

**Universitat de Lleida**

*FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT*

*July 2009*

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## **Introduction**

In 2004, the “Universitat de Lleida” (“UdL”) requested an institutional evaluation by the European University Association (EUA) in the context of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). The evaluation report was presented in June 2005.

In July 2008, almost four years after the original evaluation, UdL requested a follow-up evaluation by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association. The request was made by the Rector of UdL, Professor Joan Viñas Salas, who was also the Rector during the original evaluation.

The Steering Committee of the IEP appointed, as members of the evaluation team for the follow-up evaluation of UdL, the following:

- Régis Ritz, former Rector, Université Michel de Montaigne - Bordeaux 3, France, as team chair;
- Maxwell Irvine, former Vice Chancellor, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom;
- Jukka Liukkonen, MA student, University of Art and Design Helsinki, Finland;
- Dionyssis Kladis, Professor, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as team coordinator.

Professor Regis Ritz was also the chair of the original evaluation team.

The follow-up site visit to UdL took place from 19 to 22 May 2009.

## **The IEP follow-up evaluations**

Since 1998, EUA (then CRE) has offered, as an extension to its Institutional Evaluation Programme, the possibility of a follow-up evaluation, combined with a follow-up site visit. The rationale is that the follow-up evaluation can assist the university to evaluate the progress it has made since the original evaluation. What was the impact of the original evaluation? What use has the university made of the original evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up evaluation is also an opportunity for the university to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

In line with the Institutional Evaluation Programme as a whole, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the university itself to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the original evaluation. The university is expected to submit its own self-evaluation report, which will describe the progress made, possibly indicating barriers to change. The university's report will also indicate the issues it wishes to discuss with the follow-up evaluation team.

Monitoring the impact of the recommendations presented in the original report is one of the primary aims of the follow-up process. However, and since the overall evaluation process is a dynamic and not a static one, the follow-up evaluation should take into account new developments and reforms, both within the institution and within its wider environment, and adapt its recommendations accordingly. Furthermore, the follow-up process could also review and give feedback on the problems that may have occurred in the implementation of the original recommendations.

Finally, the follow-up evaluations provide valuable information on the relevance and the adequacy of the Institutional Evaluation Programme itself, indicating areas of consolidation and improvement that would benefit all EUA's members.

# **The follow-up evaluation process in the UdL**

## **1. Introduction**

The follow-up process and the organisation of the site visit were superviseded by the Vice-Rector for Quality and Planning of UdL, Professor Joan Prat Corominas, who also acted as liaison with the evaluation team.

The evaluation team received in due time a 10-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for the follow-up evaluation. The SER focused on the developments and the progress made in UdL following the recommendations made to the university in the context of the original evaluation (as outlined in the corresponding evaluation report). The evaluation team appreciated the work done in the SER and considered it as an honest and critical analysis of the current situation and the developments since 2005. In parallel, the evaluation team took also due consideration of the Strategic Plan 2006-2012 of UdL, which was put into action after the original evaluation of the university by the IEP.

As mentioned in the SER and as the team was told in many of the meetings, the original evaluation process was valued as very helpful to UdL and was followed by significant initiatives towards the implementation of most of its recommendations.

During the follow-up single site visit, the evaluation team had the opportunity to meet many of the key actors in UdL and the main stakeholders, namely:

- Deans of the Faculties and Heads of the Departments of UdL;
- members of the Social Council of UdL (including social partners);
- the members of the Directing Group of UdL (Rector, Vice-Rectors and General Secretary);
- members of the Self-Evaluation Group;
- members of the Quality Office;
- key persons of the central administration;
- one student, who was the chair of the Students' Council (meeting with wider group of students was not possible because of examinations).

The evaluation team had also the opportunity to visit the Agro-Food Science and Technology Park and meet members of its staff.

There were also intense and in depth discussions with the Rector of UdL, Professor Joan Viñas Salas, and the Vice-Rector for Quality and Planning, Professor Joan Prat Corominas.

The above meetings were followed by the final forum during the last morning of the visit, where the chair of the team, Professor Regis Ritz, presented the oral report of the team summarising comments and remarks on the various issues raised during the visit. The oral report was presented to an audience consisting of most of the people who participated in the meetings during the previous days. The oral report constitutes the basis of the present

evaluation report, which also results from all written information and from interviews with various actors during the site visit to UdL.

