IEP

EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Charles University, Prague. The evaluation took place between April 2017 and June 2017.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of IEP are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

All aspects of the evaluation are guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:
- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Charles University's profile

1.2.1   Charles University is a public university, based largely in Prague (with medical faculties in Hradec Králové and Plzeň and a pharmacy faculty in Hradec Králové), and comprising 17 faculties and 4 university institutes with a further 5 other units devoted to, *inter alia*, computer science, language studies and knowledge transfer. In 2015/16 student numbers totalled 50,495 with 18,325 registered on first cycle studies, 24,629 on second cycle studies and 7,541 on third cycle studies.

1.2.2   The university is steeped in history having been founded in 1348 and throughout the team's visits a real sense of pride at these antecedents flowed from all those connected with the university. Many of the buildings that currently house the staff and students of the university are physical manifestations of this history. The university views itself as the pre-eminent institution in the Czech Republic and indeed in the wider central European space. The belief in this position is stressed in a range of publications produced by the university referring to world league table rankings and its position as a research-led, research intensive university. The senior management of the university was keen to emphasise to the team the importance of the university's traditions and connections with other prominent historic universities in Europe. In part these relationships within the wider European space were seen by the university as external benchmarks of excellence.

1.2.3   The university is clearly "comfortable in its own skin" but also aware that its position is subject to constant challenge which requires the regular enhancement of all its activities. It faces funding challenges across both education and research with comparatively low and often uncompetitive salaries for teaching staff and a lower level of resource for research than found in many other European countries, including the level of stipends for doctoral candidates. This was compounded by a high level of unpredictability in the state funding of universities. Considering the mid-term risk regarding human resources and student intake in particular, the university is aware of the challenges brought about by demographic decline in the Czech Republic. These were factors that clearly hindered medium to long term planning.

1.2.4   As regards the university's essential "philosophy" of governance, Charles University strongly endorses a policy of devolution and collegiality. Faculty autonomy and bottom-up practices, together with a high degree of consensus building, are the essential structural principles in running the university. This approach is understandable and largely inevitable in view of the size of the university and the diversity of its academic provision and operational differences; and this approach may also be pragmatic to maintain a sense of ownership of university members throughout the entire institution while also serving as a safeguard against undue non-academically motivated steerage attempted by external politics. However, the downside of such basic underpinning of the university's understanding of governance and leadership can also be seen when identifying the challenges which Charles University faces in terms of developing coherent strategies and practices where necessary. These challenges will show repeatedly in the course of this report, be it in teaching and learning as regards establishing a standardised quality assurance practice and as regards forging interdisciplinary programmes and a functional modular system, be it in fully identifying core developmental areas in research, be it with regard to an overarching and focused internationalisation strategy, or be it with a view to ensuring sufficient coherence in staffing policies fit to match interdisciplinary interests. Hence, the overarching internal challenge for

Charles University lies in balancing central and decentral elements in leadership, governance and management, and in balancing holistic institutional interests and academic freedom of the individual wisely, and doing so both with a view to the principle of subsidiarity on the one hand and to assuring effectiveness and efficiency of operation for the benefit of the institution and its members and society at large on the other hand. Therefore, these challenges also permeate most of the issues which the team has scrutinised and wishes to give recommendations on, hoping to serve the benefit of the university as a whole as well as of its constituent units, of society as a whole as well as of individual members of the university.

1.2.5   In the national context there is an additional, external, challenge as a result of recent changes to the higher education law in the Czech Republic. The team understood that the Czech higher education sector was subject to a high degree of legal regulation which impacted on both organisational structures and quality practices. Changes in leadership at the Ministry of Education over the last 10 years had delayed any meaningful reforms to higher education law. Recently, some continuity had emerged and this had led to a change in the law (September 2016) focusing on two key issues: (1) institutional accreditation (2) quality of provision. Both issues firmly underpinned the university's motivation to make use of IEP as a tool for institution-wide internal reflection and external evaluation-based guidance in the university's approach to new quality enhancement processes. While, however, it was possible for the university to respond positively to these changes in the higher education landscape it was rather more difficult to achieve the scale of transformation being demanded in the timescale set down by the government.

1.2.6   More widely, the Czech Republic's relations within the EU had been subject to some strain and this had not been a positive environment for staff and student mobility and research co-operation.

1.3 The evaluation process

1.3.1   The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group composed of:

prof. PaedDr. Radka Wildová, CSc. (Chair)
Mgr. et Mgr. David Hurný
doc. RNDr. Jan Konvalinka, CSc.
prof. MUDr. Milena Králíčková, Ph.D.
Lukáš Kostínek
doc. PhDr. PaedDr. Anna Kucharská, Ph.D.
Ing. Miroslava Oliveriusová
MUDr. Milan Prášil, MBA
doc. RNDr. Jiří Tůma, DrSc.
prof. MUDr. Jan Škrha, DrSc.

The group's work was supported by a further consultative forum and relevant central departments.

1.3.2.   The self-evaluation report (SER) of the Charles University, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in March 2017. The two visits of the evaluation team to Charles University took place from 26 to 28 April and from 30 May to 2 June, respectively.

1.3.3   The university Self Evaluation Group (SEG) had been appointed by the Rector following discussion in the Rector's Collegium. The SEG included a number of Vice-Rectors, representatives from the Faculties, the Senate, the Bursar, the Chancellor, the Board of Internal Evaluation (BIE) and students nominated by their faculties.

1.3.4   It was clear to the team that the process of engaging with IEP and establishing the SEG had been conducted in an extremely professional, open and effective way by the university. The university acknowledged that there had been some suspicions within the staff community around the purpose and value of this exercise and that had been particularly true in the faculty domains. The team was informed that at the outset of the process not all faculties had been supportive of the IEP engagement and it had been necessary for the SEG to emphasise that it was an essential part of the preparation for institutional accreditation under the new Czech law. It had also become apparent that some faculty academic leaders were unfamiliar with the need to be reflective and self-critical as part of a self-evaluation process. For the team there were a number of factors at play in this. Perhaps for too long, it had been suggested to the team, the university had been used to simply asserting that it was an outstanding institution able to operate without significant constraints or problems. The team heard that, even in the post-communist era, there was still some fear about engaging in open and transparent discourse and that critical feedback was not always welcome. There was also a lack of empathy in the faculties with the notion of institutional evaluation; as was often remarked to the team, both in history and by law faculties had been given key elements of autonomy and they were assiduous in protecting that position. There was, therefore, a certain need for some measure of cultural change to accommodate the responsibilities being placed on the university as part of the move towards institutional accreditation.

1.3.5   The SER had been produced in a thoroughly competent manner although in some respects, it seemed to the team, that the university had struggled with the IEP methodology. In parts the SER followed a descriptive pattern rather than one which fully addressed the four core IEP questions. In this context it may well be that the content and style of presentation of the SER had more to do with the requirements of institutional accreditation; and, as a result, there had been a natural hesitancy to engage in a very challenging debate about overall direction and effectiveness at this

significant moment in the development of the university's strategic direction. That said, the SER revealed many points of self-reflection and self-criticism, often acknowledging the need to do better in specific areas of endeavour. The final section on main conclusions and recommendations of the SER might have benefitted from a more clearly articulated SWOT analysis, particularly relating to opportunities and threats. However, all in all, the SER was comprehensive and thorough enough to serve as a very useful starting point and reference document for the IEP evaluation process.

