EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Lebanese French University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Lebanon

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Lebanese French University of Technology and Applied Sciences. The evaluation took place in 2017 following a request from the President of ULF, Prof. Dr. Mohamad Salhab. The purpose of the evaluation of the University is to contribute to the advancement of its strategic management and to its organisational development, and to enable the University to strengthen its capacity to anticipate and address change. In its deliberations, the IEP team assessed and focused on the University's strategic priorities and used this as a basis for making recommendations for the future.

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. 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 IEP 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 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.

All aspects of the evaluation are 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 Profile of the Lebanese French University of Technology and Applied Sciences

ULF was established in 1996 by a group of French and Lebanese professors and innovative thinkers in education and research, under the aegis of a French education group, the French Association for Higher Education Development (AFDES). These early beginnings continue to have an impact on the profile, identity and academic development of ULF, and links with France and French universities remain a strong cultural and academic influence on the university. Today, the present Board of Trustees, comprising prominent figures from France, Canada and Lebanon, plays an important role in shaping the educational philosophy of ULF.

The university is one of 41 private higher education institutions in Lebanon, of which 32 are full universities, seven are university institutes or colleges, and three are university institutes for religious studies. The main law regulating the private sector was passed in 1961 and modernised in 1996. It permitted the formation, by decree, of a 'University Institute of Technology', the predecessor organisation of what is now the Lebanese French University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

In common with all higher education institutions in Lebanon, ULF is governed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). Under the 1961 law, a Council for Higher Education was established with the means for licensing new institutions. In 2002, a Directorate General for Higher Education (DGHE) was established to regulate the private higher education sector. That body licenses and validates all degrees and disciplines offered by a private university. All new institutions, and all new study programmes and doctoral schools of private universities, have to be licensed by the DGHE.

In accordance with the 1961 law relating to higher education institutions in Lebanon, as a private university ULF is independent from government, and is largely autonomous in terms of budgetary and financial matters, organisational planning, and in the establishment of its management structures and arrangements for teaching and research. However, this relatively high degree of autonomy that ULF has in the internal management of its affairs is counterbalanced by the legal framework in place at national level. For example, in addition to government powers on the recognition and accreditation of new disciplines and study programmes, due to its size and other factors ULF is not licensed for a doctoral school.

Today, the organisational profile of ULF is based on four faculties and sixteen active academic departments. The university has its main campus at Deddeh, with branches in Tripoli, Bekka, and Mount Lebanon. In addition, reflecting the university's regional and national aspirations, the team noted that planning has commenced on the establishment of a ULF campus in Beirut. As noted, the original technology institute now forms the Faculty of Technology. In 2007 the Science and Letters and the Business Administration faculties were established, followed in 2012 by the Faculty of Engineering. Together, the ULF faculties and departments cover in the fields of engineering, computing and telecommunications, business and management, marketing, and social science. New majors are being introduced in the areas of

interior design, fashion design, and graphic design, and a new Faculty of Health is being planned. Graduate programmes include an MBA in Finance and Banking and a Master's programme in Computer Science. A doctoral programme in Business Administration is also being introduced.

At the time of the team's visit, figures provided showed that of 1 280 registered students, including around 100 or so Master's students, some 76% were male. The Team was informed that of 188 staff in 2016/2017, 136 were male. This total included 6 professors, 27 assistant professors, 66 senior lecturers, and 7 instructors.

1.3 The evaluation process

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, in advance of the first visit the team was provided with a 26-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER), describing and analysing the university's vision, mission and goals, its governance and management arrangements and processes, and also a 'SWOT' analysis undertaken in preparation for the SER. The SER was accompanied by annexes which included institutional data, with some financial information; an organisation chart; academic rules and regulations; information on policies; the university's *Strategic Plan (2016/17)*; and information on staff and students. The SER, together with the annexes, was sent to the team in January 2017.

The team learned that the SER had been developed by a team appointed by the university's President to complete the self-evaluation process. Preparations had been led by the Vice-President. The self-evaluation team was comprised of representatives from faculties and the central administration and included a student member. The majority were administrative personnel.

The SER was the product of a series of regular meetings and supporting activities, and included input and data collection from teaching and administrative staff. This process also contributed to the accompanying SWOT analysis. The self-evaluation documentation was made available on the university's intranet. From meetings with staff and students it became apparent to the team that there was a reasonable awareness of the broad nature and purposes of the team's visit to the university, and the team members were warmly and openly received at all levels of the university community.

The SER provided an honest and helpful basis for the team to undertake their review activities, although it lacked a significant analytical dimension in some places. In advance of its second visit, the team requested some additional information on the university's strategic development trends, its academic organisation and management arrangements, doctoral provision, committee agendas, student numbers, mobility data, cooperation agreements, service to society, and internationalisation. These requests related to matters discussed during the first visit but which were not fully reflected in the SER and accompanying documentation. The additional information was provided in a timely manner several weeks in advance of the second visit.

The two visits to ULF took place from 5 to 7 February 2017, and from 9 to 12 April 2017, respectively. The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Professor Sokratis Katsikas, Center for Cyber and Information Security, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Professor, University of Piraeus, Greece; former Rector, University of the Aegean, Greece, team chair
- Dr Benoît Lesaffre, High Council for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, France; former Senior Vice-President, Université Paris-Est, France
- Johanna Liljeroos, Master's Student, School of Management, Tampere University, Finland
- Emeritus Professor Jethro Newton, former Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement, University of Chester, UK, team coordinator

The team would like to express its thanks to the President of the university, Prof. Dr. Mohamad Salhab, for the welcome and hospitality provided during the two visits. Special thanks are also offered by the IEP team to the university's Vice-President and IEP liaison person, Dr Joudallah Bey, for his excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process and for his kind support throughout.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

Vision, mission, and general context

The university's SER indicates that**,** in accordance with its mission, vision, and strategic goals, ULF wishes to position itself as a leading higher education institution regionally and nationally in liberal arts and science education. ULF has, however, gone beyond its founding philosophy and now offers programmes in areas that include engineering, computer science, telecommunications, business administration, and marketing. Established as a private, not-for-profit, non-denominational higher education institution, ULF has a shared vision that places emphasis on academic excellence in a humanitarian environment designed to enable faculty and students to work together. The university seeks to uphold democratic values, and promotes freedom of enquiry and intellectual curiosity as in the vision of its founders. The SER states the importance of the ULF mission of liberal education being supported and understood by all members of the university community, and of this mission being reflected in the educational objectives of faculties and departments and in their service to the wider society. The responsibilities of ULF staff in respect of the mission are specified in the university's by-laws.

