Ss. CYRIL AND METHODIUS UNIVERSITY IN SKOPJE

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STRATEGIC PLAN OF

Ss. CYRIL AND METHODIUS UNIVERSITY IN SKOPJE

2024 - 2029

2024

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje was established in 1949, making it the oldest and today the highest-ranking higher education institution in the country, which produces highly skilled personnel to meet the labor market needs, develops science and arts, promotes inclusion and greater international involvement, affirms and promotes relations of ethics, equality and freedom of thought within the University, thus influencing the processes in the Macedonian society.

As an institution of national importance, today the University has 23 Faculties, 5 Scientific Institutes, 4 Associate Member Public Scientific Institutions, 1 Associate Member that is another higher education institution and 7 Associate Members that are other organizations. At Cyril and Methodius University (UKIM), more than 28,400 students are currently studying in the first cycle, 1100 students in the second cycle, and 1071 students in the third cycle of studies. Currently, UKIM has a staff of 3,100 teaching and scientific and associate members, as well as administrative personnel. In the development of the University so far, about 134,600 highly qualified personnel, over 13,800 masters and specialists and about 4,000 doctors of science in all teaching and scientific fields have been produced.

The commitment to the teaching and scientific research activity, as well as the strengthening of social, intellectual, scientific, socioeconomic, artistic and cultural capacity of the country, and the improvement of University's international position and recognition is the basis for the development of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. Notably, the University's Strategic Plan was created by observing the main European development documents in the area of higher education and scientific research activity, such as: "European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe" (European Commission, April 2022), "Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education" (European Commission, June 2021), "Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe" (European Commission, November 2021), and "Universities without walls: A vision for 2030" (European University Association, 2021).

This Plan is a document that defines the strategic lines, areas and priorities in the University's scientific and research activities. In the process of defining and establishing its strategic lines and areas, a SWOT analysis was applied to map the key priorities and identify the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and limitations (threats) of the University. The priorities defined and the SWOT analysis are the basis for idntifying the University's strategic lines, which in turn present a solid ground to define University's Action Plans that contain action activities including implementers, budget and timelines indicated for the implementation thereof. The Strategy defines 5 main strategic areas and 3 process support areas, within which strategic activities for the realization thereof are determined. The strategic areas include:
- Teaching and Students;
- Science, Innovation and Arts;
- International Cooperation;
- Finance and Development;
- UKIM's Social Role and Position in Society;
- UKIM's Digitization and Preparation for Digital Transformation;
- Financial, Staff and Functional Autonomy;
- Administrative Staff Development Support.

The implementation of this Strategy will enable the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje to maintain its leading position in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia and to steadily improve its position at the international level.

VISION, MISSION, KEY VALUES AND STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

VISION

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje shall strengthen its leading position in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia and steadily improve its international level position.

MISSION

UKIM is the oldest and most renowned higher education and scientific research institution in the Republic of North Macedonia. As such, it is and will remain fully committed to building and strengthening the social, intellectual, scientific, socioeconomic, artistic and cultural capacity of the country, and also to the continuous improvement of the international position and recognition of both the University and the country in the world. UKIM is realizing this commitment through:

- Comprehensive offer and implementation of high-quality curricula at all levels of study and high quality instruction by full commitment to working with students in view of creating professional staff with applicable knowledge and skills, who will meet the needs of the economy and other needs of the wider community.
- Generation of new knowledge and creative results through a wide range of scientific research and creative endeavors, thus contributing to meeting the community's current and long-term needs.
- Creation of effective staff potential and capacities for raising the level of culture, art, sports, health, while nurturing true human values, folklore and traditions and overall weaving thereof into one accelerated process of social and economic development of the country and its international affirmation.
- Involvement in national, regional and international programs and initiatives, and cooperation with higher education and other related institutions from abroad.
- Emphasis on social responsibility, sustainability and green initiatives in University's curricula and research.

