

**European University Association  
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

**UNIVERSITY OF VERONA**

***EVALUATION REPORT***

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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Verona.

In June 2008, the University of Verona asked to participate in the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the European University Association (EUA). This decision was motivated by the current Rector's team's willingness to assess the University's internal policy and organisation. The University wanted to analyse to what extent these could be improved in relation to a very wide range of issues that included: research management, internationalisation, and cooperation with external environment at the regional level, student support services, implementation of the Bologna process and governance structures.

The evaluation took place on 18-20 March 2009 (first visit) and on 24-27 May 2009 (second visit). On the last day of the main visit, the chair of the evaluation team presented the Team's **oral report** to the Rector's Team, to the self-evaluation committee and to several other members of the University who decided to attend the session expressly organised for that purpose. This oral report is the basis of the present **evaluation report**, which has resulted from all written information, interviews with various members of the University and the evaluation team's observations and discussions during (and between) the two visits.

### 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 management

- 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, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

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

## **1.2 The University of Verona and its national context**

The University of Verona is a rather young university. Although its origins go back to 1959, it was only in 1982 that the national government granted the University of Verona autonomy as an independent University. The University has eight faculties: Economics, Law, Humanities and Philosophy, Foreign Languages and Literature, Medicine and Surgery, Education, Physics, Maths and Natural Sciences and Sport Science. The University is distributed across 4 locations and has been trying to consolidate those 4 parts and strengthen their inter-relation with the local environment. The University offers Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programmes, and several professionally oriented specialisation courses.

The current times are characterised by profound and rapid transformations in the higher education landscape. Italian universities are no exception to this European trend and therefore, the University of Verona is facing times of significant changes that pose important challenges to its capacity to adapt and fulfil its mission effectively.

The University of Verona is located in a wealthy and very touristic region of Italy. The region is characterised by a dense network of businesses, predominantly small and family-owned. In recent years, these have, nevertheless, faced important competitive challenges which have become an important issue for the University as well, both in terms of training and in terms of research and innovation.

Another important driving force for recent changes has been the process of reform of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), of which a major part is the so-called Bologna process. Among the major priorities of the Bologna process mention ought to be made of the structural changes associated with the introduction of the three cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate), the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms, and the recognition of

qualifications and periods of study across Europe. The development of this process has led to intense discussions and policy changes in many European countries and Italy is no exception to that.

The complex context faced by the University of Verona, as many other Italian universities, is not only due to policy changes, but also to other factors. The Italian system of higher education has undergone, like many of its European counterparts, a period of intense and rapid massification over the last decades. This was pushed both by social demand and government policies geared towards the improvement of labour force qualifications, national competitiveness and social opportunities. However, in recent years, demographic changes have affected the patterns of demand and therefore there is growing competition for students among universities.

Another challenge that has become increasingly important in recent years for most European universities is a much greater emphasis on research activities and outputs. Universities are called to improve their performance in this respect, with a growing pressure for universities to enlarge and diversify their research budgets through innovative and dynamic initiatives.

This greater emphasis on the research component of universities' activity is also correlated with another important development, which is the growing importance of post-graduate training vis-à-vis the traditional dominance of undergraduate degrees in total enrolments. The recent creation in Italy of Doctoral Schools is another sign of that trend, requiring an effort from universities such as the University of Verona in finding innovative and effective ways to integrate them into their organisational framework in order to develop good and attractive doctoral programmes adjusted to their human and material resources and responding to the local, national and international demands.

Altogether, these trends ask for more responsive universities that are able to reflect on their mission and to define their major priorities. However, universities often face significant constraints regarding their capacity to live up to those challenges. On the one hand, for many European universities only recently has this become a major issue of concern and they are still adapting to those changing times. On the other hand, many European universities also have a limited degree of institutional autonomy, though this has improved in recent decades.

Some of the major constraints faced by the University of Verona are shared by many Italian universities, and are due to a complex and changing system of university laws and regulations, which pose significant constraints on the University's autonomy and governance structure. During the two visits, the Team could see how the changing legal environment affected the University.

Another problem that hinders universities' planning capacities are the limitations regarding funding mechanisms. In the Italian case this is particularly noticeable through an absence of certainty about forthcoming levels of funding. Only at an advanced stage of the fiscal year did Italian universities such as Verona become aware of what financial resources they would be allocated by the central government. The team noted how the lack of predictability of funding hindered strategic planning and how it fostered a very conservative approach towards new developments.