Despite the university's relatively short history, the team commends ULF for its regional role and for building strong connections with the region and local community. The team noted that ULF is valued by external stakeholders. The strategic objective of meeting the needs of the regional employment market by educating employable students, represents a sound strategy. The team supports ULF in this strategic endeavour. The team found the university and its staff to be open to the problems and needs of external bodies, such as factories, banking and transport organisations. The focus on study programmes with a strong vocational and market-responsive bias should serve ULF well going forward.

Even though the university has relative autonomy in the internal management of its affairs, the team noted the constraints placed upon ULF by its operating environment. In addition to the restrictive legal framework at national level for private universities in matters such as doctoral provision and approval for new academic developments, the university operates in an unstable external environment. Further, in the view of the team, despite its healthy financial status, as a relatively small university the high dependency on student tuition fees for income means that the university faces very real resource and funding challenges in the medium and longer term. ULF also faces strong competition from other universities. The team considers that such factors will present ULF with challenges as it plans for the future and as it seeks to find ways to operate successfully in its regional and national context.

Governance and management

The present governance, management, and planning arrangements are described in the SER and in various other documents provided to the team. The team was able to explore the operation and effectiveness of these institutional arrangements in a series of helpful

meetings with ULF senior managers, staff, students, and external stakeholders. The team also considered how and where oversight is exercised and decisions made on matters such as future directions, finance and resources, and research and education.

Notwithstanding the external regulatory constraints described on page 7, the overall impression conveyed in the university's SER, and in the team's discussions with senior managers, is that although external approval is required on certain matters, governance arrangements are such that ULF is able to make its own choices and to take its own decisions. The team learned that though external approval may involve delays, there is no micro-management of the university's internal affairs by outside bodies and that, in general, ULF is able to exercise its autonomy by undertaking decision-making in a timely manner.

The central elements of these decision-making processes within the university are the four key decision-making units: the Board of Trustees; the President; the University Council; and the Academic Council. From institutional documentation and discussions with staff, the team noted that these bodies are interlinked through a calendar of meetings and through their deliberations on matters of institutional importance. In the view of the team, the degree of integration in the functioning of these bodies has a significant bearing on the effectiveness of the university's decision-making and its capacity for managing change.

From their enquiries, the team formed the view that leadership and governance arrangements, including the positions of President, Vice-President, deans of Faculty, and the operation of the University Council and Academic Council, are well established institutionally for decision-making purposes. The team also noted that while the operation of these arrangements is generally well understood within the university, the degree of central control and direction from senior management and higher-level governance bodies is quite strong.

In their examination of the functioning of institutional governance and decision-making bodies, the team noted that the ULF Board of Trustees includes prominent figures from political and senior administrative backgrounds, and strong representation from French and Lebanese professors. The university's organisational structures are defined by its by-laws. In accordance with these, the Board of Trustees oversees the ULF mission, fiscal integrity, assets, and the quality of education. The Board has legal authority for overall control of the university, and appoints the ULF President. The Board, which meets formally three times a year, with additional meetings held on an *ad hoc* basis in between, sets the university's strategic directions, and approves expansion and investment plans, albeit through advice from the President. The Board also monitors performance against the strategic plan, and ensures that the organisational structure for the administration of the university is fit for purpose.

The team learned that there is regular contact between the President and the Board of Trustees as the principal body for corporate governance. However, the Board leaves the operational management and leadership on executive matters and academic affairs in the hands of the President. Discussions with senior managers and scrutiny of institutional working

papers, including agendas for Board meetings, confirmed to the team that the Board of Trustees carries out its responsibilities in accordance with its legal powers and that corporate governance arrangements work well.

In considering the administration of the university and academic governance, the team noted that the principal bodies are the University Council (UC) and the Academic Council (AC). The former is concerned with administrative, policy and operational matters, while the latter deals primarily with academic issues. These bodies convene regularly. The team noted that the membership of the UC, which is chaired by the university President, includes the Chair of the AC, the Vice-President and Secretary General, deans and heads of academic departments, and members of academic staff. This council ensures that policies are in line with the ULF mission and goals. As the highest administrative authority it oversees and approves proposals from administrative units and also monitors the performance of faculties. The UC's meeting cycle is aligned to that of the Board of Trustees, and the proceedings and recommendations of the AC and Branch Councils feed into it. The team noted that the agendas and proceedings of the UC confirm the oversight it exercises of strategic and financial matters, and also the administration of the faculties and branches.

In a similar manner, the team paid close attention to the operation of the Academic Council. This body makes recommendations to the UC on academic matters, and discusses issues such as teaching and learning, programme portfolio developments, research orientation, collaboration with foreign universities, and student evaluations of teachers. The membership of this body includes the Vice-President, the Secretary General, heads of academic departments, the Head of Finance, and the Director of English Programmes. It is chaired by the Dean of Engineering, though not on an ex-officio basis. In discussing this arrangement with senior managers, and the importance of this body in terms of governance and leadership, it was apparent that consideration could be given in the future to the establishment of a position of Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

In furthering their enquiries on governance arrangements, the team sought to clarify the relationship of the Branch Councils (of the branch campuses) to the UC and AC, and to the main faculties. The team learned that for oversight purposes, Branch Council meetings are attended by the Chair of the AC, and that heads of academic departments at the branches relate to the head of department at the main faculty on academic matters and to the Vice-President for administrative matters. The team noted that Branch Councils deal with daily planning of academic and administrative matters at branch level. In furthering their understanding of these arrangements, during discussions with senior managers the team learned of the intention to exercise stronger oversight over operational aspects of its branches. This relates in part to the decision taken by the UC to unify the ULF calendar, and to introduce common term and semester dates, and a common examinations schedule. The team fully endorses the rationale for this change.

In assessing the above arrangements for governance and institutional decision-making, the team was particularly interested to note that in its SER the university states that it intends to

support a policy of decentralisation to deans and faculties, and to review its academic governance arrangements. While noting the intention to give deans more power and autonomy, the team also noted that there are no formally constituted Faculty Councils and that while informal faculty meetings are convened by the relevant Dean of Faculty to discuss matters relating to teaching and research, the proceedings are not formally minuted, and there are no formal terms of reference. The team was advised that steps are being taken to formalise arrangements to include Faculty Councils in the university's governance structures. The team encourages the university to make progress with these plans.

