

Hodnotiaca správa / Evaluation Report

(Vzor / Template)

**Audit úrovne internacionalizácie a implementácia projektov
internacionalizácie vysokých škôl a verejných výskumných inštitúcií**
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**Audit of the level of internationalisation and implementation of
internationalisation projects of higher education institutions and
research institutions**

University of Trnava (TRUNI)

KOMPONENT 10: Lákanie a udržanie talentov; Investícia 4: Podpora internacionalizácie v
akademickom prostredí; 10I04-20-V01;

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COMPONENT 10: Attracting and retaining talent; Investment 4: Promoting
internationalisation in the academic environment; 10I04-20-V01;

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I. INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation is integral to the core missions of modern higher education—teaching, research, and service to society. It enhances these dimensions by fostering a learning, teaching, and research environment that links a more state-of-the-art knowledge advancement with industry, the labour market, and the public sector, while helping shape the social and community values foundational to the university's surrounding communities.

High research productivity and quality are significantly enhanced through international classroom cooperation, international working groups and consortia, connections to global research output, and the provision of new tools to local actors in an increasingly interconnected world.

Internationalization components must be localized to reflect each institution's needs and capacities, as well as legal and administrative environments. The need for localization creates challenges in creating indicators of fulfilment and the subsequent tracking. It is necessary to connect individual quantitative and qualitative benchmarking to agreed-upon institutional goals. Strategic planning and operationalization require both collective benefit and localized adaptation for rationally organized, connected divisions.

It is crucial for policy makers to continually work to gain and maintain an accurate view on the state and development of internationalization, on what has been achieved and on what should be done to enhance and support the process of comprehensive internationalization at both the institutional as well as national, systemic level of the organization of higher education.

This audit serves institutions broadly, providing a basis for further development of ongoing complex analysis of their internationalization processes, enabling reflection on various components of mobilities and support. The audit's outcome should offer a broad analysis of internationalization processes, allowing divisions to reflect on their specific situations and include recommendations for improving their activities through a prescribed action plan that is short term, but which fluently connects to a 3-year+ horizon for long-term, sustainable development.

Internationalization Stakeholders

Stakeholders and actors may be defined in various ways, but given the imbedded nature of internationalisation, all members of the institution and the society it serves can be considered as internationalisation stakeholders.

Evaluation Focus

While the main focus of the audit process is on the institutional framework for internationalisation, as well the internationalisation of the student experience and of staff (i.e., the educational part of university missions), the internationalisation of the research dimension is also addressed, primarily through support offices and the teacher/researcher and doctoral student mobility, and the synergies with educational activities.

Main objectives of the evaluation

Objectives for the participating **higher education institutions**:

- Provide the basis of a complex tool to reflect and analyse internationalization at the institutional level

- Provide the institutional leadership and all internal stakeholders with an external view on the state and development of internationalization of their respective institution
- Provide participating Slovak higher education institutions with recommendations and actionable steps to improve their level of internationalization
- Provide a clear step by step approach, towards an Action Plan, to utilise the disbursed funding to implement the above recommendations, with a focus on the short-term ones (until October 2025), and achieve related internationalisation goals.

These concrete objectives at the level of participating institutions are expected to contribute, on the **medium to longer term**, to positive **system-level developments** in the Slovak higher education system, as follows

- Increase the quality of internationalization of the Slovak higher education system
- Increase the global attractiveness and competitiveness of participating Slovak higher education institutions

Organization of the evaluation

The Audit is organized and supervised by the Slovak Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth in close cooperation with external experts.

Actors involved in the evaluation process:

Internal evaluation

- Management of the University: central, faculty, and other organizational units responsible for internationalization
- Staff responsible for and/or involved in international activities across all levels – both academic and administrative
- Students (both domestic and international)

External evaluation

- Three-member panel of external experts approved by the Ministry, including one member appointed as Coordinator for each university.

The **Evaluation** and this ensuing **Evaluation report** are the result of a **comprehensive process**, co-authored by the expert panel, and is based on

(1) the Self-Evaluation report and the accompanying data sheet submitted to the Expert panel by the higher education institution, as well as on

(2) an analysis of any supporting strategic documents, where existent (e.g. Institutional strategy, Strategy for internationalisation, information available on the university website, etc.). The process is complemented by

(3) the group interviews and in-depth exchanges during the face-to-face site visit (lasting 1,5 days, and bringing together the university and faculty leadership, central and faculty support offices for internationalisation, active academics and researchers, domestic and international – both exchange and degree-seeking – students).

II. EVALUATION PANEL

Expert Panel Coordinator

First name	Irina
Last name	Ferencz
E-mail	irina.ferencz@aca-secretariat.be
Telephone	+32 2 513 22 41

Expert Panel Member

First name	Katrin
Last name	Kiisler
E-mail	Katrin.kiisler@gmail.com
Telephone	+372 516 2196

Expert Panel Member

First name	Marta
Last name	Kuhnová
E-mail	Marta.kuhnova@ucm.sk
Telephone	+42 1908353032

III. SUMMARY

The University of Trnava is a middle-size higher education institution located 30-40 minutes from Slovakia's capital city, Bratislava (with one of its five faculties also located in Bratislava, for historical reasons). It has a rich educational tradition, and an already existing network of international partners at both central and faculty level, keeping the university up to date and with and contributing to some of the latest developments in the different disciplines, as well as more broadly on internationalisation trends and processes.