1.3.6   The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Professor Jürgen Kohler, former Rector, University of Greifswald, Germany, team chair
- Professor Hannele Niemi, former Vice-Rector, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Professor Luc Hittinger, former President of the Paris-Est Créteil University (Upec), France
- Ms Gohar Hovhannisyan, student, Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia
- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, team coordinator

The team thanks the Rector, Professor Tomáš Zima, for his warm engagement with the IEP process and his kind hospitality to the team during their two visits to Charles University. The team would also like to thank the Vice-Rectors for their involvement in, and commitment to, the wide range of meetings and forums that took place during the team's visits. In particular, the team would like to thank Věra Šťastná and her colleagues for the exemplary arrangements that were put in place to make the evaluation a smooth and efficient undertaking. Finally, the team would like to express its gratitude to all participants in this IEP evaluation for their openness and willingness to discuss all issues concerning the university.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1   Charles University has well-established and articulated mission and vision statements[1]. The SER states the mission to be "to enable its students to obtain a quality education for application in a wide variety of fields… [it] positions itself as a research university which emphasises the Humboldtian principles of unity and freedom of research and education and autonomy…" The vision encapsulates the notion of a university of the "Third Millennium" that is "free, confident and values its traditions…a university that is modern, inspiring and open…and is a respected institution on a domestic, European and global scale". Considering the university's capacity in terms of staff and students, its historic track record in terms of research and teaching, its size, its history and locality, and as a result of all these factors, the university's role within the Czech higher education system, the team viewed these statements as plausible and realistic aspirations. There was an evident track record in research outputs and the university's positioning in a number of established European and world rankings testified to its international reputation.

2.2   As a cautionary note, however, the team advised that these high aspirations would be the key external barometer of its success or failure. Judgements would be made not simply on the basis of past history and achievements but on future innovation and the enhancement of activities, particularly those in the field of research. It is in this context that the team *recommends that fuller attention is paid by the university's senior leadership to horizon scanning and future proofing in the efforts to realise the university's mission and vision*. This might apply to a range of activities. The team highlighted the pursuit of excellence in medicine and the importance of technology in learning as two examples that could be particularly relevant for the university. In the world of medicine, for example, a degree of insularity was being eroded with the increasing involvement of other disciplines. Medical image computing [2] - an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of computer science, data science, electrical engineering, physics, mathematics and medicine - was typical of the evolving cross-fertilisation of ideas which challenged current norms on core research, organisational structures and the direction of resources. The canvas for the development of technology-enhanced learning in higher education was also fast moving and dynamic. While the sector investment in MOOCs (massive open online courses), for example, is currently restricted because of costs to a small number of institutions, the principles of utilising online content in delivering (enhanced) learning was common place in higher education across Europe and beyond. This allowed for innovation in pedagogy and tackling some of the problems related to dispersed student populations. It was also an

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[1] The team did, however, feel that there was also scope for developing additional mission statements specific to teaching and learning and research.

[2] Other areas that could be mentioned include nanotechnology and robotics.

area where sharing expertise with other institutions could lead to reduced development costs. With both examples there was much that could be done to consider current best practice, embrace innovation and distribute funding efficiently and effectively for the long-term benefit of the university.

2.3   The organisational structure and decision-making bodies of the university are set out clearly in the SER. The details are not exceptional in the context of most European universities and there are no obvious gaps in the elements that have responsibility for governing and leading the institution. There is, however, a particular nature to these arrangements at Charles University which is referred to in the SER as "marked decentralization". While, clearly, decentralisation as an organisational model is not unique to Charles University, the team found that the profound belief and commitment to this collegiate approach was, in many ways, exceptional. This was not simply a factor of the size of the university or its physical dispersal across Prague and beyond, nor, for that matter, the impact of higher education law. While rooted in history, this approach to governance and institutional decision-making appeared, to the team, far more of an attempt to provide a modern solution to the need for effective management and control. And throughout the various meetings with staff and students during the two site visits there was a consistency of opinion and a unifying spirit that suggested to the team that a core institutional belief in this system of governance was shared by management, academic staff and students. As a result there appeared to be no wish to challenge the fundamental principles of this organisational model; although this did not, in the university's view, diminish the ability of the university's senior management to provide leadership and determine priorities working in a collegiate way.

2.4   Throughout its two visits and many meetings, the team witnessed some of the practical workings of the decentralised organisational model at Charles University. It listened carefully to the arguments presented in support of these arrangements from all parts of the university, not least during visits to a number of faculties that reflected the diversity of the university's provision. In the view of the team the fundamental organisational architecture was appropriate and workable for the university. However, it noted some of the problems of this model referenced in the SER and had others of its own that it introduced into discussions. The dimensions of this discourse were not framed by the "either or question" of a centralised or decentralised model but rather by the effective balance between the two and the scope for rationalisation. Some of the issues relating to decentralisation include administrative inefficiency, a lack of transparency in budgetary control, too many narrow (specialist) programmes, multiple information technology platforms and difficulties in building on areas of excellence because of a lack critical mass. As this report has already noted (see paragraph 2.2) the direction of limited resources in areas such as medicine is an increasing challenge, and there might be an argument, even within a decentralised model, for looking at the number of medical faculties currently operating in Prague. In the case of the Faculty of Arts the scope for rationalisation amongst its 47 departments was generally accepted

by the faculty leadership and the team agreed that this was something that needed addressing. *The team recommends, therefore, that the impetus for such structural/organisational changes - in areas such as medicine, science and the arts - be supported by the creation of a specialist task force under the auspices of the Rectorate with a view to aiding faculties in this type of change management.*

2.5   Throughout the IEP process the university was able to point to the effectiveness of the basic building blocks of institutional decision-making. There is a recently finalised comprehensive Strategic Plan (2016-2020) that had been in development for a period of approximately a year. The Plan is structured around six key areas: Education; Postgraduate Studies; Research, Development and Other Activities; Third Role; Community; and Support of Activities. These areas are then divided into objectives, sub-objectives, tools and indicators. The team understood that there were very detailed action plans setting out further details such as timelines, milestones, and specific task related responsibilities. As the time frame of the evaluation did not allow for in-depth examination of the considerable number of different items covered by various action plans, the *team emphasises the need for the university to make sure, through a process of self-critical analysis of these plans, that goals set and, more so, the processes defined to reach these should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound)*. Equally this was perhaps the moment for *the university to consider a further refinement in priorities so that there was clarity across the organisation about ranking (first order, second order etc.) and also that, alongside funding, other criteria might be applied to determining priorities, for example strengths in disciplines*.