All those meetings and discussions were efficiently organised by Professor Joan Prat Corominas. The evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector of UdL and to the liaison person for the organisation before and during the follow-up site visit and for their generous hospitality.

## **2. Recalling the recommendations of the 2005 evaluation**

One of the major concerns of the evaluation team was to recall the 12 recommendations set in the original 2005 evaluation report and try to identify whether there was a response from UdL to these recommendations. These recommendations were as follows:

1. The distinction between policy making and management should be explained, understood and accepted by all. Policy making is a collegiate (democratic) process, whereas management is the process of ensuring that actions are taken to implement the agreed policies. Once a policy decision has been made, management must not be hindered in converting it into appropriate action.
2. UdL should actively develop, and set aside more funds for, staff development and training of academic and non-academic staff at all levels. University policy making and management require leadership skills. Staff appointed, or elected, to management positions should have opportunities for leadership training.
3. UdL, which asked for advice on developing a corporate ethos (i.e. a unified spirit within UdL), should become proactive in this area adopting and, where appropriate adapting, some of the suggestions made in the full report.
4. The plan to increase income generated from non-Governmental (including EU) sources to € 15M by 2010 is strongly endorsed, including the policy of progressively increasing the percentage charged for overheads on contract work to 25%. There should be transparent policies on the use of income from overheads and from exploiting the intellectual property rights of the University.
5. UdL is encouraged to continue its policies, and the work it has started, on technology transfer activities. In particular, the Science Park Project is strongly supported.
6. International activities (e.g. staff and student mobility, institutional networking in research) are not an additional option for a few. UdL must adopt a holistic approach to all its international activities. There is an urgent need for UdL to provide and promote language courses in major European languages for staff and students.
7. Lifelong learning (“non-regular courses”, “continuing and further education”) will become an increasingly important feature of the activities of the University not only for

income generation, but also - and more importantly - as its contribution to the well-being of the region and its people. For lifelong learning, UdL should be reactive to the needs of stakeholders through the UdL Foundation, and be proactive through proposals originating in the Centres (Faculties) and Departments.

8. It is clear that the present statutory arrangements for the appointment and promotion of academic staff are unsatisfactory. They are a constraint on future developments. The Rectors of the Universities in Catalonia should take an initiative, if possible with the support of their Social Councils, in proposing changes to the Government. Achievements in research should not be the only criterion for promotion.
9. A much higher priority should be given to creating an agreed institutional policy and culture for evaluation and quality improvement. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, recently adopted by the Ministers from the Bologna countries, should be considered as a basis for agreeing the quality standards for UdL.
10. The questionnaire for student evaluation of teaching and courses should be revised urgently. In most Centres (Faculties), there is a need for regular communication between students and academic staff.
11. Feedback on the outcomes of all types of evaluation should always be provided to those involved, indicating what follow-up actions have been taken, or indicating the reasons why actions have not been taken.
12. In most Centres (Faculties), there is a need to move towards more student-centred learning, more practical training and newer approaches to student assessment each in line with the Bologna Process.

Apart from the above direct recommendations, the original evaluation report of 2005 also addressed some other issues for which the need for progress and improvement appeared to be necessary:

- With regard to research, UdL was advised to transform itself from a traditional university to an entrepreneurial one, putting emphasis on technology transfer and innovation and developing incentives to stimulate cooperation between research groups (horizontal interaction, interdisciplinarity, internationalisation).
- With regard to academic structure and organisation, the need was stressed for UdL to clarify the roles and responsibilities between Faculties (Centres) and Departments.
- With regard to strategic planning, UdL was advised to design its strategy on the basis of a corporate attitude and ethos, adapting accordingly Faculties' strategic plans and integrating internationalisation into its general strategic plan.

### **3. The main findings of the follow-up evaluation**

#### **3.0 Introductory remarks**

Four years after the original evaluation, the issues raised by the main recommendations are still there, even if most of these recommendations have been implemented by UdL. The reason is that those issues are all related to the fundamental functions of the university and, in that sense, they belong to a process, a logical, organised progression. Therefore, the follow-up/evaluation approach today is no different and is centred on the same issues. At the same time one must remain quite aware that the implementation of new measures takes time and that the context for UdL is evolving regionally and nationally, not to mention the consequences of the current world economic crisis.

Some changes are evident: new buildings and facilities; new equipment (laboratories, applications related to information and communication technologies); the establishment of the Science and Technology Park; well kept campuses. Important progress has been made in many sectors. The evaluation team is impressed to see how seriously the original report has been considered and used by the university; its impact is indeed real on life in the university.