From the perspective of the team, a key aspect of the university's thinking on the review of governance arrangements, and its decision to pursue a policy of decentralisation, is the consideration being given to putting in place additional standing and *ad hoc* councils and committees to cover academic affairs, quality assurance and administrative matters, both at central level and at faculty levels. This is designed in part to improve the involvement and integration of internal stakeholders in decision-making processes. The team heard that any such changes would be taken forward to the University Council for discussion and approval. The team fully endorses the plans to put in place standing committees and encourages ULF to make progress with these developments. As part of these proposed changes, the team also recognises the advantages of replacing the existing Research Committee by establishing a standing committee for Research and Knowledge Transfer, included in the Academic Council and composed of members of the latter, to reinforce its operation.

In the view of the team, achieving the best balance between the 'centre' and the wider organisation is essential for the university if it is to become a more cohesive organisation, which provides for involvement of the wider academic community in governance, planning and decision making, and in institutional processes such as quality assurance. The team heard from staff that current informal opportunities for communication between faculty and deans and heads are viewed positively. Access to senior managers, including at the level of President, is viewed as good by faculty members. However, in the view of the team, while acknowledging the ways in which current arrangements work and the positive features of informal mechanisms for communication and involvement, this should be seen in the context of the present size of the university. Looking to the future, and as the university grows in size and complexity, these arrangements may not be fit for purpose. The team believes that the university's plans for decentralisation and changes in academic governance will serve ULF well going forward.

Furthermore, current discussions on decentralisation and governance provide an opportunity to consider how best to prepare for the future leadership and management of ULF. At present, senior roles and responsibilities are concentrated in relatively few persons. The team believes that there is a need to reflect on the sustainability of management and leadership capacity and capability at ULF. One option is to grow this leadership potential from within, from amongst those who share the university's vision and values. As it makes progress with the proposed changes, the team recommends that the university considers growing future leadership capacity by assigning institutional-level responsibilities in areas such as research,

learning and teaching, external relations, and internationalisation, to young members of faculty with potential for future leadership roles within ULF.

In concluding its deliberations on arrangements for governance, the team paid attention to student representation and involvement in institutional processes. The team noted that there are good informal opportunities for the student voice to be heard, and that an 'open door' policy works well for students and staff. But this falls short of formal involvement in deliberative processes. The team also noted that there have been historical difficulties in the area of student representation, and acknowledges the challenges inherent in this situation. However, the team notes that the university has indicated its intention to review the matter of formal student representation on governance bodies and fully endorses this.

Strategic planning and organisational development

In considering the university's capacity for managing change and for monitoring progress against strategic goals, the team considered arrangements for strategic and operational planning and resource allocation. Given that ULF had entered a period of expansion, including a presence in other regions of Lebanon and abroad, it was evident to the team that effective planning processes are of critical importance. The university considers that it is able to be agile in making decisions, but acknowledged that due to its dependency on tuition fees it faced financial constraints and delays. The team also noted that, in line with its decentralisation plans, ULF planned to give more authority to faculties on resource matters.

The team was interested to obtain insights into the processes used by the university in respect of strategic planning, including the extent of consultation. In discussing the planning processes with senior managers, the team learned that the processes are not formally documented, nor is there a publicly available timeline. The team noted that when the planning process is completed and faculty development plans are made available, the Head of Finance prepares the budget, though this process is again not formally documented.

The team noted that under the leadership of the President, the University Council is responsible for setting strategic directions and for monitoring progress against planned actions. The team learned that faculty and department meetings are held to discuss future plans and that achievements against faculty objectives are reviewed each July. Meetings are also held during the year with Branch Councils. In discussions with ULF staff, the team heard examples of faculty members being consulted informally on proposed developments for inclusion in the strategic planning process. Faculty development plans are considered by the University Council and are taken into account when the President draws up the draft strategic plan during the summer months for approval by the ULF Board of Trustees in September. On completion of the planning process, Deans and Heads are responsible for implementation.

In reflecting on these processes, the team took a close interest in the university's *Strategic Plan (2016/17)*, which took the form of an action plan, and the SWOT analysis that complemented it. Both documents provided analysis of the university's internal and external environment, and the latter contained detail that was particularly helpful to the team in their

enquiries on planning and organisational development. For example, the SWOT analysis set out the principal weaknesses that ULF is seeking to address and areas it wished to improve in the immediate and medium term. This includes diversification in finance, portfolio growth, marketing, estate and infrastructure development, and progress towards accreditation.

The team was encouraged to hear that the SWOT analysis process had enabled ULF to benefit from organisational self-learning. However, the team noted that the action planning element of the *Strategic Plan (2016/17)* did not specify the resources allocated to each planned action to enable implementation to be taken forward transparently. The team also learned that while the University Council had an important role in translating institutional plans and objectives into actions, the strategic plan did not specify key performance indicators (KPIs) against which institutional performance could be measured. While Deans and Heads interpret the strategic plan on behalf of their faculty or department, and set local objectives, there did not appear to be an annual operational or business planning process that is formally integrated with the institutional strategic planning process. The team believes this makes it difficult to effectively monitor faculty performance against institutional objectives. The absence of faculty councils (page 10), reinforces this difficulty.

Further, the team also noted that the planning period covered by the Strategic Plan is only one year. The team learned from senior managers that this was partly due to the university's unstable and unpredictable external environment. Nevertheless, while acknowledging this constraint, the team concluded that this limited planning period fell short of what is expected of a 'fit for purpose' strategic plan for a modern entrepreneurial higher education institution.

On the basis of these observations, the team recommends that the university builds on its work to date in this area and draws up a 3-5-year Strategic Plan containing a set of KPIs and specifies targets and resources, and timescales against which progress can be measured and monitored in a transparent manner. Implementation should be underpinned by an annual University Business Plan and annual Faculty Operational Plans which address the KPIs and targets, with progress being monitored by the University Council. These arrangements could be supported by a published Annual Report which highlights the major achievements for each phase of the planning period.

Finance and resources

During their enquiries on strategic planning, the team took the opportunity to identify in more detail some of the university's expansion plans. The team noted that these include a campus in Beirut, to be operational from October 2017. Plans also include additional space for the Faculty of Engineering by 2019 and a new Faculty of Health. Also, during the team's second visit they were informed by the ULF President that agreement was imminent for the establishment of a ULF campus in Bahrein, to be licensed for commencement in 2018/19. For governance purposes this would operate as a free-standing university.

In view of the extent of the university's expansion plans, the team took a close interest in matters relating to finance and resources. The team learned that while there is no formal

policy document covering financial matters, and for determining capital investment and budget policy, the university's informal policy is to sustain a profile of financial stability, to avoid exposure to risk through borrowing, and to ensure that the use made of financial resources is supportive of the ULF mission.