Overall, the convergence of these international, national and regional challenges, make this a timely opportunity to reflect on the current situation of the University of Verona, the challenges ahead and to propose some possible initiatives to overcome these successfully. Despite the aforementioned constraints, during this evaluation process the Team formed the opinion that the University could explore more its present autonomy. The Team hopes that this evaluation process may be an important contribution to help the University in order to be more proactive and less law-driven.

### **1.3 The Self Evaluation Process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the steering committee for Verona University which comprises 10 representatives of the academic community. The Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) was chaired by Prof. Bettina Campedelli (Vice-Rector of the University and chair of the Steering Committee), and included Prof. Angela Broglia (Chair of the Internal Evaluation Committee), Prof. Denis Delfitto – Rector's Delegate for International Affairs, Prof. Franco Fummi – Chairman of the permanent Teaching Committee, Prof. Giorgio Berton – Chairman of the permanent Research Committee, Prof. Roberto Bottiglia – Chairman of the permanent Financial matters Committee, Prof. Giovanni Pizzolo – Representative of the Directors of Department within the Academic Senate, Mr. Damiano Fermo – Student representative, Mrs. Maria Gabaldo – Research Office Deputy Manager, Mr. Stefano Fedeli – Planning and Management Control Office Deputy Manager. The SEG relied a great deal on the Reporting System & Data Warehouse unit (Mrs. Antonella Arvedi) from the Planning and Management Control Office staff, and the International Relations unit (Mrs. Anna De Salvo) from the Research Office Staff.

The Team is grateful for the significant effort that these persons have made to develop the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which has been an important first step in building a self-evaluation culture. However, the Team found that the SER was somehow descriptive, uneven and often more focused on desires rather than realities. It would have been preferable if the SER had been more analytical.

The Team also considers that the self-evaluation process has shown some weaknesses regarding participation, communication, and consultation. By reading the report, and especially in the several meetings that took place during the visits, the Team formed a strong impression that there was limited awareness and debate about the process. This was reflected in the content of the report, which was not inaccurate, but should have been more of a shared exercise by the whole University

The Team believes that this evaluation process has helped the University of Verona to understand more fully that quality improvement is a continuous process of gathering and analysing information.

#### **1.4 The evaluation team**

The self-evaluation report of the University of Verona, along with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team on 24 February 2009. The visits of the evaluation team to the University of Verona took place on 18-20 March 2009 (first visit) and on 24-27 May 2009 (second visit). In between the visits the University of Verona provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Georges Verhaegen (Chair), former Rector Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium.
- Kenneth Edwards, former Vice-Chancellor, Leicester University, England.
- Christos Nikolau, former Rector University of Crete, Greece. (absent during the Final visit due to illness)
- Christian Schneijderberg, INCHER – International Centre of Higher Education , University of Kassel, Germany
- Pedro Teixeira (Secretary), Professor of Economics, University of Porto and Director of CIPES - Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, Portugal.

During the two visits the Evaluation Team had extensive meetings at the Central Office, at the Faculties, at the departments, and with external partners of the University. At the central level, during both visits the Evaluation Team had meetings with the Rector, the SEG, and with several of the directors and offices. As regards the latter, in the first visit the Team had an introductory meeting with the University's Administrator and the Managers

of the various offices. However, the time limitations of that meeting recommended that in the final visit the team would meet with several of them again in order to get a better grasp of the University's organisation. Thus, in the final visit the Team met with the Manager of the Personnel Division, the Deputy Manager of the Students' Division, the Manager of the Accounting Division and the Head of the Evaluation and Organisation Development Office. During the second visit the Team also met with some members of Executive Council and with student representatives at the Central level.

It was also important to obtain as much knowledge as possible, bearing in mind the time constraints, of the Faculties and Departments that are part of the university. Thus, in the first visit the team had meetings at the Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences and at the Faculty of Humanities and philosophy. During this first visit, the team also visited the Department of Mother and Child, Biology and Genetics and the Department of Economics. During the second visit, the team had meetings at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery and at the Faculty of Education. There were also meetings with representatives of the Department of Law Studies and the Department of Vine and Wine Sciences, Technologies and Markets. In the second visit, the Team also had a meeting with the Heads of Centres and Labs with budgetary autonomy.

