

**European University Association
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

**UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
AT RIGA
EVALUATION REPORT**

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PART A

FOREWORD

1. Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement.

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

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

2. The composition of the evaluation team was

- Professor Jürgen Kohler, former Rector, University of Greifswald, Germany. chair
- Professor Bente Kristensen, former Vice President, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
- Professor Sergio Machado dos Santos, former Rector, University of Minho, Portugal
- Mr. Jon Olafur Valdimarsson, student representative
- Emeritus Professor John L. Davies, former Pro Vice Chancellor, Anglia Ruskin University, UK, coordinator.

3. The Self Evaluation Report was prepared by the university in January 2009. The first visit took place on 8 – 10 February 2009 and the second visit 10 – 13 May 2009. The university helpfully provided requested additional information at all times.

4. The evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector of the university, Professor Marcis Auzins for his invitation and excellent hospitality during both visits; to the Head of the Self Evaluation Group, Professor Juris Krumins and the group; to Ms. Alina Grzibovska, our principal liaison; and to all the staff and students of the university we met and who gave of their time, perception and experience with generosity and unfailing good humour.

INTRODUCTION

5. The evaluation of the University of Latvia (hereafter referred to as UL) followed the same generic format employed by IEP elsewhere and UL demonstrated a very professional approach throughout, of which the following may be commended:
 - 5.1 an evidently efficient Self-Evaluation Steering Committee which met weekly between October 2008 and January 2009 and produced the SER in a relatively short period.
 - 5.2 an open, honest and collegial process which engaged all the relevant internal constituencies in a self critical manner (faculties and other units, administration, students), and consultation with key external stakeholders.
 - 5.3 a thorough SWOT analysis carried on across the Board and with a systematic cross-referencing of the elements in the SWOT to generate a purposive Action Plan.
 - 5.4 parallel strategic workshops and structural assessments which helpfully engaged with the SER.
 - 5.5 excellent administrative support for the process.
 - 5.6 articulation with the evolving Guidelines for the Development Strategy and the assumption that this process is critical to strategic re-thinking and institutional development. The evaluation team is confident the Development Strategy picks up most of the issues identified, but also provides additional perspectives.
 - 5.7 the recognition en route that the university's data base revealed shortcomings in comprehensiveness, understanding and analysis (the evaluation team addresses this in the relevant following chapters).
 - 5.8 UL has, as part of this debate, flagged its intention of becoming a leading research university in the Baltic and Northern Europe which is an ambitious but formidable mission to which we devote considerable attention in this Report.
6. It is clear, as the UL indicates, that the severe budget cuts portended for 2009, do not figure largely in the SER, but the ramifications were picked up in subsequent discussions and in the relevant chapters of this Report where advice from international perspectives is offered.
7. The evaluation team is encouraged by the UL culture which is supportive, self-critical and honest and strategically oriented. This bodes very well for the difficult decisions which lie ahead.
8. This Report commences with a discussion of the stages of evolution of the UL (Part A) and the external and internal contexts of constraints, norms and opportunities (Part B). It proceeds to a review of what emerges as the principal strategic challenges (Part C) and analyse the effectiveness of university approaches in the

light of the above in Part D. The Report concludes (Part E) with a summary of the principal development trajectory and accompanying necessities.

The recommendations of the evaluation team appear where appropriate in the text. They derive from the discussion and are emboldened for ease of identification.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF UL TO ITS PRESENT POSITION

9. UL was founded in 1919 as the national university to promote higher education, research excellence and national development. The university had difficult times under the Nazi and Soviet occupations and its mission varied between that of a teaching and a teaching/research institution. From 1990, its status was re-established and significant developments occurred – restructuring of the curriculum; focusing of research and the establishment of the nexus with teaching; community services; the integration of the institutes of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (first as quasi-independent not for profit companies and subsequently as agencies). The Riga Graduate School of Law was incorporated in 2006 and EU membership prompted a substantial rise in research activities. It has two branches in Daugavpils and Valka and also has summer study centres which are some distance away from the capital.
10. UL has certainly evolved in terms of substantial autonomy in financial matters (see paras 25 – 29), in organisational matters (see paras 17 – 24) and in academic and research matters (see paras 48 – 59), but is rather more constrained in terms of human resource questions (see paras 30 – 33). However, overall it has considerable freedom of self determination of strategy and the selection of strategic partners and the potential to create a partnership relationship with government. These are important factors in the strategic realignment of UL. The specifics in terms of operating opportunities and constraints are considered later.
11. It is apparent at this point in time that UL is confronted by a series of difficult macro environmental challenges, which may briefly be categorised thus
 - 11.1 an external economic environment which has depressed industrial and business activity, exacerbated currency difficulties and reduced the willingness of companies of all kinds to engage in research and R&D.
 - 11.2 severe financial downturn in HE and for UL which creates issues such as of income generation and cost effectiveness cancellation of project initiatives (e.g. Technology Park initiative) etc.
 - 11.3 national demographic downturn in terms of the number of eligible students of school leaving age, which thus creates issues in terms of the buoyancy of student numbers and therefore income; competition with other providers; the search for new student populations (including non traditional), and potential downsizing and restricting.
 - 11.4 competition with other state and private providers and the risk of brain drain nationally, regionally and internationally. This also provides a challenge in terms of inter-institutional cooperation, both in the delivery of services and political pressure.

11.5 a current political culture typified by a lack of will to prioritise and re-set strategic national agendas; policy vacuum in key areas (e.g. National Qualifications Framework; joint programmes, R&D); fragmented ministerial responsibilities for the domains in which the university is active which makes it difficult to forge integrated policies at national level and cohesive strategies at institutional level.

All these issues are addressed in this report.

12. It seems to the evaluation team, as a result of the discussion so far, that UL is at something of a cross roads in its development. There are various dimensions to this
- 12.1 to date, it has been something of a classical university in (central) European terms, but has indicated its intentions of becoming a leading international status research university and this creates a challenge for how this change of emphasis will be realised. This implies a rather different set of strategic and operating assumptions which we pursue later.
- 12.2 to date, it has been primarily a national university, but it now legitimately aspires to genuine international status.
- 12.3 to date, the prevailing culture has been predominantly collegial linked to state bureaucratic conditioning factors. The sum total of paras. 11.1 – 11.5 inevitably push it additionally in the directions of a strongly focused strategic culture; an entrepreneurial culture (especially given the financial context) and a quality culture, strongly linked to international imperatives. Thus, significant change of internal culture seems inescapable – and we hope, desirable, without losing its collegial strengths. We will address this issue in various chapters.
- 12.4 to date, UL's growth has been commendably opportunist and certainly purposive – but also partly incremental, so that various ad hoc policy and procedural approaches have been adopted, which are not necessarily mutually compatible. Thus a move from the ad hoc to the consciously systematic is important at this time and the university clearly recognises this very well in its evolving Development Strategy – a relatively recent phenomenon. This also will form a thread in our unfolding commentary.
13. Reference to “cross-roads” certainly does not imply that everything is in the air and there is every evidence that the university recognises these dimensions and opportunities and then implications and is acting accordingly. It has a proven capacity to perform; is strong on the proactive analysis of challenges and displays a strong commitment of staff to resolve issues. From our part as an evaluation team, we will endeavour to provide international benchmarking experience in terms of 11.1, 11.2, 11.3 and 11.4 above to help the dynamic of institutional development.

**PART B:
THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

MISSION, VISION, SCOPE AND POSITIONING

14. The SER indicates the current statement of the University Mission (2004), which encompasses
 - 14.1 its role as a guarantor for the development of Latvia as a country
 - 14.2 internationally renowned HE via a combination of diverse fields of research and studies and creative initiative
 - 14.3 the promotion of science
 - 14.4 the cultivation of Latvian language and culture
 - 14.5 strengthening the traditions of cultural cooperation

and these desiderata are well explored in the SER through a series of goals and in the specifics of particular domains. This is a perfectly reasonable broad statement, but we suspect it needs some refinement and exposition in the light of contemporary circumstances, especially in the context of the evolving vision.

15. The particular points we would draw to the university's attention are as follows
 - 15.1 a more comprehensive definition of the nature of the research university and the rationale for, and feasibility of, this in the current financial climate (see paras 44 – 47).
 - 15.2 the roles of knowledge transfer and exchange in the context of national economic development (see paras 84 – 87).
 - 15.3 the role of lifelong learning in national development (see paras 78 – 83).
 - 15.4 a redefinition of the scope of international positioning and strategy and what is meant by “cultural cooperation” (see paras 88 – 98).
 - 15.5 the manner in which regional/national and international agendas and activities mutually reinforce each other and are embedded in the mainstream activities rather than “add-ons” (see Part D generally).
 - 15.6 what should be the future size and scope of the academic profile of UL – is there any vision of a growth trajectory in terms of quantitative projection and the various components. This is particularly important given the likelihood of ongoing financial constraints (see paras 37 – 43, 56)?
 - 15.7 what statements should be made in the mission and vision statements about internal values and behaviour norms and essential characteristics of UL (see para 12)?
 - 15.8 what would be the distinctive defining characteristics and brand of UL and the next planning period compared with other competitor HEI (see paras 56, 44 – 47)?
16. The assumption behind the above is that a mission and vision do need to evolve to adapt to changing circumstances or find new expressions and the university is

encouraged in this debate. Clearly, what is eventually determined will have consequences for all the domains of university activity.

ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

17. The organisational framework is well articulated in the SER and the evidence collected by the evaluation team confirms the assertions and explanations given. However, the team is mindful of a number of imperatives which the organisation should address in the light of the issues defined earlier and these include
 - 17.1 is the organisation over-complex both in internal and external constituencies and does the Humboldtian/Central European model need to defer to different possibilities?
 - 17.2 does it give economies of scale and critical mass, both for academic and financial reasons?
 - 17.3 is it an economic organisation in the light of financial downturn?
 - 17.4 would academic performance be improved by a certain degree of restructuring?
 - 17.5 is the organisation likely to deliver the desired strategic imperatives outlines, especially the research and financial survival agendas?

We shall consider various facets of the organisation with the above in mind.

18. As far as Senate is concerned, it was interesting to note the clear separation of powers with the executive, which is reflected in the fact that the Rector is not its Chairman – a relatively unusual feature. To date this does not seem to have been a problem because of the reliance on mutual respect, strong conventions of behaviour and a drive to consensus. This will be important to sustain as difficult decisions become inevitable. Additionally, the evaluation team would observe
 - 18.1 the Senate Committees are well configured and the role of the Budget Commission of Senate is likely to be of profound importance in dealing with financial reduction but needs to place its policy making within a comprehensive strategy on financial health which must be a major responsibility of the Strategy Commission (see paras. 37 – 43).
 - 18.2 the big issues confronting Senate may well call for a series of strategy days, perhaps with external facilitators to broaden the international perspective of possibilities – a form of training.
 - 18.3 the Senate has respected the decentralised nature of the university by a bottom-up process of engagement with faculties. From now on, a more top-down approach may be helpful to provide a clear framework in which faculties may conceive their plans.
 - 18.4 hopefully, there will be a number of areas in this Report which will help focus the increasing strategic orientation of Senate which we applaud.

19. Regarding the operation of the central leadership and management structure, we note the good relationship between Vice Rectors (2), Director of UL, Director of Administration and Chancellor, as a sort of Cabinet. This will be central in coping with the current difficulties. The evaluation team would observe
- 19.1 **the number of Vice Rectors may need to be expanded to pick up in a more focused way the strategic imperatives now arising. A portfolio for external services (consultancy, lifelong learning, knowledge transfer, internationalisation) may be increasingly necessary to generate new income sources.**
- 19.2 **a reconception of the Vice Rector position may be timely, moving it into a more proactive, strategic change management mode and with direct access to influence on appropriate parts of the administration to provide direct instruments of intervention and help where needed.**
- 19.3 **this is not inconsistent with the notion of a unified administration introduced in 2002 which we welcome, but there may be a shift needed in the nature of the administrative role; i.e. whilst its units clearly have to do routine bureaucratic tasks to keep the UL running, increasingly in a devolved university there will be the need, amongst others, to:**
- **provide targeted help to faculties with difficulties e.g. flexible staffing procedures to resolve problems**
 - **provide clear policy guidelines**
 - **provide reliable performance data**
 - **consistent goal orientation and client orientation (faculties).**
- 19.4 **the Council of Deans, with senior leadership, should play an increasing role in the generation of agreed strategy which they then implement at their level.**
20. The evaluation team welcomed the debate at UL on the configuration of faculties, especially in the context of the financial situation and the formidable research agenda. To this end, the reduction in the number of faculties discussed seems a sound proposal for financial and academic reasons. The concept of “umbrella” faculties needs unpicking, i.e. a critical review, as it introduces yet another organisational form or level which would not be helpful. Nonetheless, the realignment and amalgamation is eminently sensible to
- 20.1 **reduce costs.**
- 20.2 **create a framework for more interdisciplinary linkage and activity in cognate areas in teaching, research and knowledge exchange, which is vital in any institutional development.**

It is not for us to specify what any realignment might look like but, at first sight, the fields of humanities broadly defined, languages and the natural sciences seem obvious candidates.

21. Related to this issue is that of overcomplicated structures at faculty level, which is a rather baroque phenomenon, and no doubt, the result of creative, but incremental growth over the last decades. In our discussions we detected a lack of clarity, in that there seems to be a number of different types of research entity for historical reasons

- 21.1 university institutes
 - 21.2 “agencies” which were formerly parts of the old Academies of Science
 - 21.3 institutes at faculty level
 - 21.4 analytical centres for various specialised fields
 - 21.5 chairs
22. It is strongly recommended that there should be
- 22.1 **a clarification of the precise status and role of each, and what each type contributes**
 - 22.2 **a rationalisation of terminology for research centres**
 - 22.3 **a formal review of performance, leading to ...**
 - 22.4 **an amalgamation into bigger, more interdisciplinary units where this makes sense, especially if performance is unimpressive**
 - 22.5 **some leading ones ought certainly to be viewed as having a flagship/European role to play**
 - 22.6 **in future, there should be a rigorous process of setting these up with defined criteria fairly applied and with “sunset” clauses to activate in the event of poor performance**
 - 22.7 **the resulting centres should be located either within the scope of “new” faculty management or as inter-disciplinary centres operating across faculties**
 - 22.8 **a clear indication of where the new proposed Graduate Schools fit in.**

These issues are returned to in paras. 61 – 63 on Research.

We feel sure movement along these lines is consistent with the overarching research agenda of UL.

23. The university has adopted a pattern of significant decentralisation to faculties which we thoroughly applaud, both in terms of stimulating creativity and innovation, but also in creating a motivational framework for entrepreneurial activity and income generation. With the re-alignment of faculties discussed earlier, greater scope for interdisciplinarity within the faculties should be evident. However, several corollaries follow, which we would urge the university to consider fairly quickly, namely
- 23.1 **the pattern of decentralisation probably needs redefinition because of the financial situation i.e.**
 - **a clear financial envelope in which faculties need to plan their income and expenditure targets over time (possibly including research entities)**
 - **a budget process which is top-down – up in nature**

- **review of the budget algorithm : does it drive or inhibit new priorities?**
 - **consideration of what level in the university is appropriate for budget centre status – faculty or its subunits.**
- 23.2 **an appraisal of faculty level management, i.e.**
- **redefinition of the role of the dean as more executive rather than simply academic leader**
 - **the formalisation of associate dean roles with portfolios to match those of senior university officers, and the creation of university-wide groupings of associate deans with the same portfolios to work with the relevant vice-rectors in formulating and implementing policy consistently.**
- 23.3 **a review of the adequacy of management information/performance data pertaining to faculty health.**
- 23.4 **a review of the extent to which Faculty Councils are geared up for the strategic view they need and what training may be desirable.**
- 23.5 **since one of the dangers of excessive decentralisation is fortress faculties, the team feels UL should pay specific attention to**
- **module/credit based budgeting to stimulate interdisciplinary courses and course rationalisation**
 - **as far as possible, designating research centres as university wide or inter faculty**
 - **realising horizontal groups of associate deans**
 - **maximising the contribution of the Deans' Council to policy formation**
 - **resource sharing.**

Various issues regarding process and policy are developed in later chapters.

24. The evaluation team was pleased to note the involvement of the external stakeholders of the university in the Advisory Board, the Constitutional Assembly and other ad hoc groups covered by the Rector for specific purposes. The value of this was recognised by both internals and externals. It is understood that the proposed New Law on higher education (not yet accepted) makes reference to the creation of a university Governing Council of 16 (8 internals, 4 stakeholders and 4 ministerial appointments). The team sees the latter as a positive development and in line with international good practice, though
- 24.1 **the proportion of internals seems high, comparatively speaking. Ministerial appointments seem very high, if the four persons appointed are all ministerial officers whose main interest is in the accountability of the university. The priority should be on innovative and visionary members.**
- 24.2 **the university is urged to look at the charters/statutes of similar bodies in Scandinavia, UK and Netherlands to ensure an optimum balance of public accountability, market accountability and genuine strategic guidance. Care is advised in the drafting.**

RESOURCES: FINANCE

25. The university is a “state-funded university” with its own budgetary status outside the state budget. This status provides considerable autonomy in attracting resources from various sources and may set its own budget priorities in terms of internal redistribution once the funds are received from government. It can use banks, set up its own Foundation (which it has) and owns its own property. The amount of autonomy is very helpful when contemplating creative responses to budget cuts, but autonomy, of course, does not, per se, guarantee Government funds (see para. 28).
26. The incoming funds for education (from the Ministry of Education and Science – MES) are based on the numbers of full time student places, the basic expenses and subject specific expenses, and culminate in a planning agreement between MES and the university. The research income from government is based on a tender for projects of fundamental and applied resource adjudicated by the Latvian Council of Science, encompassing salaries, equipment etc. and is supplement by EU funding and contract research. The planning agreement has been for a five year term with annual update, but does not encompass any specific priority setting as is the case in Nordic countries, thus engendering a certain feeling of neglect in terms of strategic steerage. In the view of the evaluation team, this at least enables the UL to chart its own directions to financial salvation.
27. As far as internal financial distribution is concerned, 63% is allocated to the academic units and 37% is spent on common administration, infrastructure and support, including projects and 9% for new projects and initiatives. 61% of the budget goes on the salary fund, 2% for travel costs, 18% for services, 3% for different materials, 1% for books, 6% for social and student subsidies, 8% for capital assets, 1% for other costs. Research income is protected from any deduction, which seems sensible in the light of the research agenda. Financial control is rigorously applied through the UL Department of Finance and Accounting, but budgets are managed in a decentralised manner.

