem to be to adopt a more creative and flexible attitude in the allocation of teaching in order to provide more time for research. This should be done in a selective way. It should not be granted to every member of staff but to those that the University believes are capable of advancing significantly in their research if given that opportunity.

The Team recognises that the University of Calabria is part of a tradition shared by many Universities that has tended to place a stronger emphasis on teaching activities than on research. However, the University accepts that nowadays it needs to pay more attention to research and to develop policies and mechanisms to promote research. The Team's perception of the current situation suggests that the University should give more attention to both the coordination and assessment of its research activities in order to improve its effectiveness and external recognition. Furthermore, the Team believes that research-based teaching will, in the long run, improve the

quality of teaching and it will have several positive impacts, including in areas such as employability.

## **5. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER**

One of the dimensions of Universities' mission that has been receiving increasing attention is their relationship with their external environment. This poses significant challenges to universities, since it constitutes a complex and multifarious network of institutional and individual relationships through which universities show continuously their contribution to the various communities they serve.

The University of Calabria seems to have made some progress in this respect and the University is perceived as trying to make a contribution in a particularly difficult environment. In the meetings with external stakeholders there was a general positive appreciation of their interaction with the University, both regarding training and research activities. In general, external partners believed that the local and regional community benefited significantly from the presence of the University and its development.

The Team commends the efforts of the Technology Transfer group to intensify the relations of UniCal with the external environment. But the regional communities and enterprises do not yet seem fully aware of the benefits of possible co-operation with the University and how UniCal could contribute to the development of Calabria.

However, as could be said about many other universities, the Team identified a general internal and external perception that there is considerable room for improvement. There seems to exist a consensus across the University that it could and should stimulate a stronger and more effective relationship with the external stakeholders. In order to advance this collaboration with the external stakeholders, the University needs to adopt a more systematic and institutional approach towards the fulfilment of this mission. This is very important since it could not only bring some much needed additional resources to the university, but, more importantly, it will strengthen the bond with the surrounding environment by enhancing the University's contribution to local economic and social development.

## **6. INTERNATIONALISATION**

This is another aspect that has gained increasing visibility among universities' strategic priorities, with many institutions striving to attain greater internationalisation through training and research

activities. The current trends in higher education clearly underline this necessity and the move towards a more integrated higher education framework in Europe is only the most visible development of a broader and deeper trend. Hence, growing mobility among students and staff is likely to become a central issue for many universities, especially within the European Higher Education Area.

The Team believes that the University of Calabria has significant potential in this respect both because of its attractive location and as the only campus University in Italy. The University seems also to have the willingness to make this one of its strategic priorities that may help it to stand out among other Italian universities. The SER mentions internationalisation as an important strategic objective, though this has yet to be realised in many areas of the University.

The Team also observed that there are some recent initiatives that show some promising steps in realising that potential. The University has been trying to strengthen its partnerships with other foreign institutions and there has been some increase in student and staff mobility. Moreover, the Team thinks that the support the University is providing to outgoing mobility students is very positive and should be pursued further; especially since it appears that there is both a willingness and the possibility of stretching beyond these levels.

One of the aspects that could help to improve the University's international attractiveness is the teaching activities. As mentioned earlier, the Team believes that a more innovative approach to teaching methods could provide an important contribution to attracting more foreign students. This would also be helped if the University strengthens its current efforts in providing teaching in foreign languages. Moreover, the University should address some existing problems regarding the organisation and timetabling of language courses, which seems to hinder greater participation by international students.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCES' MANAGEMENT**

The attainment of an institution's missions and strategic priorities require a careful and effective management of its human resources and universities are no exception to that, though this is often underestimated or even largely forgotten. Thus, in recent years universities have become more aware of that need, especially since many universities across Europe (and beyond) have attained much greater levels of institutional autonomy together with greater responsibility in the management of their resources and, paramount among them, human resources.

Unfortunately, this trend towards greater institutional autonomy is complex and is often ambiguous, especially when introduced by inconsistent policy-making. In the case of the University of Calabria, the Team is aware of legal limitations regarding staff numbers, which seem to have a negative effect on the University's development. The Team would also like to explicitly recognise the existing financial restrictions that limit the recruitment of additional permanent

staff. Moreover, the limitations regarding promotions, also externally imposed, are having a very negative effect on the morale of the University's staff.