KEY VALUES

In its plans and performance of its own activity, the University strongly believes in the following key values:

- **Commitment**, as a reflection of our work ethics and aspiration to achieve the highest standards in our work and awareness of the role that each of us has in implementing the change we wish to see.
- **Integrity**, expressed through our commitment to the highest level of ethics in our personal and professional conduct, as well as full transparency and responsibility for our actions.
- **Collaboration,** expressed through collegiality, willingness to help, multidisciplinary approach and openness to cooperation with both internal and external entities.
- **Academic freedom** in expressing one's own views regarding social phenomena and processes.
- **Fairness, objectivity and openness** in relations with students, associates, colleagues and the community.
- **Equal opportunities for all** by respecting the principle of quality and commitment to excellence.
- **Creativity and innovation,** such as openness to new ideas, encouragement of intellectual curiosity and willingness to embrace risks, but also be adaptable to social, economic, cultural and other changes and needs.

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

The following 3 strategic principles guide the University's development of strategic areas or directions and shall also be the main principles of implementation thereof:
- Excellence.
- Impact.
- Inclusion.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis is an overview of the current situation in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (limitations) of the University and its environment, and it is used as a basis to define its strategic areas or strategic priorities, then three additional areas, and then its strategic goals and indicators, including its operational activities.

STRATEGIC AREA 1: TEACHING AND STUDENTS

STRENGTHS:

1. Oldest and most eminent university in the country, attractive and appealing to the best freshmen and students, and recognized and valued by the labor market;
2. Competent, quality and experienced teaching staff capable of disseminating the results of scientific research activities in the classroom;
3. Quality study programs in all three higher education cycles largely aligned with the programs of the world's best universities;
4. High level of coverage of teaching and scientific areas by the University Units;
5. Decent spatial and infrastructural conditions for teaching in the majority of University Units, with some need for modernization;
6. Strong links between teaching and research staff and the business sector, including other relevant public institutions and actors;
7. Quality students open to cooperation;
8. Relatively low cost of study compared to the competition in the country.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Insufficient interdisciplinary approach in the development of study programs among University Members, especially in the first cycle of studies;
2. Lack of regular and direct communication mechanisms with employers regarding the real labor market needs for concrete competencies when developing new study programs or updating existing ones;
3. Lack of regular evaluations by employers regarding the quality and type of competencies possessed by graduates as their employees;
4. Lack of systemic monitoring of the role and performance of each course individually in the creation of both general and specific competencies foreseen by the study program;
5. Insufficient offer of alternative forms of instruction, training, coaching and specialist studies that could be offered to the business sector;
6. Insufficient offer of complete study programs in English, which makes the University's international linking difficult;
7. Lack of distance learning modalities;
8. Insufficient application of quality control mechanisms and measures to improve the quality management system;
9. Above-average student dropout rate in the first year of studies and often a relatively longer-than-expected duration of studies;
10. Underdeveloped Career Centers of University Units with limited staff capacity for career counseling and professional guidance of students;

11. Non-existence of a functional alumni organization of the Units, i.e., at the University;
12. Several University Units without their own premises for the normal performance of their activities;
13. Insufficient share of sports in instruction and university life;
14. Uneven interest and enrollment of students in the different University Units.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Introducing efficient digital tools into the teaching process and improving the e-learning process;
2. Possibility of intensifying the cooperation with both the business community representatives (chambers, associations, employers' organizations, professional associations) and the public sector institutions' representatives in terms of adapting the study programs to current labor market needs and designing new professional and lifelong education programs;
3. Possibility to develop upskilling and retraining programs for the business sector needs, development of incubators, accelerators and implementation of joint projects;
4. Introduction of practical work (internship) into the first-cycle-of-studies' curricula as mandatory in the course of studying;
5. Expanding and deepening the official cooperation that the University and its Units have with a number of renowned foreign universities and colleges through specific mutual activities in the area of teaching (mobility of both teaching staff and students, engagement of more visiting professors in classes, including also the possibility of online involvement, development of joint study programs in English with a shared degree);
6. Creation of online study programs for the first, and especially for the second and third cycles of studies in English with the aim of attracting foreign students, as well as students from the RNM living abroad;
7. Providing a legal opportunity to complete higher education remotely for existing students who moved out of the country during their studies;
8. Developing alumni networks and career centers of both the Units and the University and realizing the opportunities of cooperation with their members;
9. Using the reputation of the University for its inclusion in the creation of policies, strategic documents and analyses regarding the development of higher education, and fair revision of its financing model;
10. Expanding the market by attracting students from surrounding countries, especially by introducing curricula in foreign languages.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. Unfavorable demographic trends and migration movements in the country and region that adversely affect the number of students;
2. Lack of a long-term national strategy for higher education development and inconsistency of higher education policies with legal changes, as well as inconsistent implementation thereof;
3. Lengthy, non-transparent and confusing processes of accreditation of new study programs and re-accreditation of existing or renewed ones by the Higher Education Accreditation and Evaluation Board within the Agency for Quality in Higher Education, including questionable interpretation of the Higher Education Law provisions;