2.6   The team was convinced that all internal stakeholders had been engaged in the strategic planning process and there is a clear practice, at the university level, of updating and reviewing the Plan on an annual basis. Faculties then engage in a mapping process to ensure that their local plans reflect the key elements of the institutional plan. What was less apparent to the team was how far loop closing occurred, particularly at the faculty level. The university points to this issue in the SER when it states that it needs to ensure that "the conclusions of individual analyses and surveys are more interlinked, in order to form a comprehensive and easily accessible basis for formulating its further development". In addition, there appeared to be no systematic involvement of external stakeholders in the strategic planning process, and this was perhaps reflected in the relatively limited range of objectives set for the Third Role in the current Strategic Plan.

2.7   In terms of the governance the university states that it sees the Board of Internal Evaluation (BIE) as being at the heart of future developments in quality assurance and quality enhancement. The BIE has only been in existence for some six months so it was not possible for the team to form a judgment on its effectiveness. Clearly, however, one of its major tasks will be to encourage a clearer articulation of how central and faculty based systems come together and how development is seen not just at the level

of the individual faculty but, equally as importantly, at the broader level of the university. The team acknowledges that the university and its faculties have been accustomed to developing programmes for external accreditation and this experience will, no doubt, play some part in the new BIE arrangements. However, the team understood that the national programme accreditation system was very prescriptive and in the main focused on checking the accomplishment of minimum standards. Inevitably there would need to be a new dynamic at play if Charles University took on these responsibilities itself following a successful institutional accreditation, putting an overall strategy of quality assurance as permanent quality enhancement at the centre of its internal institutional approach to quality. To date the university had been relatively successful in progressing changes to internal rules. These, however, only provide a framework for activities, concentrating largely on the organisation of the university's own internal processes. While these rules aim at realising decentralisation and provision of an overarching, holistic concept of quality assurance and quality enhancement measures at the same time, the university is struggling not only with finding the adequate balance between central and decentral elements in the quality processes but also with difficulties in defining clear university-wide concepts on quality strategies. The latter applies in particular to teaching and learning, where quality definition and quality strategies need to go beyond a merely broad understanding of "Humboldt" as meaning "integration of research and teaching"; even though this understanding can claim validity, it requires more concrete interpretation in the age of modern mass tertiary education.

2.8   The team noted the advisory support provided to the Rector through the Rector's Collegium and the extended Collegium[3]. While these arrangements were said to support dialogue across the institution it occurred to the team that the size of these forums might, at times, constrain effective decision-making at the senior levels of the university. In this context it also seemed difficult to justify the nine Vice-Rector roles that were in place. The team heard various opinions about the strength/value of these arrangements. In some quarters the extended Collegium was thought simply to be a vehicle for the *status quo* as individual faculty interests tended to stifle change. As for the number of Vice-Rectors, one senior view was that the size and complexity of the university might demand more than the current number of Vice-Rector roles for it to operate in an optimal manner. As with other areas of governance and leadership, the team does not want to be prescriptive around solutions to the issues that had been identified. It does think, though, that there could be benefits from the greater involvement of professional/managerial (expert) staff in supporting activities at the central level, which could in turn result in some of the responsibilities currently placed in the remit of elected academics being handled by permanent highly competent

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[3] The core membership of the Collegium is the Vice-Rectors, the Registrar, Bursar, President of the University's Academic Senate and a student representative. The extended Collegium also involves Faculty Deans and Directors of Institutes.

administrative staff. There was some evidence of this approach being adopted in the university with the creation of the Knowledge and Technology Transfer Office in 2014, and this model could apply to a number of other domains, for example, quality and research management. These "back office" functions could act as a key bridge to the faculties and also support a smaller number of Vice-Rectors with revised and enlarged briefs. In this way, a number of academics could be freed from being overburden with duties, which was an observation raised in the SER and in interviews with staff. There might also be benefits by way of a more effective Rector's Collegium. *The team, therefore, recommends that the university consider ways in which it might introduce a small number of professional/managerial staff roles to provide expert advice in areas such as quality and research management and alleviate pressures on senior academic leadership roles*.

2.9   In terms of some of the broader aspects of the management and utilisation of human resources, the team noted the very strong tradition and legal basis for staff appointments being determined by faculties. It was also interested to hear that there was a recent trend for the Rectorate to become involved as "gatekeeper" for some staff appointments where interdisciplinary considerations were at play. The team viewed this as a sensible initiative and *recommends the consolidation of this mechanism as a visible sign of how the Rectorate can play a non-threatening and nuanced role in the staff appointment process as an aid to institutional efficiency and the securing of strategic goals, namely by ensuring that the academic competence expected of the candidate fits into the overall developmental strategy not only of the faculty but of the university as a whole*.

3. Quality culture

3.1   The university has created the Board of Internal Evaluation (BIE) as the key mechanism to embed a quality culture across all aspects of the university's activities. It was made clear to the team that the immediate priority of this group was the institutional accreditation process, closely followed by the internal processes to deliver that autonomous activity. The longer term ambition was to address all aspects of quality teaching and learning, research, and support services. The BIE has some administrative support through the Registrar's (Chancellor's) Office but, at the moment, it appeared to be driven in large part by pragmatic need and the personal motivation of its members.

3.2   The team concluded that this committee offered a sound basis for the development of quality systems at the university. The team was also greatly encouraged to see that the BIE was regarded as an important *opportunity* to improve the quality of programmes and the student learning experience. It was also seen as a key arbiter in maintaining the diversity of provision across the university. The university confirmed that it saw the future quality system as a transformative tool allowing for elements of cost-benefit analysis that could support strategic reflection on the number of programmes to be offered, the ways in which they might be organised and the capacity and/or experience in faculties to change both content and pedagogy as a path to quality enhancement at the programme level. The team felt that this was a critical point - the value of *new quality arrangements had to be predicated on innovation and development and not on the reinforcement of a compliance mindset that simply calibrated quality on the basis of inherited norms provided by the government*.

3.3   The university is clearly grappling with both the conceptual and practical aspects of quality. From the conversations that took place with the team there appeared to be no common understanding across the university of the meaning of quality. Answers spread mainly between compliance, excellence, benchmarking, while 'fitness for purpose' - with a clear reference to the question of how to identify meaningful educational purposes in a holistic view - was not among the dominant interpretations of what constitutes quality. This was perhaps understandable given that the university was operating in a world where two systems were still at play - one that involved prescription from outside the institution and the other that would involve a newly established self-autonomy - with the transition between the two being extremely challenging. At the moment, from the team's perspective, the university is focusing on process and the procedural. As a consequence it was not altogether clear to the team whether this was underpinned by a well-developed quality concept.