There seems to be a new sense of belonging and collegiate spirit. This is a prominent evolution, if we recall that UdL considered the development of a corporate ethos throughout the whole university community as a main problem for the university, and this was the reason why it had required the original evaluation by IEP *“with a particular scope centred on how to develop a corporate ethos”* (see UdL Follow-Up Self-Evaluation Report, p. 1).

Beyond compliments and congratulations for the work achieved so far, the evaluation team wishes to look again at UdL, its image and its identity, its sense of accountability, its role in society. The aim of the present follow-up evaluation report is not to judge performances or check results systematically but rather to commend some actions and simply add observations and suggestions to the recommendations of the original evaluation report. The remarks are presented in the following chapters, grouped under seven major issues; although they are not shaped in the form of concrete recommendations. The points which require consideration or reconsideration by UdL are developed in the following chapters.

#### **3.1 Governance**

The evaluation team wants to underline the great progress made with regards to governance. This progress can be seen in terms of the general organisation of governance, but it can also be seen in terms of the internal communication within the university, both top-down and bottom-up. An increase in the transparency of the overall functioning of the university can be attributed to this evolution.

Furthermore, the evaluation team realised that there is a strong leadership team in the university (Rector and Vice-Rectors), in good relationship with the Deans of Faculties (Centres) – ensuring an effective two-way communication within the university –, and which is supported by competent members of the administrative staff. What really impressed the evaluation team is the fact that all these key actors speak the same language and share the same visions and concerns for the future of the university.

During the discussions, it became quite clear that the awareness of the importance of strong and effective leadership is widely spread throughout the university community and that this is strongly connected with the necessity for leadership training at all levels.

However, the team wishes to make some remarks (or perhaps reminders or warnings):

It seems that there is a danger of “overloading” in various senses. Overloading in terms of processes may lead to an invading bureaucracy (this may also be the case because of evaluation overload). Overloading in terms of too many changes occurring at one time can be tiresome and/or tiring. In one of the meetings the team heard that academics are getting more and more tired, not because of their teaching or research activities but because of encroaching bureaucracy and their continuously increasing management tasks.

Apart from the need for a better balance among the various activities and tasks of all people involved inside the university, it seems that, in spite of the progress made so far, a better information flow is required concerning life in the university and the decision making processes as such.

The large number (26) of the existing Departments seems to reduce the effectiveness and the efficiency of the system and to add to overall bureaucracy. The evaluation team has the feeling that UdL should reconsider the arithmetic balance between Departments and Faculties (Centres). It seems that the relationship between Departments and Faculties (Centres) is a little uneasy. Furthermore, and apart from the need for this kind of balance, it is interesting to notice that the two groups of leaders at these two levels focus on different issues. Deans of Faculties (Centres) focused on the need to be given the necessary means in order to act efficiently, while Heads of Departments concentrated on the increasing workload caused by bureaucracy. The existence of these two different approaches may be a proof of the above - mentioned difficulty in the relationship between Departments and Faculties (Centres).

Finally, the team feels that students are not active enough in the university governance. According to the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the active involvement of students in higher education governance should be a concern of both the institutions (i.e. the authorities or the leadership of the institutions at all levels) and the student organisations. In that sense, the team suggests that more dialogue develop between staff (teaching and administrative) and students in order to involve them more actively in the governance and, more generally, in the running of UdL.

### **3.2 Research**

The team has noticed immense improvements in this sector and wishes to commend all the actors in UdL for these very positive changes. The following elements must be strongly underlined:

- The creation of the Agro-Food Science and Technology Park
- The development of four new research centres
- The fact that a better definition of applied research has been reached, leading to a stronger and more effective link to enterprises
- The fact that a clear prioritisation has been attained with regards to research areas and related projects, still keeping the role of the natural leader to the area of food and agriculture science and technology
- The increase of the number of PhD students registered at UdL
- The fact that its overall research activities ensure a very active involvement in the socio-economic context.

However, some remarks and comments can be made at this point:

Food and agriculture can be natural leaders for UdL but not at the expense of the other priorities or subjects. The announcement of the creation of an Institute of Research in Arts – IR/ART – based in Lleida is certainly good news and a challenge for the university to make sure it becomes a reality and not just a dream.

UdL must retain its universal dimension as a true university and, therefore, it should avoid a too narrow specialisation.