The Self-Evaluation report and the site visits showcase a high level of ambition related to enhancing the university's international visibility, and boosting international cooperation activities (both outgoing and incoming mobilities, as well as partnerships of different kinds), the university being ready to seize the opportunity provided through the Recovery and Resilience project. Overall, the level of satisfaction with the support provided for internationalisation processes, particularly at the central level, via the International Relations Office (IRO) is high, although all actors also acknowledge that a lot (and at time too much) is done, by very few staff members, and that they cannot expect more from the current too small and highly efficient team.

The university and faculty leadership, as well as staff and students have a good level of awareness and deep understanding about the strengths, as well as weaknesses of the university in terms of internationalisation, which contributed to very open and constructive exchanges during the site visit, for which the expert panel is very grateful.

The project seems to come at the right moment in time – the change of leadership through formal elections in October 2024 is already perceived by some of the academic and administrative as having kick-started some necessary transformations in terms of internationalisation. Very beneficial seems also the fact that both staff in the key positions in terms of internationalisation at central level have held internationalisation management responsibilities at lower levels, making them more knowledgeable and sensitised to the potential bottlenecks as well as needs of faculties, departments and students – the Rector served in the Vice-Rector for External Affairs/Internationalisation previously, while the Vice-Rector for External Affairs/Internationalisation served as Vice-Dean for External Affairs/Internationalisation in the Faculty of Education, both having extensive international experience throughout their careers.

The site visit also revealed a very engaged leadership at faculty level, and largely motivated staff (those not yet engaging being either because of a too high teaching load, or language barriers) and showed multiple good practice examples from the different faculties, that could be mainstreamed (with some disciplinary adaptations, when needed), across the institution.

All in all, the expert panel concludes that the university has the necessary conditions (high motivation, vision, key knowledgeable staff) for making the most of its participation in the project, and for implementing some necessary changes in terms of the internationalisation infrastructures, further strategy development, and marketing, to enhance its processes and international visibility, enabling it to reach more ambitious goals.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a summary of the main recommendations of the expert panel, following the review of the Self-Evaluation survey, of strategic documents, key date and the group sessions during site visit. A rationale for the different recommendations is provided in the Detailed description of findings.

Short-term (until October 2025)

Recommended actions deemed as achievable within the period covered by the project, and to be elaborated further in the upcoming institutional Action Plan.

Internationalisation structures and existing processes

1. Expand the central IRO with 2-3 additional positions as soon as possible (to support urgent needs in terms of marketing, project funding environment scanning and advising, coordination of participation in KreativEU, and expanding the student services).
2. Mainstream the existing good practices (see section V) from different faculties to all faculties, following adaptations, where needed.

Strategy

3. Fully develop the next Internationalisation Strategy in a highly consultative manner, together with key faculty representatives, academics, administrative staff and students (domestic and international).

Marketing

4. Elaborate a marketing strategy and develop the university brand, as key promotional elements.
5. Establish a central, fully translated online portal for international users, managed by a dedicated team to ensure accessible, consistent, and well-organised information across all faculties.
6. Develop basic promotional materials, e.g. a comprehensive brochure, available in both print and electronic formats, to showcase the university's study programmes and research activities, enhancing its visibility and appeal to prospective students and academic partners.

IT infrastructures

7. Invest in basic infrastructures to allow hybrid teaching and learning, modernising existing facilities.
8. Enhance the Academic information system (MAIS) to allow processing applications for incoming and outgoing mobilities and their day-to-day management, and ensure full accessibility for students in English, facilitating a more inclusive and user-friendly experience for international users.

Mid-term (1-3 years)

Recommended actions after the period covered by the short-term recommendations, that are deemed less urgent/central, or the realisation of which will require a longer timeframe.

9. Work with the other Slovak universities to develop a coordinated effort and campaign, with Ministry support, to promote Slovakia as a study destination, and with the other Trnava based universities to promote the city as an attractive destination.
10. Set up and implement a system for improving language and intercultural competencies for academic and administrative capacities at the central and faculty level.

11. Further expand the central IRO by 1-2 additional positions and establish within all faculties project offices for research and education projects similar to existing support at central level.
12. Enhance capacity at both central and faculty level to professionalise services for incoming students and staff, as well as for outgoing ones.
13. Grow the faculty-level funding from research and education projects, to be able to fund key positions, enhance research output and increase the profile of the institution.
14. Do a mid-term review of the Internationalisation Strategy, monitor progress and adjust objectives, activities and resources as needed.

Long-term (3+ years)

Recommended actions across a longer term period.

15. Develop additional English or other foreign language taught programmes (based on thorough market research) in key attractive areas, and joint programmes.

V. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

DIMENSION 1: Institutional framework for internationalization

1.1 University's strategic position on internationalization

Trnava University is grounded in the legacy of the original Jesuit institutions, which fostered both intellectual rigour and moral integrity. Upholding the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum, Trnava University is committed to maintaining the complete autonomy of universities from political and economic pressure, preserving their freedom to pursue research and education independently.

Aligned with Christian values, Trnava University is dedicated to protecting and promoting moral and spiritual principles, offering education in an ecumenic spirit that embraces diversity. In pursuit of these ideals, the University collaborates with a range of academic institutions and research organisations within Slovakia and internationally.