4. Unclear and non-transparent criteria for higher education financing, with a declining trend of the share intended for funding the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University;
5. Limited autonomy hindering the planning of personnel, infrastructural and organizational development;
6. Limited opportunities for employment, i.e., renewal of teaching and administrative staff, accompanied by disincentive low salaries;
7. Limited possibilities of continuous modernization of the spatial, infrastructural, IT and technical conditions required for quality teaching;
8. Insufficient interest on the part of both the business sector and the state in utilizing the University's scientific, artistic and professional potential;
9. Increased and partly unfair competition that erodes higher education quality criteria;
10. Distant EU membership prospects are further reducing the University's competitiveness compared to universities in EU countries;
11. Change in young generations' habits and orientation towards shorter forms of education, online courses, etc.

STRATEGIC AREA 2: SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND ARTS

STRENGTHS:

1. A solid number of agreements and memoranda of understanding signed with the business community, public sector and international universities that can serve the purpose of increasing staff's scientific productivity and University's involvement in international projects;
2. Quality staff competent to make a significant scientific and research breakthrough under the guidance of a strictly defined strategy for the development of science, research and innovation at the University;
3. Continuous increase in the number of published scientific papers with the need to increase the share of papers published in journals referenced on the Web of Science and Scopus;
4. Continuous increase of the number of accepted international projects in which the University participates, including the need to increase the share of accepted projects whose project leader will be the University itself;
5. Financial support by the University for its Units' participation in the development of 30 scientific research projects annually, where the existing evaluation criteria, which include the mandatory publication of deliverables as scientific papers, can be advanced by a request for referencing thereof on the Web of Science and Scopus.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Too much focus of staff on teaching at the expense of scientific and research activities;
2. Modest scientific productivity of scientific research staff expressed through papers published in (impact factor) academic journals and conferences indexed in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, as well as insufficient citations;
3. Modest international presence of our staff in the editorial and scientific boards of renowned high-ranking (impact factor) scientific journals and conferences;
4. Negligible number of scientific journals published by University Units indexed in the Web of Science or Scopus;
5. Need for continuous improvement of staff capacities for writing successful scientific research projects and scientific papers in renowned scientific journals;
6. Limited opportunities for employment of research assistants or doctoral students during the implementation of international projects or doctoral studies;
7. Lack of systematic financial investments in more serious infrastructural and technical conditions at the University Units for the purpose of continuous improvement of scientific research activity and artistic activity;
8. Insufficient funding for scientific research, artistic and sports activities within the Units and a need to better focus the Units' scientific research effort towards interdisciplinary research and resolution of specific current societal issues;
9. Lack of a systematic approach to effectuating strategic partnerships with industry, state institutions and international partners in order to improve research, science and innovation opportunities;
10. A relatively small number of registered innovations, patents and trademarks as the final outcome of research activities by scientific research staff.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Improved use of opportunities to participate in scientific research and artistic projects financed by the EU, USAID, NATO, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, UNDP, WB and other international sources and funds;
2. Support for membership in European research infrastructure consortia, such as ERICs, and other research associations and alliances focused on specific scientific fields;
3. Using the possibilities of the new researchnet.mk web platform of the Center for Advanced Interdisciplinary Research (CeNIIs) to encourage concrete initiatives for joint research and publications with proven scientists and recognized professors from Macedonia who work at renowned universities around the world;
4. Using the University's reputation to initiate and create opportunities for development of research, analyses and strategies for the purposes of the state, chambers of commerce or the private sector;
5. Bestirring the representatives of the business community and the public sector regarding the benefit of their cooperation with the University through the transfer of knowledge and technologies, as well as the necessity of concrete support for science and research by awarding scholarships for doctoral and master's studies, cooperation and openness throughout the research of young researchers while they prepare their master's and doctoral theses;
6. Education, training and workshops to increase staff competencies for applying for projects from donor programs including: Horizon Europe, European Research Council, European Innovation Council, Maria Sklodowska-Curie Action, Erasmus+, EIT, COST , LIFE, IPA, NATO, UN, USAID, WB, and enhancing administrative support for such projects;
7. Encouraging applications for interdisciplinary projects in the EU programs oriented towards the advancement and transfer of technologies to industry, transfer of knowledge to society, development of innovations and support of entrepreneurial competences, as well as the establishment of hubs (digital, green and innovative), with the aim of transformation thereof into self-sustained University bodies;
8. Professional training and development, especially of young scientific research staff, including doctoral and master's students, by organizing a number of training events on successful writing of high-quality scientific papers, which will be conducted by chief and executive editors of renowned scientific magazines;
9. Targeting the Units' staff scientific engagement in specific (impact factor) scientific journals and conferences in the wider region and globally;
10. Provision of Shibboleth keys for institutional access to the indexing Web of Science and Scopus databases;
11. Creation of more motivating mechanisms to support the publication and printing of textbooks, monographs and scientific works by the University staff.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. Increased competition and pressure to publish in (impact factor) scientific journals globally, which increases the selectivity and rigor of editorial boards and international reviewers;
2. Negligible state financial support for scientific research and artistic activities, which is far below the average of European budget allocations for science;
3. Vaguely defined system of financing the teaching, scientific and artistic activity in higher education and disincentivizing low salaries;