3.4   The team acknowledges that returning to first principles is an uncomfortable task especially at this moment in the university's development. Indeed the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) accept the difficulty of defining quality, speaking of it as being "mainly a result of the

interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment" and that quality assurance "should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose". Allied to this was the need to embed the core Bologna principles of permeability, mobility and transparency reflected through, *inter alia*, credit transfer (ECTS) and the recording of achievements (diploma supplement). In these circumstances *the team recommends that the university considers/reconsiders three cornerstones of a quality orientation as a basis for further development. First, higher education aims, including preparing students for active citizenship, contributing to their employability, supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation; secondly, "system" - these could be called overarching "social" or "political" - objectives, which coincide largely with Bologna aspirations and tools, such as permeability of learning paths, mobility, recognition, social inclusion, and transparency; and thirdly, ensuring institutional profile or hallmark as a learning experience and programme outcome.*

3.5   On a practical level, one faculty Dean stressed that heads of department needed to play a greater role in embedding the notion of a quality culture with academic staff. There was, however, something of a dilemma: at one end of the spectrum was a group of older staff who often were not open to change and saw no particular problems with the ways things worked at the moment; and at the other end of the spectrum was a group of younger staff who had to juggle teaching, research, international activity and, as a consequence, found little time for reflection on their practice. Providing the breathing space and opportunities for staff to engage fully with quality matters was an important consideration for the university at both faculty and central levels. Some of the approaches that could be adopted were not resource intensive and involved the sharing, agreement and implementation of best practice. This could easily be accomplished through shared information platforms for academic staff and quality experts - something that could also be applied to learning and teaching.

3.6   By the same token increased clarity on roles and responsibilities might assist with the focus on quality. For example, the university already has a faculty based role of programme guarantor. This member of academic staff is charged with responsibility for meeting the threshold requirements for educational activities of the programme and their enhancement. As part of the new quality arrangements, the programme guarantor will produce a monitoring report for consideration by the faculty and eventually also by the university Senate. Drafting this report follows a complex process: The self-evaluation report initially prepared by the guarantor will be discussed in a joint meeting of the working group established by the BIE, the guarantor of the programme, and at least one member of academic staff involved in its implementation. This meeting may also be attended by the Dean or an employee authorised by the Dean, the President of the Academic Senate of the faculty or a representative authorised by him, or a representative of students nominated by the Academic Senate of the faculty

implementing the evaluated study programme. Based on this meeting and the self-evaluation report prepared by the guarantor, the working group of the BIE prepares a draft evaluation report, which is then submitted to the guarantor and the Dean(s) of the faculty(ies) implementing the evaluated programme to express their opinions together with the minutes of the joint meeting. Based on these input elements, the draft is considered by the BIE as a whole. The team was therefore pleased to see that, in future, there would be a significant role for the BIE in debating the regular assessment of individual programmes. This enhancement role was of some importance. However, the interplay between programme guarantors and vice-deans for education perhaps needed some further consideration, in particular since students stated that they were not always sure where "real power" was vested in cases where improvement of the quality of programmes or procedures was sought. Who should be the champion(s) of quality in the faculty and at the centre? This might be a particularly pertinent question in the case of faculties, such as the Faculty of Arts, that had very large numbers of individual programmes and where leadership of quality might easily be dissipated and the opportunities for enhancement not fully explored.

3.7   The university operates certain programmes of similar nature in different faculties, and there is duplication of certain teaching units for programmes. In effect, therefore, there seems to be scope for further developing and practicing a concept of modularisation, with internal recognition of learning being safeguarded between programmes using the same module and, at best, participating in developing jointly offered modules. The team hopes that these issues of *quality focus and enhancement opportunities are carefully reflected upon by the BIE and that aligning outcomes from individual programme reviews with broader considerations relating to programme duplication, core shared programmes and modularisation should be regarded as a key benchmark for success in enhancing the university's provision*.

3.8   As part of its current quality processes the university makes significant use of student questionnaires as a means of evaluating the quality of teaching on both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Some faculties also cover feedback from doctoral candidates in this process. As with a number of other activities, faculties have a high degree of autonomy in the ways that they can develop such surveys; and the team was able to consider the survey templates from four faculties as a way of understanding the diversity of practice that flowed from such autonomy. It was immediately apparent that diversity led to considerable inconsistency in practice, while there was no evidence that such differences could be justified by differences inherent in the academic fields concerned. A number of issues flowed from this. In the first place, it was not clear to the team why, in an area of some importance to both quality assurance and quality enhancement, it was not possible to reach agreement amongst faculties for the use of a basic template for student assessment of teaching. There was nothing intrinsically threatening to faculty autonomy in bringing forward some institutional standardisation of these questionnaires. Indeed there were clear benefits

from doing so in terms of efficiency, sharing of best practice and consistency in the student experience, particularly where progammes were being taken by students across faculties.

3.9   Secondly, a significant element of student feedback appeared to relate to teacher performance. This was understandable and, of itself, not a problem. However, it should not be the only measure of good (or bad) teaching and there were risks from not obtaining a more rounded picture of the student learning experience. Such a picture needs to encompass the entire student life cycle, thus comprising admission policies and consultative services, study programme cohesion and progression in learning, individual student performance monitoring and academic support systems, fairness and administration of the assessment system, career services, and certainly adequacy of IT, library, and mobility opportunities (see also paragraph 4.4). Moreover, evaluation tools could be broadened. For instance, peer review of teaching was one way of providing a wider platform for evaluation. Also tracking graduates and feedback from employers could be developed more strongly.

3.10   The team heard from a number of students that belief in the teacher assessment process was undermined by a lack of transparent and demonstrable action to deal with the problem of under-performing teachers. While the team understood that the review of outcomes of teaching assessment by students was built into the work of the deliberative structures of the university at both central and faculty levels, it was less confident that these considerations were providing as rigorous a scrutiny of quality assurance or as informed judgements on quality enhancement as might be the case if provided with better developed tools and a more holistic approach across the university. *The team therefore recommends that steps are taken to review the student feedback process to ensure greater consistency in questionnaire design and that wider thought be given to how this might link with other approaches to a holistic concept of programme assessment. Such a review might also give some thought to the problem of "questionnaire fatigue" amongst students, something that was raised during a number meetings with the team*.

3.11   The university should consider establishing a more pro-active scheme for enhancing teaching performance (see also paragraph 4.3) rather than mere ex-post checking on performance. There was no evidence of "teach the teacher" schemes being in place which could be a regular service to both future academic teachers and to those in practice who may feel the need to update their teaching competences. The latter might, for example, be essential in view of the imminent need to blend e-learning and more traditional modes such as seminars, lectures, or tutorials. *The team therefore recommends that the university consider the establishment of such a supportive approach, also with regard to the call for introducing more updated learning concepts based on blended learning, guided independent learning, individualised learning paths, and multi-purpose-module based programmes.*

4. Teaching and learning

4.1   The current focus on institutional accreditation and the implementation of new internal quality processes had probably contributed to what the team felt was a lack of a more developed discourse on approaches to teaching and learning across the university. In part this gap in explication was reflected in the absence of a university learning and teaching strategy or anything similar in the faculties. The content of such strategies might be aided by the development of a specific mission relating to teaching and learning (see paragraph 2.1). As might be expected, given the university's mission, the commitment to the link between learning and teaching and research was reinforced in a number of the meetings that the team held with faculty staff. But while the assertion of this link was a consistent theme, the team found it difficult to establish how this worked in practice. There was some evidence that students worked together with academic staff on projects but evidence of the impact of research on the development of the curriculum did not emerge in any meaningful way. There were many ways that the *synergy between learning and teaching and research could be reinforced*. Perhaps most immediately, given the current move towards institutional accreditation, this *could take place through improved curriculum design - embedding of research methodology courses or research practice not only through final year projects/dissertations and participation in current research projects of academics but also - and not just as an option but rather as an essential hallmark of a university which sees its mission to be in line with a "Humboldtian tradition and aspiration" - by fully embracing the overarching educational concepts of student-centred, problem-based learning (see also paragraph 4.3). The BIE should be an important agent of change in this respect.*