According to the Strategy of Internationalization, the goal of the University is to become a leader in fostering dialogue across diverse viewpoints within a pluralistic society while also advancing and disseminating European research of global significance.

1.2 Strategic planning processes in internationalization

The primary guiding document shaping Trnava University's approach to internationalization is the Strategy of Internationalization, a local policy framework established in 2020 and effective through 2026. The document is focused on the University's core objectives in international engagement in a clear and structured manner, accessible to a broad audience. Serving as a foundational reference, the Strategy underscores the University's commitment to fostering global connections and amplifying its international presence. A notable emphasis is placed on the Erasmus+ program, reflecting a critical role as a mechanism for facilitating international exchange and collaboration.

The strategy was largely overseen by the International Relations Office in coordination with the Vice-Rector for External Relations and Cooperation. The strategy itself, rooted in established best practices, functions as a key decision-making and policy development tool at the University, ensuring alignment within the overarching goals of internationalisation. Through the objectives and actionable pathways, this document strategically positions the University to adapt to the evolving demands of global education, championing values of inclusivity, diversity and academic distinction on an international scale.

Recognising the dynamic nature of the global academic environment, a planned review of the Strategy in 2025 will be essential to recalibrate goals and sustain the momentum of the internationalization efforts.

In the process of developing the next Internationalisation Strategy, it will be essential to fully involve:

- the faculty leadership at all drafting stages, to ensure the relevance of the Strategy for the faculties, as well as their active contribution to the strategy implementation – the sessions with the faculty leadership showed that reflecting on the links between the faculty-level

objectives and related internationalisation processes, and those of the university as a whole are not yet part of the regular modus operandi of the faculties, and that, as a result, opportunities to upscale good practice from the faculty level or to contribute to some centralised strategic developments are regularly missed.

- active academic and administrative staff, as well as those that would like to be involved more, but whose work or teaching load poses a great barrier – throughout the site visit the expert panel met a great number of dedicated staff with a long-lasting experience in international cooperation, that aspired to models seen in various partner institutions abroad, and whose accumulated knowledge and networks would bring great value to both the development and the implementation of the strategy.
- domestic and international students will be a great asset in helping the institution understand how it is seen by prospective students (both domestic and international), how the university image could be further strengthened, via which communication channels promotion should best take place to reach relevant students, as well as which services and changes should be a priority, from students' point of view.

Important at this stage would also be to thoroughly address the links between the university's participation in the KreativEU European university alliance and its broader internationalisation ambitions, to clarify whether the alliance is an important (or the main) 'tool' for reaching the broader internationalisation ambitions, as well as which is the specific role of faculties therein.

Various formats could be considered for the process of developing the strategy, from co-creation workshops with the faculties, with the drafting of the strategy assigned to the central-level leadership together with a cross-faculty team (representatives at different levels) to a faculty tour by central-level leadership to collect faculty input and concerns, and to try to align them into a common vision.

1.3 Internationalization management

At the central level of Trnava University, the Vice-Rector for International Relations holds primary responsibility for overseeing the University's internationalisation initiatives. This role represents the University in international settings and formal engagements. The Vice-Rector can serve as a principal spokesperson in global collaboration and external partnerships, lead institution-wide international projects and hold authority over individual Erasmus+ agreements, affirming the university's commitment to fostering international exchanges.

Reporting directly to the Vice-Rector is the International Relations Office (IRO) within the Rectorate, a specialised team tasked with managing the University's internationalisation activities, particularly the Erasmus+ program. The IRO's primary functions encompass the following:

- Administration of Bilateral Agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (The IRO negotiates, establishes, and maintains all bilateral agreements and MoUs, supporting the university in establishing of global partnerships),
- Submission and Oversight of Erasmus KA131 and KA171 Projects (This includes preparing and submitting grant applications under Erasmus+ Key Actions 131 and 171 with the responsibilities for detailed budget calculation, distribution, and financial oversight),
- Management of Outgoing Erasmus+ Mobilities (The IRO handles all administrative aspects for University students and staff participating in Erasmus+ exchanges, including the creation and execution of individual grant agreements and payments.
- Coordination of Incoming Erasmus+ Students (The IRO provides comprehensive support for incoming students from nomination through arrival, including the management of all required administrative documentation, assistance with daily needs, and coordination of cultural programs to enrich their international students' experience.

Additionally, the IRO collaborates with the Erasmus Students Network (ESN) Trnava, enhancing the cultural and social integration of incoming students.

Despite the central role of the International Relations Office (IRO) at Trnava University in facilitating and managing complex activities, and the very high level of satisfaction of the faculty leadership, academics, international and domestic students with the diverse services offered by the central IRO, the current staffing level of 2 – one officer supporting outgoing mobilities and one supporting incoming mobilities, as well as with responsibilities over agreements, international visits, participation in higher education fairs, etc. – is insufficient to meet the demand associated with these responsibilities and further development of the office and improving the current state of the internationalisation at the university. The team is supported by 1 person in the Department for Pedagogical Activities and Social Affairs, who supports incoming students with their application and recognition processes, very intensely liaising with the faculty administration (often with limited English language knowledge and thus not able to fully assist the students). The limited number of personnel poses challenges in ensuring that the tasks and responsibilities are completed efficiently and thoroughly impacting the office's ability to support the university's growing international engagement. The under-resourcing of the IRO is particularly pronounced given its role in promoting the University's internationalization strategy, supporting individual faculties in their Erasmus+ activities, as well as the university's recent start of participation in the KreativEU university alliance. With the current staffing levels, it is clear that the university cannot manage to meet its internationalisation ambitions.

