

**European University Association
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

**UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-ESPRIT DE KASLIK
Lebanon
*EVALUATION REPORT***

October 2009

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik. Following a request from the Rector of the University, the Steering Committee of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme appointed a team for the institutional quality evaluation of the University. The purpose of the evaluation of the Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik is to contribute to the advancement of the strategic management of the University and to its organisational development, and to enable the University to strengthen its capacity to anticipate and address change. In its deliberations, the IEP Team assessed and focused on the University's strategic priorities and used this as a basis for making recommendations for the future.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

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

The evaluation is guided by four key questions:

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

1.2 Institution and National Context

The Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK), founded by the Lebanese Maronite Order, was recognised as a private university by the Lebanese government in 1961. USEK is independent from government, both financially and for the purposes of management. Government powers are restricted to the recognition and accreditation of new programmes that USEK may wish to offer.

1.3 The Self-Evaluation Process

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the preliminary visit, a 47-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the university was sent to the evaluation team. The SER, which included the SWOT analysis undertaken in preparing the self-evaluation, analysed the university's institutional context, mission and goals, its organisational structure and quality management and quality assurance arrangements, as well as its strategic management and capacity for change. The SER, which was sent to the IEP Team in advance of their first visit, was accompanied by appendices which included institutional data, and the internal evaluation questionnaire used for the SWOT analysis undertaken in preparation for the SER.

The self-evaluation process was directed by a Steering Committee appointed by the Rector, and chaired by the Assistant to the Rector, Dr Georges Yahchouchi. Members were selected from the academic staff of all faculties and institutes, reflecting the university's view that the involvement of all academic units was essential to the process of institutional evaluation. The self-evaluation methodology included a questionnaire, completed by faculty Deans and institute Directors, on academic quality and administrative matters at faculty and institutional levels. Analysis of completed questionnaires was supported by extensive data collected from a variety of organisational units and by discussions with key people regarding institutional practices, policies, and regulations. A draft of the SER was then discussed and reviewed through open debate by the Steering Group. The IEP Team appreciated the work done in the SER and the accompanying documentation, and found them to be of great assistance in enabling them to undertake their deliberations.

1.4 The Evaluation Team

The evaluation took place during two visits. The Team undertook a first visit to the university from 29 to 31 March 2009, and the second visit from 6 to 9 September, 2009. For its second visit, the Team requested some additional information and documentation regarding USEK's strategic and financial planning; quality management and quality evaluation; research; internationalisation; and matters relating to the operation and remit of governance structures and committees. Some additional data, and further clarification on a number of matters, were also requested. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were not fully reflected in the SER. This additional information was provided two months in advance of the main visit and covered the issues identified by the IEP Team in an extremely helpful manner.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Üstün Erguder, former Rector, Bogaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey (chair)
- Philippe Rousseau, former Rector, Université Lille 3 Charles de Gaulle, France;
- Carles Solà, former Rector, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain;
- Tobias Walser, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland (student member);
- Jethro Newton, Dean of Learning and Teaching, University of Chester, United Kingdom (coordinator).

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Father Hady Mahfouz, for the welcome and hospitality provided during their two visits.

Special thanks are offered by the team to Dr Georges Yahchouchi, President of the Self-Evaluation Committee, for his excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process, and to the Self-Evaluation Steering Committee for their organisation and practical assistance before and during the two visits. The team would also like to thank Rima Mattar and other colleagues for their excellent interpretation and translation work, and all the other members of the university for their kind support.

2. Mission, vision and general context

The university's norms and values are reflected in its mission, set out in Article 92 of its Lebanese Maronite Order status. The fundamental mission of USEK is 'to dedicate itself to individuals and community, through teaching, communication of knowledge, research, and innovation'. Reflecting its near-eastern location and environment, USEK is committed to 'the creation of human capital that contributes to the development of the economic, political, and social aspects of Lebanon', 'the preservation and promotion of an oriental Christian cultural heritage', and 'the installation of a community climate in which spiritual values and citizenship prevail'. The university also 'seeks to perpetuate the mission of the most prestigious theological and intellectual institutions of the Christian Orient and to establish dialogue with intellectual currents of thought'. A Catholic university, with Antiochean roots, USEK positions itself as a University in the broad sense. It is both a community of learning, based on critical reflection, and a national institution whose educational programmes reflect the official requirements of government. The university is a pluralist Mediterranean institution, open to both the Arab and Western worlds.

In seeking to achieve its vision and mission the university acknowledges that it faces a period of transition in which the further development and institutionalisation of key structures, systems, and governance and leadership arrangements, is of paramount importance. The IEP Team learned that the university's notable achievements to date in terms of education, facilities, infrastructure, and an outward looking perspective on the future, have sharpened its recognition of this need for further institutionalisation and organisational change. In its SER, the university makes explicit the top-level commitment to the IEP self-evaluation process and its determination to maximise the opportunities this presents for paving the way for the future development of USEK. This commitment is illustrated in the range of development priorities, identified at different organisational levels, which emerged from the University's self-evaluation process and deliberations. The IEP Team's primary feeling is that USEK is open to the challenges it faces. By taking the forward-looking step of being the first university in Lebanon to invite a team of independent IEP international experts to evaluate its organisational arrangements, USEK is to be congratulated for showing itself to be a pioneering, modernising university.

3. Governance, management and strategic planning

Governance and management

USEK is one of only six universities operating in 1961 when the Council of Higher Education and the Committee of Programme Recognition were established under the laws governing higher education. The university is one of the largest universities in Lebanon in terms of student numbers, faculty, and the outreach activity at its regional centres. All Lebanese universities, except one, are private. Though new programmes require government approval, USEK has complete managerial, administrative, and financial autonomy. The University is largely dependent on student tuition fees for its income.

Governance structures reflect the statutes and by-laws that have operated since 1998. The university is owned by the Lebanese Maronite Order (OLM). The OLM Board, which functions as a governing council, is headed by a Father Abbot who, along with a council of four assistants, is elected every six years by fellow monks. The university Rector, who is required to be a member of the OLM order of monks, is elected every three years, and is the executive head and senior authority of USEK. Faculty Deans are proposed by the Rector upon his election, and nominations are ratified by the head of the OLM Board.