The team learned that the budget building process requires each faculty to present their projections for revenue and expenses to the Head of Finance who constructs a draft budget for discussion at University Council. The Board of Trustees approves the financial plans, and takes responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of financial policy. Control mechanisms to support financial prudence and decision-making include the deployment of an external auditor. The team was informed that arrangements are in place to align the sequencing of the annual budget building process with the process for the development of the strategic plan.

However, in reflecting on these arrangements, the team draws attention to the recommendation made earlier regarding the absence of KPIs and lack of specificity on resources allocated for the *2016/17 Strategic Plan* (page 12). It was apparent to the team that at the point where the annual strategic planning and budget building processes are completed, there is no formal requirement for resources to be added to the action plan that forms the basis of the strategic plan and annual business planning process. The university may wish to reflect on this matter.

The team gave further consideration to the financial dimension of the university's ambitious plans for growth and expansion, and how this can be funded. The team noted the high dependency on tuition fees for income and that, even with the generation of an annual surplus, this is a challenging area for ULF, particularly given the shortage of development money. It was not clear to the team how the projected developments were to be resourced.

The Team acknowledges the occasional support provided by the external organisations, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) and the French Association for Higher Education Development (AFDES). However, in the view of the team there is a need for ULF to diversify its income sources. The team noted that a policy of zero debt has been pursued historically. However, due to limited access to additional finance for new developments, the university acknowledged the need to explore new possibilities. The team's attention was drawn to the approach ULF has made to the AUF for development grants to be used for infrastructure development and expansion plans. If such intentions can be realised, the University would hope to create an Academic Programme Development Fund, a Physical Infrastructure Fund, and a University Development Fund.

In view of their findings, the team recommends that the University makes progress in identifying opportunities for diversifying its income sources, and encourages the proposals to obtain external funding for an Academic Programme Development Fund, a Physical Infrastructure Fund, and a University Development Fund. Consideration should also be given to obtaining funding for capital projects from additional external sources.

3. Quality culture

In assessing progress being made in quality assurance and quality management, the team noted that much of the university's efforts to date have been devoted to meeting the external licensing and regulatory requirements of the Ministry of Education (MEHE) and the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE). For example, there is a regulatory requirement to re-examine academic programmes approved by the DGHE, and administrative and academic support services have been modified to satisfy the licensing requirements of the MEHE. The team noted that the university obtained ISO 9001: 2008 certification in May 2016 for services provided by its Registry Office through its Tripoli Branch and that plans to seek ISO accreditation for two additional ULF branches are at an advanced stage. This certification process and the associated annual external audit mechanism have enabled the university to improve its administrative systems and processes, including the student life-cycle from the enquiry stage and registration through to graduation.

However, the university's SER indicates an intention to publish a quality assurance handbook and to take steps towards a more centralised approach to quality assurance, with a central committee for such purposes and sub-committees at the level of faculty and administrative department. The team endorses such plans. Further, in its SER the university also states its commitment to go beyond its present situation by developing an institutional quality culture. To date, some progress has been made in several areas of quality assurance, such as feedback surveys, performance evaluation and appraisal of teachers by Deans, and quality review and evaluation undertaken by Deans and Heads of Department. The team learned that conferences have been organised to raise awareness of quality policy and practice in areas such as pedagogy and research. Also, measures are in place to focus on student employment, internships, and employability as an indicator of study programme quality.

In reflecting on these matters, the team concluded that ULF lacks a coherent institutional quality system and organisational framework that fully meets both internal and external requirements, and which addresses both academic and administrative needs and purposes. With the current emphasis on ISO 9001 on the one hand, and various types of staff and student evaluation on the other hand, in the view of the team the university's approach to quality is somewhat fragmented at the present time. Indeed, the SER acknowledged that while the components of ULF's approach to quality are in line with the legal requirements of Lebanese higher education, its approach should be developed to broader European standards. The team confirmed that there was no evidence to date of any systematic use being made of Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in planning the university's approach to quality matters. For example, the staff groups with whom the team met showed no awareness of the ESG or of established European approaches to practices such as team-based <u>internal</u> annual and periodic quality evaluation and review.

Taking account of the need for a comprehensive quality assurance model that is appropriate for academic purposes, the team recommends that a Quality Working Group should be established to undertake a mapping exercise and 'gap analysis' against the ESG. The university should use the outcomes to inform the development of a university quality assurance manual which documents ULF quality procedures, and a programme of university-wide briefing and training to achieve full awareness of the quality assurance manual and the practices highlighted in the ESG.

As part of the university's review of governance arrangements (page 10), the team learned that consideration is being given by university authorities to establishing a quality assurance committee at university level, with sub-committees at faculty level with the latter coordinating the activities of departments in the area of quality assurance. At present, general faculty and department meetings are convened periodically to promote quality and for administrative and operational purposes. The team noted that annual faculty meetings are held to consider internal and external feedback, evaluation from students and employers, and academic results. Department meetings are also held to discuss learning and teaching matters, and these are convened on a weekly basis if required. However, the team learned from students that they are not included in such meetings, and that there are no councils in which they can participate and raise quality issues, even though they confirmed that Heads of Department and Deans can be approached informally. Indeed, the team was advised that the faculty and department meetings described here are conducted on an informal basis and there are no formal agendas or minutes. The university indicated that it has begun the process of formalising faculty council meetings, and the team strongly supports this as an important contribution to the process of developing a quality culture at ULF.

From their enquiries, the team learned that responsibility for quality assurance in faculties and departments is heavily focused around the Dean and Head of Department, with markedly less emphasis on ownership of quality on the part of faculty members who deliver the study programmes and who are in direct contact with students for learning and teaching purposes. The team was informed that the review of licensed programmes and of learning and teaching quality is undertaken jointly by the Dean and Head of Department, where checks are undertaken of alignment with ECTS requirements and use is made of external and internal feedback. They also make preparations for each semester, including approval of syllabi. While Heads of Department (Chairpersons) are required to hold regular meetings with faculty members to discuss the effectiveness of academic programmes, there is no expectation that faculty members and study programme teams should have formal responsibility for quality control.

In pursuing their enquiries on these matters, the team noted that there is no formal procedure for the completion of annual self-evaluation reports at department and study programme level, and that the practice of self-evaluation within the university is focused exclusively on the quality management overview procedures followed by Deans in conjunction with Heads of Department. In the view of the team, while Deans and Heads of Departments can exercise management oversight of study programmes and of survey

outcomes, the ownership of quality and responsibility for undertaking <u>self</u>-evaluation of a study programme should be assumed by those responsible for the delivery of a programme (i.e. the study programme team or equivalent). This self-evaluation by front-line academics should underpin the annual quality monitoring cycle of the university and the action planning that results from this.