The team had meetings with external partners to discuss the degree and types of interaction of the University of Verona with its environment. During the first visit the Team had meetings with 8 external partners representing different stakeholders such as the Municipality of Verona, Private Foundations, Professional Organisations and representatives from businesses. All of them had the experience of interacting with the University of Verona, though whereas some of those representatives have had long-time and varied relationships with the university, others had more specific and recent collaborations.

The discussions with the members of the University of Verona have helped the Evaluation Team to understand better some aspects of the university's internal organisation, its history and its dynamics. The participation of all involved in the evaluation was very positive. The current report has benefited greatly from the engagement of the various internal and external stakeholders of the university in participating in those meetings.

The Team would like to express its sincere thanks to Rector Prof. Alessandro Mazzucco and to the whole University of Verona for their generous hospitality and practical assistance before and during our two visits. The Team is also grateful to Prof. Denis Delfitto, Mrs. Antonella Arvedi and Mr. Stefano Fedeli for their support in the preparation and during the visits and to Mrs. Manuela Arvedi, Mrs. Anna de Salvo and Mrs. Gabriella Monaco for their role as interpreters during the meetings.



## **2. Mission Statement**

The multiple and complex challenges that universities face nowadays require that they have a clear perception of their purpose, of the constituencies they are trying to serve and how they are trying to serve them. This requires from universities a much more intense process of discussion and determination of their institutional mission. In the case of the University of Verona, the Team did not find a very clear mission statement, neither in the SER, nor during the institutional visits. The Team believes that the definition of a clear institutional mission is important and that it is a necessary starting point for the definition of institutional policies and strategies.

The Team considers that the lack of a clear mission statement may be associated with the fact that that the University seems to be mostly reactive to external demands. Both in the SER and in many of the discussions we had, we have formed the impression that many decisions and features of the University were explained as a result of external constraints, especially legal and regulatory decisions taken by the national government and higher education regulatory bodies.

In order to develop a clearer mission statement, the University needs to nurture a stronger commitment to self-analysis. In fact, the definition of an institutional mission requires strong participation and commitment from the whole university and it may contribute to develop a stronger institutional identity.

Thus, to support the development of a Mission statement, it is recommended that the whole University be involved in SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. An equal amount of effort should be put into all four areas of SWOT. This process of self-analysis should aim at involving all stakeholders of the university.

This process of self-analysis needs to be coordinated in order to be effective. The Team suggests that a good option would be to define a small and diverse group of motivated and knowledgeable people. Both the size and the composition of that group are important, since the process needs to combine effectiveness and cohesiveness with representativeness and legitimacy. The group should reflect and engage actors with different views about the University.

Then, the work of this group should be shared with the whole University, aiming at incorporating relevant contributions. Hence, the University should promote a widespread discussion of the results of the small group at all levels

of the University. The final synthesis of the original contribution with the enlarged debates should be brought to the extended Senate and the final document legitimised by it.

### **3. Policy Formation**

After the definition of an institutional mission statement, the Leadership of the University should launch a process of definition of policy priorities. Again, this process should be coordinated, but with a significant degree of reflection and participation at the various decision-making levels of the University.

The final result of this process should lead to a document that has to be adopted by the University through the extended Senate and, when appropriate, by the Administration Board. The implementation of these policies should be supported by smaller and more specialised groups.

### **4. Teaching**

In the various meetings that the Team had during the institutional visits, it identified a general appreciation from students on the dedication of the teaching staff. This is particularly important since the Team also recognises that the University has significant teaching staff shortages. The dedication and effort of the teaching staff is therefore an asset that the University should preserve and nourish.

The Team also recognises that the University faces significant constraints in order to improve those shortages and that most of them are related to national regulations.

Nonetheless, the Team thinks that the University practices seem to pay too much attention to teaching and insufficient attention to learning. The Team was struck by the poor current knowledge of substantive changes promoted by the developing EHEA, noticing that most of the recent changes were rather formal and hardly challenged traditional views about teaching methods and assessment practices.

The Team thinks that the University should develop greater commitment regarding pedagogical innovativeness and effectiveness. Despite the existing

constraints, the Team believes that the University has the capacity to make visible improvements towards student centred learning, namely by relying less on classical models of knowledge transmission and by emphasising more the learning of students in training and professional environments.