For the purpose of academic development and academic strategy the principal committee of USEK is the University Board. The membership of the Board is proposed by the Rector for a term of three years, and consists of the Vice Rectors, Secretary General, Deans, Directors of Institutes, Financial Administrator, two university members, and the Librarian, with the Rector as Chair. The University Board is a key element of the university's policy making and management systems. It deals with matters referred to it such as programme modifications, proposals for the creation of new programmes, admissions, external partnership agreements, personnel and promotions proposals, and research matters. The University Board is supported for operational purposes by the Administrative Council, a body established in late 2008 to coordinate the implementation of the policies and decisions of the University Board or the Rector. The Council's administrative and operational focus is reflected in its membership, which includes all directors of administrative services, along with the members of the USEK senior management team (Rector, Vice Rectors, Finance Administrator and Secretary General). The Administrative Council plays an important part in a process of centralisation of key administrative functions and services and inter-faculty cooperation that the university embarked on some five years ago. The University Board is supported by a number of other committees that report to it, including the Academic Programmes Committee, the Peers Committee (*Comité des Pairs*), the Admissions Committee, the Academic Staff Selection Committee, and the Information Systems Committee. Each faculty has an Academic Units Council that functions as a Faculty Board. Reporting to the University Board, Faculty Boards have responsibility for developing admissions conditions, teaching programmes, inter-university, and other partnerships.

From the documentation and diagrams they saw, and from their discussions with members of the university community, the IEP Team formed the view that reporting

lines between the various bodies in the committee and management structure were not as clear as they might be, and that the terminology used was sometimes inconsistent. Moreover, it appeared to the Team that the position and status in the committee hierarchy of some bodies, such as Faculty Boards, and Academic Programmes Committee, was also unclear. The IEP Team would therefore encourage the university to be proactive in reviewing and improving its present organisational chart regarding governance and management arrangements, and to implement a consistent set of internationally established terminology for identifying organisational entities and procedures.

From their deliberations, and through discussion with members of the senior management and governing council of USEK, it became clear to the members of the IEP Team that the university has recognised that present governance, organisational structures, and strategic planning arrangements may not be sufficient for the effective development of the high quality university, able to compete globally, that USEK wishes to become. The IEP Team was particularly interested to learn of the development and imminent introduction of new statutes and by-laws for the governance of the university. The new statutes, which were under consideration by the University Board at the time of the IEP Team's visit to USEK, are due to be ratified and implemented in the autumn of 2009. They make provision for the creation of a new Strategic Advisory Board. That body will provide a significant change in the governance of the university. Its membership will incorporate members of the OLM Council and will also include up to eight prominent external stakeholders from business, industry, commerce and the wider society. In the view of the IEP Team, the new Board, which will act as an advisory body, will add a vitally important element of externality to the university's governance arrangements. While the balance of the Strategic Advisory Board's remit will evolve, the IEP Team came to the judgement that it has the potential to make a significant contribution to the future direction of USEK.

The IEP Team notes the progress made to date in developing new statutes and by-laws, and in strengthening the university's central governance system.

However, while commending USEK for being proactive in these matters, the Team notes that these efforts are in their initial stages and advises the university that, in due course, they will need to be reviewed, monitored and adjusted, as appropriate, in order that progress can be evaluated and consolidated. Further, while welcoming the proposal to establish a Strategic Advisory Board the IEP Team formed the view that the university would be well served by ensuring that the remit and title of this body extends beyond consideration of strategy, to include fund-raising, wider matters of organisational direction and performance, portfolio development, and the effectiveness of links with the wider society.

Strategic planning and organisational development

The university's academic organisation is structured into ten faculties, four Institutes (including a Nursing Science Institute), and three regional centres. At the time of the IEP Team's visit, there were a little over 7,000 registered students, with a record number of almost 900 students graduating in 2007/2008. There is no policy of government capping of student numbers in Lebanon and the university is free to plan

growth in student numbers in accordance with its own academic strategy. Full-time faculty numbered 159 at 2008/2009, with part-time instructors averaging around 650. Many of the latter hold contracts at other Lebanese universities. In the view of the IEP Team this dependence on an excessively high proportion of part-time faculty is a matter upon which the university may wish to reflect in its future human resources planning.

The faculties offer a wide range of first cycle (undergraduate) programmes, and a modest number of second cycle (Masters) programmes. A small number of doctoral students are also registered at the university. The academic portfolio is oriented towards meeting local and international labour market needs focusing particularly on the Arab world. The portfolio is increasingly vocational, with the needs of business, industry, commerce, and the professions being addressed by a number of USEK's faculties. Recent developments include law, business, and medicine (though the protocol between the Hospital and USEK is yet to be fully developed). New programmes scheduled for development in the near future include engineering, pharmacy, and an executive MBA. It is a growing strength of USEK that it is increasingly able to offer programmes through the medium of both the English and French languages. The university has a number of agreements with a range of strategic partners, and is working to increase collaboration with the private sector, NGOs, and local schools. USEK also has an increasing number of international links. The nature and extent of these agreements vary according to the needs and circumstances of individual faculties. Though relations and networks are oriented to both the East and the West, USEK is keen to open up and extend its cooperation with European and North American universities, and to diversify beyond its traditionally strong links with French universities.

It was evident to the IEP Team that the current organisation of the university's portfolio of activities revealed both distinctive features and challenges. The commitment of USEK to its regional centres at Chekka, Rmeich, and Zahlé facilitates access to higher education for members of the population who might not otherwise be able to benefit from a university education. This is a key element of USEK's traditions and mission. Nevertheless, the Team notes that student numbers on each regional campus are quite low, and that delivery of a number of programmes also made available on the main Kaslik campus puts pressure on staffing resources and facilities, and signifies strategic planning challenges. The IEP Team also noted that while three faculties showed student numbers of between 1,000 and 2,200, student registrations in all other faculties, institutes, and regional centres, with one exception, were well below 500. Moreover, it is evident that there is a significant, though declining, degree of duplication of academic programmes across the university's academic units.