In view of this, to improve and to encourage ownership of quality at the point of delivery, and as near as possible to the student experience, the team recommends that for each study programme a Study Programme Leader should be identified who, in conjunction with all members of the study programme team, should draw up an annual programme monitoring report, using all qualitative and quantitative information available to them, including student and stakeholder feedback. These reports should be considered by Faculty Councils when these bodies become fully established.

The team also paid attention to the use made by the university of student feedback on their experience of teaching. The team learned that anonymous course evaluation is organised by the Secretary General, in conjunction with the Dean, at the end of each semester. Students are invited to comment on their teachers' performance, knowledge of subject, timeliness of examination feedback, and coverage of course material. The focus is therefore on teaching rather than learning, though there are some open-ended questions allowing for feedback on other issues. Feedback is analysed using SPSS and is made available to Dean and Head of Department. The outcomes are discussed with the relevant faculty member. On occasions, matters may be drawn to the attention of the President. The team understood from students that they do not receive formal feedback on the issues they raised in these surveys, though they may learn of some actions on an informal and fortuitous basis. Not all faculties make use of such surveys and therefore not all students are able to provide anonymous comments. Further, there is no institutional level mechanism or summary report of key issues that could be considered by, for example, the Academic Council, and therefore no comparison between faculties.

In reflecting on these arrangements for obtaining anonymous student feedback on aspects of their experience, the team suggests that steps should be taken to ensure that all departments and faculties make use of the same template for feedback surveys. Further, the team formed the view that this process, which focuses largely on teaching-related matters, is being used mainly for management purposes, and that while issues are fed upwards in the organisation for consideration by managers, there is no mechanism for feedback downwards to students and other stakeholders on actions being taken. Therefore, the team advises the university to reflect on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that surveys are used in all faculties and that mechanisms are put in place across the university and its departments for informing students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

4. Learning and teaching

ULF students, who are drawn from many backgrounds, spoke well of their learning experience and the accessibility and enthusiasm of teaching staff and professors, and the positive atmosphere in the university environment. Students conveyed the impression to the team that the university is student-friendly, and it was evident that they appreciate the 'open door' policy that characterises staff-student relations at ULF. The team wishes to record the marked pride in the university displayed by ULF students and staff.

In progressing their enquiries on learning and teaching, and on the learning environment provided for ULF students, the team noted that the languages of instruction are French and English and that students choose between these options. All students are tested on their language aptitude on entry and sit a language examination prior to graduation.

With regard to the learning environment, students with whom the team met during both of their visits testified to the good laboratory facilities and equipment that supports their learning opportunities and, for many, these modern facilities influenced their decision to study at ULF. Students also confirmed that these positive learning conditions enabled them to benefit from practical work during their studies. It was also apparent to the team that learning materials made available by teaching staff, and access to other learning resources such as the library, were viewed positively by students. The team also noted the work in progress to develop and enhance the university's E-Library, and students spoke well of the university's intentions in this regard. When invited to identify any improvements they would wish to see in their learning environment, students drew attention to the value they would attach to the provision of more social space for informal interaction, and to the provision of learning spaces for small group work.

The team also explored the information that students receive about academic matters. Students confirmed the accessibility and quality of the information made available in the ULF Student Guide, and that they found the university's website easy to use and to navigate. Similarly, the information made available by faculties and departments was also valued by the students with whom the team met. The team also noted that the university has mechanisms in place for providing academic advice, including academic advisors who advise students on matters such as course choice and manage students' academic files. The team learned that each study programme has an academic adviser. These arrangements appear to work well.

Through their enquiries, by making use of institutional documentation and by meeting staff and students, the team formed the view that in matters of learning and teaching, ULF places high value on intellectual inquiry and critical thinking, and that educational goals reflect the university's mission in the areas of liberal education and science. Further, study programmes reflect the institution's focus on student employability, and the curriculum is profiled to reflect this. The team noted from discussions with students that the teaching process emphasises applied knowledge and practical learning. It was also evident to the team that academic programmes incorporate well defined syllabi and that ULF curricula are designed to

address the challenges of the technological era. In the view of the team, study programmes are appropriately resourced.

The team notes that the university has recognised the need to modernise learning and teaching and has stated this clearly in its SER. For example, ULF has adopted the ECTS system, and pedagogic approaches are based on specified contact hours, transferable credit, and notional student learning hours. Discussions with staff and students pointed to evidence amongst staff that approaches to teaching are beginning to move in the direction of a less teacher-centred approach. For example, students are assigned practical projects, engage in group work, make use of technology, and are introduced to the importance of soft skills. The university is beginning to make progress with the introduction of modern technology to support learning, and is also seeking to emphasise lifelong learning. Progress is also being made with online and blended learning.

However, student-centred learning is not yet formalised or fully established at the university. As is acknowledged in the university's SER, and as was evident from meetings with staff and students, engagement with student-centred learning and new pedagogical approaches varies from teacher to teacher, and from course to course. Further, while the team heard a number of examples where teachers are exploring innovative pedagogy, the university's SER focuses narrowly on ECTS as a basis when outlining the institutional concept of student-centred learning. Moreover, in the view of the team, the available examples of good and innovative practice in student-centred learning (such as problem-based learning, case studies, interactive learning, and the use of technology for pedagogic purposes) should be shared more systematically. It appears that the sharing and dissemination of good practice where it does take place, does so informally.

It was also apparent to the team that arrangements for teaching staff for professional development and training in the enhancement of teaching and learning and academic practice for teaching staff are limited and sporadic, and that there are no formal institutional mechanisms to enable student-centred learning to be developed and taken further forward. The team noted the valuable contributions made from time to time by external experts from French universities, but formed the view that there is more work to be done in the area of learning and teaching enhancement, not least in leadership to drive change and innovation. From the team's perspective, it would be of benefit to the university if advantage was taken of European developments in learning and teaching, including practices associated with the Bologna Process, in areas such as a learning outcome-based approach to curriculum design and assessment, and innovation in learning and teaching more generally.

Therefore, the team believes that to enable progress to be made in the enhancement of learning and teaching, the university should set up a mechanism for connecting with and taking advantage of European developments in student-centred learning. The team recommends that a suitably qualified academic should be given responsibility to provide leadership in these matters and to promote the dissemination and sharing of innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment.