The general view obtained by the evaluation team across the UL was that the internal systems are transparent and fair and attuned as far as possible to strategic priorities and incentivisation, with which commendation, the team agrees.

28. The big challenge to all the above is that produced by the effect of the global financial downturn on Latvian state finances and the knock-on consequences for UL. Whilst the situation continues to be very volatile, it seems the case that a budget cut of 34 – 40% for the immediate future is inescapable and at the time of the main visit, 10% had already been cut. The predictability of this situation produces the urgent need to determine a strategy of response.
29. At this stage in the report, we merely identify some principal considerations which will be developed in detail elsewhere.

29.1 strategies for cost reduction are high on the agenda and this will encompass, *inter alia*

- **the economies of the educational process (class contact, duplication of modules, class sizes, electives etc.**
- **administrative savings**

- **voluntary staff salary reductions (10% has already occurred)**
 - **organisational restructuring (see para 19 – 24).**
- 29.2 **the acquisition of new income sources which are diverse, buoyant and durable, which is not easy in the societal context of general economic depression. Properly done this would**
- **exploit the entire academic offering of services**
 - **place great stress on the Foundation and Innovation Centre and external stakeholder advice.**
- 29.3 **a detailed appraisal of current HR strategy from the standpoint of 29.1 and 29.2 and using staff more economically.**
- 29.4 **how to sustain creative innovation in a contracting base – the sanctity of the 8% initiative fund is important here.**
- 29.5 **the refinement of internal management processes to meet the current predicament – internal redistribution formula; how far decentralisation can continue; revisiting the income generation incentives; planning agreements with faculties etc.**
- 29.6 **the sustainability of a cooperative internal culture to manage the above.**
- 29.7 **the potential of the Association of Latvian Universities to act coherently and persuasively in national policy debates and public relations.**
- 29.8 **the creation of room for manoeuvre.**

To all these we return in more detail in paras 37 – 43.

HUMAN RESOURCES

30. The university appears to be reasonably content with the degree of autonomy it possesses in relation to matters of HR policy and practice and the evaluation team would not disagree. It may however be that, as has been the case in other HE systems facing financial reduction, the Ministry could usefully develop more enabling policies and practices to ease the more difficult HE issues arising **e.g. funds for voluntary redundancy or incentives for early retirement. To this point, we return later.**
31. Whilst the SER and SWOT contained some pertinent examples of good practice e.g. gender policy, staff recruitment and job definition, there did not however, appear to be a comprehensive HR strategy encompassing the normal contents. The evaluation team recommends the establishment of one at an early date to help cope with emerging issues e.g.
- 31.1 **analysis of current and future HR issues.**
- 31.2 **nature and expectations of staff – academic and non academic.**
- 31.3 **staffing projections over strategic plan period in various domains and categories including shortages and overcapacity; skills deficits.**

- 31.4 **priorities for recruitment of staff.**
- 31.5 **processes for appraisal and development.**
- 31.6 **staff development strategies.**
- 31.7 **staff reduction strategies.**
- 31.8 **gender, equal opportunities etc.**
- 31.9 **salary and reward policy.**

By definition, this list of topics indicates some of the areas where there seems to be a policy vacuum. Notwithstanding this, good practice can certainly be observed in many areas.

- 32. The evaluation team would recommend strongly that the university address the following
 - 32.1 **the design of a series of HR policy initiatives to address financial reduction. These might include**
 - **a staff workload profile projection indicating staff complements possible, given certain manpower planning financial scenarios, staff student ratio targets etc. for the whole university and for its component parts over the next planning period**
 - **using these as the basis for determining where staff priorities need to be lost or suspended – and also where additional capacity is needed in growth areas**
 - **developing means of staff reduction with government cooperation – early retirement, staff redeployment, transfers, voluntary redundancies, redundancies – if needed**
 - **performance appraisal.**
 - 32.2 **the design of a series of HR policy initiatives to address the international research status priority e.g.**
 - **volume of teaching hours**
 - **sabbaticals**
 - **using modular systems to free up staff time**
 - **secondments with foreign universities (two way)**
 - **hiring of international class researchers full-time; part-time; fractional**
 - **competitive salaries (admittedly difficult in a period of financial reduction)**
 - **incentive and reward systems.**
 - 32.3 **the creation of a staffing strategy for each academic and administrative unit : this assumes that unit heads have HR management as part of their job descriptions, including staff appraisal.**
 - 32.4 **the evaluation team notes the six year open competition rule for staff appointments, which is potentially very helpful at a time of financial reduction but which may need some readjustment.**

- 32.5 **the evaluation team commends the existing foci for academic staff development (innovation and ESF; Framework programmes competence development; professional upgrading for internationalisation). However, there are various other generic staff development needs emerging from this Report which reinforce the need for an explicit comprehensive annual staff development programme linked to QA processes and outcomes and the strategic plan at various levels.**
- 32.6 **the substantial strengthening of a properly functioning HR department, using examples from Nordic countries.**
33. The evaluation team notes the existence of the single union with 80% membership and commend the fact that both staff and student unions are heavily engaged with management in generating creative responses to financial reduction in academic and other domains. The enrichment of this cooperation is vital in the next few years.

EVALUATION AND QUALITY PROCESSES

34. The SER addresses fully the issues of evaluation and quality in relation to academic domains personnel questions and the connection with university strategy and the SWOT. UL has come a long way in a relatively short period and the evaluation team commends the university on
- 34.1 the establishment of a coherent organisational framework for QA, encompassing
- a responsible Vice Rector and a Quality Management and Audit Department (QMAD)
 - a Quality Evaluation Commission of Senate (QEC)
 - the adoption by Senate of a strong QA perspective and processes.
- 34.2 the design of a range of instruments either in use or planned. These include
- internal accreditation of new study programmes
 - re-accreditation processes
 - regular ongoing programme evaluations and questionnaires and a Year Book
 - clear rubrics for assessment
 - QA for academic administrative staff development.
- 34.3 the systematic engagement of students and employers in QA processes, with which both are reasonably satisfied.
35. Given the newness of some of these developments, it is not surprising that a fully robust QA culture has only partly developed, so that the full understanding and implementation of the above is not universal across or throughout the university, which is partly due to the UL's decentralised nature (which we applaud). We appreciate the development of a quality culture takes time and is a consequence of repetitive cyclical activity and purposive action loops to ensure implementation of recommendations – and subsequent verification. The advent of financial reduction and the discipline of developing an international research university should reinforce

this, and the SER Action Plan addresses the issues of “fragmented organisational culture”. Earlier chapters (paras. 12.4) referred to the need for progressive systematisation and this area is a good candidate. The proactive role of Faculty Boards is seen as vital in a robust QA culture in a decentralised institution.

36. Given the above, the evaluation team would specifically recommend that UL consider the following:

36.1 **The establishment of a “philosophical” model which underpins the evolving strategy in that it indicates the lead idea steering the understanding of “quality” and, following from this, quality development and quality assessment. We suspect that this is likely to be a combination of “Fitness for Purpose” and “Quality as Excellence” approaches, on which subsequent briefing can be provided if desired.**

36.2 **Most mature QA systems would encompass a comprehensive range of objects for Q evaluation e.g.**

- **teaching**
- **research**
- **knowledge exchange**
- **academic units**
- **administrative units**

- **defined policy areas (such as internationalisation).**

Of the above, research degrees, knowledge exchange and academic units departments and “research centres” are not well developed, and, as far as we could tell, there is no prospect as yet of policy areas to be looked at over time. These gaps should be filled shortly in a planned manner.