Looking ahead to the future organisational development of USEK, the IEP Team took the view that the present proliferation of faculties and other academic units represented a complex set of structural arrangements that could be simplified. In the Team's judgement, unless this is achieved then, from a resourcing point of view, it is not easy to see how the university can sustain some of its key strategic aspirations, such as the growth of its research activity. In their deliberations on the current academic organisation, and from discussions with staff at all levels, including senior

managers, the IEP Team advises the university that it may wish to reflect on whether a degree of streamlining of faculty structures (i.e. number of faculties) may be necessary for securing greater organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

It appeared to the IEP Team that the university has shown itself to be well capable of addressing such challenges. From the SER and other documentation, and from discussions at all levels within USEK, the Team learned in detail of the various initiatives that the university has undertaken to achieve greater organisational effectiveness. These developments have been taken forward through an extensive programme of centralisation and a re-balancing from a previously decentralised and distributed set of arrangements whereby faculties had enjoyed considerable administrative autonomy. At the time of the IEP Team's visit, it was evident that progress continued to be made in this centralisation of administrative functions, and of finance and resourcing arrangements. This centralisation programme was informed by a strategic focus on improving quality and standards, and enhancing the student experience. Key services which in the past five years formed part of the centralisation process, included human resources, staff promotion, student admissions, student support services, and programme development and modification. Procedures, regulations, and management and administrative arrangements have all been subject to greater centralisation, and new offices have been created to enable delivery of the services referred to.

For the purposes of academic administration, some ten years previously the university had adopted a US-type credit system in place of the previous French system, along with a semesterised structure. The challenge of implementing and embedding these changes was supported by the introduction of a centralised registry, the development of common procedures, and the adoption of a modern approach to student records management. Such functions had previously been performed in varying ways by individual faculties, with a resulting lack of consistency and cohesion. The process of integrating faculties into the new administrative arrangements, including grading, timetabling, room usage, and course development, has taken time and continues to demand energy and determination. The introduction of new laws has assisted this process. In addition to improved interaction between administrative units, a development that has been assisted by the creation of the new Administrative Council, the university is also prioritising increased academic and administrative cooperation between faculties and Institutes. This is designed to improve quality assurance and control arrangements and to reduce the duplication of academic programmes between faculties. In support of the latter, a key role is now played by the Academic Programmes Committee in exercising oversight of course development, the introduction of new academic regulations, and the establishment of an Admissions Committee.

Though the programme of centralisation has entailed a relative loss of administrative autonomy for faculties, and continues to require adjustments to be made by faculty members, it became evident to the IEP Team that this process of rationalisation has enabled faculty Deans to focus more of their efforts on academic affairs and that this had benefited the institution from the point of view of organisational effectiveness. Nevertheless, the Team noted that, as the university's

senior managers acknowledged, challenges remain in terms of ensuring that an appropriate balance and consensus is secured between a centralising of key functions and processes, and the contexts, needs and cultures of the university's faculties, each of which must be allowed to show initiative. The Team learned with interest that progress was being made in developing a suitable communications infrastructure to support corporate and strategic purposes and that, to strengthen the university's communications capability, a Communications Director had been appointed and a Communications Office established. The IEP Team believes that these developments have the potential for facilitating the enhancements in consultation processes and the dissemination of information that are necessary to support future arrangements for governance and strategy development, and to underpin the university's processes of centralisation. In essence, the Team's view is that, in a time of change and transformation, a key element of the successful development of organisational culture centres on the use by the university of good communication and consultation arrangements for generating corporate ownership and involvement from all faculty. Equally, the IEP Team also advises that while senior managers have a responsibility for leadership, there is a reciprocal responsibility for faculty to demonstrate personal commitment and belonging to USEK.

As the government provides private universities with no financial support, USEK is largely self-financing. It is substantially reliant upon fees collected from students for its income. At present, other sources of income generation, including external sponsorships and research project income, are relatively small. From this the IEP Team concluded that, given the present reliance on student fee income, USEK faces considerable constraints in implementing key elements of strategy. This is acknowledged by the university and, in its SER, it is noted that external partners, which include banks and financial institutions, can potentially contribute to future development. The IEP Team learned that fund-raising is a top-level priority for the Rector and senior administration, and the SER prioritises external funding and sponsorship as a key area for development over the next three years. The Team noted that efforts are being made to identify and contact new individual sponsors, including alumni, and also industrial sponsors. In the view of the IEP Team, the matter of fund-raising, and exploration of income generation opportunities is of considerable importance for the future development of the university. At present, the overall annual budget for the University totals around US\$ 33M; teachers' salaries account for 38% of costs. The overall pay/non-pay ratio is around 50/50. Faculty allocations are made annually on the basis of student numbers, hire of faculty, and also strategic considerations, such as costs of laboratories, as agreed by the University Board. Allocations to regional centres reflect student numbers and course portfolio. From discussions and from the documentation provided, it appeared to the IEP Team that, while Deans were able to apply for additional funds for special projects, the allocations to faculties largely reflected historical budget profiles. It was evident also that there is an element of cross-subsidy between faculties.

The IEP Team noted that there is strong central oversight of budgetary matters. While Deans exercise responsibility for preparing the budget of the faculty, all budgets are discussed by the University Board in the context of each faculty's 3-year or 5-year plan. The university's budget is then submitted to the OLM Council for final

consideration and approval. Thereafter, the Financial Administrator, reporting to the Rector, monitors spend against allocated budgets. For the purposes of budget-building and monitoring, the university has in place a timetable and set of procedures relating to the preparation, consolidation, approval, and control of the annual budget, and spend against profile. The IEP Team also learned that the university's leadership, through the Rector and University Board, has complete latitude for spending on current activities. For decisions of a more strategic nature, such as the formation of a new faculty, or a major building project, while the University Board progresses and considers all such proposals, the final approval rests with the OLM Council.

While the budgetary and financial information provided to the IEP Team was helpful to them in building a clearer picture of these matters, a number of aspects of the university's budget policy and financial model remained unclear. For example, it was not apparent whether a full economic costing methodology is used for the purposes of costing courses, teaching, and research activity, or how reserves are identified for the purpose of meeting large, unexpected costs, and whether current arrangements for steering strategic goals are sufficiently clear and robust. The IEP Team came to the conclusion that there are insufficiently clear links between the structure of the budget and declared strategic goals. Such matters are acknowledged by the university and the SER's assessment of funding policy and related practices openly identifies a number of weaknesses that are being addressed by USEK, including the need to strengthen the linkage between budget preparation and strategic planning. The university is to be commended for being proactive in identifying these matters. The IEP Team recommends that the university takes steps to review its existing budget policy and financial model, and to consider whether they might be used more effectively to underpin the strategic planning of the university.