The team also considered a number of aspects of student support services at ULF. This included the office of the Registry, administrative arrangements for student admissions, registration and enrolment, and support for the graduation process. The team also noted central arrangements for the administration of examinations. All such arrangements and procedures appeared to work well and to be understood by staff and students. However, the team learned that some arrangements that are currently devolved to ULF branches are to be unified and centralised. This appeared to the team to bring benefits in terms of efficiency and procedural consistency.

In furthering their enquiries in the area of student support, the team was interested to learn about the scholarship support for ULF students. Scholarship support in the form of fee-reduction, at various levels, is available to students with the best grades, and also to various categories of financially and socially disadvantaged students. Students with whom the team met were fully aware of the scheme, and the process and policies for financial support seemed fair and transparent. Arrangements are also in place to advise students who wish to obtain bank loans, and some students can also benefit from sponsorship by local benefactors and local social aid agencies.

Through consulting the documentation made available to them, and during their discussions with staff and students, the team noted the various ways in which the university has taken steps to encourage and support student employability, and to enable positive employment outcomes for its students. These arrangements are highly valued by students and by external stakeholders. A key focal point in this area is the Secretary General, who advises students on internships and job opportunities. He also supervises the Internships Office which places students in a variety of work settings. The team formed the view that there are good opportunities for placing students with companies of various sizes, in both private and public sectors. The team learned of the wide range of placements, in fields such as telecommunications, environmental projects, transport, finance and accounting, and engineering. In some cases, internship placements lead to permanent employment. The team also noted other initiatives put in place by the university, such as graduate projects to help employability, and an apprenticeship centre being run on a project basis.

However, the Team noted that while in some faculties and departments internships are mandatory and that all students benefit from such opportunities, in other academic departments either there is no internship requirement, or only a limited percentage of students are able to benefit from it. Further, the university has yet to establish a careers service. Also, while some tracking of student graduate employment takes place under the authority of the Secretary General, this is not yet done systematically or on a comprehensive basis. The team wishes to encourage ULF to make further progress on such matters. Accordingly, the team recommends that to further strengthen the provision it makes to support student employability, it should: take steps to fully institutionalise its internship policy across all faculties and departments and award academic credit for internships; make arrangements for the comprehensive tracking and recording of student employment destinations; and complete its plans to establish a central careers and counselling service.

5. Research and knowledge transfer

In the documentation provided to the team, and through discussions with senior managers, the university made clear its determination to grow its research profile. However, though ULF is permitted to pursue scientific research activity, the university acknowledges in its SER that the volume and scope of such activity, and the outputs, are in need of improvement. The team agreed with the view that ULF should be better equipped to undertake research and recognises the challenges involved. The SER stated that, in accordance with the ULF mission, all faculties should participate in research and that the university's policy should be that all faculty members should undertake research.

The team noted that policies, processes, and regulations are in place that govern both undergraduate and graduate research projects completed by Master's students. The team also noted that ULF encourages staff to engage in research in a number of ways, including through the organisation of conferences that include international inputs, most notably from research active professors from the ULF's French partner universities. The team also learned, however, that ULF is constrained in the area of research by there being no established tradition or culture of research cooperation between Lebanese universities. In the view of the team this restricts ULF in its desire to form research and project partnerships that could help to develop the university's research profile and capacity.

In pursuing their enquiries with ULF staff, the team sought to assess the extent of support provided by the university to stimulate research at an individual level. The staff with whom the team met were positive in this regard but indicated that they would value more support for foreign travel in relation to research opportunities. A number of staff are involved in the supervision of Master's and doctoral students on a co-direction basis with French partner universities, such as Montpellier, Grenoble, Nancy and Evry, and this collaboration includes joint publications. Though the number and volume of all of these activities is quite low, the team recognised the value of these links to ULF faculty.

The team also explored the student dimension of research and noted that some projects by Bachelor and Master's students are developed into research projects with members of staff. Students thereby contribute to the outputs of ULF's research units. Students with whom the team met were able to provide examples of their awareness of research undertaken by staff and how this informed teaching and learning, and the team also heard from senior managers that efforts are being made to integrate research into the teaching and learning process.

The team noted the central role played by the University's Research Department, whose current Head is the Dean of Engineering. This department is exercises management oversight of all research activities, and the head coordinates research by liaising with Deans, by reporting to the Academic Council on research matters, and to the University Council for final decision-making. Processes are understood by staff. The team also learned that team-based faculty research is organised into several research units: materials, energy, and automatic control; optimisation and multi-agent systems; corporate social responsibility; and civil

engineering and environment. These small teams are defined by the projects in which they are involved, and each group has a close working relationship with a French university.

To further their understanding of these arrangements, and of the resourcing of research at ULF more generally, the team paid close attention to funding, both internal and external. In common with other Lebanese universities, the university's research budget is influenced by the requirement of the MEHE that 5% of a university's total revenue should be allocated to research. The team noted that there is little public funding for research and that ULF is not well placed to compete for external research funding. Funds for research, therefore, are relatively limited. Though ULF sets aside 5% of its budget, in reality, support for the main areas of research activity is supplemented by links with French universities, and through occasional funds obtained through the AUF, the French Embassy, and through Le Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation et de Recherche économiques et sociales (CEDRES), on the basis of bilateral agreements between the French and Lebanese governments.

The team explored how the 5% allocation was managed, and the distribution model used. Though part of this allocation is used to fund individual activities, such as conferences, the largest proportion is set aside for the purpose of funding the research units. This process is managed under the authority and oversight of the Academic Council which allocates funds to specific project proposals. This is not undertaken through a system of 'calls for proposals' but is taken forward on an asynchronous basis with proposals being submitted through the academic year. Approval is given by the Academic Council and ratified by the ULF President.

The Team formed the view that while these arrangements are fit for purpose in the university's current context, as ULF grows in size and the volume of research activity increases, it will need to organise its research funding on a different basis. From the team's perspective, this might be undertaken on a project basis with a more formal submission and approval process, and clear criteria; or it could be organised as core funding to support research teams with a proven track record and enhancing research areas that the university wishes to grow. Either way, the team concluded that the University will need to change its approach in the medium term, particularly if it aspires to involvement in large scale external projects.