36.3 **Greater attention probably needs to be given to the more systematic bedding down of the “Action Loop” and the use and verification of Quality Improvement Plans arising from reviews. The reviews associated with a period of financial reduction demand quick responses and accountability for action.**

36.4 **Greater systematisation of QA invariably calls into question the extent, robustness, validity and updatedness of performance data – primarily a matter for QMAD. We were not able to see how data is used for QA purposes, but nonetheless propose this as a matter of continuing attention – which also means attention to access, transparency and rules of interrogation.**

36.5 **Understandably, QA enquires focus on academic quality per se, but increasingly the team feels that this will have to be linked to value for money studies in terms of pedagogy and cost/educational effectiveness. This is referred to elsewhere (see paras. 40.2, 54).**

36.6 **As familiarity with ECTS and credit/modular based system grows, it will be necessary to evolve QA processes to keep pace with the exploitation of the credit/modular system e.g.**

- **modules once approved may be used for a variety of programme titles and do not need to be approved every time they figure in a new programme**
 - **programme approval is thus more about approval of the title; verifying levels of market demand; and ensuring that resources are used effectively**
 - **separate processes of module and programme approval are likely**
 - **module assessment is likely to be based on explicit learning outcomes.**
- 36.7 **The relationship between QA and strategic planning in a period of financial reduction raises new issues (see paras. 100 and 103).**
- 36.8 **As the SER acknowledges, policy on publication of reviews, transparency etc. is a sensitive area, and UL is urged to look at practices adopted in mature QA systems.**
- 36.9 **The Year Book is an excellent idea to record activity and outcomes. However, it is the place where observed good practice examples should be categorised and celebrated for the purpose of cross-fertilising good practice – important in safeguarding against “fortress faculty” attitudes.**
- 36.10 **Whilst we note the demands of national accreditation, the university may wish to consider the possibility of international accreditation of relevant programmes via subject-based accreditation agencies, e.g. business. This, whilst time consuming, is worthwhile in terms of international credibility (see also 91.9).**
- 36.11 **On a technical point, the administration of student questionnaires by electronic means would probably be more efficient.**

**PART C:
GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S PRINCIPAL STRATEGIC
AGENDAS AND CHALLENGES**

GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF PRINCIPAL STRATEGIC AGENDAS OF UNIVERSITY

37. The university, in its SER, synthesised the results of the SWOT analysis undertaken and very interestingly produced an Action Plan with four categories of classification of actions
- 37.1 those which would exploit opportunities presented by the external environment which aligned with existing strengths
 - 37.2 those designed to eliminate external threats by using existing strengths
 - 37.3 those designed to improve existing weaknesses to take advantage of external opportunities
 - 37.4 those designed to improve existing weaknesses to cope with external threats.

The actions identified seem to the evaluation team to be logical outcomes of the analysis and it is hoped the university will use these as a basis for the next iteration of the Strategic Plan/Development Strategy, the current one just about having expired.

38. In para. 11 of this Report, we also alluded to some critical macro environmental challenges which add a few dimensions to those identified in the SWOT. This section of the IEP Report explores a limited number of the principal broad policy responses to these challenges which will be further developed in the specific contexts of the domains of university activity in Part D. The agendas explored are as follows:
- 38.1 developing strategies for financial reduction (see paras. 39 – 43).
 - 38.2 the research university agenda (see paras 44 – 47).
 - 38.3 the internationalisation priority (see paras. 88 – 98).
 - 38.4 the regional institutional profile (see paras. 72 – 87).
 - 38.5 the future institutional profile (see paras. 56).
 - 38.6 securing a responsive organisation (see paras. 17 – 24).
 - 38.7 strategic partnerships (see paras. 105).

The evaluation team hopes this discussion will prove pertinent as the next version of the Strategic Plan is developed.

Developing Strategies for Financial Reduction

39. As the fairly long standing conventional wisdom in the international literature demonstrates¹, there are several different types of contraction, each calling for

¹ e.g. J. L. Davies (1997) The Evolution of University Responses to Financial Reduction. *International Journal of Higher Education Management*. OECD Vol. 9 No. 1

different types of strategic response from universities. UL appears to fall into the category of "Substantial Contraction over a short period", but, depending on the nature of the Latvian economic revival, this could extend to "Long Term Contraction", neither of which is especially pleasant, but emphatically, both need a strategy rather than a collection of ad hoc responses. We are confident the UL realises this, and is taking active steps to produce a coherent strategic framework, in which the Senate Budget and Strategy Development Commissions will need to play major roles in enabling consensus, ownership and inspiration. The main elements in a strategy for this severe condition of a 34%+ cut are likely to be a very comprehensive range of possibilities.

40. The university is recommended to address the following, in terms of cost efficiency:
- 40.1 **health of academic units/centres: are they performing qualitatively and financially. So ...**
 - **again, performance data on income, costs and teaching, research is needed**
 - **on the basis of this, some units in growth areas would be earmarked for investment; others subject to closure or reconfiguration**
 - **a transparent process for these judgements is clearly essential.**
 - 40.2 **administrative costs e.g.**
 - **are certain processes actually necessary?**
 - **scope for simplification, if so?**
 - **scope for outsourcing?**
 - **scope for downsizing?**
 - 40.3 **personnel area : reduction of staffing costs by e.g.**
 - **voluntary redundancy**
 - **early retirement**
 - **non-filling of vacancies**
 - **converting some staff to fractional appointments**
 - **no reappointment at competition stage**
 - **staff appraisal as a means of assessing quality**
 - 40.4 **library consolidation.**
 - 40.5 **cessation of branch campuses**
 - 40.6 **suspension of capital expenditures**
 - 40.7 **percentage reductions across the board**
 - 40.8 **merger of small organisational units**
 - 40.9 **job-sharing with (national or/and international) partners by means of cooperation in certain areas, i.e. by establishing joint programmes**

None of these are easy, but the evaluation team would recommend their consideration by the university, if not already done. Clearly, the above need to be put in the context of Strategic priorities, so as not to lose valuable resources of potential growth.

41. New income generation is the other side of the equation, to make up deficits by more creative, expansionary endeavours. This dimension is more positive and intellectually exciting, because it cries out for innovation, imagination and entrepreneurial behaviour. It also has the huge bonus of increasing the university's capacity for self determination by reducing dependence on public funds. However, the income needs to demonstrate a surplus over cost, for purposes of cross subsidising deficits elsewhere and building a base for room for manoeuvre and subsequent investment. **Among the possibilities are**

41.1 exploitation of intellectual property

- **consultancy**
- **university companies/start-ups and spin offs**
- **licensing**
- **contract research**

41.2 external research grants : nationally, internationally

41.3 attracting non government student income

- **fees for lifelong learning courses**
- **non EU student fees**
- **exchange students (non EU)**
- **full cost postgraduate courses.**

41.4 sales of goods and services

41.5 leasing or sale of buildings/land

41.6 corporate sponsorship

41.7 "Foundation" related funding – donations, endowments, scholarships, etc. especially internationally

41.8 use of strategic alliances with international universities to "piggy back" on international bids

41.9 campus tourism

41.10 internal mergers to generate new interdisciplinary clusters in market growth areas.

The evaluation team recommends consideration of the above which, of course, implies an entrepreneurial culture at least in part, strongly focused and realistic marketing, accurate costing and pricing and commercialisation based on institutional strengths, not weaknesses.

42. The above places considerable strain on the universities and its members, but the evaluation team also asks the university to consider

- 42.1 **the positive potential of this difficult situation, which provides a lever for doing what probably should have been done already, as several faculties helpfully told us e.g. rethinking language policy; eliminating wastage; encouraging multi-disciplinarity; searching for new markets.**
 - 42.2 **a mix of cost reduction and income generation is likely and each unit in a decentralised setting should be required to strategise a realistic mix for itself.**
 - 42.3 **space for manoeuvre and investment in new initiatives must be created – hence the importance of surplus budgeting.**
 - 42.4 **the above policy options for the university should not provoke a reversion from a decentralised system which impels ownership of problems and the obligation to produce solutions.**
 - 42.5 **how the political dynamics of the adoption of these policies (or part thereof) would be handled. Here, the evaluation team is certainly confident of the university’s capacity for consensus building.**
43. The evaluation team would be happy to advise further on any of the above. The financial reduction challenge clearly impinges on virtually every other element of quality and strategic development – hence the team’s feeling that the above advice may be helpful to the university.

THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AGENDA

44. The SER is quite unambiguous on the vision of establishing UL as a leading research university in the Baltic region and eventually further afield. It is clear about the reasons for such an ambition. However, the economic situation, on the one hand, signifies substantial financial reduction and a threat to sustainable national investment in UL’s research, but, on the other, provides an impetus to seek independent positioning and funds outside Latvia. The latter is easier said than done and clearly also engages the institutional strategy of UL, of which more will be said later.
45. UL has acknowledged that research intensiveness inevitably involves excellence as the highest level of quality and is systematically using international performance indicators to this end, which we commend. It has consciously devised a set of instruments for the promotion of its research excellence, formulated as a matrix, covering, *inter alia*, the attraction of resources and the nurturing of autonomy in relation to staff involvement, infrastructure development, attraction of funding and cooperation synergies. It is open and honest about success stories, ambiguous outcomes and failures, which is most impressive.
46. In similar vein, the SWOT analysis is forthcoming in terms of factors relevant to the international research agenda, namely
- 46.1 among strengths :
 - clear vision
 - comprehensive profile
 - international recognition in some fields

- staff outputs
- upward trends in research performance indicators.