The university has made considerable achievements to date. These are helpfully set out in the SER prepared for the IEP evaluation and are illustrated in the 13-point institutional plan developed prior to the SWOT analysis undertaken by the Self-Evaluation Steering Committee. Progress made in achieving these goals is set out in the SER. It is evident that the university has developed a clearer set of institutional goals to assist institutional planning. The IEP Team were impressed to note the progress made against these 13 strategic goals, even over the relatively short period of time that had elapsed between the first visit and second visit to USEK. However, it was not clear to the Team how the 13 goals, and the extensive set of development priorities, referred to in the SER as a plan of action, and that had emerged from the SWOT analysis, articulated with each other. It did not appear to the Team that these goals and development priorities had been brought together in one publicly available Strategic Plan document. Moreover, although the IEP Team learned that improving the quality of the student experience was a key strategic goal, this did not appear to be set out in a strategic planning document. In order to further facilitate initiatives to support institutional cohesion and effectiveness, the IEP Team strongly encourages the University to build on its present 13-point institutional plan and to put in place a Strategic Plan which is clearly focused on the university's principal organisational objectives and finds expression in the university's budget. Further, the EUA Team advises the university that this Strategic Plan should be underpinned by a set of

supporting strategies in key areas (finance, quality, research, learning and teaching, human resources, internationalisation, and estates).

4. Quality assurance, quality management, and quality culture

Quality assurance and quality management

Based on their reading of documentation provided, and their discussions with staff and students, in their deliberations the IEP Team distinguished between three dimensions of 'quality', each of which is an important element of the quality culture that USEK seeks to grow and to embed. These are: the initiatives being progressed by the university to enhance administrative and service quality; those relating to student evaluation and feedback; and those arrangements relating more broadly to academic quality assurance.

The IEP Team noted that developments in quality assurance and quality management at USEK, and the emphasis being placed upon the creation of a quality culture, were a further manifestation of the university's programme of institutionalisation and centralisation of administrative arrangements. The Team recognised that this formed an important part of USEK's efforts to strengthen organisational cohesion and effectiveness. In its SER the university identifies the creation of a quality culture as one of its principal goals. This goal focuses on administrative quality, service quality, the quality of programmes, and the requirements of accreditation. This signified to the IEP Team an acknowledgement by USEK of the importance of both the 'administrative' and 'academic' aspects of quality. The IEP Team noted a number of internal quality initiatives at institutional level. In addition to the quality assurance and review of administrative procedures, mechanisms for obtaining student feedback on teaching and campus life were now being put in place, signalling the beginning of an emphasis on academic evaluation through reviewing the student experience.

Though these various developments had yet to be drawn together in an overarching quality strategy, it was evident to the IEP Team that the launch in 2006 of a programme to formalise procedures, both administrative and academic, signalled an important strategic step for USEK. This was followed in 2008 by quality assurance training of an academic team from the university by an international body in Italy. Reflecting this strategic commitment, in 2008 the university also established a Quality Assurance Office. The remit of the Office includes the development of quality management procedures; documentation of procedures in a Quality Manual; audit and management reviews of administrative and academic units to evaluate implementation and performance; and development of procedures for evaluating teaching and students' campus experience. The IEP Team views positively the decision to establish a central Quality Assurance Office with a remit to exercise institutional oversight of quality.

The IEP Team learned of a number of other quality practices, relating to the evaluation of academic quality, but currently these do not appear to be integrated in a coherent, fully developed system. The university has become more active in using student complaints for evaluating the student experience; data are available for quality monitoring of student achievement, failure, completion and progression; and much

greater use is being made of procedures to evaluate teaching quality and performance. In addition, the Academic Programmes Committee is undertaking important work in examining and approving programme modifications and new programme proposals. However, its remit does not extend to course monitoring and review, whether annual or periodic. The Team explored responsibilities and procedures for quality monitoring and review at faculty and programme level but found that practices varied considerably. It appeared that though academic programmes had been reviewed during 2007 and 2008, this had been undertaken at institutional level to meet external accreditation requirements and to support the introduction of the credit system. The IEP Team found limited examples of independent academic review involving external peers, and it did not appear that external stakeholders were involved in any systematic way in course development or course monitoring. Though each faculty committee is responsible for the quality assurance of learning and teaching there does not appear to be an established set of university-wide monitoring and review procedures that are consistently used across all faculties. Nor are faculties and their programmes subject to reporting for the purposes of annual and periodic academic review. Reviews being conducted at present by the Quality Assurance Office are focusing principally on administrative procedures and are compliance-based.

In reflecting on the foregoing, the IEP Team recognises that USEK's SER makes an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements for quality assurance as reflected in the university's quality assurance policy. That assessment takes some account of the need to go further in a number of respects, including the monitoring and review of academic quality and academic provision. The IEP Team believes that further strengthening is needed and that this should extend beyond the current focus on student evaluation of teaching – welcome though that development is – to include a wider focus on academic quality assurance and review. The IEP Team notes that while progress is being made in the development of procedures to assure the quality of administrative structures and procedures, there is a need for USEK to extend this effort to an overarching quality framework that includes the quality assurance of academic provision and activities. The Team therefore strongly recommends that the university continues to make progress with the institutionalisation of quality assurance and puts in place arrangements for academic quality assurance, monitoring and review at faculty and programme levels. This would complement the arrangements being developed for administrative and service quality, would extend across all faculties and programmes, and would draw together into an integrated system the various procedures developed to date.

Student issues

The IEP Team wishes to place on record the marked degree of pride in their university displayed by USEK students during meetings with members of the Team. The IEP Team members were impressed by the lively and thoughtful students with whom they had discussions, and formed the view that the university has an excellent opportunity to build on this enthusiasm for quality development purposes.

The IEP Team noted that, in its SER and in other documentation, the university described several relatively recent initiatives designed to strengthen provision in the areas of alumni, careers, and student employability. The Team learned from the

Rector that he was personally very active in taking the lead in seeking external advice and establishing appropriate structures for USEK alumni. An Alumni Office has been in place for two years, under the management of a Director of Alumni; a database has been developed; and overseas alumni offices are being planned in a number of countries. The external stakeholders with whom the IEP Team met - from the worlds of business, finance, and the professions - expressed considerable enthusiasm for the establishment of an alumni association and regarded this as, potentially, a strong feature of USEK both nationally and internationally. From their reading of the University's SER, and USEK's assessment of its three-year priorities in this area, the Team took the view that the university has good ideas for making progress in developing its alumni networks for the purpose of reinforcing USEK's identity.