4. Insufficient interest by the business sector in engaging the University's scientific, artistic and professional potential;
5. Limited in scope and often dysfunctional state system for plagiarism checks of students' scientific and professional papers, master's theses and doctoral dissertations, which must be applied;
6. University's limited access to relevant databases of scientific and professional papers due to non-fulfillment of the obligations as in the Higher Education Law, Article 189 paragraph 5, which provides for access to one papers database financed by the Budget of the R.N. Macedonia. Lack of access to the reference indexing databases Web of Science and Scopus, as well as to the reference database of complete scientific papers, Science Direct;
7. Insufficient alternative financing and scholarship opportunities for second and third cycle studies by the either state or the private sector;
8. Reduced interest in science or studying in the second and third cycle of studies due to insufficient and inadequate valorization of higher education degrees by employers and the labor market;
9. Limited opportunities for hiring staff with proven scientific and research qualities.

STRATEGIC AREA 3: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

STRENGTHS:

1. A large number of concluded bilateral and multilateral agreements for international cooperation at the University, with a steadily growing trend;
2. University Units have built long-term and successful collaboration with specific foreign universities that can be a solid ground for intensifying, deepening and expanding such collaboration in other areas as well;
3. Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje is a full-fledged member of the AcrossEU Alliance – an alliance of European universities established on the European Commission's initiative, where, in addition to our University, eight other universities are members. This Alliance is a form of strategic partnership between member universities, membership in additional 13 university networks and associations at the regional, European and global level; existence of an International Cooperation Office with the potential for capacity building and improvement;
4. A clear and shared vision of the University's staff and management that increasing international visibility and presence is a top priority for the University;
5. Increasing participation in international projects and initiatives in recent years.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Limited own funds for financing the international activities and initiatives of staff, students and Units;
2. A small number of teaching scientific or research staff with a degree in their education from renowned foreign universities that have strong connections with those researchers;
3. Insufficient international visibility of some of the Units due to non-functional English versions of their websites;
4. Insufficient international visibility of research staff due to failure to fulfill the obligation to open digital identifiers and profiles such as Orcid, Google Scholar, Citation Profile, Scopus Aithor ID, ResearchGate profile and Researcher ID that allow automatic tracking of their publications, linking them to the researcher, institution or site and creating metric reports;
5. Insufficient number of programs in English, which discourages the exchange of students and teaching staff in the role of visiting professors;
6. Insufficient activity and engagement in the utilization of already concluded agreements with foreign universities and institutions.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Creation of a new University Internationalization Strategy;
2. Enhanced use of opportunities offered by European programs such as Erasmus+, Maria Sklodowska-Curie Action or CEEPUS for financing staff mobility, structural reforms, the design of innovative study programs with dual or shared degrees;
3. Involvement in new forms of mobility of students and teaching staff that foresee the possibility of combined (physical and virtual) and completely virtual mobility;
4. Commencement of processes for University Units' international accreditation and encouraging study programs' internationalization;