4.2   One of the normal barometers of success in learning and teaching is levels of student achievement - course success rates, progression between years, retention and graduation outcomes. The team noted the high drop-out rates across all three cycles of learning, with the highest levels at the first and third cycles. The university attributed student drop out from first cycle programmes to a range of factors including lack of stringency in entry criteria, lack of clarity on programme choices by students, movement to other universities and difficulties in coping with subject matter during the first year. The university recognises that these levels of attrition, particularly at bachelor level, are far too high and has already initiated project work designed to throw some light on the underlying factors contributing to these numbers. *The team feels strongly that such analyses should be a priority for the university and that the terms of reference should be wide-ranging to embrace, amongst other things, admissions guidance, criteria and practice; support for diverse learners through curriculum development and new approaches to pedagogy; the role of technology in supporting and enhancing learning; and the embedding of pedagogical training for teachers.*

4.3   The students that the team met seemed relatively happy with their programme experience. However, some noted that there needed to be more of a focus on learning

and teaching, finding some professors more interested in their research/writing up grant applications than in pedagogy in the classroom. The university also acknowledges in the SER that there has been little focus on student-centred learning until comparatively recently and that this situation is "unsatisfactory". Experience across faculties can be variable and the lack of development in student-centred learning might explain the lack of interest shown by many students in the student feedback mechanisms. Clearly in some faculties and degree programmes large student numbers present particular problems to teaching innovation; however, the team felt that the university was perhaps making a false connection when presenting small teaching groups as a pre-requisite to an individual approach to students. To some extent this is acknowledged in the SER when the university highlights the need for modernising the learning environment and improving the teaching skills and competencies of academic staff. And there is indeed a growing debate about excellence in teaching which has more to do with teaching modality as opposed to curriculum content. The team was told that university support for pedagogy is available but that this is not mandatory or systematic. Furthermore in some faculties there was no requirement for a new member of staff to demonstrate teaching skills as part of the appointment process. This situation is not helped by the lack of a teaching observation scheme as part of the assessment of academic staff. The lack of innovation in learning and teaching was highlighted for the team by student responses to their learning environment. For example, students who had taken advantage of mobility links with universities outside of central Europe were clearly starting to use different benchmarks for judging how far their programme/faculty/university was up-to-date, adopted modern teaching methods and made use of the most advanced technology and learning platforms. In short they said to the team that they felt their learning experience at Charles University was less ambitious and challenging in comparison to their experience at the partner institutions they had visited. For the team this message was strongly reinforced when it heard from a clear majority of students that most teaching at the university was delivered by standard lecture.

4.4   The team also wanted to highlight a wider context in which these issues needed to be considered. This is related to the student life cycle. The student journey through higher education is a continuum that involves pre-entry advice on programme choice, support at admission through induction at both faculty and university levels, advice on the choice of elective courses, the availability and integration of appropriate learning platforms into curriculum delivery, the integration of "soft skills" within the curriculum, and pre-and post-graduation support for employment opportunities. The quality of this wider student experience is sometimes neglected; and while the team had not been able to examine the detail of these processes, it had gained some insight into areas that might need further scrutiny by the university. In discussions with students, for example, the team found that there was little awareness of opportunities for structured careers advice either on course or at the point of graduation. In the same area of preparation for employment, the team heard from both students and external

stakeholders that the building of soft skills was given insufficient attention both in curriculum design and the availability of specialist advice through, for example, the careers service. Some of this would be relatively straightforward for the university to address particularly in the area of curriculum design where the introduction of more innovative assessment instruments - presentations, group working, report writing - could help build a wider skills base for students. *In the view of the team this could be part of the development of a more systematic tracking of student destinations, including preparedness for the world of work and the opinions of external stakeholders on the relevance of Charles University graduate attributes to the needs of business, industry and the not-for-profit sector.*

4.5   In summary, in the midst of the current pre-occupations with institutional accreditation and the presentation of the university as a research intensive organisation, the team felt that there was some danger that improvement in the undergraduate teaching and learning environment might not be given sufficient prominence in the priorities of Charles University. *This was therefore an opportune moment for the university to review and recalibrate the quality of the wider student learning experience, including by reference to best practice elsewhere in Europe, and the team recommends that this benchmarking of excellence be taken forward by university and faculty senior leaders.*

4.6   The team noted that the university needs to clarify its overall concept of what constitutes "quality" in teaching and learning (see paragraph 3.3). While there is no foregone conclusion as to choice, there is some rationale in considering the "fitness for purpose" concept more thoroughly, in particular since it can integrate such approaches as "excellence" or "benchmarking". In doing so, the university will (1) have to start by considering the major objectives of study programmes (as indicated in paragraph 3.4) in a holistic way and with a view to adequate learning outcomes in term of student competencies, all of which will have to interpreted in a meaningful way. Thereafter, (2) the university will have to define the input factors in terms of overall programme design, module content and assessment practices, staff and material resources while making sure that these elements are fit to reach the afore-defined purposes, i.e. overall objectives. Moreover, the university (3) will have to establish and operate, on a reliable and routine way, a system for monitoring both the continuous validity of the programme objectives and of the suitability of the input factors mentioned above for accomplishing these objectives. Finally, (4) there needs to be a reliable scheme in place to ensure that adaptations are carried out in cases where the objectives need to be adjusted or fine-tuned or in cases where certain input factors appear not to serve the purpose as expected. *The team recommends that the university, through the BIE, ensures that there is a process in place throughout the entire university which ensures that all of these four steps (PDCA: plan - do - check - act) are taken at a level of high expertise for all existing programmes ("quality assurance ex post"), and that the first two steps - due consideration of programme objectives and fitness for purpose of input*

factors - are considered before new programmes are started ("quality assurance ex ante").

5. Research

5.1   The university states in the SER that its ambition is "to play a visible role in both a European and a global context" in the research space. The objectives set out in the current Strategic Plan highlighted that there were some fundamental issues that the university needed to address in order to sustain and enhance the reputation of the university's research activities. These included the introduction of a new funding methodology and the establishment of an internal quality system for research. In respect of the internal quality system for research, the team noted that progress had been made by enshrining this under university Rules approved by the Senate earlier in 2017. This regulation now had to be implemented and this would be an important focus of the research agenda in the coming months. Equally, the university has already responded to the strategic objective on funding through the introduction of schemes such as PROGRES, UNCE, PRIMUS, and also the Donation Universitatis Carolina. The team was pleased to hear that this impetus would be continued and that, for example, a second call for funding of research activity under PRIMUS was already in place for 2017. In the view of the team it was essential that this level of commitment was both sustained and enhanced. The university also identifies problems with obtaining international grants and with the wide range and variety of research activities (also seen, in some measure, as a strength). The team noted that some progress has been made on focusing on high profile/value research activity (flagships) and this has resulted in a priority list of around 60 fields (from approximately 600 fields in total) that the university wanted to encourage in order enhance its research base. In view of the broad range of academic fields and traditions and considering the university's strong emphasis on autonomy at faculty level, narrowing down the number to high profile research fields while maintaining consensus must be seen as a considerable achievement.