At the faculty level, the responsibilities concerning the internationalization are primarily undertaken by Vice-Deans for International/External Relations (with the exception of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, where the Dean assumes these responsibilities).

The Vice-Deans are tasked with developing and implementing the faculty's strategies, approving Learning Agreements for both outgoing and incoming students and ensuring that study results align with mobility criteria for academic recognition. In some faculties – e.g. the Faculty of Health and Social work – these tasks are further decentralised to the department level, leading to a plurality of practices and levels of engagement with internationalisation activities. Overall, the faculty leadership for internationalisation is responsible for organising events and meetings for international students and visiting scholars and participating in regular consultations with the Vice-Rector and the IRO to maintain alignment with the University's broader international objectives.

Erasmus+ faculty coordinators, who in some faculties also hold the position of Vice-Dean, carry out the operational aspects of international exchange. They oversee the academic integration of incoming exchange students, provide support for outgoing students in course selection, and assist with logistical aspects of their studies. These coordinators offer personalised guidance to incoming and outgoing students, ensuring a smooth academic transition and compliance with faculty and program requirements. They play a critical role in conceptualizing and advancing foreign collaboration initiatives, laying the foundation for sustainable and strategic international partnerships.

The same understaffing for internationalisation activities is observed also at the faculty level, where often one and the same person holds various roles related to internationalisation (e.g. Vice-Dean and Coordinator and Inclusion Officer). While very good results have been obtained so far despite these staff shortages, it is clear that this is not sustainable on the medium to long term, especially as the university aspires to enhance its internationalisation activities.

A first priority should be thus given to enhancing the IRO team at both central and the faculty level. For the central level, 2-3 positions are recommended, all within the IRO structure: 2 positions covering external funding sources and application advising (see section 1.6 for

further details), one marketing specialist focused on the promoting the university and study opportunities online and abroad (see section 1.10 for further details), one member of staff centrally coordinating the university's participation in the KreativEU alliance (see section 1.8) and one looking into the broader and deeper development of coordinated student services (both incoming and outgoing), in close cooperation with the faculty level, for a more harmonised level of support.

1.4 International agreements

The university has made impressive strides in establishing a diverse range of bilateral agreements, with notable outreach beyond Europe. This global engagement aligns well with the university's strategic strength in fostering social responsibility and multicultural awareness. Managed centrally, the IRO oversees central agreements and memorandums, particularly within the Erasmus+ programme, facilitating student and staff mobility. A large portion of bilateral agreements, however, are established at the faculty or even departmental level, leading to considerable variation in accessibility across the university, an issue noticed also by students – while some noted they have multiple mobility opportunities (e.g. in the Faculty of Law), others, in other faculties and departments highlighted their options are very limited, if existing at all.

Despite the sufficient number of international agreements, their impact is often limited by insufficient inter-faculty collaboration and a lack of coordinated network initiatives across academic divisions.

Some faculties tend to rely heavily on partnerships with Czech universities, where the scope of internationalisation may be somewhat limited. Expanding bilateral agreements beyond the close neighbour and establishing more university-level agreements could diversify opportunities and provide broader access across faculties.

Strengthening communication channels and fostering a culture of active, coordinated participation among faculties would enable the University to maximize the value of its international partnerships, thereby advancing its goals for comprehensive internationalization.

It is essential that faculties would also regularly update these agreements, with a real-time system perhaps that updates available mobility options online, streamlining access for all students. While PhD students often require tailored contacts, enhancing faculty awareness and access to these more open opportunities would strengthen both student mobility and collaboration efforts.

A notable good practice in the development of bilateral agreements comes from the Faculty of Law, a subject area that is traditionally harder to internationalise due to the regulated nature of this profession. The faculty has the highest level of outgoing student mobility thanks to an active role of the faculty leadership and good collaboration with the different departments in increasing the number of agreements, and opening new courses taught in English in more accessible areas of law, such as European law, Competition law, Business law or European Environmental law, with the objective to host increasingly higher numbers of incoming students.

1.5 Funding for internationalization

The financial support for internationalisation initiatives is derived mostly from grants awarded through the Erasmus+ programme, which provide substantial resources for student and staff mobility, and to a much more limited extent in the case of Trnava University, for partnership development and collaborative projects, as well as from the CEEPUS programme (involving

three faculties: Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Health and Social Work).

There are two exceptions in this regard – the Faculty of Health and Social Work, which has been successful in recent years in several Horizon (Europe) projects, and the Faculty of Education, that managed, while activating the partnership of the KreativEU alliance (even before securing the European Universities Initiative funding), to secure grants for additional cooperation projects under Erasmus+.

Recently, additional funding has been also accessed through the Recovery and Resilience Plan, supplementing this effort and expanding its international outreach and activities.

All in all though, the funding for internationalisation activities is very limited, and particularly the external project funding rather low, comparatively speaking, making this an area of untapped potential for the university, that should be addressed immediately during the project period and with the project resources.