This leads to several imbalances regarding teaching. One of those imbalances refers to continuous assessment. This seems to be insufficiently present across the University and students' work seems to be too concentrated at the end of the semester. This is largely explained by the fact that the assessment practices continue to be too focused on written and oral examinations. This is even more striking bearing in mind the fact that the University faces a very worrying situation on drop-out and retention, as shown by the University's own data.

Moreover, and as regards assessment, the multiple opportunities of examination worsens the aforementioned teacher shortages by requiring a disproportionate amount of teachers' time. This has not only a negative impact in various dimensions of the University's activity, but seems to provide a very negative incentive for many students in the way they approach assessment.

Although the Team recognises that these problems are not unique to this university, namely as regards the Italian context, and that several of them are exogenously imposed by national regulations, the Team believes that this is a clear case in which the University could and should be less passive and more pro-active. For instance, the University should ensure that all Faculties develop good practices regarding coordination between courses and assessment, stimulating innovation in teaching and assessment methods and making it possible for successful examples could spread across the whole University.

## **5. Research**

As it was said in the beginning of the report, Italian universities, like their European counterparts, are aware that research has attained greater importance in recent years among the various dimensions of their institutional mission. Young universities such as Verona need to work hard to establish a reputation in a highly competitive environment, regarding the most qualified human resources and obtaining the financial resources necessary to support that greater research intensity.

The University of Verona is part of a tradition that has tended to place a stronger emphasis on teaching activities vis-à-vis research. However, the University recognises nowadays that it needs to give more attention to research and to develop policies and mechanisms to promote that accordingly. Moreover, the research intensity seems to vary across fields, without significant agreement about how to assess research progress.

On the basis of the analysis of the SER and of the various discussions that took place during the institutional visits, the Team formed the opinion that the University apparently defined several policies regarding research. However, the Team found little evidence about established practices of assessment of their effectiveness.

One of the most concerning issues regarding the development of the University's research activity is linked to an issue raised in the previous section on Teaching. The amount of teaching staff time available to perform research seems to be negatively influenced by the problems with current examination practices. Although we are aware that the University faces some limitations on this issue, the Team believes that the University could and should be more proactive also on this issue.

A promising possibility seems to be to adopt a more creative and flexible attitude in the allocation of teaching in order to provide more time for research. This should be done in a selective way. It should not be granted to every member of staff but to those that the University believes that have the conditions to advance significantly their research if allowed to benefit from that opportunity.

Another problem that the Team identified is that the organisation of research appears to be quite loose in certain areas. The Team is aware that this is a sensitive issue and that academic freedom is absolutely vital to the daily operation of any University. However, the Team also considers that any university, let alone a young and rather small one like the University of Verona, cannot develop all areas and topics of research. Thus, the Team considers that the University needs to concentrate human and material resources in those limited areas in which it believes it has the capacity to make significant headway.

The steps towards more effective research coordination should count on a greater role by the Departments. This definition of strategic areas of research should be widely discussed and balancing it with the necessary preservation of academic freedom and the possibility that each faculty member may still develop non-priority areas, though without strong institutional support.

The greater emphasis on research has been associated in Italy with the establishment of Doctoral Schools in recent years. We have seen that this requires a significant effort from universities such as the University of Verona

in finding the best way to integrate them into their organisational framework. Moreover, the goal of doctoral level education should be stated more clearly for each Doctoral School, including being more specific about certain basic issues such as the 60 credits' annual requirements.

The Team thinks these issues strengthen the need to rethink both the current Departmental structure (focused on research activities) and the interaction between these and the Faculties. The University will need to develop a more coherent and flexible structure in order to develop a supply of good and attractive doctoral programmes adjusted to the University's human and material possibilities.

Finally, the Team thinks that the university should encourage greater multidisciplinary and cross-fertilisation in research. This is relevant for several of the abovementioned issues, notably the rethinking of the structure and roles of the Departments and the integration of the development of the Doctoral Schools. These efforts towards greater multidisciplinary should also include collaboration with other Universities, both nationally and internationally, that may complement and strengthen the University's research potential and strategic priorities.

## **6. Relationship with the External Environment**

One of the dimensions of Universities' mission that has been receiving increasing attention is their relationship with their external environment. This poses significant challenges to universities, since it constitutes a complex and multifarious network of institutional and individual relationships through which universities show continuously their contribution to the various communities they are serving.

The University of Verona seems to have made some progress in this respect. In the meetings with external stakeholders there was a general positive appreciation of their interaction with the University, both regarding training and research activities. In general, external partners believed that the local and regional community benefited significantly from the presence of the University and its development.