46.2 among weaknesses :

- organisational culture
- institutional fragmentation and structural barriers
- restricted doctoral student provision
- per capita loss productions
- limited QA
- low level stakeholder arrangements in R&D
- funding limitations
- insufficient staff time for quality research compared with administrative and mass teaching.

46.3 among opportunities

- EU financing of R&D
- cooperative R&D with national stakeholders
- utilising relative autonomy.

46.4 among threats

- national economic situation
- unfavourable age profile and slow renewal
- demography
- the VAT threat to R&D funding.

Of these factors, it is interesting to note that many of the weaknesses identified can be approached through internal reforms of structure, processes, job definitions and investment directions and are not dependent on external resources.

47. The evaluation team notes and commends the instruments advocated in the SER for the sustainability of research excellence. These are all very relevant. **To the above broad strategic points, the evaluation team would also add**

47.1 **the emergence of an international class research intensive university is in the national interest and no doubt political pressure is being exerted by the Rector and key stakeholders on government. The arguments here would presumably include**

- **the role of such a university in industrial and business reconstruction and realignment (assuming UL is geared up to this) – see also paras. 72 – 77**
- **such a university serves the interests of a range of ministries not just MES**
- **such a university is a potential instrument of securing international funding and business inward investment.**

47.2 **a major research university probably needs a high general plateau of very good research across the board (which is not entirely the case at present), as well as some significant peaks of excellence (which probably need closer identification and targeted investment at UL) to which the others may legitimately aspire. This raises the point that research fund allocation probably needs to be more “top-down” and**

selective rather than thinly spread – at least to start. A corollary is a clear statement of the criteria by which such “peaks” are designated and de-designated based on their performance.

47.3 a research university is normally typified by a relatively large proportion of postgraduate students, especially research masters and doctoral students (c. 35 – 40%+). Apart from the specific detailed issues involved which we consider later (paras. 64 – 67) this would constitute a major strategic decision and leap for UL.

47.4 does UL need any more disciplines in its profile properly in this regard, especially bearing in mind the knowledge transfer/economic regeneration imperatives; the interdisciplinary possibilities; the comprehensiveness which is often the feature of research-intensive universities? Technology and related areas come to mind. If additional fields are needed, these could be generated by various means

- simply adding additional fields, assuming they can be funded**
- strategic alliances with other universities with these disciplines thus supplementing the UL’s capacity, especially in NE Baltic**
- mergers with other Latvian HEI.**

This point, of course, raises all sorts of other strategic issues about the future size and scope of UL, which are addressed elsewhere.

These broad strategic dimensions are developed in more detail in subsequent paragraphs.

**PART D:
ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE KEY OPERATIONAL AREAS/DOMAINS
OF THE UNIVERSITY**

EDUCATION, TEACHING AND LEARNING

48. The university's provision of educational programmes reflects a dynamic process of evolution over the past eight years, to satisfy a range of explicit goals, namely
- 48.1 enhancing the student experience in terms of access, equity, meeting employment and personal development aspirations
 - 48.2 articulating with the benchmarks provided by Bologna and other internationally imperatives
 - 48.3 serving society and the needs of key employing stakeholders
 - 48.4 interdisciplinarity
 - 48.5 excellence
 - 48.6 inter-institutional provision.

This has resulted in a significant development of new programmes at various levels and incorporating an evident lifelong learning provision; so-called professional courses; and e-learning delivery. The evaluation team commends the university's efforts.

49. Putting this evolution in its context,
- 49.1 such growth almost inevitably means that some deficiencies emerge en route as systems and particularities catch up with the innovations (see paras. 36).
 - 49.2 the current financial situation clearly has implications for future directions both in terms of the existing profile and what is possible in relation to future developments.
 - 49.3 the adoption of the research university goal clearly holds significant implications for the content of the rest of the educational profile.
 - 49.4 a fully responsive university demonstrably needs both sufficient autonomy to act quickly in academic development and also a robust national framework.

These considerations are explored throughout subsequent paragraphs.

50. The overall programme portfolio is comprehensive and the following may be briefly noted:
- 50.1 the programme is comprehensively modularised at bachelor level and incorporates an obligatory A section of common basic modules of the scientific discipline(s); a B section of obligatory optional modules pertinent to the area of study; and a C section of free choice modules. This design is commended in terms of student choice and the scope for multi-disciplinarity and employment preparation (e.g. entrepreneurship courses)
 - 50.2 masters level studies similarly embrace the multi-disciplinary possibilities, especially in terms of professional masters

- 50.3 there is the perception that the graduate outputs may not equate in market needs in several areas which creates issues of choice in terms of managing expansion or reduction
- 50.4 there is a tension between so-called "professional" and "academic" programmes – legal constraints, the conception difference, if any, in view of the fact that all programmes are expected to offer employability and praxis
- 50.5 whereas there are stated learning objectives, there is evidence that
- these are unaccompanied by a National Qualifications Framework, which is clearly a handicap at the various levels
 - these are not uniformly applied across the university
 - this has knock-on consequences in terms of module design and assessment
 - learning outcomes may be less than optimally achieved because of the limited development of individual self managed learning as against more traditional didactic approaches.
51. The evaluation team was pleased to receive evidence from a wide range of employers, who contributed complimentary and complementary perspectives on the educational services provided by UL, namely
- 51.1 a general satisfaction with their ability to participate in discussions on programme matters through involvement in Study (Programme) Councils and the contribution of part time lecturers on processional programmes
- 51.2 a concern about the limitations from government on programmes changes once approved (20% rule) and therefore about the speed of course development and evolution
- 51.3 the artificiality of the divide between academic and professional programmes and the knock-on consequences
- 51.4 limits imposed on the maximum credit points for internships/praxis
- 51.5 frustration about the lack of a National Qualifications Framework which embodies the development of transferable study for work-related consequences, despite the useful work undertaken by the UL Careers Centre in this direction
- 51.6 a general concern about systematic and institutional flexibility to facilitate swift responses to market needs.
52. Whilst commending the university on much good development, the evaluation team would certainly wish to recommend early national legislation on higher education to make the university's response to changing circumstances swifter, e.g.
- 52.1 **the introduction of a National Qualifications Framework incorporating academic and employment competencies**
- 52.2 **removal of distinction between academic and professional programmes**
- 52.3 **clarification of opportunities for double degree structures**

- 52.4 **removal of the constraints on short term programme modification and on interdisciplinarity.**
53. The advance of the research university initiative carried with it corollaries in terms of the mainstream educational programme and the evaluation team affirms the university's plans to
- 53.1 **expand the proportion of postgraduate work to 50% - noting that there has been some slippage**
- 53.2 **pursue the expectation of a teaching force dominated by staff with doctorates**
- 53.3 **ensure that research competencies are well developed at bachelors and masters levels and this includes**
- **substantial research projects**
 - **appropriate training, including applied/action research skills**
- 53.4 **enhance library internet access to data bases and journals**
- 53.5 **align the master programmes with the emerging research specialisations – which implies a consideration of the roles of institutes and centres.**
54. The financial reduction agenda inevitably carries ramifications for education, teaching and learning. The following recommendations emerge
- 54.1 **achieving economies in the teaching – learning process (see also paras. 29.1, 36.6) namely**
- **reducing the curriculum volume**
 - **increasing class sizes**
 - **controlling the proliferation of modules and electives**
- 54.2 **examining the possibilities of substituting lower cost student self managed learning/e-learning for more and probably costly conventional didactic processes. This will need to be done on a carefully planned basis.**
- 54.3 **progressively moving to a module based budgeting system of resource allocation**
- 54.4 **an explicit and ongoing process of eliminating module duplication on an annual basis**
- 54.5 **utilising the modular system for the development of new programme titles by utilising existing modules (in terms of a maximum proportion and according to robust ground rules)**
- 54.6 **developing new programmes only in areas of buoyant demand – or when a new programme is likely to create demand and income, both of which imply serious market research and cooperative course development with industry and business**

55. Whilst progress on the development of the modular system has been promising, its full potential is not entirely realised as yet, which is certainly not unreasonable. However, the evaluation team feels the following might now be increasingly addressed
- 55.1 **using the system to achieve economies without weakening academic standards**
 - 55.2 **exploring its possibilities for lifelong learning including the Assessment of Prior Learning and linking it to Open University delivery**
 - 55.3 **using it proactively to facilitate interdisciplinarity of two types**
 - **student led (an extension of the Category C in 46.1)**
 - **staff led (formally designated degrees).**
56. As far as the planning process for education is concerned, the evaluation team feels it would be helpful over the next 18 months for the university to produce
- 56.1 **an overall academic profile, which would need to reflect the overarching view of the university of its role and mission (institutional profile, here: as an internationally recognised research university) in general, of where it wants to be by the end of the planning period, in terms of**
 - **desired size**
 - **total academic profile in terms of fields of study**
 - **distribution of full-time/part-time; home/EU/international students; under/postgraduate.**

This would probably assist in determining choices and subsequent actions.
 - 56.2 **a prospectus of what new programmes are likely to be developed and the timescale**
 - 56.3 **a check list of programme approval criteria, which might include**
 - **module justification**
 - **resource envelope**
 - **degree of contribution to the “big agendas”**
 - **use of existing modules**

etc.
57. Such a process will clearly identify staffing needs (see also para. 30 – 55) and staff development priorities e.g.
- 57.1 **student managed learning**
 - 57.2 **languages**
 - 57.3 **interdisciplinarity.**
 - 57.4 **mentoring.**

58. The organisation of educational programmes may well need consideration, bearing in mind the drive to enhanced quality, the importance of Faculty Councils as drivers of change, and the evolution of the modular system. One possible development may be that of the two tier assessment examination based process

58.1 **module assessment panels (since modules may well serve several degrees)**

58.2 **award boards (which receive marks and grades from the panels, aggregate, and award degrees)**

This is a not uncommon development in mature modular systems.