5.2   In the view of the team, however, this step change was tempered by the fact that these flagships had been self-declared from within faculties and that no agreed university wide criteria had been used to justify the selections. The team also had doubts as to whether, even with this list of priority areas, it was possible to promote a fully coherent and realisable research strategy. As with learning and teaching, it might be appropriate for the university to develop a specific research mission. This could help with strategic reflections on areas of "blue sky" basic research, but also on applied research and engagement with external stakeholders to accompany it. Alongside this strategic steer, the team believes that more could be done to improve the process for identifying and supporting flagship research areas. *The university should move beyond a (valid, first-step) process that allowed self-identification of excellence in research activity and initiate a follow-up process that establishes robust criteria for flagship status; in the course of applying these criteria, the university should make more use of external peer review while reducing reliance on mere bibliometric methods. This might help with a further reduction in the list of centres of excellence, more targeted funding than is*

currently the case and greater opportunities for growth for areas where there was strong evidence of research output. While establishing such an element of strategic focus, the university should nonetheless bear in mind that often true progress in research is subject to surprise and unpredictability. *Therefore, the team also recommends allowance be made for academic freedom in order to set individual research agendas, thus ensuring a fruitful balance between individualisation and planning.*

5.3   In the SER it is stated that a number of faculties feel threatened by institutional initiatives because they believe they might lead to "excessive centralisation". As with other areas of university activity this seems to be something of a *leitmotif* for the faculties. The team noted these concerns but, while understanding of this perception, urged academic leaders across the university to avoid the dangers of a silo mentality. It understood that the recently introduced PROGRES programme had been designed to break down barriers in research focusing on interfaculty, interdisciplinary and international cooperation. The team could do no better than quote the university's own appraisal in the SER of the current state of affairs:

> "Up until now, the university has succeeded in promoting joint interfaculty projects to only a limited extent - evaluation of previous programs has shown that, in some instances, declared co-operation was merely formal. In the coming years, therefore the University must insist on real, consistent co-operation between participating constituent parts and teams".

In the team's meetings with faculties there was no clear evidence that this change of mindset was high on their agendas. This was clearly a challenge for the university's senior leadership (see paragraph 2.9). The team wants to offer its encouragement to initiatives such as the one to introduce more focus on the appointment of interdisciplinary research staff. The team also believes that this strategic ambition to reflect the fast moving world of interdisciplinary research could be strengthened by defining new research trends alongside the current practice of evaluation on the basis of track record. This would fit well with wider institutional efforts at horizon scanning mentioned earlier in this report (see paragraph 2.2).

5.4   The university has high numbers of registered research students; it also has an extremely high drop-out rate (47%) and figures for completion times that are also of concern with a significant number of 3 year doctoral candidates being shown as taking an additional 3 years to complete their studies. In the team's discussions with faculties the main explanation for this level of attrition was the low level of doctoral candidate funding which was a national problem. Research students that the team met tended to confirm that financial considerations represented the key difficulty facing them when completing their studies. The team heard that most doctoral candidates understood, before the commencement of their studies, that the limited national stipend would represent a challenge; however, many clearly underestimated these

pressures and either withdrew in the initial period of their studies or became "non-active" when their stipend was exhausted. These non-active students were typically now in full-time employment and often saw little prospect of finding the time to complete their studies. While the team understood that some faculties were able to provide additional financial support for doctoral candidates this was far from common place and the extent of drop-outs still suggested an enduring problem. At the same time the team recognises that the university is trying to support young researchers by offering employment in teaching or as research assistants, and that university schemes such as grants provided by the Charles University Grant Agency and the PRIMUS programme are helpful. *The team recommends, therefore, that the university continue to investigate ways in which it might help provide adequate financial support for **all** its doctoral candidates and that this should be allied to an in-depth study and analysis of the reasons for the high drop-out rate in third cycle studies.*

5.5   In many ways this picture places an added burden on the university to secure the quality of the doctoral candidate learning experience. Two areas are perhaps especially important in this respect. First, the university should ensure that the doctoral candidate experience was not subject to the vagaries of the discipline being followed. The team heard, for example, that support and direction for doctoral candidates was often lacking in the humanities and social sciences and there was a general sense of isolation for research students in these disciplines. Doctoral study in science, medicine and related areas, by contrast, was said to be more structured, with greater contact with supervisors and more opportunities for working with fellow researchers. Secondly, from accounts provided by students, the quality of research supervision seemed to be dependent on the enthusiasm and personality of the supervisor as well as on the impact of their other professional commitments rather than determined by a clearly structured support package i.e. a contractual arrangement that set out the formal hours of supervision that a student should receive, training in research methodology, the requirements relating to taught courses and arrangements for involvement in research projects in the faculties. *The team feels strongly, therefore, that at a time when financial pressures continue to weigh heavily on doctoral candidates that the university should look carefully at how it might ensure the consistency and quality of the learning experience for research students across all its faculties. This should be seen as a matter of internal quality assurance/enhancement and made a priority for the BIE once institutional accreditation had been achieved.*

5.6   The senior management of the university acknowledged that the area of knowledge and technology transfer had suffered from a low profile for an extended period of time. This was perhaps explained by the focus in faculties on "pure" science - an approach that did not extend easily to the application of such research to the commercial arena. The team was pleased to see that more progress had been made in the area since 2014 as a result of the reinvigoration of the specialist Knowledge and Technology Transfer Office (see paragraph 6.3). In some ways this reflected the team's recommendation

(see paragraph 2.8) that there would be a benefit from recruiting a small number of expert managers/administrators to support the development of core university activities.

6. Service to society

6.1   In the view of the team the section of the SER relating to service to society and the approach and objectives set out in the university's current Strategic Plan, did not evidence a well-developed strategy of external engagement, particularly at the level of business, commerce and industry. In their meeting with external stakeholders, almost all of whom were alumni of the university, the team found a certain level of frustration at the gap between the rhetoric of the university on third role interactions and the reality of such interactions from a stakeholder perspective. This was a strongly felt view offered by a number of attendees at the meeting although there were also examples given of effective collaboration. While the points made by business and industry representatives were not unique to Charles University, they were, nonetheless, made with some emphasis. The business sector and university staff were felt to speak different languages and, most significantly, university staff that engaged in academic (pure) research seemed unable to focus on the end point required by business - the market and the customer. This was having a negative effect on the relationship. External stakeholders felt that graduates from the university were not well equipped to contextualise or utilise their programme experience in a work environment; while from the university perspective, business was failing to see what the university had to offer. Indeed the university had devoted some resource to producing a comprehensive Catalogue of Services setting out the expertise and services offered by various faculties and institutes in the university. From some comments by external stakeholders this Catalogue was symptomatic of both a general communication problem and perhaps, more importantly, of a supply-led philosophy embedded in the university's faculties. In terms of communication it was for the university to reach out to potential partners and actively promote the range of services on offer. On the basis of that improved communication, however, it was important that faculty researchers made a greater attempt to understand and respond to the actual demands and needs of companies and organisations.