In their exploration of developments in the area of careers and student employability the IEP Team learned that much of the university's current efforts relate to assisting students in obtaining part-time employment during their period of study at USEK. This activity takes place under the aegis of the office of the Director of Student Affairs. Responsibility for careers services is more closely linked to the responsibilities of the Alumni Office. The Careers Office undertakes work to establish links between students and companies on completion of their studies, though from their meetings with students the IEP Team formed the view that this support appears to be in the early stages of development. It appeared to the IEP Team that there is more work for USEK to do in this area, including the establishment of more extensive links with and involvement of employers and the monitoring of student employment destinations following graduation. Reflecting the foregoing summary of the Team's deliberations, the IEP Team wishes to encourage the university in the development of an effective Alumni network and Careers Service.

The IEP Team focused some of their enquiries on the use made of formal student feedback and evaluation by the university and its faculties. Several questionnaires are used to obtain student views of their teaching and learning experience, and their wider experience of services at USEK. Until recently, practice was limited to those faculties and individual members of staff who obtained their own feedback, though this was not consistent across the university. This practice is still followed in most faculties by some staff. One example brought to the attention of the IEP Team, had been developed by the English Language department. The questionnaire that had been devised was designed to evaluate and bridge the gap between the students' and teachers' perceptions of students' needs. This appeared to the Team to represent good practice that could be adopted for their own use by other departments and courses within the university.

In the Spring of 2009, the university introduced a centrally devised and centrally analysed 'evaluation of teaching' questionnaire containing 15 questions relating to the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment. The distribution process was managed at faculty level. The report enables Deans to obtain results on student evaluation of each member of faculty. In addition, in June 2009, a 'Well Being at the Campus' survey was distributed to some students to assess their satisfaction with the administrative and academic services provided by the university, with around 20% of students responding. These initiatives appeared to the IEP Team to represent good

steps taken by the university. But in their meetings with students, members of the Team heard consistently that there appeared to be no arrangements in place for feeding back to students on the issues they had raised and actions taken or planned to address those issues. It also appeared to the IEP Team that arrangements could be introduced, in each faculty, to enable students to formally discuss such issues and actions. One such mechanism open to the university is the establishment of a staff and student liaison forum. In summary, the Team identified a need to introduce a mechanism for 'closing the loop' in the student feedback process, supplemented perhaps by the inclusion at local level of a Staff-Student Liaison Committee arrangement.

The IEP Team also considered arrangements for formal student representation in institutional processes. The SER describes various ways in which students may express their views. These include the freedom to make representations to the Student Affairs Office, the open access they have on an informal basis to Deans of faculty, and informal opportunities to discuss decision making with a Dean or with a member of the teaching staff. In this respect, students confirmed to the IEP Team that these 'open door' opportunities are valued. With regard to more formal involvement and representation, students are not represented in committee and deliberative structures, such as the University Board or Faculty Boards. The IEP Team notes, however, that USEK has identified in the SER that 'promotion of student involvement in teaching and learning quality assurance' is a priority over the next three-year period.

The Team members wish to record their full recognition of the realities of USEK's situation, as described in the SER and as emphasised in discussion with senior managers, which serve to make the matter of student involvement in institutional governance an extremely delicate one. Nevertheless, it is also important that the Team records its finding, from various meetings with students, that there is a degree of student willingness to embrace more formal representation and participation opportunities and that USEK has excellent students who would like to contribute more. The Team therefore notes that, even though there are very good informal arrangements for access to faculty, the lack of a full range of opportunities for student representation and involvement in quality processes is a matter requiring further consideration by the university. Though recognising existing constraints, the IEP Team formed the view that USEK should follow European trends and start working on a design to involve students more fully in quality processes and committee deliberations.

5. Developments in learning and teaching

Students generally spoke highly of the quality of their learning experience, and the accessibility and support of faculty. The IEP Team was particularly impressed by USEK's arrangements for student support, including financial aid for students to assist them in the payment of tuition fees. This included generous reductions in fee levels made by USEK at the university's regional centres. USEK's funding policy in this area reflects well that aspect of the university's mission which emphasises the promotion of equal opportunities through its social welfare policy. The IEP Team commends the university's student aid policy and, in their meetings with students, members of the Team frequently heard students referring to the affordable fee levels set by USEK. This is a distinctive feature of USEK. The Team formed the view that the steps taken to develop the university's language policy also represent a distinctive and positive feature of USEK. The university prioritises language skills for students and sets appropriate standards, in both English and French. Moreover, USEK is the only university in Lebanon to impose a language test in three languages at the point of entry. To support the compulsory emphasis placed on language competence USEK offers a unique remedial programme (English and French) at Rmeich. The IEP Team also learned of the excellent cross-university language skills programme made available by the Faculty of Letters, where 25 qualified language teachers help students to achieve the appropriate standards. An increasing number of new programmes are being delivered through the medium of English. The best of USEK's students are confidently trilingual.

The IEP Team noted that most aspects of facilities, learning resources, and learning and teaching infrastructure, were generally appreciated by students and faculty. It appeared to the IEP Team that progress continues to be made in areas such as Wifi, video-conferencing facilities, and specialist facilities such as the Business School's Reuters Dealing Room, a feature which is particularly popular with students. These developments complement existing strengths in some areas, such as science laboratory provision. Nevertheless the Team was made aware of scope for improvement. This was acknowledged by the university, both in meetings with the IEP Team and in the SER, where an assessment is made of current strengths and of areas for development, such as extension of opening hours, increasing the profile of the library to students, e-resources and on-line access to journals for reference purposes. The latter, along with some shortages of books, was a particular concern to medical students requiring access to Medline.

In their discussions with USEK faculty and senior managers, and in their reading of documentation made available to them, the IEP Team explored various aspects of learning and teaching strategy and of leadership in support of the development and enhancement of learning and teaching. The Team noted that Faculty Deans took a leading role in the promotion of student academic life, the nomination of new staff, and assessing the teaching performance of faculty, and noted that faculty committees pay attention to procedures in support of learning and teaching. The IEP Team was also made aware of the significant pressure placed on faculty, particularly full-time, through heavy teaching loads combined with administrative duties and an expectation to undertake research. This inevitably creates constraints for faculty in providing support

for students, including in specialist areas such as hospital teaching. As a predominantly teaching-led university, this is a matter of concern for USEK, as is acknowledged in its SER.

