



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

The peer review meeting took place on **22.07.2020** from **11 am to 1 pm (CEST) / 12 noon to 2 pm (AST)**.

Reviewed Institution		
<i>KRG Partners</i>	<i>tick as appropriate (✓)</i>	<i>Represented in person of</i>
KISSR		
UOS		
SPU		
UOR	✓	Dr. Mofaq Khalid Ibrahim Mr. Araz Mohammed Ismail Mr. Saeed Rasul Hama Ms. Rania Ahmed Khdir Ms. Liza Ibrahim Abdulla Mr. Ari Murad Mohammed Dr. Jamal Ali Omer Dr. Salah Babakr Hussein
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>During the meeting, partners from UOR demonstrated in an impressive way which transformational results can be achieved in the course of 3 years with internationalisation having deeply penetrated the university's institutional setup and mind-set.</i></p> <p><i>In their reporting, KRG partners were able to give a detailed report on the management of the change processes and institutional reforms initiate in the framework of TIGRIS project, thereby not only demonstrating a sophisticated approach to planning and implementing institutional change but also the comprehensive nature and inclusiveness of the reform process rendering internationalisation at UOR a truly institution-wide process and proving that internationalisation has become an institutional priority.</i></p> <p><i>Hence, European 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. For implementation and monitoring of the strategy, UOR employs a dedicated committee involving all relevant stakeholders. Potential issues in regard to operationalising the monitoring of internationalisation, raised by partners from UOR themselves during the meeting, are not seen as critical by European partners, since awareness of potential shortcomings exists. In addition, the decision to appoint the head of the IRO to being a member of the University Council, the university's main deliberation and decision-making structure, is a proper step in the right direction.</i></p> <p><i>Partners from UOR demonstrated an appropriate and inclusive process for the continued development of the international strategy and related policies to be in place while also showing institutional arrangements for collaboration with the colleges for the implementation of internationalisation to be established and working, mostly employing the deans and dean's offices or, in other cases, the heads of departments. The planned introduction of dedicated staff at the colleges (liaison officers) will yet strengthen the collaboration of the central structures,</i></p>				

	<p><i>the colleges and their departments and facilitate the internationalisation of the institution even further.</i></p> <p><i>A framework for the recognition of studies abroad was found to be in place and working with partners from UOR demonstrating both the current procedures in place, which involve the Scientific Committee of the relevant department and the IRO representatives, as well as the past hurdles that had to be overcome in establishing recognition and related procedures. In this regard, it is worth noting that UOR managed to include elective courses in the revised (ECTS based) curricula, thereby enabling students to put in ECTS gained abroad. In the future, UOR will be tasked with continuously ensuring the proper operationalisation and implementation of said procedures.</i></p> <p><i>An institutional process for implementing the Bologna Process and related reform elements has started. Here, KRG partners were able to demonstrate the details of the reform process and stakeholders involved showing both the existence of relevant committees for coordination at the institutional level as well as the deployment of dedicated working groups at the college and departmental level involving both representatives of the relevant Scientific Committee and the Directorate of QA and Programs. Here, UOR again shows to have an elaborate setup in place providing the necessary preconditions for a proper implementation of the Bologna Process.</i></p>
	<p>Recommendations:</p>
	<p><i>None.</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>Generally, European partners find the IRO and its premises to be suitable for their purpose and sufficiently equipped with equipment purchased with TIGRIS funds marked accordingly. Furthermore, the organisational structure of the IRO as portrayed during the meeting is found adequate for the current state of internationalisation. However, from the reporting it is understood that the structure represents the latest iteration created after the TIGRIS trainings in March 2020, which has yet to be officially adopted by the University Council (decision delayed due to Covid-19 pandemic). Nevertheless, setting up regional or country desks within the revised organisational structure, thereby defining clear priorities for future cooperation, shows that a strategic approach to internationalisation has already manifested in the institutional mind-set and planning.</i></p> <p><i>Generally, the number of staff (6) allocated to the IRO is found to be appropriate for the current state of internationalisation. However, with two staff members currently on leave personnel capacities face temporary limitations placing a higher burden on remaining staff, especially its head. UOR should prevent staff numbers from dropping even further and generally should ensure that appropriate personnel resources are available at the IRO, especially if the university wants to operationalise above mentioned structure. In this regard, the planned introduction of the already trained liaison officers at the colleges is expected to bolster the available personnel capacities to engage in internationalisation, thereby alleviating some of straining effects caused by the limited number of staff currently working at the IRO.</i></p> <p><i>In line with other KRG partners, UOR reports on difficulties in recruiting additional staff 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, again, 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>Staff with English language proficiency is found to be available at the IRO. In this regard, for any new staff to be recruited respective language requirements should be set.</i></p>				
Recommendations:				
<p><i>European partners encourage UOR to follow through with plans to increase the number of staff available at the IRO in order to ensure that sufficient capacity is available to manage and promote internationalisation. In the future and with increasing levels of internationalisation, UOR might also be required to allocate addition staff to the IRO in order to accommodate for</i></p>				

increased workload and complexity. In addition, fully formalising the position for grants and scholarships is highly encouraged by European partners.