59. **The recommendations above should also be cross-referenced with those of the section dealing with QA (paras. 34 – 36).**

RESEARCH AND R and D

60. Paragraphs 44 – 47 have outlined the scope of a strategic approach to research with specific reference to the agenda of moving UL towards the status of a research intensive university. The purpose of this section is to focus on a selected number of specific research elements and to provide more detailed comments, namely

60.1 organisation (paras. 61 – 63).

60.2 research degrees (paras 64 – 67).

60.3 human resource management policy relating to research (paras. 68 and 32.2).

60.4 innovation (see paras. 69 and 84 – 87).

60.5 international review (see para. 94).

Organisation of Research

61. The UL's pattern of organising research has certainly become more complex since the early 1990's and various developments have resulted in a pattern of 9 UL semi autonomous agencies (formerly Academy of Science Institutes); 7 institutes under the Vice Rector; 19 centres, 4 Institutes and 6 laboratories within the faculties; and 29 departments which include as sub units 23 centres, 1 institute and 25 laboratories. The development has been opportunistic and incremental and thus somewhat difficult to comprehend since

- the process of the designation of each is not very clear
- the precise role, status and terms of reference of each organisation type are ambiguous , certainly as perceived by members of the UL

- the performance accountability of research units is somewhat confused
- the lines of supervision of doctoral students seem overlapping, which represents a potential QA problem
- analytical centres for infrastructure.

In addition, there is the impending development of doctoral schools and possible European centres. This is not to say that much good work is not going on. We were impressed by such organisational formulations as the Centre for Judaic Studies, for instance and others.

Whilst we recognise the organic nature of much research and the necessity of building in scope for creativity, the evaluation team strongly supports the leadership's efforts to rationalise this very confusing situation. This is essential, given the research university agenda and would especially recommend to assist this process

- 61.1 **update of the interdisciplinary research themes of the 2004 – 2007 Academic Development Strategy into a relatively small number**
 - 61.2 **formulation of research organisational clusters of critical mass around these themes on a strategic basis, with an internal matrix organisation to reflect strong disciplinary groups on one axis and interdisciplinary themes on the other. These broad areas are likely to be university wide and thus responsible to the Vice Rector (Research)**
 - 61.3 **the rationalisation of small centres, units and institutes based on relevance to future agendas, critical mass and performance to date**
 - 61.4 **standardisation of definitions of research entity**
 - 61.5 **the incorporation of the agencies into mainstream faculties**
 - 61.6 **institutionalisation of**
 - **targeted funding to designated areas**
 - **regular performance monitoring**
 - **analytical centres for infrastructure**
 - 61.7 **early implementation of the doctoral school concept.**
62. The team commends the idea of so-called “European centres”, since this would certainly facilitate international positioning, joint research and research degrees with other universities. However, care should be taken to
- 62.1 **select appropriate partners – probably complementary rather than similar – to add capacity**
 - 62.2 **ensure how these would relate to an already complex structure.**
63. The central support of research is vital in a research intensive university and the precise nature of this is not absolutely clear at present. The Vice Rector for Research, of course, is ultimately responsible, but attention might also be given to

- 63.1 **ascertaining whether the Vice Rector has adequate instruments of steering**
- 63.2 **a comprehensive Research and Development Office encompassing a policy, advisory, monitoring and problem solving role in respect of**
 - **IP matters**
 - **research funding distribution**
 - **performance monitoring**
 - **management of external funding submissions**
 - **interface with HR and Finance Offices**
 - **research marketing**
 - etc.**
- 63.3 **a horizontal Faculty Research Directors Group (Associate Deans) to facilitate speedy implementation of jointly agreed policies.**

Research Degrees

- 64. A substantial doctoral and masters research degree programme is clearly critical for the research intensive university in terms of
 - 64.1 developing subsequent faculty members and the professoriate – the sustainability argument
 - 64.2 bringing in new blood, particularly international
 - 64.3 increasing productive capacity.
- 65. Given its size and aspirations, UL is probably under-performing in its research degree activity, in terms of numbers, overall distribution across the faculties, completion times and completion rates, compared with other international players. The team understands the financial limitations to sustain a large programme, since the funds emanate largely from government (stipends) and from EU and are highly competitive. Of note are the following:
 - 65.1 there are 24 doctoral programmes across UL
 - 65.2 $\frac{2}{3}$ graduates go to academic careers and $\frac{1}{3}$ to external employment
 - 65.3 the durations of study are three years plus one full time; four years plus two part time (which proportions are a little strange in terms of probable workload)
 - 65.4 industry apparently needs excellent PhDs for company development purposes. This raises questions of whether more industrial PhDs are needed and whether they need generic skills training also.
 - 65.5 the thesis may be in Latvian or English
 - 65.6 funds are available for overseas travel, but their access is seen as pending on the interests and contacts of the supervisor

- 65.7 there are apparently system constraints to some types of interdisciplinary degrees
 - 65.8 cohort training programmes have been developed, but mainly on subject related methods
 - 65.9 the recent development of doctoral schools.
66. Clearly, much good development has occurred, but, to achieve the research-intensive university ambition, it probably needs to speed up. The particular priorities recommended by the evaluation team are as follows:
- 66.1 **progressive articulation of the doctoral programme with the emerging European consensus on doctoral learning outcomes, systematisation of training etc. – essential in terms of the international research agenda**
 - 66.2 **strengthening of training programmes, to include multi-disciplinary subject updating; multi-discipline methodologies; generic transferable employment related skills (e.g. project management, group leadership, life skills, entrepreneurship)**
 - 66.3 **strengthening of QA arrangements for research degrees – monitoring, feedback, supervisory teams, transparent codes of conduct**
 - 66.4 **development of doctoral programmes for industry – professional doctorates, industrial/practice based doctorates related to the knowledge transfer agenda**
 - 66.5 **enhanced international dimension through international doctoral programme partnerships, joint supervision, attachments to other centres, double degrees etc.**
 - 66.6 **multi-discipline external examiners**
 - 66.7 **examination of the internal resource allocation formula to provide incentives to faculties for research degree and masters' student recruitment**
 - 66.8 **expansion of pool of supervisors and introduction of supervisors' training programme.**
67. The advent of doctoral schools is applauded by the evaluation team, since potentially they address the challenges of critical mass, group support, proper routing of finances, interdisciplinarity, team supervision, cost effective training. Appreciating that doctoral schools are still evolving, the evaluation team recommends attention to
- 67.1 **absolute clarity on the respective roles of doctoral schools and other research entities in terms of doctoral supervision**
 - 67.2 **ensuring they genuinely address the interdisciplinary question**
 - 67.3 **the QA regimes in relation to the European conventions and precepts**
 - 67.4 **exchanging good practice across doctoral schools.**

Human Resource Management Policy to Support Research

68. Paragraph 32.2, as part of general HR strategy, indicated several necessary HR policy initiatives to improve the UL research capability, to which the reader is referred. In addition, the evaluation team recommends
- 68.1 **expansion of the doctoral supervisory capacity and the introduction of a supervisory training programme for existing and new supervisors**
 - 68.2 **a research staff development programme**
 - 68.3 **creating funds for post doctoral stipends**
 - 68.4 **experienced quality researchers to act as mentors to younger colleagues**
 - 68.5 **rewards and incentives for good performance.**

Knowledge Transfer and Exchanges

69. This is, of course, a major feature of a mature twenty-first century research university and essential in the UL context of diminishing finances. Since this is very much about the university's regional role, the evaluation team's observations are located at paras. 84 – 87.