1.6 International projects support

To fully capitalise on international opportunities, the current structure supporting international projects would benefit from a strategic review. Presently, the central-level Projects department has only one staff member, focused primarily on non-international initiatives, which places much of the responsibility for managing international proposals on the Vice-Rector, faculty members, and the IRO.

An exception in this regard, and thus a good practice example is the Faculty of Health Care and Social Work, that has a one-person office at faculty level, scanning the research funding horizon, informing academic staff of relevant opportunities and providing some support with project applications. The existence of this office already translated in several successful Horizon (Europe) projects, the faculty standing out, vis-à-vis the others in its level of external research funding.

Faculties show strong interest in having more large-scale projects like Horizon Europe, yet limited centralised administrative and technical support hinders their ability to benefit fully. Establishing a central project office with dedicated staff for environmental scanning, information sharing, cross-university collaboration, and with some advisory role in proposal writing, would streamline the process, allowing academic staff to focus on research aspects of the projects rather than administrative demands. The establishment of support could initially be funded through recovery fund resources, with long-term sustainability supported by project overheads. Such a centralised office would provide essential support without diminishing the faculties' role in leading and driving the academic content of these initiatives.

This office would be best placed within or work very closely with the IRO, and would ideally have 2 positions – one covering research funding opportunities, and the other education funding grants, liaising with all faculties. The expectations from this office should stay realistic, and focus primarily on information gathering and advising, the actual project application writing resting with the academics and support from administrative staff at faculty level. In the medium term, this central-level support office should be supplemented by similar positions at faculty level (at least one per faculty), given the priority that attracting international research funding and related collaboration have for faculty leadership and academics alike.

1.7 International partnerships and university networks

While the university is a member of several international networks at central level, such as the Danube Rectors' Conference (since 2004), EAEC, the European University Association (EUA) and Magna Charta, they were rarely mentioned during the site visit, pointing to the symbolic character of membership.

At faculty level, several disciplinary networks were mentioned: an informal network of the faculties of philosophy, membership in The European Research Institute for Social Work or the European Law Institute (ELI) (of the Faculty of Law).

1.8 European Universities alliance

The most significant development in the university's internationalisation efforts is its recent inclusion in the European University Alliance, KreativEU, which was approved in June 2024 and will commence in January 2025. This collaboration places the university among the few Slovak institutions being part of European University Alliances. Originally intended as a consortium of mid-sized universities with a shared focus on cultural heritage, KreativEU has evolved into a diverse network of institutions offering complementary strengths, including advancements in AI, natural sciences, and climate change research.

The alliance has fostered a cooperative and inclusive environment with equal partnerships creating a strong sense of shared purpose, enthusiasm and community. However, to fully leverage the alliance, there is a need for enhanced awareness and support within the university. While leadership is enthusiastic, faculty members are not yet fully informed on the alliance's potential benefits, how they can participate, or how it might impact their work. While this is often the case in the early stages of alliance participation, bringing the faculty leadership and relevant departments onboard early in the process is essential for maximising the impact of the alliance opportunities on the university's transformation. Additionally, the IRO requires more staff to manage the expectations and increased workload the participation will bring, a reason for which it is recommended to foresee at least one full-time position within the central-level IRO, for overall coordination of the alliance participation, supported by additional designated staff at faculty level. The alliance provides the university with the opportunity to pursue key internationalisation goals, such as introducing joint and double degree programmes, developing micro-credential courses, and supporting lifelong learning for its staff. These initiatives align closely with the university's ambitions in the field of internationalisation, yet achieving them will require significantly enhanced cross-faculty collaboration and coordination.

1.9 Domestic partnerships for internationalisation (if applicable)

While the Strategy mentions 2 domestic consortia – one created in 2019 with now 11 Slovak higher education institutions (U11), and one created in 2020, with other foreign partners, both networks seem to be less important at the moment in supporting the internationalisation ambitions of the university. Nonetheless, a closer partnership with the two other universities based in Trnava (which thus far is limited, based on the information provided during the site visit, to the buying and sharing of facilities) could be beneficial in promoting the Trnava brand, as an attractive study destination, as well as a closer partnership with the other Slovak universities at the national level, to promote, with support from the Ministry of Education, Slovakia as an important study destination. Given the size of the institution and the marketing

gap, working with other universities is highly recommended, to build a stronger voice and have wider outreach.

1.10 International marketing and promotion

The strategy prioritises stronger collaboration between IRO, study, and marketing departments to attract top international students and conduct focused market research. In 2024, the university's international presence improved through participation in conferences like NAFSA, APAIE, and EAIE, with support from the Ministry of Education. Every opportunity should now be used to build on these initial steps, as establishing a strong message with potential partners and students requires sustained effort over time. Ideally, a dedicated marketing and communications specialist focused solely on international promotion should be positioned within the International Relations Office, rather than the general communications department, and be tasked in a first step with developing a dedicated communication strategy (currently missing), to effectively showcase its programs, research, and international partnerships to potential students and collaborators worldwide. This placement would ensure alignment with the specific needs of international staff and students. This specialist could also work together with the faculties in promoting outgoing exchange opportunities towards Slovak students, adjusting the messages to specific obstacles encountered in the different fields of study.

