



Report with findings of the Peer Review Meeting (WP4.3)

The peer review meeting took place on **22.07.2020** from **9 am to 11 am (CEST) / 10 am to 12 noon (AST)**.

Reviewed Institution		
<i>KRG Partners</i>	<i>tick as appropriate (✓)</i>	<i>Represented in person of</i>
KISSR		
UOS		
SPU	✓	Assist. Prof. Dr. Alan Faraydoon Ali Prof. Dr. Soran Abubakir Muhammed Dr. Bakhtiar Aubaid Sharif Mr. Shirwan Hamid Muhammed Mr. Awat Muhammad Rashid Mr. Ali Jamal Hashm Ms. Shank Kawa Ahmed Mr. Miran Saeed Mr. Awder Ahmed
UOR		
UOH		
CHU		
DPU		
EPU		
SU		

Peer Reviewers		
<i>EU Partners</i>	<i>tick as appropriate (✓)</i>	<i>Represented in person of</i>
UGOE	✓	Dr. Uwe Muuss, Jakob Hedderich
KUL		Jef Schrooten
MU	✓	Violeta Osouchová
RUG	✓	Maaïke Wagenaar

I. General institutional setup for the internationalisation of the Higher Education Institution (HEI)		<i>tick as appropriate (✓)</i>		
#	Item	Assessment		
		Yes	In part	No
1	An institutional setup conducive to the internationalisation of the university and implementation of the international strategy has been achieved.	✓		
2	The International Relations Office has been set up properly within the institutional framework of the HEI with reporting lines established.	✓		
3	Apart from the International Relations Office, other structural units of the university important for internationalisation have been identified and are included in the internationalisation process.	✓		
4	An appropriate (inclusive) process for the continued development of the international strategy and related policies is in place.		✓	
5	Monitoring of the internationalisation process and implementation of the international strategy is established.		✓	
6	Institutional arrangements for collaboration with the colleges (faculties) on internationalisation are in place.		✓	
7	A framework for the recognition of studies abroad is in place.		✓	
8	An institutional process for implementing Bologna Process reform elements (e.g. student-centred learning, ECTS, learning outcomes etc.) has been initiated.	✓		
Written assessment / Comments:				
<p><i>Generally, EU partners found that an institutional setup conducive to the internationalisation of the university and the implementation of the international strategy has been achieved with the International Relations Office set up and other structural units important for internationalisation identified and involved in the process. Furthermore, the preconditions for both monitoring of internationalisation as well as the continued development of the international strategy and related policies are fulfilled by establishing the necessary structures and assigning responsibilities respectively.</i></p> <p><i>European partners could also establish that SPU employs a more decentralised approach in regard to conducting internationalisation and as part of this is employing dedicated committees representing both the central administration and the colleges. Engaging with the colleges (students and staff), which represent both the main target groups and important stakeholders of internationalisation, is very important and European partners strongly encourage SPU to strengthen this participatory element. In this regard, European partners also found it especially positive to hear that students were consulted during the process of drafting the intl. strategy via their representatives in the University Council. (A fact corroborated by the interviews with the students who highlighted student involvement as being a strong suit of and general element at SPU.)</i></p> <p><i>That being said, during the meeting European partners also identified areas for improvement of the institutional setup:</i></p> <p><i>Generally, European partners do not doubt that the existing institutional arrangements produce desirable results in bringing about internationalisation of the university, especially in regard to the current scope and formats employed. However, although de facto found to be working and with the commitment to internationalisation clearly showing, EU partners perceived the existing arrangements to not yet being fully institutionalised and governed by formalised procedures. In the future and with increasing levels of internationalisation, this will become a requirement in order to being able to conduct internationalisation on an institutional scale and as routine business. In this regard, the stated intention to install a dedicated Vice-President for</i></p>				