International Review

70. **UL is right to emphasise in the SER the necessity for international quality review of research as an instrument of development. The evaluation team's thoughts in this context would be to**
- 70.1 **design a framework for review which encompasses**
 - **academic quality review in terms primarily of the integrity of the proposed thematic areas**
 - **efficacy of instruments.****This does imply selection of reviewers who are generally interdisciplinary themselves.**
 - 70.2 **ensure this is cyclical – perhaps a 4 – 5 year cycle in the first instance**
 - 70.3 **enhance internal performance monitoring on an ongoing basis to ensure consistent longitudinal data**
 - 70.4 **visit mature research universities to benchmark research management and international review (e.g. University College Dublin, University of Helsinki, Imperial College London)**

70.5 **espouse the commitment of international peer reviewers as in Finland and Ireland, for instance**

Reflection

71. We appreciate the significance of the new research-intensive agenda for UL and hope that the details in this and other related sections will help move the university along. We also appreciate there are many recommendations which UL will need to prioritise.

REGIONAL AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

72. This arm of the university role is likely to become more significant in the immediate future, owing to

72.1 the financial situation which necessitates the generation of additional non-state income – much of which is likely to be found with regional clients

72.2 the economic situation in Latvia which calls for the university's provision of help in regeneration of existing organisations and the stimulation of new business

72.3 the harnessing of global opportunities for regional development which any good university should be well placed to facilitate.

73. The combination of the above reinforces the statutory mission role of UL in regional development, though it does pose a certain tension between the philosophy of community services and the imperatives of commercialisation – which both external stakeholders and management well appreciate. The UL is invited to consider the three roles which Finnish universities adopt in the regional role of the university:

73.1 university as an anchor – to stabilise against the movement out of Latvia of companies, capital and expertise

73.2 university as dynamo – regenerating and creating local enterprises

73.3 university as magnet – drawing inward investment

This analogy may be helpful to UL and it is clear that excellence in teaching and research must be a pre-requisite to effective knowledge transfer/exchange with the region, and education (via lifelong learning) and research (via R&D) are themselves investments.

Favourable Conditions

74. In general, various favourable conditions for effective regional endeavours might be expected, with reference to international benchmarks and these are now discussed with reference to UL.

75. Robust cooperative fora with principal stakeholders and the university providing an important continuing umbilical link for the flow of demand and supply; reciprocity of intelligence etc. Here, we have the

75.1 Constitutional Assembly

75.2 Council of Advisers

which are relatively recent but whose functioning received various commendations. They are slowly evolving into sound mechanisms of engagement at various levels of the university. In addition, the evaluation team would recommend

- **more extensive representation of the university on company and NGO Boards**
- **strenuous attempts to link UL's next strategic plan articulation with that of the City and region and principal stakeholders**
- **explicit cooperative planning agreements with government to deliver desired national outcomes.**

76. The creation of interface organisational structures is necessary for engaging with and delivering services to the Community. At present we have

76.1 the Innovation Centre, which is developing very well in terms of patent submission and supporting research centres and institutes

76.2 the development of the proposed Riga Science and Technology Park, which we understand has been halted because of the economic situation. The fields of study (biomed, biotech, pharmaceuticals etc.) involved clearly need this as a matter of scientific and economic urgency for spin-outs and spin-ins and the evaluation team would **strongly support its reactivation as essential for economic regeneration**

76.3 some promising initiatives in the continuing education area with the emerging Centre and units in some of the Faculties. These developments could be strengthened by

- financial transparency
- university wide catalogues of offerings
- coherent across the board arrangements for accreditation of one-off modules
- the avoidance of internal competition.

76.4 **the creation of an Open University (possibly in conjunction with appropriate partners) to give effect to the e-learning, distance learning dimension is felt to be a good move. However, the start-up costs are substantial. The UL is encouraged to**

- **look at alternative models (Finnish and Swedish Universities which have excellent institutional e-learning capacity; the UK and Catalonian Open Universities) as possibilities**
- **consider strategic alliances for start-up purposes to reduce costs.**

76.5 the various regional branches of UL which potentially provide sub-regional distributed provision at Valka and Daugavpils. This has involved responding

to local municipalities who, not unnaturally, see HE status and the provision of an anchor for youngsters as being important in local development. To date, programmes have been delivered in the fields of education, nursing, management and life sciences, often part-time. However, demographic downturn, small class sizes and the inability to offer more than a small number of courses because of demand, places these activities in jeopardy. The evaluation team would recommend

- **formulating a clear policy on the maintenance of such centres, especially in the light of financial downturn**
- **if leased, considering the development of e-learning delivery as an alternative.**

77. The creation of incentives (and the removal of obstacles) for faculties and staff members to participate in regionally related activities is normally essential to stimulate development, since there are huge pressures to maintain mainstream education and research, the traditional functions of a university. The evaluation team would recommend UL considers whether

77.1 **the formula by which funds are distributed to academic units is sufficiently favourable in terms of part-time degrees, short courses which count for credit etc.**

77.2 **the academic units are able to retain a goodly proportion of any additional income generation in entrepreneurial activity**

77.3 **such work counts sufficiently for promotion to higher grades and are part of contractual obligations**

77.4 **the individual may have access to such funds to pay for foreign academic travel etc.**

77.5 **R&D, consultancy and lifelong learning are conceived as contributing to research and scholarly agendas.**

Life Long Learning

78. The university has made good progress in this direction with several hundred courses designed for the more traditional student market in Latvia. The evaluation team sees the need now to strengthen this commitment because of

78.1 the changing demographics of Latvia and a drop in the school-leaving population eligible for university – numbers need to be made up.

78.2 the financial imperative

78.3 the criticality of continuing education for adults in its various forms as a contribution to economic and societal regeneration.

79. As the recent expansion has taken place, it has identified some gaps in the strategic conceptualisation of lifelong learning as well as procedural necessities and these are now addressed.

80. Latvian society may well contain different groups with interests in further lifelong learning, namely
- 80.1 employees with degrees wishing to change career directions, who need further qualification.
 - 80.2 employees needing to enhance promotion feasibility with advance study, normally part-time.
 - 80.3 employees who missed out on earlier opportunities.
 - 80.4 citizens interested in HE for leisure reasons lessons especially associated with national culture.

UL is recommended to undertake market analysis in each of these categories – with stakeholders – to establish the precise nature of need and demand and position itself against other providers.

81. In terms of the “offering”, the evaluation team recommends attention to
- 81.1 **addressing specific sectoral needs by active partnering with HR managers in specific industry groupings and the public sector to develop essentially collaborative provision, which would recognise ...**
 - 81.2 **accreditation of prior learning and experience (APL/APEL) and in-company training.**
 - 81.3 **the full utilisation of the modular system for credit accumulation, interrupted study, custom built modular combinations, work based assignments etc. and the evolution of common ground rules (there are variations at present across faculties)**
 - 81.4 **flexible delivery – on campus, in company, e-learning, distance learning – and at times congenial to the learner**
 - 81.5 **staff development in pedagogies appropriate to the adult learner.**
82. **Reference has already been made to organisation which probably now needs**
- 82.1 **strengthening in terms of real expertise in marketing, individualised study programmes etc.**
 - 82.2 **a fresh look at costing, pricing of lifelong learning activities, particularly bearing in mind the tension between public service and communication: should it generate a surplus or should it be a subsidy? This is not clear at present.**
83. **Opening up mainstream courses for part-timers constitutes a good opportunity for lifelong learning and the nourishment of “professional” experiences across all programmes, not only “professional degrees”, is a valuable contribution to knowledge transfer, to which we now turn.**

Knowledge Transfer/Knowledge Exchange

84. The evaluation team was impressed by the Commitment of the UL to this domain, which is clearly critical for a university with ambitions of becoming research-intensive on an international level. The scope of this work evidently encompasses
- 84.1 publication of texts and manuals nationally and increasingly internationally, assuming increasing linguistic competence
 - 84.2 diffusion of knowledge via under- and particularly postgraduate students, who obtain scientific jobs in industry
 - 84.3 staff consultancy – though we understand some of this is privately undertaken, which we do not criticise per se, as this has connotations of incentives
 - 84.4 translating scientific research into practical applications via patents and their subsequent licensing other producers, or conversion into university spin-out companies, with or without accompanying joint venture capital (not particularly plentiful at present)
 - 84.5 the intended Science and Technology Park – now apparently suspended pro tem – as a basis for incubation, spin-offs and spin-ins to engage with research cultures at the UL.
85. The university has a comprehensive grasp of what a KT/KE strategy is all about and its engagement with key Latvian and international companies is impressive, as we discovered from various meetings with the Innovation Centre, research centres, institutes and stakeholders in a number of scientific areas, including materials, geodetics, Euratom, pharmaceuticals, nanotechnology, solid state physics, biomed, biotech etc. The evaluation team was encouraged by the focus on knowledge exchange (two-way) rather than just knowledge transfer and engagement with Mode 2 R&D assumptions (interdisciplinary; stakeholder related research etc.).
86. As far as the future evolution of this domain is concerned, the evaluation team would recommend
- 86.1 **systematically addressing the issue of the development of Small Medium Enterprises (SME) by**
 - **targeted consultancy assistance**
 - **entrepreneurship programmes based on a combination of business and other faculties**
 - **quicker spinning off as companies promise PhD research projects and staff consultancy companies (with stakes, of course)**

as appropriate
 - 86.2 **a clarification of whether the university's intellectual property policy needs renewal**
 - 86.3 **pursuing strategic alliances which could facilitate the above e.g.**