5. The level of staff mobility, staff involvement in international research projects and the number of international scientific publications with foreign authors should be one of the key criteria for either Units' or University's internationalization;
6. Activating the already concluded agreements on cooperation with foreign renowned universities, including concrete annually defined forms and pace of regular students' and staff exchange;
7. Using the possibilities of the new researchnet.mk web platform to encourage specific initiatives for cooperation with proven scientists and recognized professors from Macedonia who work at renowned universities around the world;
8. Involvement in existing or initiation of new regional interdepartmental professional gatherings or symposia with the aim of improved networking of staff from the region and enhancing opportunities for involvement in joint research projects or publications;
9. Efficient implementation of the obligation to create digital identifiers for the entire teaching and scientific staff with mandatory opening of profiles on Orcid, Google Scholar Citation Profile, Scopus Author ID, ResearchGate profile and Researcher ID, which enable automatic tracking of their publications and linkage with the institution;
10. Encouraging and financing the participation of our students in renowned international competitions;
11. Launching an initiative to fully or partially exempt our students from the costs of participating in international scientific and professional conferences organized by our Units.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. Lack of a Strategy for Higher Education Internationalization at the national level;
2. Absence of more serious financial support from the state for higher education internationalization and support for international mobility and other initiatives;
3. Relatively small number of mobilities granted annually by the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility compared to the total number of students and teaching staff at the University;
4. Complex and lengthy procedures for nostrification of foreign diplomas of students interested in enrolling in study programs at our University;
5. Difficulties in the process of recognizing the exams passed by our students within the student mobility framework;
6. Insufficient state or university accommodation facilities for accepting international visiting professors and foreign exchange students;
7. Insufficient appeal of the region to attract and retain top scientists, professors or students from high-ranking foreign universities.

STRATEGIC AREA 4: FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

STRENGTHS:

1. Decent spatial and infrastructural teaching conditions in most of the Units, including the need for modernization thereof;
2. Relatively well-equipped libraries, reading rooms, teaching laboratories at University Units, as well as organized field practice in cooperation with business;
3. A successful model and concept of integration of Units within the University established, with the need to improve University autonomy in terms of its financing and development;
4. Existence of internal resources, knowledge and competences that could serve the purpose of internal processes' organizational restructuring;
5. University's references and established reputation that guarantee the provision of a high level of quality, knowledge transfer and modern growth with development;
6. A budget that is largely based on University Units' self-financing revenues;
7. Own property (both movable and immovable) that allows the allocation of resources for development;
8. Relatively well-equipped dormitories for postgraduate students, foreign exchange students and visiting university professors.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Several of University Units without their own spatial conditions for normal performance of their activities;
2. Bureaucratically burdened double recording of students' achievement and progress during studies (both electronically in the i-Know system and in paper form, such as using student ID documents, exam applications, signatures, payment slips, etc.);
3. The i-Know information system, the development of which should be intensified and rounded off in order to enable a better user experience and a higher level of satisfaction regarding the numerous users' needs;
4. A large number of processes that need to be mapped, standardized and digitized according to international ISO standards;
5. Limited financial possibilities for continuous modernization of spatial, infrastructural, IT and technical conditions for quality instruction, and Units' high financial dependence on budget transfers;
6. Student dormitories that require complete reconstruction in order to provide adequate accommodation facilities for the reception of international visiting professors and students.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Introducing efficient digital tools in the teaching process and improving the e-learning process;
2. Digital transformation and standardization of University processes and activities and quality management;
3. Activities to take over, complete and put into operation the sports gym at the University campus;