The IEP Team was interested to learn of the important contribution made to the university in the area of teacher quality by the Selection Committee (*Commission ad hoc*) and the Peers Committee (*Comité des Pairs*). The former is involved in evaluating potential teaching skills of new faculty, while the latter assesses reports on the teaching and research performance of faculty and also makes recommendations to the Rector on promotions. However, the Team noted that the university does not currently have sufficient arrangements for training teachers for university teaching. The Team formed the view that this is an area that the university should reflect on with a view to providing firmer underpinnings to the enhancement of learning and teaching, pedagogy, and academic practice.

In reviewing USEK's academic provision and approaches to learning and teaching, the IEP Team learned that the university offers some major programme options that are not available elsewhere in Lebanon. The Team noted that USEK has been responsive to the expectations of external partners by introducing programmes which lead to disciplinary specialisation on a progressive basis, but which also commence with a multi-disciplinary approach. For almost a decade, USEK had also introduced courses and options to encourage inter-disciplinarity. However, the Team noted that, given that student numbers on some programmes are relatively low, the university may wish to consider combining courses in some areas, thus achieving efficiency gains and improved use of resources.

Students who met the members of the IEP Team reported good flexibility for adjusting between programmes. It was also noted that where programmes had been introduced relatively recently in new areas of provision, such as medicine, course organisation had shown steady improvement. A number of students, however, on a variety of courses, from arts to medicine, expressed a preference for a better balance between the theoretical and applied aspects of their courses, with the balance weighted too much towards theory at present. In its SER the university also acknowledged that it was addressing weaknesses in advice and counselling support for students. The IEP Team encourages USEK to make good progress with these matters.

During meetings with external partners and stakeholders the IEP Team heard clear evidence of the employability and maturity of USEK students, their attractiveness to employers, and the extent to which their competencies and skills were valued by the wider society. It is a credit to USEK that such confirmation is supported by stakeholders representing prestigious international companies. However, during meetings with students the IEP Team noted that students reported a lack of sufficient opportunities on their programmes of study to gain work experience, placements and internships. Some students reported that in the absence of support from the university they had arranged their own placements. The IEP Team considered that this was a matter that needed to be reviewed, perhaps by the university's Careers Office.

From meetings with senior staff at faculty level, and from documentation provided, the IEP Team was encouraged to note examples of good links with employers, including annual colloquia and seminars. But the Team also noted that there was scope for strengthening such links by, for example, involving industry and employers in curriculum development and the identification of new programmes, including short courses. In view of the university's stated goals relating to meeting labour market needs and addressing the lifelong learning agenda, the IEP Team recommends that in its academic and pedagogic planning, particular attention is paid by the university to the professional updating, training, and enterprise requirements of stakeholders in industry, business and commerce.

The IEP Team was particularly interested in how the university enhances the methods and approaches used in learning and teaching, and how best practice is shared. As the SER indicates, use is made of international partnerships for the purpose of updating teaching methods and introducing new ideas; new staff are provided with guidance and advice; and faculty are encouraged to adopt critical reflection and to attend each other's classes to exchange ideas. Other documentation provided to the IEP Team also draws attention to practices that support enhancement. These, such as evaluation of teachers, are referred to earlier in this report. The Team was also interested to learn of the role of Teaching Coordinator, and considered that this remit could be reinforced to include a more explicit emphasis on enhancement of learning and teaching.

The IEP Team views positively the attention paid by the university to practices which support enhancement of learning and teaching. However, while noting the variety of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment used, the Team also formed the view that there remains a lack of sufficient mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice amongst faculty and for prioritising learning and teaching objectives at faculty and university levels. The Team was not convinced that an appropriate balance was being achieved between 'teacher-centred' and 'student-centred' approaches to learning and teaching. Moreover, it was not clear to the IEP Team whether learning and teaching enhancement was sufficiently prominent in the terms of reference of either higher-level central committees, such as University Board, or Academic Programmes Committee, or the remit of faculty committees. The Team also came to the judgement that, in improving central oversight of learning and teaching policy and practice, the university might wish to reflect on the merits of putting in place a university-wide Learning and Teaching Strategy, to include a focus on e-learning, with each faculty developing its own local-level strategy for the enhancement of learning and teaching. In summary, as USEK seeks to establish itself as a leading university for high quality learning and teaching in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, the IEP Team encourages it to review and consider whether it has the necessary arrangements to facilitate pedagogic development and enhancement of academic practice including e-learning.

6. Research

In the documentation prepared for the IEP Team's visits, the university has stated its strategic objective to develop the profile and level of activity of its research. The USEK Mission refers to the importance of 'research and innovation', while the SER identifies goals that emphasise the need to improve the positioning of USEK in terms of 'scientific research and publications', and to gain 'more international recognition in research'. The SER also makes reference to some knowledge transfer activity, through research projects in areas such as sustainable development. It was evident to the IEP Team that research had not, historically, been given a high priority in universities in the Lebanon. Reflecting the University's aspiration to grow research,, the IEP Team also noted that this was a further area where USEK was seeking to achieve greater centralisation and a better degree of central oversight, while also emphasising the importance of innovation and initiatives at the faculty level. The IEP Team formed the view that, while at this present juncture this set of circumstances represented a considerable challenge both for the university and in the country as a whole, equally, it could be viewed by USEK as an opportunity. The Team believes that any progress made, in both applied and pure research, will help the university to be placed on a higher pedestal competitively and enable USEK to achieve competitive advantage in specific areas of research and knowledge transfer.