Improving accessible information in English on the university's website is a key objective of the internationalisation strategy. Both staff and students highlighted the current lack of up-to-date, comprehensive information in English, noting that many faculty websites are either poorly translated or not translated at all. At present, international students rely heavily on just two people from the International Relations Office for guidance—an arrangement that, though supportive and responsive, is not sustainable as numbers grow. Ideally, a central online portal specifically designed for international users could address these needs, providing clear, relevant, well-organised, and fully translated information on admissions, study programmes, accommodation, support services, and contacts. A dedicated team could coordinate translation and content management across faculties, ensuring consistency and alignment with the university's international image.

Attracting international students (be they degree-seeking or incoming exchange students) to a university located in a smaller, less well-known historical city can be challenging, especially when students are drawn to larger capitals with dynamic social scenes. At the same time, the university does have some unique selling points and brand potential (at the moment, even some of your vice-rectors do not believe that you could be an attractive place to study) that it should fully develop and invest in. Priority should also be given to creating a vibrant campus life for your existing international students, promote proximity to multiple European capitals, organise weekend excursions and day trips, develop unique offer of programmes, build on your greatest strengths. And, as mentioned above, working with other universities to build a brand for Slovakia would be key.

Currently, social media platforms are not being utilized for international marketing and promotion at the University, representing a significant missed opportunity to reach and engage a global audience.

In the future, the marketing specialist in the IRO could consider establishing a partnership with the ESN local branch or with student interns (both domestic and international) that could support or even manage, based on a commonly agreed content plan, the promotion of the university via social media channels (e.g. Instagram take-overs, reels, lives, etc.).

DIMENSION 2: Internationalization of the student experience

2.1 Incoming student mobility (degree and credit, physical and blended)

Most faculty representatives seem to be (almost exclusively) focused on incoming exchange students, the attraction of more degree-seeking international students not featuring as a topic or as an objective, based on the interactions during the site visit. Given the other challenges or more urgent priorities of the institution, the expert team recommends further focusing in increasing the numbers of incoming (and outgoing) students first, and make necessary curricular adaptations, before embarking on bigger efforts to attract degree-seeking students more systematically.

During the site visit, incoming students expressed satisfaction with their welcome and the quality of education provided. Notably, the primary reason for choosing TRUNI appears to be academic (relevance of the fields of study or programme for students' education), which provides a strong foundation for future growth. The expert panel was impressed by the international students' commitment and motivation, and it is encouraging that their concerns are mainly organisational or technical rather than academic. Regarding the organisation of studies, the timing of students' arrival could be reconsidered, as too much initial time is currently spent on preparation, awaiting responses from teachers, and getting courses started. Students value the university's support, but feel some of their time is unproductively used and are worried about accumulated delays, that could prevent them from maximising their educational experience (finishing coursework, assignments, etc.).

One alternative to a later arrival for incoming students could be foreseeing an online onboarding and teaching period before they physically arrive at the university, for which an enhancement and a modernisation of the IT infrastructure would be much needed. Students commented at length about the missing or insufficient IT infrastructure, the need for modernisation, with theology students often 'praying' that the old equipment and technology works for connecting to peers online.

One element that incoming students at the Faculty of Law appreciate, and which could be followed as an example of good practice is the modular approach and grouping of courses, allowing for some class-free periods, when students are encouraged to travel and explore, to make the most of their study abroad experience.

Currently, foreign students at the University face limited opportunities to learn the Slovak language, which can hinder their integration and engagement within the local community. Such courses seemed to be offered in the past, but no longer are (post pandemic). While not all incoming students might be interested in learning Slovak (a reality shared by the academics and IRO members during the site visits), some (especially those coming from outside of Europe for longer studies and wishing to extend their stay in Slovakia) are very motivated to do so. Establishing accessible Slovak language courses would greatly enhance their cultural experience and foster deeper connections with peers and faculty.

A type of course that would benefit all incoming students is an Introduction to the Slovak language and culture – a How to survive Slovakia? type of class, where students learn about key aspects about Slovak society, habits, as well as essential vocabulary to be able to handle everyday life in the city and basic interaction with the locals.

2.2 Outgoing student mobility (credit, physical and blended)

Overall, while outgoing student numbers are on the rise, they are below the potential of the university, so further efforts are recommended to increase participation, following the model of more successful faculties.

Students from the different faculties assess differently the opportunities they have for studying abroad. While some feel very well informed about the opportunities (e.g. Faculty of Law) and are very happy with the broad(er) diversity of study options, student from other faculties, especially where the agreements are done at the level of the department, report uneven access to such opportunities, and in some case having no options. Some students also noted receiving the study abroad information too late (e.g. one-two weeks before the application deadlines, which ultimately hindered their participation, as remaining time was not sufficient for getting necessary information – e.g. on the destination options, cost of living, size and coverage of the grant – for them to take a final decision and apply).

A good practice in early promotion of study abroad opportunities comes from the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Law, that now informs all newcomer students about the study abroad opportunities during the Welcome and Open days at the university, for students to have time to consider it and gather necessary information.

Increasing outgoing student numbers would also require addressing some of the key obstacles encountered by Slovak students – some report the too low level of the grant to cover living costs abroad, others would like more destination options, at better ranked international universities, while others fear recognition problems upon return. The Faculty of Education has again a good practice example in the latter regard, having developed a faculty-wide practice and guidelines on the full recognition of study abroad.