4. Ensuring energy independence and financial benefits to University Units through public-private partnerships for photovoltaic installations;
5. Provision of funds from the Ministry of Education and Science for the completion of the faculty buildings for the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering and the Faculty of Physical Education, Sports and Health and their commissioning at the University;
6. Provision of necessary investments from the Ministry of Education and Science, including additional funds from various donors, programs and sponsorships for the purpose of adaptation, extension and modernization of the conditions for study and work at University Units;
7. Possibility to intensify cooperation with business community representatives (chambers, associations, employers' organizations, professional associations) and public sector institutions' representatives in terms of preparation and application of joint projects to international donors;
8. Using the University's reputation for a fair revision of the higher education financing model and regaining University's rightful place in society as a result of its decades-long pivotal role in setting the scientific, cultural, artistic and economic foundations of this country;
9. Digitization and modernization of University Units' libraries, reading rooms and teaching laboratories.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. Small market for professional literature and lack of interest by the state in protecting authors' copyright;
2. Unclear and non-transparent criteria for higher education financing, with a declining trend of the share intended for funding the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University;
3. Insufficient commitment by competent state institutions to establish, recognize and finance the real cost per student/student place;
4. Unpredictable funds from self-financing sources that are under the control of the state treasury system;
5. Lack of a marketing strategy for professional literature publishing activity that would allow publishers to undertake the financial and technical aspects of publishing;
6. Limited financial autonomy, which hinders the planning of personnel, infrastructural and organizational development.

STRATEGIC AREA 5: UNIVERSITY'S SOCIAL ROLE AND POSITION IN SOCIETY

STRENGTHS:

1. Existence of internal resources, knowledge and competences that could serve the purpose of business, community and society development;
2. Strong individual ties between teaching and research staff and business, and other relevant social institutions and actors;
3. A solid number of agreements and memoranda of understanding signed with the business community, public sector and international universities that can be used to undertake initiatives with a strategic impact on the development of business, community and society.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Insufficient presence in the wider community and slow response to the labor market needs;
2. Lack of planned and system-oriented engagement of academia in society;
3. Absence of regular and direct communication mechanisms with employers;
4. Lack of systemic monitoring of the role, successfulness and impact of each study program in the creation of expected changes in both the labor market and society.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Definition of specific initiatives to engage academia in different sectors of business and society;
2. Systematic encouragement of various socially responsible initiatives in teaching and science;
3. Taking advantage of the reputation of the University for its involvement in the creation of policies, strategic documents and analyses for the development of society and business opportunities.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. UKIM is insufficiently active in the field of social change;
2. Insufficient interest on the part of both the business sector and the state in utilizing the University's scientific, artistic and professional potential;
3. Insufficiently recognized as a significant social driver and holder of new progressive ideas and initiatives.

PROCESS SUPPORT STRATEGIC AREA 6: UKIM'S DIGITIZATION AND PREPARATION FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

STRENGTHS:

1. Existence of a University Computer Center that maintains the computer network and provides internet support for the Units;
2. Existence of an integrated and functional information system for students (iKnow) which enables electronic entry, storage and processing of data related to students and teaching;
3. Part of the services have been transferred to a cloud on the Microsoft Office 365 platform, and an electronic teaching support system (iLearn) has been introduced and put into operation, which enables better cooperation and communication between students and teaching staff and administrative services, as well as greater flexibility and scalability of IT resources;
4. University's stable Internet connection, which is a prerequisite for supporting University's online teaching, research and administrative activities. Some of the University Units have already digitized their work processes;
5. Solutions such as repository.ukim.mk and journals.ukim.mk created, which enable centralized storage and access to scientific and research publications, thus increasing the visibility and availability of the University's intellectual capital;
6. The existing computer infrastructure is an opportunity for digital connection with entities outside the University ecosystem with the aim of reducing paper documents circulation and easily transitioning to e-society.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Lack of a Digitization Strategy and Action Plan;
2. Insufficient IT support at UKIM level, which limits the University's efficiency in introducing and maintaining modern technological solutions;
3. Insufficient IT staff in the Units;
4. Lack of effective communication between the Units and University, resulting in unsuccessful coordination of IT initiatives and resource utilization;
5. High dependence on technical faculties for integrated services, which leads to unevenly developed IT infrastructure across the University and slow digitization development;
6. An underdeveloped University Computer Center as a separate organizational unit within UKIM with an adequate organizational structure, formally defined powers and expediently supported by staffing and material resources that would maintain a uniform policy of development and implementation of IT solutions for all University stakeholders;
7. Slow process of introducing new technologies and insufficient use of already developed IT solutions;
8. Low level of digitization of administrative processes;
9. Limited deployment of eduroam access that restricts access to the Internet for domestic and international students and staff at various University locations;
10. Incomplete digitized work with students that makes it difficult to exchange information and communicate with students.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Access to international programs and projects for the implementation of digital transformation;
2. Full transfer of information-based services to a cloud, which would enable greater scalability, flexibility and efficiency in the management of IT resources;
3. Implementation of ready-made solutions for the digitalization of administrative processes;
4. Introduction of digital signatures;
5. Migration to known and tested platforms that offer services on a subscription basis;
6. Optimization of work processes before their digitization, which would ensure that digital systems are introduced into already efficient and well-structured processes;
7. National platform (maintained by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration).

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. The increase in the prices of cloud services may limit the University's ability to invest in other important digitization aspects.
2. Great dependence on the relevant Ministry and the Government in providing funds and qualified personnel for the implementation of digitization;
3. Reduction of University's revenues;
4. Absence of legal prerequisites for full digitization of processes.

PROCESS SUPPORT STRATEGIC AREA 7: FINANCIAL, STAFF AND FUNCTIONAL AUTONOMY

STRENGTHS:

1. Long-term experience in financial management, staff policy and administrative procedures;
2. Reputation established as the oldest and most eminent university, which has produced the largest number of personnel in high government and business positions, with a potentially large alumni network;
3. Initial steps made to a greater integration of University Units;
4. High availability of own resources that could be used to implement crucial reforms in terms of internal organization and operation.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Insufficient activity in terms of securing independent revenues;
2. Absence of a realistic and up-to-date study cost calculation;
3. Big discrepancies among University Units in terms of funds available for their operation;
4. Insufficient coordination and cooperation between Units, great individuality and absence of a sense of responsibility for the University's results;
5. Complex and inflexible decision-making mechanisms for applying and implementing activities that can contribute to securing additional revenues;
6. A long-term process of developing new teaching staff, with an uncertain outcome, which deters potential candidates;
7. Absence of a written Action Plan for recruitment of best students;
8. Inadequate model for budget planning by revenues and expenditures, as per items in line with plans.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Revision and reformation of internal mechanisms, functional setup and decision-making processes;
2. Standardization, digitization of administrative operation processes and reframing thereof through the quality policy lenses;
3. Making financial savings through greater energy efficiency of buildings, installations and equipment;
4. Retaining the best quality students to be hired as teaching staff through various incentive forms;
5. Implementation of activities aimed at securing own income, particularly through the cooperation with the business sector and partner relations with both companies and institutions from the country and abroad.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. Legal and institutional limitations in the processes of financial planning, staff renewal and optimal staff selection;

2. Impossibility of establishing a budget planning model by revenues and expenditures, as per items in line with plans, due to University's inadequate financial autonomy resulting from government restrictions;
3. Frequent attempts by state authorities to interfere in the University's autonomy in order to meet their ongoing needs;
4. Room for selection of new teaching staff limited by the available offer of postgraduates and doctoral students;
5. Disregard of the provisions arising from the Higher Education Law on the part of the state regarding the financing and support of higher education and science;
6. Instability in state funding and unstrict criteria for the allocation of funds to individual universities.