6.2   The team heard some creative ideas about how the engagement with external stakeholders might be improved, one example being some form of mutual internship with professors and industry colleagues spending time in their counterpart organisation/faculty. However, it was noteworthy that stakeholders did not regard the barriers to cooperation as being especially new and the team was told that the university had been advised of these problems on a number of occasions in the past. It was accepted that there were forums for trying to influence the university, for example, the Advisory Board for Commercialisation; but this seemed to operate around the normal rhythms of university life and there appeared to be different expectations around the purpose of its work. In the view of a number of external stakeholders, response time was felt to be of the essence and staff in the university appeared not to be looking at the same clock as the external ("real") world.

6.3   Despite some of these difficulties the team witnessed a great willingness from all sides to make collaboration between the university and its external stakeholders more effective. This enthusiasm will most likely bear fruit once appropriate structures for collaboration are fully operational. This might involve reviewing the terms of reference of the Advisory Board for Commercialisation. More tangibly, making more use of the Knowledge and Technology Office as a single gateway for external companies and organisations seeking out expertise and services could be a promising development. *The team recommends, therefore, that the relevant senior managers in the Rectorate work closely with all levels of faculty staff to provide a more coherent approach and demand sensitive university response to external organisations seeking expert help and support. In this context, the Knowledge and Technology Office needs to receive full support in order to progress further the reinvigoration of its work since 2014.*

6.4   The team was also conscious of comments that had been made by both university staff and external stakeholders about the limited extent of external input into curriculum development. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this report, the expected arrangements for internal programme accreditation offer significant opportunities for improved quality processes. *The process of programme accreditation therefore needs to ensure that external stakeholders have an appropriate say in the development of the curriculum.* This is an important consideration when reflecting on the currency of programmes and their link to employability. *The BIE is perfectly placed to ensure that faculty guarantors involve the relevant external expertise when updating their programmes and then offering those programmes for accreditation.*

7. Internationalisation

7.1   As the section on internationalisation in the SER testifies, the university can list an extensive range of international links by way of bilateral agreements, mobility programmes, exchange programmes and joint research projects. The team understood that the strategic steer on international priorities came from the Rectorate, drawing on analysis by the International Office, and following discussion with faculties. This provided the justification for funding decisions. The extent of funding varies from relatively small amounts (37,000 Euros to support research project activities with leading world universities) to the more significant budget of 0.5 million Euros to support the university's mobility fund. At the same time, faculties still have the autonomy to forge links that did not form part of university priorities; such links, however, do not receive central funding support and have to be sustained through faculty budgets.

7.2   Support arrangements for internationalisation are largely covered by the International Relations Office in the Rectorate and the European Centre. Two Vice-Rectors share senior academic leadership roles in this area, and consultation and cooperation between the Centre and faculties is said to be continuous in nature. However, while there is said to be a consensus in the university that "the international dimension is crucial to the development of the University and its faculties", there seem to be mixed opinions, particularly in faculties, about the effectiveness of some of the initiatives in this area and how far internationalisation really imbues the work of the university. In some ways this points to some of the same questions that have been raised over research strategy. Was the rush to reach out to international partners sufficiently focused and were the measures for success sufficiently well-articulated and then acted on? There is some doubt as to the extent of concentration in international partnerships by aligning internationalisation policies and practices to strategic partnering in research and studying, and indeed the university is clear that it needs to improve in this respect. As with research, the ability to clearly identify excellence and then provide appropriate financial incentives either on a start-up basis or to enhance existing activity is key to future development. *The team therefore recommends ensuring the concentration of international partnering on those institutions in Europe, and also in select regions elsewhere, which can offer high calibre research links and/or complementary study programmes of high quality.*

7.3   In a number of areas, particularly bilateral agreements and exchange agreements, more attention was being paid to qualitative criteria in establishing and sustaining such arrangements. In the case of some agreements, however, students expressed concerns over a lack of recognition of ECTS because of the failure to map study programmes appropriately. The team believes that the focus on qualitative evaluation of partnerships is critical in protecting the reputation of the university, safeguarding the

student experience and ensuring that funds are allocated in a responsible and accountable way.

7.4   Internationalisation at home is fostered by offering foreign language modules and programmes. In some cases, particularly in medicine, offering programmes to international students is also seen as a device for raising tuition fees. Whether or not this is seen as "politically correct" is not to be judged on; it may certainly be a useful means for ensuring better funding for the university and for balancing a decrease in domestic students which may need to be addressed in view of demographic decline.

8. Conclusion

8.1   Charles University exudes the confidence of a seat of learning that has been in existence for nearly 670 years. The institution's confidence is essentially well-founded since, generally speaking, it is a university of high standards in teaching and research performance. Notwithstanding this justifiably proud history of delivering higher education, the university chose to engage in the IEP process as a way of reflecting on its current position - nationally and internationally - and establishing its capacity to respond to the changes that it is facing, particularly in taking full responsibility for the overall quality of its institutional learning environment and the quality assurance and enhancement of its programmes. The team found that this was far from a tick box exercise for the university. On the contrary the process was rigorously pursed at all levels of the university, and it appeared to the team that the discourse of the IEP evaluation had, in some ways, reinvigorated the desire to look forward and avoid a complacency that might easily be a dominant, but unhelpful, feature of being such a well-established university.

8.2   The process of self-reflection for the university has highlighted its ability to be self-critical and the strengths of its collegiate approach to discussion and decision-making. This is not a "top-down" institution; instead, it makes significant efforts to preserve academic space and autonomy for its faculties. Its confidence in the basic principles of its organisational model is unswerving. At the same time the university is now facing an environment, both internally and externally, that requires a level of re-evaluation and re-engineering both in terms of organisational structures and processes. The team has made a number of recommendations in respect of governance and institutional decision-making. It is convinced that these recommendations, if acted upon, offer a way of improving the work of the university and the experience of its students without threatening the current overarching organisational architecture. There are therefore opportunities for the university to encourage a more dynamic interaction between centre and faculties and for this to have a positive impact in the delivery of enhanced teaching and learning and improved research outputs.

8.3   At the heart of the university's current pre-occupations lies the move towards institutional accreditation with all that this endeavour entails. The team recognises only too well the pressures this places on the university to change rules and introduce new processes, often at an externally determined pace that places unreasonable demands on its staff body. In the view of the team, however, it is important that the university gives some pause to the mechanics of change to confirm that it has sufficiently thought through its concept of a quality orientation, something that must provide the cornerstone for evaluating its progress in meeting its future objectives. It is also critical that the university views these developments as a real opportunity for improvement and a driver for positive change.