2.3 Incoming and outgoing student mobility support

At the university level, once students are nominated for Erasmus+ mobility by the university's Erasmus team, the International Relations Office (IRO) undertakes several key responsibilities to support the students throughout their mobility experience. These include:

- Sending an email containing essential information and a step-by-step guide on the next steps in the mobility process.
- Providing personalized assistance to students in completing the required documentation and navigating necessary procedures, as needed.
- Coordinating with the sending institution to address and resolve any potential issues that may arise.
- Liaising with the Slovak embassy to manage visa-related matters, when applicable.
- Ensuring secure and guaranteed accommodation for Erasmus+ students at the university's dormitories.
- Collaborating with the local Erasmus Student Network (ESN) to facilitate a warm welcome, pairing each incoming student with a Slovak student for assistance on their first day.
- Organizing a personalized welcome meeting to provide crucial information, facilitate university account setup, and ensure immediate access to Wi-Fi services.
- Distributing welcome gifts, including an ISIC student card, with all associated costs covered by the university.
- Offering ongoing daily support to students on a variety of issues, including course registration, communication with faculty, health-related concerns, and personal matters.

At the faculty level, Erasmus+ students receive academic guidance and support primarily from the designated Erasmus+ coordinator within the faculty. For students arriving through other funding programs, such as the Slovak National Grant or Fulbright, the International Relations Office also provides essential support, including registration with local authorities and assistance with accommodation arrangements.

A type of support that incoming students greatly appreciate is having a domestic 'buddy'. At the same time, the students are concerned with the very low number of buddies, which makes existing ones overburdened with too many students and requests, and prevents them responding as fast as they would like to, or to all students, especially as the buddies are students themselves. Expanding the network of buddies by rewarding the participating students (e.g. through extra credits for international and intercultural activities and competences, promotion of their activities within the university, etc.), would be highly necessary.

While generally a tailor-made, case by case type of support is provided, enhancing the service capacity for outgoing students would be an absolute must, especially with higher numbers of students undertaking study abroad. Coordination between the central and faculty level should also be strengthened, in this respect.

2.4 Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC)

Like many universities in the region, the university is still in the early stages of fully integrating international perspectives into its curriculum. While strategic documents emphasise internationalisation, the focus has been on student mobility and on adapting courses for incoming students rather than embedding intercultural competencies into the curriculum for all students. However, as the global work environment evolves, it is increasingly important to equip graduates with these competencies, preparing them to meet the diverse demands of today's teaching and professional fields.

Since most students may not have the opportunity to study abroad, developing intercultural skills locally is essential. This can be achieved by creating shared learning environments for local and international students, increasing incoming student numbers, incorporating intercultural components into coursework, and offering more courses in English. For example, consider introducing an English-language course focused on intercultural communication and global awareness. The course should encourage participation across faculties as a strongly recommended elective. By including both local and international students, it would promote interaction, collaboration, and real-world language practice, building confidence for future professional settings. Alternatively, the outcome could be achieved by mobility, participating in buddy system or similar. Making intercultural competence a learning outcome across programmes, and expanding access to existing internationalisation courses for local students, would foster cross-cultural exchange and may inspire more students to consider mobility opportunities in the future.

2.5 Foreign language taught programmes

A significant challenge facing the university's internationalisation efforts is the limited availability of accredited programmes offered in the English language. Currently, only six study programmes are available in the English language. Furthermore, these programmes are concentrated within just three faculties and are predominantly available at the doctoral level, restricting options for undergraduate and master's candidates seeking English-language instruction.

To align with its strategic goals, the university aims to increase the number of full-time programmes taught in English. However, given current resources and circumstances, an immediate focus on full degree programmes may not be feasible. Instead, prioritising a diverse selection of cross-faculty courses and modules designed to attract exchange students could be more impactful. These offerings should be accessible to both local and international students, providing a shared classroom experience that benefits non-mobile students as well. Drawing on faculty strengths, particularly in areas such as European law and competition law, this approach can lay a foundation for future expansion into full degrees or joint programmes with selected partners.

To be able to adapt more courses to incoming exchange students, the university would also need to motivate differently the staff able to teach in English, so that they can do so more regularly. The site visit also revealed that more academics have the necessary level of language proficiency to teach in English than it is currently the case, but that cannot 'afford' to do so, as their current teaching load is too high, as they have very little or no administrative support, and as they receive no additional incentives (financial or otherwise) for the extra load of developing courses in English.

2.6 Joint study programmes (academic and administrative)

The university's strategy includes developing joint, double, and multilateral degree programs with foreign institutions. Currently, Trnava University offers one joint programme, the Social Work and Social Economy (SOWOSEC) degree, in partnership with the University of Applied Sciences FH Campus Vienna. Through the KreativEU alliance, beginning in January 2025, TU aims to expand its joint degree offerings. While language and administrative challenges are expected, viewing the alliance as a way to share strengths, diversify teaching, and leverage partner expertise can help overcome these obstacles.

DIMENSION 3: Teaching and Research: Academic staff

The university is committed to strengthening international engagement among its staff. The university's internationalisation strategy prioritises academic mobility to support research, alongside efforts to expand overall staff mobility. Currently, mobility relies heavily on departmental networks, with support from Erasmus+, the National Scholarship Program, and CEEPUS, particularly benefiting incoming staff. Given the university's need to accommodate a growing number of international students, investing in internationalisation and development of staff is essential. Internationalisation of staff not only creates partnerships and fosters research projects but also inspires educators to introduce innovative teaching practices, benefiting both students and the university as a whole.