	<p><i>International Affairs can be considered a proper step in this direction and should be flanked by formalising and solidifying cooperation arrangement with the colleges.</i></p> <p><i>Beyond that, European partners found an institutional process for the implementation of Bologna Process to have started with relevant committees having been formed. However, EU partners recognise the yet early implementation stage, which is in line with other KRG HEIs and the Kurdistan Region as a whole. As part of this reform process, SPU should strive to strengthen its recognition procedures for studies abroad in order to render recognition an institution-wide standard.</i></p> <p><i>As a final note, EU partners noticed from the reporting that currently many of SPU's key partners stem from the broader region (e.g. Turkey, Egypt, etc.), which is understandably given the proximity and cultural affinity. However, for the future and for realising a truly comprehensive vision of internationalisation, SPU will be required to reach out and develop partnerships with institutions from beyond the region.</i></p>
	<p>Recommendations:</p>
	<p><i>SPU should closely monitor its internationalisation process in order to establish if the current institutional arrangements allow for internationalisation on an institutional scale. Formalising intra-institutional cooperation arrangements and procedures will render internationalisation an integral and systemic part of higher education at SPU guaranteeing its long-term sustainability.</i></p> <p><i>European partners encourage SPU to continue with the implementation of Bologna Process reform elements, best by developing its in-house expertise and with continued support from (international) experts in the field. Ensuring a proper understanding of the Bologna Process, its elements and implementation by all relevant stakeholders to this process is a conditio sine qua non.</i></p> <p><i>European partners advice SPU to ensure that proper procedures for the recognition of studies abroad are in place rendering recognition an institutional norm.</i></p> <p><i>In the future and despite the known challenge to build such relations, European partner encourage SPU to invest in building partnerships with institutions beyond the broader region.</i></p>

II. The organisation of and resources available at your International Relations Office		<i>tick as appropriate (✓)</i>		
#	Item	Assessment		
		Yes	In part	No
1	The organisational structure of the International Relations Office is appropriate/functional and clear responsibilities are established.		✓	
2	Appropriate personnel resources are available at the International Relations Office.		✓	
3	Staff with English language proficiency is available at the International Relations Office.		✓	
4	Based on photo evidence, the International Relations Office and its premises are found to be suitable for the purpose and sufficiently equipped.	✓		
5	Equipment purchased with funds of the Erasmus+ TIGRIS Project is installed properly and marked according to Erasmus+ requirements.	✓		
Written assessment / Comments:				
<p><i>While European partners found the IRO and its premises to be suitable for their purpose and well equipped with both equipment purchased with TIGRIS funds and funds of the university, other areas show potential for improvement. This mainly concerns both the personnel resources available at the IRO as well as the English language proficiency of current staff members. However, partners from SPU clearly showed to be aware of this: with calls for application for 2 additional staff (2 FTE) already published and English language requirements set, Kurdish partners are found to be actively addressing the issues. Furthermore, the plans for language training for existing IRO staff are also highly appreciated in this regard.</i></p> <p><i>Unfortunately, partners from SPU reported on increased difficulties in recruiting and adding more staff, often leaving published positions vacant. Partners identified this as being due to both budget cuts and existing regulations that prevents KRG universities from autonomously recruiting staff, instead requiring them to go through a prolonged bureaucratic process with the respective ministry (ministries) in order to have staff assigned. This clearly shows the detrimental effect the current employment conditions (university staff being appointed civil servants for life) can have on institutional change and reform processes.</i></p> <p><i>Although being aware of the restrictions a limited number of staff available imposes on the organisation of an IRO and on establishing clearly defined areas of responsibility, European partners note that, despite being sufficient for the current state of internationalisation, with further progression the organisational structure of the IRO is likely due for revision in order to accommodate for the complexity of the internationalisation process and the need for increased functional differentiation that comes with it.</i></p>				
Recommendations:				
<p><i>European partners encourage SPU to follow through with increasing the number of staff available at the IRO and to engage in continuous staff development, e.g. by offering language training, thereby solidifying the IRO and increasing its capacity to implement internationalisation at SPU.</i></p> <p><i>For the future and in conjunction with solidifying the IRO and its role in implementing internationalisation, partners at SPU should consider revising the organisational structure of the IRO, thereby introducing clear individual areas of responsibilities and achieving a higher level of functional differentiation, which in turn can improve efficiency while also helping staff members to accommodate to their new roles as promoters and managers of internationalisation.</i></p>				

For the long term, European partners encourage SPU together with other KRG HEI partners and through the newly established Network of Kurdish Internationalisation Practitioners to launch an initiative lobbying for a revision of regulations that prevent KRG HEIs from recruit staff autonomously.