However, as it could be said about many other universities, the Team identified a general internal and external perception that there is plenty of room for improvement. One of the aspects requiring greater attention is the way this relationship operates. The interaction of the University of Verona with the external environment appears to be largely dependent upon

individual and/or isolated initiatives. This often represents an earlier stage of development of third mission activities.

In order to advance this cooperation with the external stakeholders, the University needs to adopt a more systematic and institutional approach towards the fulfilment of this mission. One of the elements that could contribute to that is the, already existent, liaison office, through which the University could stimulate a stronger and more beneficial relationship with the external stakeholders. Many of the existing collaborations do not seem to have taken advantage of that support and in several cases were even unaware of its existence. This suggests that both inside and outside the University there is not only limited awareness of its existence, but, more importantly, a blissful unawareness of the benefits such a unit can bring to this cooperation.

The current situation also suggests that there is limited engagement of the University as an institution of that process. There is nothing negative about individual initiatives. Quite the contrary, since these represent the necessary vitality of this relationship, both inside and outside the university. However, they need to be nurtured and supported in order to grow and, if possible, multiply. This is very important since it could not only bring some much needed additional resources for the university, but, more importantly, it will strengthen the bond with the surrounding environment by enhancing the University's contribution to local economic and social development.

## **7. Internationalisation**

This is another aspect that has gained increasing visibility among universities' strategic priorities, with many institutions striving to attain greater internationalisation through training and research activities. The current trends in higher education clearly underline this necessity and the move towards a more integrated Higher Education framework in Europe is only the most visible development of a broader and deeper trend. Hence, the growing mobility among students and staff is likely to become a central issue for many universities, especially within the EHEA.

The Team believes that the University of Verona has a lot of potential in this respect due to its attractive location and to the dynamic region in which is embedded. The University seems also to have the willingness to make this one of its strategic priorities that may help it to stand out among other Italian universities.

The Team could also observe that there are some recent initiatives that show some promising steps in realising that potential. The University has been trying to strengthen its partnerships with other foreign institutions and there was an increase in student and staff mobility. Moreover, the Team thinks that the support the University is providing to outgoing mobility students is very positive and should be pursued further. However, there seems to exist a possibility and a willingness to go beyond these levels.

One of the aspects that could help to improve the University's international attractiveness refers to teaching activities. Following the above remarks about the need to adopt a more innovative approach to teaching methods, the Team believes that this could provide an important contribution to make the university more attractive to foreign students. This would also be helped if the University strengthens its current efforts in providing teaching in foreign languages. The University should also continue with its efforts to provide housing for international students and to foster (social) activities that promote their integration, preferably including Italian students as well.

Greater efforts should also be made in research, where internationalisation is also performing an increasingly important role. The Team believes that, although this is often initiated by individual initiatives, it needs institutional support to grow. This may be also linked with previous remarks above about the need to adopt a more coordinated and strategic attitude towards research activities.

Closely linked with research are doctoral programmes, which could be used to leverage internationalisation of both the teaching and the research dimensions. The Team noted that some departments, especially due to the quality of their research teams, already show some interesting degrees of internationalisation. Nevertheless, the Team shares the perceptions voiced in many of the meetings that this could grow significantly.

Finally, the Team was surprised that recent legal changes will require national scientific qualifications for new teaching staff since it may hinder further international staff mobility. However, it was explained that this is unlikely to represent a significant issue since the majority of individuals are likely to obtain that national certification.

## **8. Human Resources Management**

The attainment of an institution's missions and strategic priorities require a careful and effective management of its human resources and universities

are no exception to that, though this is often underestimated or even largely forgotten. Thus, in recent years, universities have become more aware of that need, especially since many universities across Europe (and beyond) have attained much greater levels of institutional autonomy that have brought with them greater responsibility in the management of their resources and, paramount among them, human ones.

Unfortunately, this trend towards greater institutional autonomy is complex and often marred with incongruence, especially introduced by inconsistent policy-making. In the case of the University of Verona, the Team is aware of legal limitations regarding staff numbers, which seem to have a negative effect on the university's development. Moreover, the limitations regarding promotions, also externally imposed, are also having a very negative effect on the morale of the University's staff.