Central to the university's research aspirations are a number of initiatives, at various levels. Principal amongst these are the Doctoral College responsible for the development of faculty doctoral programmes; a Higher Research Centre, the *Centre Supérieur de la Recherche* (CSR), responsible for the promotion of research projects; a renewed emphasis on investment in laboratories; and the stimulation of research at the level of individual faculty. Responsibility for research at senior management level is vested in the Vice Rector for Research, whose remit is to oversee the activities of the Doctoral College and of CSR, and also to promote research in the university's faculties and academic units. The IEP Team noted that, to date, student numbers in the Doctoral College were relatively low, with no completions yet recorded, signalling that the movement towards increasing the level of USEK's own doctoral activity was in its early stages. The College is structured into two doctoral schools, Science and Social Science and Humanities, with a range of programme options being offered in most, though not all, faculties. The IEP Team learned that this measured pace of growth was deliberate and that, in seeking to secure an effective transition from the previous French model of doctoral study to the shorter Anglo-Saxon model, of 3 to 4 years study, the university had adopted a careful and selective admissions policy. There continues to be a significant number of doctoral students who are based at USEK for their studies but who are registered in a French university. The view of the IEP Team was that, given the importance of postgraduate and doctoral programmes in terms of underpinning research within a university, the successful development of the Doctoral College was quite significant to USEK.

The IEP Team noted that the university makes publicly available a range of information on research outputs, advanced scholarship, and publications. The university acknowledged that, even though efforts continued to be made to encourage scientific research and publications, the general level of activity remained at an

unsatisfactory level. The IEP Team noted that no benchmarking of research outputs and publications was undertaken for the purpose of drawing comparisons with, for example, similar universities in Lebanon and the Middle East. Further, in examining the information provided, the Team members took the view that the university might wish to consider whether clearer a clearer distinction could usefully be made between 'research' and 'advanced scholarship', as is the case in established universities.

The IEP Team also had the opportunity to explore aspects of the operation and impact of the centrally coordinated research projects scheme, funded and administered through CSR. The Team learned that this central body meets annually at the request of the Rector to consider proposals submitted by faculties and departments. Emphasis is placed on projects from humanities and social sciences, or fundamental sciences faculties. From their reading of the documentation, the IEP Team noted that projects are expected to 'contribute to the development of Lebanese society' and to take account of the local and regional dimensions. Project teams can include researchers from overseas. Each year, two calls are made and projects are funded up to a modest level of \$US 10K per project. At the level of the faculty, proposers of projects discuss their plans with their Dean of faculty and seek initial approval from the Faculty Board. Projects are assessed on behalf of CSR by a specialist in the relevant field, and this informs the decision making process. During the 2008/2009 round, 6 projects were selected for funding, from 21 proposals.

In reviewing these various activities and initiatives, the IEP Team identified a number of considerations relating to the capacity building in research that USEK is undertaking, which suggest that there are significant constraints yet to be overcome by the university. This includes matters such as staff time, resources and facilities in some fields, and funding. While the Team noted a number of positive signs of development, such as the potential competitive advantage of the university's science laboratory provision, and the accreditation of the Business faculty's doctoral programme (the only such accredited provision in Lebanon), nevertheless, these strengths were outweighed by a number of factors. Staff from a number of faculties with whom the IEP Team members met reported that heavy teaching and administrative loads limited their opportunity to undertake research. It appeared that in some faculties there was, as yet, little or no research being undertaken, no professorial positions, no USEK-registered doctoral students or accredited doctoral programmes, and no Masters provision. In addition, the IEP Team learned that the university has no policy for sabbatical research leave, that research is insufficiently incentivised, that doctoral students are not remunerated, and that no provision is made for post-doctoral activity. Moreover, while it was evident to the Team that Deans of Faculty undertook some monitoring of the research activity of individual faculty members, and that this included recommendations for promotion, it was unclear whether individual members undertook research through personal choice or whether expectations were more formalised and whether such matters were considered within the university's committee system.

On the basis of their deliberations on the matters described, the members of the IEP Team formed the view that, while there were specific aspirations and priorities, such as increasing the number of PhD holders employed by the university, there was

as yet no perceptible human resources strategy and staff development policy for supporting the desired development of research and teaching activity. Moreover, it became evident to the IEP Team that while the Higher Centre for Research (CSR) has in place a prominent scheme for funding a range of research projects on an annual basis, there appear to be no clear institutional research priorities that inform the processes of selection of projects and the promotion of the scheme. As a consequence, it seems that the project funding is spread somewhat thinly across the university, reflecting perhaps the background of individual faculty members and their university of origin rather than being informed by clear strategically-driven priority lines. Indeed, the Team came to the judgement that there are no performance indicators or output measures for research; that there appears to be insufficient central monitoring and use of data for tracking purposes; and faculties do not appear to have a documented research policy. Moreover, in view of the somewhat narrow remit of the University Board in these matters, the university will no doubt wish to assure itself that research does not become under-prioritised, particularly since, unlike established research-intensive universities, there is no Research Committee within USEK's committee university's structures. The IEP Team also noted that there are untapped opportunities for the university. These include the promotion of applied research and knowledge transfer activity which, given the significance of USEK's links with civil society, locally and regionally, have obvious income generation potential. Accordingly, in view of the importance the university attaches to research as a key area for development, the IEP Team recommends that this should be reflected in and driven by a clearly defined institutional research strategy and strong central coordinating arrangements, and supported also by staffing policy and human resources strategy.

In reviewing matters relating to research the IEP Team gave some consideration to resourcing and budgetary matters. The SER stated that the University's goal was to allocate some 3% of the annual budget to support for research activity, but also acknowledged that this had not yet been realised and that at present the research budget remains too low, as is the level of income generation. Indeed, the Team noted that most of the research budget is drawn from external sources. From financial information made available, including income from external research grants and projects, and statements on income and expenditure, the members of the IEP Team formed the view that there is scope for the university to enhance and increase its own financial support for research. The Team therefore recommends that the university develops a clear funding policy and budget to support the development of research, and takes the view that the funds currently available to USEK can enable this to happen.

7. International dimension

The IEP Team noted the growing importance being attached by the university to the international and wider European dimension. From meetings with staff and students, and from documentation provided, the Team noted a range of evidence of USEK's desire to increase the range and extent of its international contacts and partnerships - both in the Arab world, and in Europe and the USA - and to move beyond the university's French origins and well established links to France. The Team also noted the importance of the university's language policy for enhancing the university's international aspirations and achieve more openness towards, for example, Anglo-Saxon and North American systems and traditions. In this regard it was evident to the Team that USEK students were attractive to employers across the world. The Team learned that the introduction of new by-laws was assisting this process of moving beyond USEK's French heritage. The university's international links are illustrated by academic links of various kinds, such as staff and student mobility; joint research supervision arrangements with European partner universities; agreements between faculties and international partners; international conferences and networks; involvement in projects and research programmes; and the review of courses to meet international accreditation requirements.