However, the Team thinks that the University should attempt to develop some mechanisms that, despite the limitations, could improve the current situation. Staff promotion and recruitment should be used as much as possible to strengthen and focus the existing and desired profile of the University. There is significant evidence that the degree of personnel satisfaction is not only associated with monetary returns. One of the aspects to which the University could devote more attention is staff development practices. The Team is aware of several recent positive developments that have been taking place in training opportunities, especially regarding non-academic staff. However, and despite those increasing opportunities for training of staff, there is the perception that more can be done in this area.

As regards academic staff, the Team recognises that there are also several areas for reflection by UniCal. On the one hand, and although the University has been growing mostly based on externally recruited academics, the coming years will increase the likelihood of a policy of internal recruitment, with its associated risks. On the other hand, and following previous remarks about teaching, the University should reflect on the existing mechanisms to support academic staff in their teaching and research missions. Possible examples of areas to discuss in this respect are didactics and learning methods as well as the development of research projects.

## **8. INTERNAL ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE**

The trend towards growing institutional autonomy has led universities to give greater attention to their institutional autonomy. Moreover, the definition of strategic priorities requires an adequate organisational support that helps rather than hinders the attainment of those priorities. Thus, in recent years, there has been significant discussion about organisational changes and decision-making processes in universities.

The Team understands that these seem to be important themes of debate within the University of Calabria. In fact, the request for participating in the IEP/EUA was greatly motivated by the institutional leadership's desire to reflect on the university's development over the last years and to consider possible improvements on internal policy definition and decision-making processes and the way these can positively influence several important dimensions of the University's mission.

From an organisational point of view, the University of Calabria appears to be a well organised institution. The University has an extensive collection of data and administrative documents and its leadership and managerial team have demonstrated careful financial management in a very difficult context. This is even more significant bearing in mind the strong constraints imposed by national regulations and a decreasing budget.

These organisational assets are particularly relevant since the current times are characterised by profound and rapid transformations in the higher education landscape. Italian universities are no exception to this European trend and, therefore, the University of Calabria is facing times of significant changes that pose important challenges to its capacity to adapt and fulfil effectively its mission. Nevertheless, the University has shown a positive capacity to adopt a careful and flexible approach with respect to resources that can help it to face those challenges successfully.

Some of the major constraints faced by the University of Calabria are shared by many Italian universities, and are due to a complex and changing system of university laws and regulations, which pose significant constraints to University's autonomy and governance structure. During the two visits, the Team saw at first hand how the changing legal environment affected the University.

Another problem that hinders the planning capacities of universities concerns the limitations regarding funding mechanisms. In the Italian case this is particularly noticeable through an absence of certainty about forthcoming levels of funding. It is only at an advanced stage of the fiscal year that Italian universities become aware of how much financial resources they will be allocated by the central government. The Team noted how the lack of predictability of funding hindered strategic planning and how it fostered a very conservative approach towards new developments.

Despite the aforementioned constraints, the Team believes that the University should explore more its present autonomy, in order to be less law-driven and more proactive and hopes this evaluation process may be an important contribution in this respect. The current challenges faced by the University of Calabria, like many of their Italian and European counterparts, ask for a more responsive behaviour. The University should reflect about ways to take better advantage of the current regulatory context and to anticipate potential changes in the national framework and the way these may help the University to fulfil its mission better.

## **9. QUALITY CULTURE**

In recent years quality in higher education has become a growing concern for policy-makers and institutions. This has led to a rise in quality assurance mechanisms that aim both at self-improvement and accountability. In many countries, regulators have placed increasing demands on universities and these have become much more concerned with quality issues and with the need to make their daily commitment to permanent quality improvement more explicit. Thus, one of the major aims of the IEP process is to help institutions to develop a stronger quality culture.

In the Italian case there is the perception among Universities that insufficient attention is paid to quality assessment. This is substantiated, in particular, by the absence of a National Quality Agency or a similar organisation. At the moment there is a National Evaluation Council, which was established some years ago, and whose main criteria refer to issues such as success of studies,

number of students, and research outputs. This has led universities to document their activities more effectively and in greater detail, though it does not seem to have stimulated significant analysis of the data produced. In this connection the Team wants to commend the positive effects of the Alma Laurea reports and encourage UniCal to use the outcomes of these reports for its strategic planning.

One of the first steps for an institution to develop an effective quality system is to know what is happening and how it is happening. The Team thinks that the University of Calabria has shown a good capacity to document its activities. The Team asked for additional information and this was in general available and provided without delay and with sufficient level of detail.