Having well-trained staff is important for every IRO, but especially for smaller ones. Hence, EU partners encourage UOR to invest in continuous staff development. For this, UOR should actively look for further training opportunities, of which some are available internationally, e.g. through participation in international staff weeks.

For the long term, European partners encourage UOR 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>During the meeting, partners from UOR demonstrated a clear definition and understanding of the IRO's core business and operations. In addition, staff was found to be well aware of their tasks and responsibilities, in this also showing a well-developing functional differentiation. Core services and tasks were found to be offered/performed by the local International Relations Office. Especially the management of mobility as well as services for grant applications & project support (consultation, funding advice, proposal writing) were portrayed in more detail and generally were found appropriate.</i></p> <p><i>Especially to note are the transparent and competitive nature of the selection process (via committee) as well as the comprehensive services provided to students going abroad, which next to administrative support also include intercultural aspects, a fact generally confirmed by students' report. European partners are very pleased to find UOR making active use of international experiences made by their students and staff, e.g. in form of IaH activities and other formats, which is a mandatory requirement for any student or staff of UOR going abroad. European partners could establish that international marketing aimed at recruiting international students and staff is currently not a priority at UOR, which is reasonable when looking at the current state of internationalisation. Despite that, European partners found promotion in English language targeting an international audience to be conducted via the university webpage and related social media channels in collaboration of the IRO and Media Department.</i></p>				
Recommendations:				
<p><i>Despite not being a requirement for now, developing dedicated capacities for intl. marketing should be part of the future development plans at UOR.</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		tick as appropriate (✓)		
#	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>).	✓		
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 to be well informed on internationalisation activities of their university and opportunities to engage in it. Relevant information are reportedly disseminated both via the university's webpage and by official notification to the colleges and department. During the meeting, staff highlighted the short communication lines at UOR, which facilitate the proper flow of information.</i></p> <p><i>Both students and staff report on having received comprehensive support by the IRO and are generally satisfied with services provided by the IRO and its staff. Students report that consulting and advice received also included intercultural aspects and highlight the easy accessibility and attainability of advice. However, one student expressed the desire to receive more information on the host institution including practical advice for daily life (e.g. renting accommodation). Although one would consider providing such information to be more of a responsibility of the host institution, UOR should actively use the knowledge and experience of students and staff that have gone abroad and, as part of post-preparation, collect this information (e.g. via a report or questionnaire) to be used for consultation in the future. This way, first-hand information is available that can remedy potential informational gaps without relying only on the host institution.</i></p> <p><i>In their report, students also confirm the open and competitive selection process in place at UOR. Where applicable, student reports that the studies abroad were recognised by the home university.</i></p> <p><i>In their reporting, staff provided additional information on the reforms taken on the institutional and departmental level and in the area of teaching methodology and curricular reform (ECTS, student-centred learning, assessment, etc.) confirming the comprehensive change process at UOR. They also report on being in the process of developing a joint BA and MA programme in English Studies, thereby showing that the English Department is pioneering internationalisation at UOR.</i></p> <p><i>Both students and staff show to be aware of internationalisation, its importance and benefits. Both groups express the wish for increased internationalisation of their university, especially an increase in the area of mobility and exchange opportunities. In the future, UOR will be tasked to satisfy this demand by building international relations and partnerships, thereby also increasing the currently limited number of students and staff going abroad. In regard to</i></p>				

	<p><i>mobility, staff reports on the heavy bureaucratic procedures in place for going abroad each time requiring a ministerial decree to be issued, which is perceived as an additional burden.</i></p>
	<p>Recommendations:</p>
	<p><i>The IRO should collect information from students and staff having returned from stays abroad and use this information for future consultation as well as for improving its own services. In addition, the IRO should follow-up with the partner institution in question in case certain information are found to be lacking.</i></p> <p><i>With the demand for more internationalisation clearly visible, especially opportunities for mobility and exchange, UOR should now see to translating its achievements in creating the necessary preconditions and capacities to successfully engage in internationalisation into tangible results by building partnerships and relations with international partners. As long as the current COVID-19 pandemic is impeding on international mobility, virtual exchange formats could be explored.</i></p> <p><i>With staff reporting on additional bureaucratic hurdles when engaging in international mobility, European partners encourage UOR to launch an initiative together with other KRG HEIs through the newly formed Network of Kurdish Internationalisation Practitioners lobbying with the ministry for a revision of existing regulations and reduction of said bureaucracy.</i></p>



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