A further key aspect of the university's stage of development in research is the arrangements made by ULF for doctoral provision. Though ULF is licensed for some Master's provision, it is not permitted to establish its own doctoral school. Nor is there a tradition in Lebanon of co-accreditation arrangements between two partner universities. As a consequence, it is dependent on its links with French universities for enabling staff and students to undertake a PhD externally, including through the co-direction supervision arrangements noted earlier. This also includes a recently finalised agreement with Montpellier for a Doctor of Business Administration programme, partly delivered at ULF. But the team noted that although the university wishes to increase the volume of co-direction, and to add further cooperation agreements, these arrangements are at a relatively early stage and the number of students and staff involved in such arrangements is low. To date, no doctoral candidates have graduated. The university is, however, able to take advantage of funding from French partner

universities, and from other French organisations such as AUF, for its Master's and graduate students to undertake doctoral studies in France.

While the university can benefit from these links when doctoral candidates return to join the ULF teaching staff, from the team's perspective it is difficult to see how ULF can significantly grow research in the absence of its own doctoral school. The team was interested to learn that, in support of its aspiration to be accredited for the establishment of a doctoral school, it has imminent plans to seek institutional accreditation by a European agency registered by EQAR. The team learned that this would be an important step towards meeting the recognition requirements of MEHE and the Higher Education Council. In reflecting on the matter of doctoral provision, the team noted that currently some 40% of ULF faculty are qualified to Master's level but that changes in higher education law will require qualification at PhD level. In the view of the team, the University should plan to address this situation though the team noted that the university has set no clear and specific targets.

In drawing together their findings on research and knowledge transfer, the team concluded that the university is not maximising opportunities to grow research on a regional basis, or internationally. Possibilities exist for collaboration with European universities in European-funded projects. Further, the team believes that, even from small beginnings, the university can grow its applied research capability by strengthening links with external partners. For example, ULF could seek income-generation opportunities by providing knowledge transfer and consultancy, and offering business solutions to regional stakeholders. This is recognised in the university's SER, which states that there should be more business and technological research contributing to the wider community.

The team noted that knowledge transfer, and the provision of continuous training and lifelong learning opportunities to external organisations is relatively new in the culture of Lebanese society and higher education. To date, while some training is provided by ULF to outside organisations such as banks and utilities companies, this is largely undertaken on a *pro bono* basis. Most activity in this area is focused around conferences, workshops and seminars. In the view of the team, the university needs to go beyond this. However there is currently no mechanism for undertaking a systematic analysis of training needs in the external environment, such as advanced training requirements, professional qualifications, short courses, or business solutions, nor is there an office or institutional focal point for this.

To make progress in the matters identified in this section, the team recommends that the university should set clear directions by prioritising and by agreeing a set of realistic, achievable and measurable targets for the next three to five years. Particular attention should be paid to: extending doctoral provision through links that include Montpellier; seeking applied research opportunities for income-generating knowledge transfer and consultancy agreements with regional organisations in the business, commercial and professional sectors; making available a programme of short courses for advanced training and skills up-dating in niche areas; and growing research links with universities in the wider European context.

6. Service to society

The team considered how the university has positioned itself in relation to community engagement and service to society. Though no formal requirement is placed upon faculty members, ULF encourages community service and the team learned that staff of the university are involved in a range of community oriented voluntary activities in areas such as environmental issues and ecology, outdoor and sporting activities, social welfare and support for disabled persons, and social issues generally. The team also noted the range of cultural events and activities that enhance its community profile and enable it to provide service to society. This includes scientific conferences and publications, and cultural events focused on local, regional, and international topics.

From the point of view of corporate identity and the ULF 'brand', the university has made good progress in establishing connections with the region and the local community. Support from the municipality is strong, and the level of interest amongst the business community, the professions, and public and private organisations is high. The university seeks to build relations with the wider community through its links with business and technology organisations, transport and agriculture, through bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, and through development agencies such as the Arab Economic Council. The team noted partnership and cooperation agreements with a range of such public and private bodies throughout Lebanon, all of which illustrate the determination of ULF, as a private university, to be successful at regional and national level.

Though Lebanon lacks a strong industrial base, thereby restricting regional and national employment opportunities for ULF graduates and leading to emigration by many qualified persons, the university makes notable contributions to society and also derives significant benefits. This includes involvement in development projects, exchange of data on market needs, workshops and seminars with people from business, industry and the professions, and invitations to companies to provide information on job opportunities. Together, such external links have, over twenty years or so, enabled ULF to add value to the external society and to derive a degree of competitive advantage for its educational product. The team learned that, while the lack of a thriving industrial sector in Lebanon represents a challenge to the university, the emphasis placed by ULF on the practical dimension of education, on work-related learning, and student employability, is recognised and appreciated by external stakeholders.

As is illustrated in the preceding paragraphs, the university's future development and general strategy is overall well aligned to regional development. From the perspective of the team, the specialist focus on areas such as technology, engineering, IT and computing, and business and management, will serve the university well going forward. The university takes deliberate steps to develop study programmes that meet the evolving needs and problems of society in areas such as renewable energy, telecommunications and transport. The team also noted

that the university's President involves partners in regular meetings to discuss community needs and ULF's involvement in external affairs.

Even so, while noting such links, contributions and services to society, following a fruitful meeting with external stakeholders it was apparent to the team that there is scope to build on current arrangements and to develop even stronger external relations in the regional economy and society. The team formed the view that the university may not be maximising available opportunities to involve external stakeholders more directly in the affairs of ULF, whether in governance structures or influencing strategy, or in matters relating to the development of the curriculum portfolio. There is potential to engage prominent external stakeholders in an advisory capacity on matters such as the future direction and development of the university. Accordingly, the team advises the University to take full advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from business, commerce and the professions, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the University Council and the ULF executive management team on opportunities for promoting the regional, national and international interests of ULF, and on strategic matters generally.

During their enquiries, the team learned that the university is revisiting an earlier proposal to establish an alumni association. Through meetings with various external and internal stakeholders, including former students with prominent positions in Lebanese business, commerce and the professions, it was evident that there is firm support for such a development. In view of this, and in noting that ULF is still a relatively young institution, the team recommends that the university should speed up the process of establishing a 'ULF Alumni Association' to promote the university's reputation and 'brand', and to take advantage of the potential benefits this could bring.

7. Internationalisation

In considering the university's international links and aspirations, the team noted the importance attached to links with French universities and academic organisations. This reflects the founding vision of ULF. Such partnerships contribute to teaching and research, and include joint degrees, credit transfer arrangements, student and staff exchanges, and research cooperation. The university also receives visits from prominent French academics and engages regularly with AUF in conference organisation and staff exchanges. However, in considering the wider picture of internationalisation, the team learned that the international partnerships, agreements, and networks from which the university and its staff and students are able to benefit, are predominantly oriented towards the French context and are relatively modest in range and number.