These international links have clearly been of benefit to the USEK academic community. This was illustrated to the Team by the external pedagogic links at the level of individual faculty members, the research experience gained, the common delivery of courses with French partners, and agreements and exchanges of various types. However, in their overall assessment, the IEP Team members noted that, to date, much of this activity had been built through links with French institutions and networks. The Team also noted that while the University is seeking to grow its international activity, currently most mobility and exchange links involve instructors and not students. Indeed, students from all faculties who met with the Team indicated enthusiasm for more central support for pursuing mobility opportunities, to complement faculty-level support, and would also like to see more international students coming into USEK from non-Arab countries. They would also wish to see more assistance from the university for USEK students during their international placements. The IEP Team formed the view that while the development and growth of more international links was a greater priority for some faculties than for others, it was evident that the university faces not inconsiderable funding and budgetary constraints if it wishes to grow its international activity.

The IEP Team views positively the clear signs of the higher profile that USEK wishes to give to its international dimension. The Team noted from the university's SER that goals, objectives, and priorities have been identified that support improvement of the institution's position internationally. The roles and remit of the Vice Rector and Director for International Affairs are also an important aspect of USEKs internationalisation aspirations. However, it was not evident to the IEP Team that the university had put in place the mechanisms and arrangements necessary for drawing together the various planned activities into a coherent strategy, with a clear set of measurable targets, and for exercising oversight of progress being made. Accordingly, while the IEP Team acknowledges the constraints facing the university in its efforts to

secure greater mobility of both students and staff, it is recommended that a clearer policy is developed to act as a driver for this activity, supported by clear arrangements for monitoring and review at management executive level. Further, while the IEP Team commends the university's intention to widen its profile from its French linguistic origins, given the challenges that this involves, it is recommended that this requires that strong commitment is reflected in an appropriate allocation of resources. Finally, to assist USEK in establishing its standing both in and beyond immediate region, the IEP Team proposes that the university may wish to consider using the proposed new Strategic Advisory Board as an advisory forum on the wider dimension of organisational change and development, and to stimulate networking and engagement with Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, North American, and wider European and international trends and developments.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The recommendations of the IEP Team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the university's aspiration to be a leading university in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean regions, and to its capacity for taking forward successful change.

Governance and management

- The IEP Team would encourage the university to be proactive in reviewing and improving its present organisational chart regarding governance and management arrangements, and to implement a consistent set of internationally established terminology for identifying organisational entities and procedures;
- The IEP Team welcomes the proposal to establish a Strategic Advisory Board and formed the view that the university would be well served by ensuring that the remit and title of this body extends beyond consideration of strategy, to include fund raising, wider matters of organisational direction and performance, portfolio development, and the effectiveness of links with the wider society.

Strategic planning

- In their deliberations on the current academic organisation, and from discussions with staff at all levels, including senior managers, the IEP Team advises the university that it may wish to reflect on whether a degree of streamlining of faculty structures (i.e. number of faculties) may be necessary for securing greater organisational efficiency and effectiveness.
- In a time of change and transformation, the IEP Team formed the view that a key element of the successful development of organisational culture centres on the use by the university of good communication and consultation arrangements to generate corporate ownership and involvement from all faculty.
- While senior managers have a responsibility for leadership, the IEP Team advises that there is a reciprocal responsibility for faculty to demonstrate personal commitment and belonging to USEK.
- The IEP Team recommends that the university takes steps to review its existing budget policy and financial model, and to consider whether they might be used more effectively to underpin the strategic planning of the university.
- In order to further facilitate initiatives to support institutional cohesion and effectiveness, the IEP Team strongly encourages the university to build on its present 13-point institutional plan and to put in place a Strategic Plan which is clearly focused on the university's principal organisational objectives and finds expression in the university's budget.

- Further, the Team advises the university that this Strategic Plan should be underpinned by a set of supporting strategies in key areas (finance, quality, research, learning and teaching, human resources, internationalisation, and estates).

Quality assurance, quality management, and quality culture

- The IEP Team strongly recommends that the university continues to make progress with the institutionalisation of quality assurance and puts in place arrangements for academic quality assurance, monitoring and review at faculty and programme levels.
- The IEP Team wishes to encourage the development of an effective Alumni network and Careers Service.
- Though recognising existing constraints, the IEP Team formed the view that USEK should follow European trends and start working on a design to involve students more fully in quality processes and committee deliberations.

Developments in learning and teaching

- The IEP Team also proposes that, in its academic and pedagogic planning, particular attention is paid by the university to the professional updating, training, and enterprise requirements of stakeholders in industry, business and commerce.
- As USEK seeks to establish itself as a leading university for high quality learning and teaching in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, the IEP Team encourages it to review and consider whether it has the necessary arrangements to facilitate pedagogic development and enhancement of academic practice including e-learning.

Research

- Given that the University attaches importance to research as a key area for development, the IEP Team recommends that this should be clearly reflected in and driven by a clearly defined institutional research strategy and strong central coordinating arrangements, and supported also by staffing policy and human resources strategy.
- The IEP Team recommends that the university develops a clear funding policy and budget to support the development of research and takes the view that the current funds available enable this to happen.

International dimension

- The IEP Team acknowledges the constraints facing the university in its efforts to secure greater mobility of both students and staff, but would recommend that a policy is developed to act as a driver for this activity, supported by clear arrangements for monitoring and review at management executive level.

- The IEP Team commends the university's intention to widen its profile from its French linguistic origins. Given the challenges this involves, it is recommended that this requires a strong commitment and appropriate allocation of resources.

9. Envoi

The IEP Team wishes to thank the university for the excellent arrangements made in preparation for its visits and in support of the work undertaken by the Team, and for the generous hospitality extended by the university and its staff. The IEP Team enjoyed learning about the unique structure and characteristics of USEK and wishes to commend its pioneering spirit as the first university in Lebanon to engage with the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme. As has been noted at various points in this report, USEK is in transition and faces a period of further change. It has been a great pleasure to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders, the strategic challenges faced by the university. The Team hopes that the university finds its comments and suggestions helpful and supportive in its planning for the future. The IEP Team believes that USEK has the maturity and the ambition to build on its current strong foundations to face new challenges. We wish the institution well in its next stage of development.