However, the Team thinks that the University should attempt to develop some mechanisms that, despite the limitations, could improve the current situation. One of the aspects to which the University could devote more attention is staff development practices. There is significant evidence that the degree of human resources satisfaction is not only associated with pecuniary returns. Moreover, the Team is aware of positive developments that have been taking place with non-academic staff. Thus, the University could develop mechanisms to support academic staff in their teaching and research missions. Possible examples of areas to discuss these improvements are didactics and learning methods or the development of research projects.

## **9. Internal Organisation and Governance**

The trend towards growing institutional autonomy has led universities to give greater attention to their institutional autonomy. Moreover, the definition of strategic priorities requires an adequate organisational support that helps and not hinders the attainment of those priorities. Thus, in recent years there has been significant discussion about organisational changes and decision-making processes in universities.

The Team understands that these seem to be important themes of debate within the University of Verona. In fact, the request for participating in the IEP was significantly motivated by an internal debate about possible improvements on internal policy definition and decision-making process and the way these can positively influence several important dimensions of the University's mission.



The Team believes that this is an important debate. During the evaluation the Team formed the opinion that it would be important to clarify better the roles and contribution of the extended and the restricted Senates to the University's decision-making process, which are central bodies for the most important decisions of the University. Moreover, the Team believes that the University could take more advantage of the extended Senate as a policy-making unit and as a mechanism for communication and information transfer.

In several meetings the Team got the impression that there is some lack of awareness or misunderstanding regarding decision-making processes. This may happen in particular with more recent members and with those constituencies that spend fewer years in the University, such as students, who should be regarded as full members in any aspect of university life as stated in the Bologna process documents. Thus, the Team recommends that greater efforts should be made regarding information dissemination and that new members should be aware of rules and regulations, especially across Faculties.

At the organisational level, the Team felt there were some problems of coherence that seem to hinder a better articulation between different parts of the University. One of the most significant in this respect refers to the relationship between Faculties and the Departments. Although the Team understands some of the historical factors underlying the current structure of Departments, the Team thinks that the University should reassess the current division and its coherence with the structure of Faculties. The Team believes that improvements could be made in order to enhance the fulfilment of teaching and research missions in which Faculties and Departments play an essential role.

Remaining with the organisational level, the Team felt that there was room for reflection on certain financial issues. The Team felt the University should reflect about its current level of decentralisation regarding certain financial issues such as contracts. Although the Team is aware of the necessary degree of flexibility in order to be able to perform fund-raising and funding diversification effectively, it believes that this flexibility should be balanced with adequate levels of accountability and responsibility.

## **10. Quality Culture**

In recent years quality in higher education has become a growing concern for policy-makers and institutions. This has led to a rise in quality assurance mechanisms that aim both at self-improvement and accountability purposes.

In many countries, regulators have placed increasing demands on universities and these have become much more concerned with quality issues and with the need to make more explicit their daily commitment to permanent quality improvement. Thus, one of the major aims of the IEP process is to help institutions to develop a stronger quality culture.

In the Italian case there is the perception among universities that there is an insufficient attention to quality assessment. This is substantiated, in particular, by the absence of a National Quality Agency or a similar organisation. At the moment there is a National Evaluation Council, which was established some years ago, and whose main criteria refer to issues such as success of studies, number of students, and research outputs. This has led universities needing to document their activities more effectively and in greater detail, though it does not seem to have stimulated significant analysis about the data produced.

One of the first steps for an institution to develop an effective quality system is to know what is happening and how it is happening. The Team thinks that the University of Verona has shown a good capacity to document its activities. The Team asked for additional information and this was in general available and provided without delay and with a sufficient level of detail.

However, the Team perceived an insufficient reflection about the data available. In many discussions it became apparent that the University as a whole was either unaware of the situation or did not draw sufficient implications from the realities portrayed by the data available. The University should have a service dedicated to quality enhancement that not only collects data, but also provides advice.

Moreover, the existing data did not seem to have produced a widespread discussion across the University, namely within its major forums of debate. This is clearly associated with previous suggestions made by the Team to use the extended Senate more effectively both as an instrument to promote better dissemination of the information available and more intensive debate about the strategic choices facing the University of Verona.

Furthermore, the Team thinks it is very important that the University re-evaluates the adequacy and effectiveness of some of its current mechanisms of quality assessment. One of the dimensions of the university's mission which has shown the relevance of such weakness was teaching. The Team was struck by the lack of coverage of fundamental issues such as learning outcomes and examination procedures in students' questionnaires. The latter seemed not only incomplete, but also rather ineffective.