However, the Team perceived an insufficient reflection about the data available. Throughout the evaluation process it became apparent that it is not clear how the data collected influences strategic decisions. The University does not seem to take full advantage of the data available and to have a strong capacity to draw sufficient implications from the realities portrayed by the data available. The University should reflect on the creation of a service dedicated to quality enhancement that not only collects data, but also provides advice.

Furthermore, the Team thinks it is very important that the University re-evaluates the adequacy and effectiveness of some of its current mechanisms of quality assessment. One of the dimensions of the University's mission which has shown the relevance of such weakness was teaching. The Team was struck by the lack of coverage of fundamental issues such as learning outcomes and examination procedures in students' questionnaires. The latter seemed not only incomplete, but also rather ineffective. In terms of quality assessment, performance targets should be the guiding principle in measuring success.

In several of the discussions which took place the Team formed the opinion that there is a wide perception across the University about the limited consequences of current evaluation procedures. This has affected the willingness of several of the constituencies to participate in evaluation processes, since they do not believe in its relevance. This should be a matter of concern for the University's leadership, because all institutions need to have a strong belief across its members that there is an adequate system of rewards and sanctions that promotes fairness and good practices.

Thus, the Team agrees with the SER that the University does not yet have an integrated quality system that assesses its various missions. Quality assessment should not be a burden but an instrument of self-improvement that permeates the routines of the University.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **9.1 Strategic Planning**

- Elaborate a concrete strategic plan with well defined actions, clear goals and targets
- Use institutional strengths to improve and to take initiatives
- Build on excellence in some well-defined areas
- Be proactive in the strategic orientation
- Involve employers and other external stakeholders in your strategic planning.

### **9.2 Teaching**

- Work to fulfil all Bologna ideas with respect to curricula (including learning outcomes), employability, internationalisation etc.
- Use Bologna as an opportunity for positive change (encourage self-directed learning, shift from teaching to learning, reduce hours spent by students in classes)
- The University should ensure that all Faculties develop good practices regarding coordination and planning of courses and assessment
- The University should encourage students to be more proactive
- Strengthen your attempts to attract students from all over the country and from abroad
- Promote a foreign languages policy
- Expand the offer of courses delivered in English
- Support mobility of students and teachers
- Promote an international perspective to curricula.

### **9.3 Research**

- Strengthen the focus and sustainability of research
- Concentrate resources in order to obtain critical mass in specific research areas
- Make research more visible

- Enhance research co-operation with enterprises and other research institutions at regional, national and international level
- Promote an output-oriented and performance-based allocation of resources.

#### **9.4 Student Services**

- UniCal should provide full and effective information (e.g. handbook) for all new students, especially international students
- Student accommodation should include facilities such as laundry and cooking
- Efforts should be made to ensure reliable and continuous internet access
- Public transportation between the UniCal and local towns might be improved.

#### **9.5 Quality Assurance**

- Define procedures and actions resulting from evaluations
- Develop mechanisms to support academic staff in their teaching and research missions
- Comply with European Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance in order to establish a quality culture within the institution
- Transfer examples of good practice from one Faculty to the whole University
- The University should build on the experience of the Self Evaluation Group to develop a service dedicated to quality enhancement, that not only collects data, but also provides advice.

#### **9.6 Technology Transfer**

- The Team appreciates the significant work carried out to date by the Technology Transfer Group, which should be supported and given more visibility across the University
- Intensify contacts with local authorities and enterprises

- Present examples of good collaborative research projects to potential industry partners
- Provide relevant upskilling for potential partners.

### **9.7 Internal Organisation and Governance**

- Promote the definition of a clearer mission statement
- Develop a stronger culture of self-analysis and reflection about existing data
- Define the University's policy priorities in accordance with the institution's mission
- Stimulate stronger participation and commitment from all the University's stakeholders, including active involvement from students, staff and external partners
- Explore ways of taking more advantage of the existing degree of institutional autonomy
- Trust in the future and be more self-confident.

## **10. ENVOI**

The Team appreciates the significant effort done by the University of Calabria in performing this exercise and would like to commend the leadership of the University for taking the University through this process of self-discovery and analysis.

However, the Team hopes that the process will not end here. On the contrary, it must be a starting point. The Team believes that the University will be capable of continuing these efforts in order to develop a strong quality culture and help UniCal to find its vision through more ambition, strong participation and collective responsibility.

The Team hopes that this report will help the University of Calabria to pursue further this path of self-improvement and greater institutional reflection about the University's priorities and the best ways to attain them. The Team believes that the University can develop a greater degree of trust in its capacities in order to become more proactive and to be recognised as a relevant and significant player in the Italian and European higher education landscape.