More international networking is also needed to ensure local connections with the economic world at large and open new fields/areas of development (The School of Agriculture Engineering and its international actions could be a model in that respect).

Doctorate students should be better integrated into the research centres and the interface between doctorate students and junior researchers should be made stronger.

### **3.3 Academic development**

#### **a) Implementing Bologna**

Much has been done in UdL for the implementation of the Bologna Process and this obviously means an immense amount of work for the teaching and administrative staff. For example, many new master programmes have been created which means a huge effort in terms of innovation and originality. It seems that changes have occurred mainly with regards to academic structures without affecting the teaching and learning methods. During the meetings, many people (academics and students) complained that the teaching methods are still very traditional, focusing on the fact that they are more theoretical than practical. In parallel, some students think their rights are not respected, notably concerning examinations and continuous evaluation, and, rather unexpectedly, they say that the Bologna Process should be blamed for that. It is known, of course, that the attitude to Bologna is very much a love-hate relationship. But, there must be a solution inside UdL to

this problem which is probably based on a pedagogical misunderstanding. It is true that at the heart of the Bologna reforms is the shift from teaching- oriented to learning- oriented education methods, from a teacher-centred to student-centred new Educational Paradigm. But this shift does not necessarily means continuous evaluation of students in a traditional approach. Furthermore, the spirit of Bologna requires the defining of curricula in terms of learning outcomes and not just in terms of contents. Therefore, the student-oriented methodology becomes central to that end. All this requires much more effort from all, students and teachers, but primarily from academics.

#### b) Staff development

A staff development policy will mean better training to face the new curricula and pedagogical challenges. The training courses for all staff represent one of the best answers. Furthermore, an effective and realistic staff development policy should also consider the need to bring some relief to overloaded teaching staff who complain about their heavy load of work due to large number of reforms and changes. The possibility of introducing sabbatical leaves, as practised in many European universities, could be considered to that direction.

#### c) Lifelong learning

In terms of lifelong learning (LLL) much has been done by UdL. The university must continue along the same line, conscious that the demands of the social partners are always justified and that it must adapt to these demands. However, UdL should widen the aim and the scope of its LLL activities and should not restrict them to Continuous Professional Development. LLL programmes deal as much with practical training as with the personal development of adults. This would be the best way for UDL to show that through such service to the community that it is perfectly integrated into the social context.

Lifelong learning is considered as a means to widening participation in higher education under the basic principle of public responsibility of/for higher education. We could quote at this point the paragraph concerning LLL from the recent Leuven Communiqué (adopted by the European Ministers in April 2009): *“Widening participation shall also be achieved through lifelong learning as an integral part of our education systems. Lifelong learning is subject to the principle of public responsibility.... Lifelong learning involves obtaining qualifications, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competences or enriching personal growth”*. LLL is a win-win process as every partner knows.

### 3.4 Links with society

The evaluation team is pleased to notice that the part played by UdL in its local and regional environment is continuously increasing in terms of increased accountability. Of course, one is aware of various constraints arising from the legal framework, but these constraints should not stop or delay more initiatives and original actions.

We had the opportunity to realise the very active involvement of UdL in the socio-economic context. And it is interesting to notice that this is a two-way involvement. On the one hand, a very positive cooperation of UdL with the city council is manifest, and, on the other hand, the Social Council of UdL (in fact its link with its social environment) is obviously full of ideas and energy; its very interesting composition and balance – senior and junior members – is very stimulating.

The team suggests on this issue that UdL should strive for more university people to be invited to sit on the administrative boards of regional associations for trade, commerce, or of small and medium size enterprises to counter the complaint that these associations do not know enough about the university and its scientific and social role.

### **3.5 Europeanisation - Internationalisation**

UdL must strike a balance between its local/regional and international positioning. To this end, the evaluation team would like to make some additional remarks.

#### **a) Mobility**

The Erasmus programme is evolving positively with more students willing to go abroad (although the principle of reciprocity is not respected as the incoming students are more numerous than the outgoing students). A big effort should be made to work with the Leonardo da Vinci programme for professional training. This will give a great opportunity to UdL students to find an internship or *stage* in firms abroad.

At the same time UdL must make sure it develops a language policy in order to ensure a greater mobility for their students; also courses in a foreign language (and not only English) can make UdL very attractive to European and world students (cf Erasmus Mundus master programmes).