The team noted that ULF takes steps to encourage staff exchanges with several French universities with which there are well established agreements. Professors from these partner universities visit ULF to contribute to course delivery, and one ULF professor teaches Master's courses at Montpellier. Regarding student mobility, the team noted that there are no incoming students from any European universities. Further, although there is financial assistance for students to attend a French university under an Erasmus agreement, the take-up from ULF students is limited. While recognising that it is ULF policy to support mobility, including at Master's and doctoral levels, the team concluded that the level of activity, for both staff and students, is low. The team also noted the absence of measurable targets.

In pursuing their enquiries, the team was interested to learn that ULF has academic links in the wider Arab region, for example in Dubai and the UAE, and in Canada. It was also brought to the team's attention that the university is seeking additional academic agreements with European universities, with a view to growing cooperation on teaching, learning and research. While acknowledging the benefits gained from its traditional French links, the team encourages ULF in seeking agreements with a wider range of European universities.

In reflecting on these matters, the team noted the absence of a formal internationalisation strategy and the narrow focus on mobility in the scope of international activity. In discussions with the team, the university acknowledged that its approach to internationalisation should be re-visited. The team believes that it will be assisted in this by adopting a broader concept of internationalisation that goes beyond matters such as student and staff mobility, and includes a more strategic assessment of the types of international partnerships it needs. Accordingly, the team recommends that to strengthen its profile and impact in this area, the university should develop a wide-ranging internationalisation strategy, informed by a broadened concept of internationalisation and a focus on a wider range of geographical areas. This strategy should include clear and measurable targets, extending over a 3-5-year period, to include staff and student mobility, research partnerships, and involvement in European project opportunities such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020. This strategy should be part of the Strategic Plan addressed in Chapter 2.

8. Conclusion

The recommendations of the IEP Team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the University's future success and strategic development, and the determination of ULF to position itself as a leading higher education institution regionally and nationally in education and research. The Team's recommendations have been reached after full consideration of the structures and processes which underpin the operation of the University, its plans for change, and its capacity for taking forward successful change.

Governance and institutional decision-making
- As it makes progress with its policy development and decentralisation and its review of governance arrangements, the team recommends that the university considers growing future leadership capacity by assigning institutional-level responsibilities in areas, such as research, learning and teaching, external relations, and internationalisation, to young members of faculty with potential for future leadership roles within ULF.

- The team recommends that the university builds on its work to date in the area of strategic planning and draws up a 3-5-year Strategic Plan containing a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and specifies targets and resources, and timescales against which progress can be measured and monitored in a transparent manner. Implementation should be underpinned by an annual University Business Plan and annual Faculty Operational Plans which address the KPIs and targets, with progress being monitored by the University Council.

- The team recommends that the university makes progress in identifying opportunities for diversifying its income sources, and wish to encourage the proposals to obtain external funding for an Academic Programme Development Fund, a Physical Infrastructure Fund, and a University Development Fund (Branches). Consideration should also be given to obtaining funding for capital projects from additional external sources.

Quality culture
- Taking account of the need for a comprehensive quality assurance model that is appropriate for academic purposes, the team recommends that a Quality Working Group should be established to undertake a mapping exercise and 'gap analysis' against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

- The university should use the outcomes of the 'gap analysis' to inform the development of a university quality assurance manual which documents ULF quality procedures, and also a university-wide programme of briefing and training to achieve full awareness of the quality assurance manual and of the practices highlighted in the ESG.

- To improve and to encourage ownership of quality at the point of delivery, and as near as possible to the student experience, the team recommends that for each study programme a Study Programme Leader should be identified who, in conjunction with all members of the study programme team, should draw up an annual programme monitoring report, using all qualitative and quantitative information available to them, including student and stakeholder feedback. These reports should be considered by Faculty Councils when these bodies become fully established.

- The team recommends that the university reflects on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that surveys are used in all faculties and that mechanisms are put in place across the university and its departments, for informing students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.

Learning and teaching
- To enable progress to be made in the enhancement of learning and teaching, the university should set up a mechanism for connecting with and taking advantage of European developments in student-centred learning. The team recommends that a suitably qualified academic should be given responsibility to provide leadership in these matters and to promote the dissemination and sharing of innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment.

- The team recommends that to further strengthen the provision it makes to support student employability, it should: take steps to fully institutionalise its internship policy across all faculties and departments and award academic credit for internships; make arrangements for the comprehensive tracking and recording of student employment destinations; and complete its plans to establish a central careers and counselling service.

Research and knowledge transfer
- To make progress towards growth in research the team recommends that the university should set clear directions by prioritising and by agreeing a set of realistic, achievable and measurable targets for the next 3 to 5 years.

- Particular attention should be paid to: extending doctoral provision through links that include Montpellier; seeking applied research opportunities for income-generating knowledge transfer and consultancy agreements with regional organisations in the business, commercial and professional sectors; making available a programme of short courses for advanced training and skills up-dating in niche areas; and growing research links with universities in the wider European context.

Service to society
- The team recommends that the university takes full advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from business, commerce and the professions, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the University

Council and the ULF executive management team on opportunities for promoting the regional, national, and international interests of ULF, and on strategic matters generally.

- In noting that ULF is still a relatively young institution, the team recommends that the university should speed up the process of establishing a 'ULF Alumni Association' to promote the university's reputation and 'brand', and to take advantage of the potential benefits this could bring.

Internationalisation

- The team recommends that to strengthen its profile and impact internationally, the University should develop a wide-ranging internationalisation strategy, informed by a broadened concept of internationalisation and a focus on a wider range of geographical areas, and included in the new Strategic Plan. This strategy should include clear and measurable targets, extending over a 3-5-year period, to include staff and student mobility, research partnerships, and involvement in European project opportunities such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020.

Envoi

The IEP team has enjoyed learning about the distinctive characteristics and role of ULF as a forward-looking provider of higher education with strong regional and national aspirations. It has been an interesting experience to discuss with staff, students and external stakeholders the challenges faced by ULF and the university's efforts to address constraints and to explore future opportunities. We believe the university has the potential to be successful in its next stage of development, particularly in its regional, entrepreneurial role.

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the ULF President, Prof. Dr. Mohamad Salhab, for inviting the IEP team and for the welcome and hospitality provided during their two visits. Special thanks are offered to Dr Joudallah Bey, Vice-President and IEP liaison person, for his important work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process, and to Mrs Norma Arab for her excellent work and assistance as an interpreter.