In several of the discussions the Team formed the opinion that there is a wide perception across the University about the limited consequences of current evaluation procedures. This has affected the willingness of several of the

constituencies in participating in evaluation processes, since they do not believe in its relevance. Moreover, this should be a matter of concern for the University's leadership, because all institutions need to have a strong belief across its members that there is an adequate system of rewards and sanctions that promotes fairness and good practices.

Thus, the Team agrees with the SER that the University does not have yet an integrated quality system that assesses its various missions. Quality assessment should not be a burden but an instrument of self-improvement that permeates the routines of the University.

## **11. Summary of Recommendations**

### **11.1. Institutional Mission and Strategy**

- Promote the definition of a clearer mission statement, with strong participation and commitment from all of the University's stakeholders
- Develop a stronger culture of self-analysis, namely through a SWOT analysis.
- Define the University's policy priorities in accordance with the institution's mission

### **11.2 Teaching**

- Devote more attention to learning, notably through a stronger commitment to pedagogical innovativeness and effectiveness
- Put a stronger emphasis on mechanisms of continuous assessment, in a coordinated way between subjects within each programme.
- Promote the dissemination of good practices in each of those issues to ensure that successful examples spread across the whole University.

### **11.3 Research**

- Adopt a more creative and flexible attitude in the allocation of teaching in order to provide more time for research, which should be done in a selective way.
- Promote greater coordination of research areas, namely by indentifying areas in which the University may have some competitive advantage.
- Define more clearly the organisational framework of research activities, namely regarding the role of Departments and of the recently established Doctoral Schools.
- Encourage greater multidisciplinary and cross-fertilisation in research.
- Promote collaborations with other universities, nationally and internationally, that may complement and strengthen the University's research potential and strategic priorities.

### **11.4 Relationship with the External Environment**

- Adopt a more systematic and institutional approach towards the relationship with external stakeholders, namely by using more effectively structures such as the liaison office.
- Find effective ways to nurture and support existing individual initiatives.

### **11.5 Internationalisation**

- Improve the University's international attractiveness through a more innovative approach to teaching.
- Strengthen current efforts in providing teaching in foreign languages.
- Develop stronger mechanisms of supporting the internationalisation of research activities.
- Use doctoral programmes to leverage internationalisation of both the teaching and the research dimensions.

## **11.6 Human Resources Management**

- Strengthen current initiatives regarding staff development practices.
- Develop mechanisms to support Academic staff in their teaching and research missions.

## **11.7 Internal Organisation and Governance**

- Clarify better the roles and contribution of the extended and the restricted Senates to the University's decision-making process
- Use the extended Senate as a policy-making unit and as a mechanism for communication and information transfer.
- Improve awareness and understanding regarding decision-making processes, with greater efforts upon information dissemination.
- Reflect on the degree of coherence and articulation between different parts of the University, namely between Faculties and the Departments.
- Reflect on the current level of decentralisation regarding certain financial issues and try to balance the necessary degree of flexibility with adequate levels of accountability and responsibility.

## **11.8 Quality Culture**

- Develop a stronger reflection about the data available, possibly through a service that not only collects data, but also provides advice quality enhancement.
- Promote a stronger culture of debate about the strategic choices facing the University, namely through the extended Senate.
- Rethink the adequacy and effectiveness of some of its current mechanisms of quality assessment, namely on teaching activities.

- Improve the effectiveness of current evaluation procedures and nurture the belief across the University that there is an adequate system of rewards and sanctions that promotes fairness and good practices.

## **12. ENVOI**

The Team appreciates the significant effort made by the University of Verona in performing this exercise and would like to commend the leadership of the University for taking it through this process of self-discovery and analysis. However, the Team hopes that the process will not end here. On the contrary, it must be a starting point.

The Team is aware of the significant constraints, faced by the University in the present regulatory framework, which hinder significantly its strategic development. Nevertheless, it is our firm belief that the University can explore more extensively its present level of institutional autonomy, despite its inconsistencies and uncertainties.

The Team hopes that this report will help the University of Verona to pursue further this path of self-improvement and greater institutional thinking about the University's priorities and the best ways to attain them.

The Team believes that the University will be capable of continuing these efforts in order to develop a strong quality culture that will promote participation and collective responsibility.