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INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGIES  
ADVISORY SERVICE

# ISAS Review of Mykolas Romeris University's Internationalization Strategies FINALREPORT

International Association of Universities  
(IAU) October 2011

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**This is a confidential report for use by Mykolas Romeris University only. IAU will not publish, or make public any sections of this report, without the express consent of MRU. IAU believes that wide internal distribution and discussion of this report should be undertaken at MRU, in order to enable the university community to implement some of the outlined recommendations.**

## **Introduction**

### **Overall purpose of the ISAS review**

The overall aim of the ISAS review was to help Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) refine its internationalization policies and processes, support its future-orientated internationalization efforts and to help it achieve its stated aim of becoming more internationally active. MRU tasked IAU with examining and providing feedback on MRU's current and future internationalization policies and processes, so that the university can forge ahead with its internationalization agenda, in line with the plans articulated in *The 2010-2020 Strategic Activities Plan of Mykolas Romeris University*.

This report builds upon the findings of the *MRU Self-Assessment Report* that was produced in September 2011 (Appendix C), and provided to IAU Panel members in advance of their site visit. This report is also based on the analysis of the findings of a two and a half day site visit to MRU 10-14 by the IAU Expert Panel members. The Panel Members are listed on page 4 of this report.

### **Key areas of review**

The following four areas comprise the focus of investigations for the ISAS review, as detailed in the Guide to Self-Assessment provided to MRU to help the Working Group organize the Self-Assessment and the ensuing report:

- Policy, administrative structures, implementation, and monitoring of internationalization
- Student and staff mobility
- Internationalization of academic programmes, research and campus life
- Partnerships and cooperation , including joint and dual degree programs

The Working Group also undertook an analysis of the work accomplished to date and made suggestions for future action in the conclusion of the report. MRU also provided general background information on the university in the self-assessment report and made the University's strategic plan available to the panel.

## **Methodology**

### **Approach taken by MRU and IAU**

Throughout the assessment process, MRU and IAU worked in a collaborative and open manner. After the Memorandum of Understanding was signed, the project involved several distinct but interlinked activities:

- Selection of IAU Expert Panel members, with approval from MRU;
- Development of Self-Assessment guide by IAU;
- Formation of MRU Working Group to guide the process and draft the Self-Assessment Report;
- Initial site visit by IAU Expert Panel Chair;
- Self-Assessment process undertaken by MRU;
- Self-assessment report provided to IAU Expert Panel for analysis and initial feedback;
- Site visit by IAU Expert Panel;
- Final draft report prepared by IAU and the IAU Expert Panel, submitted to MRU for fact checking;
- Final IAU report submitted to MRU.

Further details on these activities are provided below:

#### **Panel members and their selection**

The Panel members were agreed upon by MRU and IAU. Each Panel member is an expert in the field of internationalization of higher education. The Panel represented a broad range of regional expertise, experience, and cultural backgrounds.

The Panel Members were:

- **Dr. Madeleine GREEN (Chair)**  
*Senior Fellow, International Association of Universities, former Vice President for International Initiatives, American Council on Education.*
- **Prof. Dr. Patricia POL**  
*Former vice president for international development at Université paris-Est and former Bologna expert, Policy advisor for European and international affairs, AERES,*
- **Prof. Dr. Lily KONG**  
*Vice-President (University and Global Relations), National University of Singapore and Acting Executive Vice-President (Academic Affairs), Yale-NUS College*

**Ross HUDSON**, IAU Programme Officer coordinated the project for the Association, working closely with several staff members from MRU and most particularly with **Giedre RACIENE**, Head International Relations Office, Communication and Marketing Centre.

### **Design of Self-Assessment instrument**

Following a period of detailed research, IAU developed a questionnaire to guide data gathering and preparation of the self-assessment report by institutions participating in ISAS. IAU encouraged MRU to use a broadly participatory and inclusive process to gather the information required for the development of the report.

For the Self-Assessment Guide, see Appendix B

### **MRU Working Group**

Following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between MRU and IAU, the university formed a working group to implement the review the process (Rectors Decree 15 December 2011 Nr. 11-118). The members of this working group were:

- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Giedrius Viliūnas**, Vice-Rector for Education (Chair)
- Prof. Dr. **Inga Žalėnienė**, Vice-Rector for Research (Vice-Chair)
- Dr. **Stasys Vaitkevičius** – Vice-Rector for Development and International Relations
- **Rugilė Jazbutytė**, IRO International Relations Manager
- **Roberta Burinskaitė**, MRU Students' representative
- **Audra Dargytė Burokienė**, International Exchange Unit Senior Academic Assistant
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Birutė Pitrénaitė**, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Politics and Management
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Jolanta Pivorienė**, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Social Policy
- **Gedrūtė Račienė**, Head of International Relations Office
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Irmantas Rotomskis**, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Economics and Finance Management
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Aelita Skaržauskienė**, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Social Informatics
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Lora Tamošiūnienė**, Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages, Institute of Humanities
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Regina Valutytė**, vice-dean, Faculty of Law