#### **b) UdL in the European Higher Education Area**

It is clear that UdL is well aware of the development of the European Higher Education Area; it wants to be part/active member of that area. The successful reforms and changes noticeable in the university represent the best means to achieve this aim. The evaluation team wishes again to commend the university for the spirit in which it has worked towards this aim.

The university should continue its progression bearing in mind that the pillars of the European Higher Education Area are:

- the new architecture of diplomas at undergraduate and graduate levels (Bologna reforms)
- the European Credit Transfer System – ECTS
- the mobility programmes Erasmus – Leonardo
- quality assurance and cooperation on quality assurance in Europe
- lifelong learning programmes – LLL

- attractiveness to the world – Erasmus Mundus programme
- doctoral studies and research; increased international cooperation at doctoral level.

### **3.6 Quality culture**

The evaluation team is pleased to see that significant progress has been achieved in UdL with regards to quality assurance. The establishment and functioning of the Quality Office is now a reality, offering valuable data to the university and improving the quality assurance process. In other words, quality assurance has become a true priority for UdL and a real quality culture is developing at the university. The suggestion regarding this issue is that UdL should consider the potential danger of an invading bureaucracy through too much evaluation. In order to avoid this danger, or to cope with it, UdL must find an internal balance in the quality assurance procedures by increasing their efficiency. Furthermore, and in order to make everyone in the university community aware of the importance of quality assurance, UdL should pay increased attention to the transparency of the processes and to the impact that quality assurance processes have on the improvement of the university. The questionnaires filled by the students are a good example of this. The team noticed with pleasure that these questionnaires have been fundamentally revised and improved; and this is another good point for the university. It is important, however, that this process should be handled in such a way that it brings an essential feedback on the teaching and learning processes in line also with the new Educational Paradigm as mentioned earlier.

### **3.7 Strategic management and planning**

As mentioned earlier in this report, the development of a corporate ethos and a collegiate spirit is a key issue for UdL. The evaluation team believes that this aim can be better improved and achieved through a strategic plan at institutional level which will be based on the principle that the progress of the university as a whole will result in the progress of all separate units and of all individual members of the university community as well. Of course, this strategic plan should integrate a strategic management structure at institutional level in order to be implemented effectively and efficiently. The dissemination of a strategic plan, the definition of precise projects and of priorities is certainly the best way to develop that collegiate spirit so much needed.

The evaluation team is pleased to notice that UdL has definitely progressed with regards to this issue. The Strategic Plan 2006-2012 is a reality and the difficult phase of its implementation has already started. UdL must make sure now that declarations, concepts and statements are transformed into actions and concrete practical moves. All projects must be accompanied by a clear definition of the mission, of the people in charge and of a schedule. All components of the university must find their place; even behind important leaders, from technical sciences to health sciences- medicine and nursing-, to educational sciences, to arts and humanities, to law and economics, to agriculture engineering. A real action plan brings cohesion to the institution because it is institution-wide.

The strategic plan of a university reflects its particular identity. The evaluation team realised that UdL has immensely changed in a few years in terms of identity – and of identification. In fact, its identity has become clearer, and this change is reflected into its strategic plan.

Regarding UdL's identity, the evaluation team would like to stress two issues of major importance. The first issue refers to the external behaviour of UdL. In spite of difficulties (budget, funding) and other constraints, UdL has managed to maintain and successfully develop an active cooperation with outside partners from the political to the social and to the economic worlds. The second issue refers to the multidisciplinary identity of UdL. The diversity of subjects taught and of research projects developed is the real richness of UdL and it should be kept alive as part of its own culture. The evaluation team believes that these two characteristics should be at the heart of UdL's strategic plan and of its necessary evolution.

## **Envoi**

The evaluation team feels the need to express once again its sincere thanks to the people of UdL for the excellent arrangements provided to make this visit a challenging and delightful experience. At the same time, the evaluation team wishes to thank UdL for the generous and overwhelming hospitality.

The evaluation team has been positively impressed by the commitment and the engagement of all people in UdL, especially of its leadership. The evaluation team is convinced that the initiatives undertaken by the leadership of UdL are driving the university in the right direction and strongly supports the leadership to continue on this course.

Universitat de LLeida is a university at work, capable of change; a university in the city, with the city, for the city. Many partnerships are of a very high quality and efficiency. It is a university that believes in its future and which is on the right track.

And, last but not least, the evaluation team has met ambitious and happy university people who wish to cooperate, collaborate, unify, integrate and who wish to give sense to such words as complementarity, synergy, conjunction. This is one of the major strengths for any university in Europe today.