It is thus recommended that the staff uses existing contacts for own mobility stays, and that it subsequently builds on these mobilities to develop bilateral agreements, send students abroad and initiate educational and research partnerships.

3.1 Incoming academic staff mobilities and foreign staff

While during the site visit it was reported that different departments often host visiting staff, it also became apparent that these visits are not always reported to the central level, which does not have, as a result, a good overview of incoming staff numbers, unless they come through formal agreements and the IRO is involved in supporting them. Another challenge reported by the academics was the lack of interest of domestic and international students to attend the classes taught by visiting professors. A better and advanced promotion of these visits, and

some incentives for students to attend related classes might lead to higher participation, which would be ultimately highly beneficial to the students.

3.2. Outgoing academic staff mobilities

While the academics in different faculties report many outgoing experiences, and do not seem to lack opportunities nor support, a positive and more recent phenomenon is the outgoing mobility of administrative staff through participation in Staff training weeks. This is highly encouraged, both in terms of increasing levels of participation as well as the diversification of staff profiles, to include roles that are less internationalised, but whose support is highly needed to enhance the internationalisation of the university (e.g. staff regular faculty services, in dormitories, etc.).

3.3 Academic staff support (mobility for teaching, training, research, etc.)

The academics are generally happy with the level of support they received, and did not express specific wishes for additional services, other than a reduction by faculty leadership of their teaching load.

3.4 Staff development

To further encourage international engagement, setting clear targets for academic staff—such as participation in international projects and grant applications—could help create a culture of active collaboration. Introducing rewards, such as career progression incentives or weighted consideration in academic evaluations, for those teaching in English or securing international grants would strengthen the university's international profile. Since recruiting internationally experienced staff remains challenging, offering robust support and recognising international contributions at the faculty level can help retain and motivate current staff, building a hospitable environment that values internationalisation. Incentives can be both monetary and career-oriented. Setting goals, such as requiring staff to undertake at least one international project or grant application over a period in office, with these achievements positively impacting career growth, can be particularly effective. Additionally, establishing scholarships, awards, or prizes for faculty members who excel in developing English-language courses or obtaining grants not only acknowledges their contributions but also alleviates financial and time constraints they often face. Integrating internationalisation activities into departmental evaluations and funding allocations would further encourage participation.

One of the main obstacles to advancing internationalisation and developing English-language courses appears to be the limited English proficiency among university staff. To increase the number of courses, programmes and international students, the university should invest into enhancing the English language proficiency of its staff. Implementing standardised language requirements for new academic and administrative positions—such as a minimum CEFR level of B2 or C1—and consistently applying them during recruitment is essential. For existing staff, setting progressive language goals can support gradual improvement over time. Currently, English skills may not be thoroughly assessed due to low applicant numbers; in such cases, prioritising candidates with international experience and English proficiency is beneficial. For leadership positions, these qualities should be key selection factors, and offering PhD students international experience is also vital, as they are potential future colleagues. Finally, fostering cultural sensitivity and soft skills among staff is essential to meet the needs of a diverse international student body.

3.5 Internationalization of research

Internationalising research is a key objective in the university's strategic plan, aiming to raise the global impact of its research and creative work. This includes increasing publication in high-ranking international journals, expanding participation in international research projects, and promoting open science through accessible publications, data, and resources. Despite some strong international projects, particularly in cooperation with low-income countries, support for large-scale initiatives, such as Horizon projects, remains limited. Currently, academic staff must navigate complex grant applications with minimal central support, which restricts access to larger grants. Establishing a dedicated research support office could alleviate administrative burdens, enabling researchers to focus on project development and collaboration.

Improving research support would also benefit doctoral students, who often struggle to find placements and resources in their fields internationally. More structured assistance for PhD students in finding suitable host research groups abroad enhances your future academic competitiveness. Additionally, to encourage a shift in mindset, leadership positions could require experience with EU grants, and rewards could be introduced for successful or well-reviewed applications. Learning from colleagues with Horizon project success and adopting a “learning by doing” approach would empower staff to pursue more ambitious research goals, knowing that each attempt—successful or not—builds essential experience in international research.

The absence of a comprehensive research strategy presents a gap in guidance for researchers on selecting project partners and effectively identifying and monitoring emerging research opportunities. A well-defined strategy could provide clear criteria and frameworks for partner selection, facilitating alignment with the University's research goals and enhancing collaborative potential. Additionally, establishing structured processes for tracking relevant funding calls and research initiatives would enable researchers to engage more proactively and strategically in advancing their work within the international research landscape.

V. COHERENCE BETWEEN PROJECT FUNDING RELATED PLANS AND INSTITUTIONAL FINDINGS

The application submitted by the university to the Recovery and Resilience project and its preliminary ideas on the use of project funds showcase a high level of motivation and very good awareness of the processes and activities that need attention. They also represent a mix of immediate, and longer term priorities.

As the project funding is limited and the project implementation period is very short, the expert panel recommends through this report focusing on the actions deemed as most urgent, or most enabling for subsequent actions that could be taken on the medium and longer term, and that should be further elaborated in the upcoming Internationalisation Strategy.

In a nutshell, these are actions meant to enhance the systemic approach for internationalisation processes, enhancing the current internationalisation infrastructure.