The first meeting of this working group took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

In addition, on 8 February 2011, *IAU Senior Fellow & Panel Chair* Dr. Madeleine GREEN undertook an initial site visit to the University to meet with the MRU Leadership and Working Group Members, and discuss expectations.

### **Mykolas Romeris University Self-Assessment**

MRU began self-assessment process in early 2011, led by the MRU Working Group. The Working Group divided up the self-assessment instrument and prepared each chapter in coordination with the Working Group chair and consultation with the Panel chair, as follows.

**1. Background - Chair, Vice-Chair, IRO**

**2. Policy, Administrative Structures, Implementation, and Monitoring of Internationalization - Birutė Pitrėnaitė**

**3. Student mobility - Audra D. Burokienė, Roberta Burinskaitė**

**4. Internationalization of academic programmes, research, and campus life - Regina Valutytė, Lora Tamošiūnienė**

**5. Partnerships and Cooperation - Jolanta Pivorienė, Aelita Skaržauskienė, Irmantas Rotomskis**

**6. Analysis and Recommendations - Chair, Vice-Chair, IRO**

The Working Group also conducted staff and student surveys to probe more deeply into specific areas and to expand the information provided in the Self-Assessment Report. (Appendix C includes the results of these surveys).

The IAU Panel chair, and IAU Programme Officer were provided with initial drafts of different sections of the Self-Assessment Report as they were produced. Feedback on these drafts was in turn provided to the Working Group. The IAU Panel Chair also conducted regular telephone meetings with Giedre RACIENE, *Head, International Relations Office* from March to October 2011 to advise the Working Group on the conduct of the self-assessment and the development of the report.

Once completed, the *Self-Assessment Report* was distributed within MRU and shared with the IAU Panel members in advance of the site visit, enabling them to ask questions for clarification or request additional data prior to the visit. MRU was very responsive in providing additional information and related documents in response to these requests.

The *Self-Assessment Report* was highly informative and helped to guide the Panel members' questions during the site visit. (Appendix D includes the *MRU Self-Assessment Report*, and the responses given to the additional questions asked by the IAU Panel Members).

### **IAU Expert Panel site visit**

The IAU Expert Panel site visit, took place from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2011. The visit programme consisted of approximately 14 one-hour meetings with a broad range of individuals from across MRU's campus community, including the Rector Prof. Dr. **Alvydas PUMPUTIS**, vice rectors, deans, department heads, teaching and administrative staff, students, and external stakeholders.

Some sessions began with a brief presentation by MRU; all included an open discussion and question and answer session between the MRU representatives and the IAU Expert Panel Members. The MRU representatives and students were open, honest, and engaged during discussions with the Panel members, which greatly increased the quality of the conversations.

The complete schedule of the site visit is included in Appendix E, and all of the MRU presentations are included in Appendix F of this report.

### **Findings and Observations**

Throughout visit, the dedication of MRU advancing its internationalization agenda was evident to members of the IAU Panel. IAU applauds MRU for its belief in the importance of internationalization as a means of enhancing quality and raising the profile of MRU, and notes the University's considerable successes to date. The Self-Assessment Report is an excellent document, and provides well-presented evidence about the current state of internationalization at MRU, and provides a sound basis for future action.

MRU's many strengths and accomplishments to date include the following:

- The tremendous commitment of leadership to integrating internationalization into every aspect of the university;
- The significant work on the part of teaching staff to intensify the international dimension of teaching and research;
- The commitment and effort of the MRU Working Group and others in accomplishing the Self-Assessment review, including conducting of surveys that required additional work and persistence;

- The thorough and extensive use of European tools, with special congratulations on MRU's recent success in obtaining funding as coordinating university in the Erasmus Mundus program. These activities indicate that MRU is also making a significant contribution to the development of the European HE area;
- The very high levels of satisfaction expressed by international students, and the wide range of opportunities offered to MRU national students to enable them to gain international experiences.