- **international investors for joint venture purposes**
 - **the Technical University to fill in missing expertise**
- 86.4 **clarifying the precise legal status of spin-offs**
- 86.5 **consideration of what enhanced institutional support may be desirable e.g.**
- **marketing and head-hunting connections**
 - **enterprise training for staff**
 - **facilitating inter-academic unit cooperation**
- 86.6 **continuing political pressure to re-establish the Science and Technology Park on the agenda.**
87. **Finally, the evaluation team would draw attention to the emerging concept of the Knowledge Region and recent reports on this from OECD (e.g. “Clusters, Innovation and Entrepreneurship” 2009) and EUA (e.g. Knowledge Regions in Europe, 2007). These studies are very relevant to Latvia in its present position and contain pertinent benchmarks in terms of the above issues both for universities and regional stakeholders.**

INTERNATIONALISATION

88. The interest in, and commitment to, internationalisation at UL has been a constructively evolving process from the original strategy in 1998, to an updated paragraph in the 2004 Strategic Plan, to the two European Policy Statements in 2002 and 2007 and the recent general Strategic Guidelines. A revised international strategy is due and we would concur in its urgency because of
- 88.1 the international research agenda
- 88.2 status positioning
- 88.3 enhancing student employability
- 88.4 the potential of income generation and assisting in inward investment
- 88.5 the need for systematic arrangements for supporting international efforts to avoid unconnected ad hoc developments at lower level in the university.
89. The evaluation team would recommend that, at this point, a comprehensive strategy is needed, to ensure a fully integrated approach. This could usefully encompass
- 89.1 **a coverage of all relevant domains**
- **education**
 - **research**
 - **QA**
 - **knowledge transfer**
 - **supporting provision – student services, housing, etc.**
 - **human resource management.**

- 89.2 **engagement of all relevant central service units (many of whom can help/hinder the effort e.g. provision of good dormitories for full-time overseas students) and faculties/departments/centres**
 - 89.3 **both the seizing and creating of opportunities**
 - 89.4 **an international endeavour which goes way beyond Western Europe and Bologna (e.g. initiatives in China and Asia are certainly helpful).**
90. By definition, the evaluation team observed gaps in the above, accompanied by a variable commitment to the international cause across the university. This may reflect
- 90.1 **a deficit in the encouragement of well-informed bottom-up initiatives**
 - 90.2 **an insufficiently precise framework of incentives**
 - 90.3 **the need to ensure faculty strategic plans have an international dimension.**
91. The helpful discussions on education and the international agenda revealed significant recent progress in securing consistency with the Bologna principles and architecture and ECTS, but this groundwork is not yet yielding the desired fruit in student mobility – only 1% of home students engage in exchanges, a ratio of 2: 1 incoming vs. outgoing. To improve this situation the evaluation team commends emerging intentions and particularly emphasises in addition
- 91.1 **the development of double degrees with relevant partners**
 - 91.2 **inducements to Latvian students to go abroad as a normal part of their study**
 - 91.3 **ensuring credits earned overseas count as part of their degrees.**
 - 91.4 **developing credit worthy praxis as a normal part of out-of-country study (i.e. with overseas companies attached to the placement universities)**
 - 91.5 **setting targets for the expansion of incoming and outgoing students**
 - 91.6 **focussing on new market areas**
 - 91.7 **upgrading facilities for incoming students**
 - 91.8 **accelerating the internationalisation of the curriculum**
 - 91.9 **the international accreditation of selected UL degrees by overseas subject-based accrediting bodies – Business, Computer Science etc. – to increase their credibility and student attractiveness.**
92. The existing QA processes for the international domain are not especially differentiated from normal standard processes, but the evaluation team would commend the “Erasmus” valuation process for incoming and outgoing students.

93. Finally, the evaluation team would (in market development terms) propose **UL looking especially at the master's level for international programmes, especially collaborative masters.**
94. Considerable attention has already been given to the Internationalisation of Research in paras. 44 – 47 and 70. Here we would primarily focus on
- 94.1 **enhancing the support mechanisms to enhance the strike rate for EU project bids**
 - 94.2 **substantially increasing the number of overseas visiting professors on long term attachments to UL**
 - 94.3 **consortia for European doctorates**
 - 94.4 **motivating PhD students to undertake internationally oriented projects and ensuring the Scholarship Fund for this purpose is used**
 - 94.5 **the necessity of international peer review.**
95. Partnerships are equally important and the evaluation team notes the endeavours made to utilise strategic networks like UNICA, the Utrecht network and Campus Europe. We would merely recommend here
- 95.1 creating a catalogue of all existing partnerships at all levels and evaluating their effectiveness against explicit strategic criteria
 - 95.2 affirming these where effective and curtailing them, if not
 - 95.3 establishing a new catalogue with long term ambitions in mind especially the research agenda
 - 95.4 monitoring their progress, with a sunset clause to activate, if necessary.
96. As far as organisation is concerned,
- 96.1 the International Office seems to be performing effectively, but we wonder whether its capacity is sufficient for the tasks of significantly expanding the international profile
 - 96.2 there is a clear need for effectively performing international coordinators at faculty level
 - 96.3 all central units need activating in support of the research agenda
 - 96.4 all central committees and Faculty Boards should examine whether their business sufficiently reflects the seriousness of the agenda.
97. **UL well recognises the importance of language competencies in the international domain and the evaluation team commends the policy indicated in the SER. This relates primarily to students, but the team would also ask UL to review the language competency of staff too and provide appropriate assistance. Given the financial situation, the possibility of outsourcing provision may need to be considered.**

98. If the international strategy really takes off, there are other initiatives which could develop on the strength of this, but not just yet.

PART E:
EVALUATION SUMMARY AND GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

EVALUATION SUMMARY AND GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

99. This has been a longer IEP Report than usual, but the circumstances warrant it and the evaluation team is anxious to provide as much useful advice as possible. The purpose of this section is to indicate those instruments which seem to us to be critical in enabling the university to meet its demanding strategic goals and to respond positively and creatively to a series of difficult environmental situations and opportunities. Clearly implementation and action is the order of the day.
100. The nature of the development strategy/strategic planning process is vital and, here, the evaluation team is conscious of a difference between strategic planning as a beacon/lighthouse (which generally guides navigation) and a cascade (in which priority actions trickle or surge from one) from organisational level to another, in a systematic manner. We would happily advocate a fusion of the two, but with a very strong emphasis on a concrete action plan (who does what, when, how and how do we know it is completed). The present situation probably calls for the cascade model. The particular manifestations of this would be
- 100.1 a comprehensive plan involving means and ends
 - 100.2 a well-articulated planning cycle (annual and multi-year) embracing performance review against priorities
 - 100.3 annual implementation/operational plans
 - 100.4 a synchronisation of strategy and budget processes
 - 100.5 plans as appropriate for each academic and administrative unit
 - 100.6 a systematic evaluation of the performance of each academic unit (in terms of academic quality, financial health and external relevance and standing) and administrative units (in terms of quality and efficiency of services (this implies a good robust performance data base)
 - 100.7 decisions made on the basis of this evaluation in terms of the expansion, steady state or contraction of various units i.e. a redistribution of investment.
- The evaluation team would be pleased to advise further on this.
101. All the proposals in previous points need a comprehensive and robust HR policy and HR department to deliver change (see paras. 30 – 33). The details are listed and hopefully are self evident, but they do require professionalised management and HR conscious academic leaders.
102. Organisational reform is considered essential over the next few years, as outlined in paras. 17 – 24, to ensure
- 102.1 a more efficient and outwardly responsive organisation
 - 102.2 a strong strategic focus at relevant levels
 - 102.3 the redefinition of key leadership roles
 - 102.4 a problem solving culture

102.5 a redefinition of the centre-faculty interface in relation to the planning and entrepreneurial dimensions

102.6 speed of committee decision-making.

Systematic management development and training is an essential element in this.

103. Enhanced QA/Performance Accountability functions and processes especially in relation to

103.1 delivery institutional priorities.

103.2 the Action loop

103.3 redistribution of funding

103.4 external peer reviews.

104. Evidently, the addressing of the financial situation is critical to any developmental agenda and techniques of cost reduction and income generation have been identified.

105. The university may well find that its capacity to develop and solve problems is greatly enhanced by a succession of strategic alliances with

105.1 national stakeholders

105.2 other national HE providers

105.3 overseas universities

Reference has been made to the dynamics of and conditions for effective partnerships in the principal domains of activity.

106. All the above are likely to create shifts to models of university culture as proposed in Para. 13 and a shift in culture and behaviour will eventually prove to be a self sustaining property.

107. We have proposed a formidable checklist of recommendations which UL must priorities; incorporate as desired into the next strategic plan; phase realistically in terms of implementation; and effectively monitor. We thank the Rector and university for a fine experience and wish the university the very best as it strives to realise its ambitions.