III. The scope and mode of operation of the International Relations Office		tick as appropriate (✓)		
#	Item	Assessment		
		Yes	In part	No
1	Core services and tasks ¹ of an International Relations Office are offered/performed by the local International Relation Office.	✓		
2	Core services and tasks not offered/performed by the local International Relations Office are offered/performed by another unit of the university (<i>only if applicable</i>).	✓		
3	The mode of operation of the International Relation Office as portrayed in the meeting is found to be appropriate for the related task(s).		✓	
Written assessment / Comments:				
<p><i>Due to the currently employed decentralised approach, EU partners found some services and tasks provided by the IRO while other are handled either solely or in conjunction with other structural units of the university. E.g., this is found to be true for academic mobility, project support and consultation as well as international promotion, the latter currently being mostly conducted via the English language section of the university's webpage (and social media). Here, EU partner would like to note that promotion and marketing for recruiting international students and staff currently is not a priority for SPU since according to the reporting governmental regulations are in place here as well that impede on recruiting intl. students and staff. In this regard, KRG partners refer to the higher education law from 2008 that is currently being revised to accommodate for internationalisation in general and recruitment of intl. students and staff in particular. For the future, however, international marketing and promotion should become part of the internationalisation portfolio of the university and SPU should plan for it.</i></p> <p><i>In regard to the operations of the IRO, EU partners had the impression that IRO staff members (in part due to being recently appointed) are still in the process of asserting themselves in their roles as international officers and managers. Here again, having a clear understanding of the IRO's core mission and business as well as one's individual responsibilities would be conducive to facilitate this process. In addition, during the meeting not all duties of IRO staff could directly be linked to internationalisation, which reinforces the impression that IRO operations need to be defined more clearly.</i></p>				
Recommendations:				
<p><i>For the future, partners from SPU should think on how and where to establish international marketing and promotions services.</i></p> <p><i>Likewise, for the future and with increasing mobility of students and staff (especially in exchange with European institutions and within the framework of Erasmus+ KA107), SPU should see to having a formalised, transparent and competitive selections process in place.</i></p> <p><i>European partners advise SPU to revisit the IRO's current setup in order to sharpen its scope and mode of operation, thereby clearly defining its core services and tasks. This is of even greater importance for universities that employ a rather decentralised approach.</i></p>				

¹ For this purpose, core services & tasks are defined as (1) coordination and management of **international relations** (with foreign university, networks, partnerships, etc.), (2) coordination and management of **international mobility** of students and staff, (3) conducting **intl. marketing/promotion** incl. recruitment of intl. students and staff, (4) offering **project support** (consultation incl. funding advice), (5) offering **support for incoming students and staff**.

IV. Experience of students and staff with internationalisation at the university and services offered by the International Relations Office		<i>tick as appropriate (✓)</i>		
#	Item	Assessment		
		Yes	In part	No
1	Students report to be well informed on internationalisation activities and opportunities offered by the university.	✓		
2	Students report on having received appropriate support before, during and after their international experience.	✓		
3	Students report to be satisfied with support received.	✓		
4	Students report that their studies abroad have been recognised by the home institution (<i>only if applicable</i>).	Not applicable		
5	Staff members report to be well informed on internationalisation activities and opportunities offered by the university.	✓		
6	Staff members report on having received appropriate support before, during and after their international experience.	✓		
7	Staff members report to be satisfied with support received.	✓		
Written assessment / Comments:				
<p><i>Both students and staff report on having received comprehensive support from the IRO and/or other responsible university staff and report to be satisfied with the support received, showing that the decentralised approach is working currently.</i></p> <p><i>Both students and staff consider themselves well informed on internationalisation activities and opportunities offered by the university. Here, students highlight SPU's standard practice in involving students, of which they are highly appreciative. Students also report on having shared their experience abroad with other students in an IaH format.</i></p> <p><i>Both students and staff were generally aware of internationalisation, its importance and benefits. Also, both groups consider increased internationalisation of their university to be highly desirable, especially increased opportunities for international exchange. Here, staff noted that using staff mobility for institutional learning could yet be improved by enhancing post-preparation and dissemination of information and knowledge gained abroad.</i></p> <p><i>Recognition of studies abroad (item 4) was not applicable in this case, since in the summer programme, in which the two students participated, no credits were awarded.</i></p>				
Recommendations:				
<p><i>European partners encourage SPU to review its approach to staff mobility and its exploitation in regard to utilising information and knowledge gained. Using staff mobility strategically for staff development and capacity building will greatly facilitate SPU's future development.</i></p>				



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