The Panel affirms that MRU has taken the right direction in its internationalization strategy and activities, including internationalization of studies, international students, research collaboration, and joint and dual degrees.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations take into account the concluding part of MRU's Self-Assessment Report that describes strengths and weaknesses in internationalization and outlines recommended future actions. The recommendations also attempt to address four questions posed to the Panel during the first session of the site visit by the Vice Rector for Academics who served as the Working Group chair. Prof. Viliūnas expressed the University's wish that the ISAS programme provide answers to the following questions:

1. Is the long-term vision of the University sustainable?
2. What of MRU is (and could be made) 'internationally marketable'?
3. What is the appropriateness and quality of current plans and instruments?
4. Any other suggestions how to develop a high-class university?

In attempting to be responsive to MRU's goals for the ISAS review, the Panel sought to address these questions in a variety of ways. The Panel notes, however, that in-depth answers to questions concerning which programs might be the most internationally marketable and other suggestions for improvement are beyond the scope of ISAS. An internal discussion, perhaps aided by disciplinary experts, will be needed to probe these questions more deeply.

#### **International marketability and profile**

At this point in the evolution of MRU's internationalization efforts, the Panel recommends that MRU be more targeted and selective in the areas that it wishes to emphasize and develop within its internationalization policies and activities. In the future, the most important selling point for MRU

nationally and internationally needs to be the University's quality and distinctiveness. Although internationalization can certainly contribute to raising MRU's quality and to enhancing its profile, a foundational step to building reputation is to have excellent programs. Excellence attracts international partners, who in turn, enhance the quality of MRU's teaching and research. Although the Panel cannot comment on the quality of specific academic programs, it notes that MRU's welcoming environment for international students and location in an attractive Eastern European city are points of distinction.

Every institution struggles with the question of what it means to be distinctive in its particular context. In discussions with stakeholders during the site visit, we found no clear consensus on MRU's distinctiveness. If MRU is to become better recognized in the region and world-wide, it is important that the MRU community have a thorough and shared understanding of the University's unique identity and its "selling points." Thus, the Panel recommends that the university undertake a series of discussions to develop a common vision of MRU's distinctiveness and points of excellence. A fuller and university-wide understanding of these dimensions will enable MRU to take a more targeted approach to internationalization.

### **University-wide internationalization strategy**

The Panel also suggests that MRU build on the interest generated about internationalization whilst undertaking the ISAS review with IAU, to develop MRU's specific strategic plan for internationalization. Many institutions find it important to take a dual approach to developing an internationalization strategy: one is to create a specific document outlining a university-wide internationalization strategy and the second is to have internationalization incorporated in the overall institutional plan, as is already the case at MRU. The university-wide internationalization strategy should spell out specific actions, timetables, costs associated with each action, responsible person, milestones to be achieved along the way, and metrics of success. The Panel recommends that MRU develop such a document. This new document, aligned with MRU's *2010 – 2020 Strategic Activities Plan*, will help the University further refine its internationalization activities and processes.

### **Joint and double degrees**

The Panel understands that joint and double degrees are an important instrument of internationalization in Europe today, and endorses their value. However, the goal of internationalizing all of the master's programs by 2020 seems premature and overly ambitious. We recommend that MRU select a limited number of study programs in each faculty that lend themselves by their content to being joint and/or double degree programs and that might be flagship programs for the University, and focus

on building and evaluating those selected as a basis for future action. MRU already has some interesting models underway—for example, the programs offered by the Law and Social Policy Faculties — that are providing the University with a good base of experience. The Panel suggests that the university now take the time now to distill the lessons learnt about developing such programs, and share good practices in a formal way within the institute, as well as seeking to learn as much as possible from others beyond the university.

### **Strategic choice of partners**

The choice of international partners is inevitably a combination of serendipity and strategy. The Panel suggests that MRU select a limited number of institutions with whom to deepen its relationship and develop them more fully as strategic partners. The approach the University has outlined to focus on institutions in the former Soviet bloc seems to be a potentially productive strategy. Another natural affiliation MRU has identified is Ireland and the United Kingdom, where there are currently large Lithuanian populations. Furthermore, in the future, given sufficient planning and targeted development, MRU could assume a role as a leader in providing English programs within the Erasmus context, thereby attracting more partners from Western Europe to send their students to Lithuania.

### **Research collaboration**

As in other areas, MRU's goals for the internationalization of research are very ambitious. The Panel suggests that MRU develop a plan for targeting a few high impact research collaborations, linking them to existing strengths, programs and research initiatives and connecting them to other internationalization activities such as student and faculty mobility and study programmes. The five interdisciplinary areas MRU identified should be part of an integrated strategy that includes various internationalization approaches (including, for example, exchanges, research collaboration, joint and dual degrees). As MRU reviews and refines the five areas, it is possible that they need to be modified to better align academic strengths with international initiatives.