8.4   In many ways, therefore, this is a watershed moment for the university. It recognises that in responding to a fast moving external environment it is constrained from within by a number of factors. This includes organisational fragmentation with multiple faculties/departments, duplication of programmes, lack of inter-disciplinarity in education and research and a lack of focus in research priorities. There is also a need to offer greater coherence in strategy and policy and practice with evidence of inconsistency amongst faculties in basic quality assurance processes, weaknesses in the process of assigning research flagships and shortcomings in staffing policies to support inter-disciplinary activity.

8.5   A counterpoint to these constraints is the number of opportunities that, if grasped, could help the university respond to its immediate and future challenges. These included the development of an embedded quality culture and improvements in governance and organisational cohesiveness. The university might also find opportunities to accelerate the development of inter-disciplinarity across both education and research. And, perhaps most significantly, the move towards institutional accreditation offers a level of empowerment for the university that could promote even greater professionalism and ownership amongst all the stakeholders of Charles University. The team has no doubt that the university has the capacity to achieve the required changes. It has a strong and agile senior leadership that has a clear awareness of the areas that need change and improvement. It has a very knowledgeable and committed staff body that is capable of debating change and reaching difficult and challenging conclusions. And, finally, it has a large group of sympathetic external supporters who are willing to contribute fully to the enhancement of its activities.

Summary of recommendations

1   That fuller attention is paid by the university's senior leadership to horizon scanning and future proofing in the efforts to realise the university's mission and vision.

2   That the impetus for structural/organisational changes - in areas such as medicine, science and the arts - be supported by the creation of a specialist task force under the auspices of the Rectorate with a view to aiding faculties in this type of change management.

3   The university ensures, through a process of self-critical analysis of action plans, that goals set and, more so, the processes defined to reach these should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound)

4   The university considers a further refinement in priorities so that there is clarity across the organisation about ranking (first order, second order etc.) and also that, alongside funding, other criteria might be applied to determining priorities, for example strengths in disciplines.

5   That the university consider ways in which it might introduce a small number of professional/managerial staff roles to provide expert advice in areas such as quality and research management and alleviate pressures on senior academic leadership roles**.**

6   That the "gatekeeper" role for the Rectorate in some staff appointments be consolidated as a visible sign of how the Rectorate can play a non-threatening and nuanced part in the staff appointment process as an aid to institutional efficiency and the securing of strategic goals, namely by ensuring that the academic competence expected of the candidate fits into the overall developmental strategy not only of the faculty but of the university as a whole**..**

7   New quality arrangements should be predicated on innovation and development and not on the reinforcement of a compliance mindset that simply calibrated quality on the basis of inherited norms provided by the government.

8   That the university considers / reconsiders three cornerstones of a quality orientation as a basis for further development. First, higher education aims, including preparing students for active citizenship, contributing to their employability, supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation; secondly, "system" - these could be called overarching "social" or "political" - objectives, which coincide largely with Bologna aspirations and tools, such as permeability of learning paths, mobility, recognition, social inclusion, and transparency; and thirdly, ensuring institutional profile or hallmark as a learning experience and programme outcome.

9   Issues of quality focus and enhancement opportunities should be carefully reflected upon by the BIE and that aligning outcomes from individual programme reviews with

broader considerations relating to programme duplication, core shared programmes and modularisation should be regarded as a key benchmark for success in enhancing the university's provision

10   That steps are taken to review the student feedback process to ensure greater consistency in questionnaire design and that wider thought be given to how this might link with other approaches to a holistic concept of programme assessment. Such a review might also give some thought to the problem of "questionnaire fatigue" amongst students, something that was raised during a number meetings with the team**.**

11   That the university consider the establishment of a supportive approach to enhancing teaching performance ("teach the teacher"), also with regard to the call for introducing more updated learning concepts based on blended learning, guided independent learning, individualised learning paths, and multi-purpose-module based programmes.

12   Reinforce the synergy between learning and teaching and research through improved curriculum design - embedding of research methodology courses or research practice not only through final year projects / dissertations and participation in current research projects of academics but also - and not just as an option but rather as an essential hallmark of a university which sees its mission to be in line with a "Humboldtian tradition and aspiration" - by fully embracing the overarching educational concepts of student-centred, problem-based learning. The BIE should be an important agent of change in this respect.

13   Analysis of student drop-out rates should be a priority for the university including wide-ranging terms of reference to embrace, amongst other things, admissions guidance, criteria and practice; supporting diverse learners through the development of the curriculum and approaches to pedagogy; the role of technology in supporting and enhancing learning; and the embedding of pedagogical training for teachers.

14   The university should develop a more systematic tracking of student destinations, including analysis of student preparedness for the world of work and, perhaps most importantly, the opinions of external stakeholders on the relevance of Charles University graduate attributes to the needs of business, industry and the not-for-profit sector.

15   The university review and recalibrate the quality of the wider student experience, including by reference to best practice elsewhere in Europe, and that this benchmarking of excellence be taken forward by university and faculty senior leaders.

16   That the university, through the BIE, ensures that there is a process in place throughout the entire university which ensures that all of these four steps (PDCA: plan - do - check - act) are taken at a level of high expertise for all existing programmes ("quality assurance ex post"), and that the first two steps - due consideration of programme

objectives and fitness for purpose of input factors - are considered before new programmes are started ("quality assurance ex ante").

17   The university should move beyond a (valid, first-step) process that allowed self-identification of excellence in research activity and initiate a follow-up process that establishes robust criteria for flagship status; in the course of applying these criteria, the university should make more use of external peer review while reducing reliance on mere bibliometric methods. This might help with a further reduction in the list of centres of excellence, more targeted funding than is currently the case and greater opportunities for growth for areas where there was strong evidence of research output.

18   Allowance be made for academic freedom in order to set individual research agendas, thus ensuring a fruitful balance between individualisation and planning.

19   That the university continue to investigate ways in which it might help provide adequate financial support for **all** its doctoral candidates and that this should be allied to an in-depth study and analysis of the reasons for the high drop-out rate in third cycle studies.

20   That at a time when financial pressures continue to weigh heavily on doctoral candidates that the university should look carefully at how it might ensure the consistency and quality of the learning experience for research students across all its faculties. This should be seen as a matter of internal quality assurance/enhancement and made a priority for the BIE once institutional accreditation had been achieved.

21   That the relevant senior managers in the Rectorate work closely with all levels of faculty staff to provide a more coherent approach and demand sensitive university response to external organisations seeking expert help and support. In this context, the Knowledge and Technology Office needs to receive full support in order to progress further the reinvigoration of its work since 2014.

22   The process of programme accreditation should ensure that external stakeholders have an appropriate say in the development of the curriculum and the BIE is perfectly placed to ensure that faculty guarantors involve the relevant external expertise when updating their programmes and then offering those programmes for accreditation.

23   The university should ensure the concentration of international partnering on those institutions in Europe, and also in select regions elsewhere, which can offer high calibre research links and/or complementary study programmes of high quality.