### **Programs in foreign languages**

Although the international students were extremely pleased with their experience at MRU, they reported that they had few, if any, Lithuanian students in their classes. They perceived this as a loss in their educational experience, and we note that the separation of international students is a lost opportunity for MRU to make more effective and efficient use of the human resources it devotes to these classes. Offering a large number of courses in English with a very small number of students in each

does not seem to be sustainable financially. MRU needs to find a way to have more Lithuanian students take classes in English. This will require some incentives for Lithuanian students to choose to take some courses in English—perhaps some special certificate of English language studies or prestige associated with the program. MRU might want to consider having demonstrated second language proficiency become a requirement for the bachelor's and master's degree, which would provide an incentive to take courses in another language and would affirm the international nature of MRU. Prizes and awards for language accomplishments are another possibility.

### **International students**

As noted above, MRU does an excellent job with the international students it has. Its services are outstanding and students feel very well taken care of. The mentor system currently in place is extremely successful, and the Panel heard many positive reports from international students about this program. A greater mixing of Lithuanian and international students in and outside the classroom is highly desirable, and we recommend that the Erasmus students and other international students living in the dormitories be given the option of having Lithuanian roommates.

The target of a 10 percent international student population by 2020 is ambitious and if it is to be achieved, it will require a significant investment of resources in recruitment and infrastructure to support the international students. MRU should work out a budgetary plan for recruitment activities, the expansion of courses offered in English, and personnel to staff student services for international students. A vastly expanded international student service infrastructure will also require an individual at a senior level to oversee these efforts.

The strategy of having international students act as ambassadors and recruiters in their home countries seems to be a successful one. We recommend that MRU formalize this practice as a component of its international recruiting plan, which would require a modest investment of resources.

The Panel suggests that MRU continue to target the countries where the university has been successful to date, and decide on a limited number of countries on which to focus its efforts for the near future.

### **Outgoing student mobility**

The *MRU Self-Assessment Report* notes a goal of 380 outgoing students by 2020, and also a 5 percent annual increase specified by the National Higher Education Internationalization Support Program. The Panel recognizes that MRU has had considerable success in this area, and suggests that MRU develop a

cost-effective university-wide plan to ensure that these goals are met. The student survey revealed that students do not necessarily receive the information that MRU disseminates about the mobility options open to them. This challenge is certainly not unique to MRU. Whilst the Panel recognizes that MRU is already undertaking a number of initiatives, including the ‘bi-annual Erasmus information days’, the Panel suggests that MRU intensify its efforts to promote study abroad opportunities to its home students by undertaking workshops, promotional fairs, and enhanced advertising through social networking mediums.

The Panel notes that a large proportion of the master’s students hold jobs while they study, so that semester-long mobility is difficult for many. The Panel recommends, therefore, that MRU continue to develop short-term and virtual mobility opportunities for students who cannot spend a semester abroad. Furthermore, it recommends that MRU take advantage of its technological infrastructure to create joint virtual classes with international partner universities, bringing in lectures from professors abroad, and experimenting with virtual joint student projects with international partners.

Finally, the Panel suggests that MRU further emphasize the international opportunities available to students in its recruiting materials and as a point of institutional distinction.

### **Organizational structure**

There are many different models of organizational structure for internationalization among higher education institutions. There are advantages to both centralization and decentralization, and studies have shown that there is no one ‘best way’. This debate continues around the world. The Panel understands that the Vice Rector for Development and International Relations has responsibility for the external dimension of internationalization, and that the other vice rectors also have responsibility for internationalization in their domains. The Panel was impressed with the extent to which all the vice rectors see internationalization as a priority among their responsibilities. However, given the high level of activity and ambitious goals of the university, we recommend that one senior individual be responsible for the internal coordination of internationalization activities, including a leadership role in the development and implementation of a specific, university-wide internationalization plan, as detailed above.

### **Conclusions**

The IAU Panel would like to reiterate how impressed it was with the highly professional process MRU developed for the ISAS exercise, the quality of the self-assessment report, the professional and

committed attitude evident in all those the Panel met during the site visit. Their collaboration, enthusiasm and openness made this a very interesting and enjoyable experience for the Panel Members.

MRU is on the right track in seeing internationalization as central to its identity and progress and in taking vigorous steps to move ahead. The University is at a point in its evolution and its internationalization planning to benefit from a more targeted and strategic approach, including selecting a few priority activities, developing a specific plan for internationalization, and fostering greater internal coordination and collaboration. MRU has accumulated valuable experience and the timing is right to take some time to reflect on lessons learned and implications for future practice.