PROCESS SUPPORT STRATEGIC AREA 8: ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

STRENGTHS:

1. Loyal employees with many years of experience and high development potential;
2. Decent working conditions;
3. Existence of internal resources, experience, knowledge and competence that could serve the purpose of developing the administrative staff competencies.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Insufficient number of employees regarding the University's development needs;
2. Lack of a professional plan for the development of employees and their competencies;
3. Absence of a system for regular employee performance evaluations with regular and constructive feedback sessions;
4. Insufficient career advancement opportunities for administrative staff, burdened with rigid bureaucratic procedures;
5. Insufficiently optimized administrative processes;
6. Insufficient mutual communication and cooperation between various University Departments and Units regarding specific joint initiatives for processes or operational efficiency improvement.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Creation of a mid-term plan for administrative staff recruitment and competencies development;
2. Annual programs for regular education, training events and workshops to enhance staff competencies and motivation;
3. Possibility of financing staff competencies development programs through University's participation in various international projects;
4. Introducing efficient digital tools to improve work processes efficiency;
5. Professional mapping of administrative processes and standardization thereof.

THREATS (LIMITATIONS):

1. Limited autonomy, which hinders the planning of staff development;
2. Limited opportunities for administrative staff recruitment or renewal, accompanied by rigid bureaucratic employment procedures;
3. Insufficiently motivating wages.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje strives to maintain its good reputation and leadership position in the field of higher education in the country, and also to improve its position in the overall international education system. For this purpose, the University has defined 5 main strategic areas and 3 process support areas, within which strategic activities have been determined for the implementation thereof.

UKIM is the oldest and highest-ranked higher education institution in the country, which produces highly professional staff to meet the labor market needs, develops both science and arts, promotes inclusion and greater international involvement, affirms and promotes relations of ethics, equality and freedom of thought within the University and with its influence affects the processes in Macedonian society. Therefore, the University's overall work in the 2024-2029 period will be focused on the development of the following main strategic areas:

STRATEGIC AREA 1: TEACHING AND STUDENTS
(Responsible entities: Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Teaching Department)

The main goal of the University is to continue striving for high-quality education translated into study programs where students are the main focus and which are compatible with the programs of the most renowned universities in the world according to international rankings. For this purpose, in addition to the mandatory national accreditation, international accreditation of its study programs and Units themselves will be initiated. We wish to remain attractive to the most ambitious students in the country, and also to become attractive to students from the region. The University will continue to nurture its tradition of open doors to all students regardless of their gender, ethnic or national origin, age, religion... Student diversity and inclusion remains our highest imperative.

In order for our study programs to meet the development needs of society and the economy, the cooperation with the economy, business community and chambers of commerce will be intensified through their participation in the design of study programs and assistance in the employment of graduates.

The quality of teaching at the University will continue to be based on good organization, high professionalism of teaching and associate staff, and a high level of mindfulness and ethics in our cooperation with students and process of their assessment. This requires continuous investment in the pedagogical, methodological and didactic competences of both professors and associates, as well as greater internationalization of teaching through the establishment of joint interdisciplinary study programs with other universities, and mobility of students and staff. We will encourage a culture of innovation and experimentation in teaching and learning, strengthen creative and critical thinking among students, encourage the use of digital tools and integrate online formats into traditional teaching. This implies mindful maintenance of our existing facilities and continuous modernization and investment in new teaching aids.

Our aim is to provide education that creates 21st century skills and competences that would enable students to gain international employability, entrepreneurial culture, ability to quickly change and adapt to the needs of digital society.

Finally, in order to retain a strong relationship with its graduates and remain their "first" choice later in the course of their professional development, the University will create a number of lifelong learning programs that will be brought closer and offered to them via the University Units' alumni associations whose revival will be the next focus of the University.

Strategic objective 1.1. Enhance the attractiveness of studies and increase the number of students

Strategic activity 1.1.1 **Modernize study programs and offer new interdisciplinary curricula**: Update existing study programs to ensure that they reflect the latest developments in the relevant field, where an interdisciplinary approach shall be included in collaboration with renowned foreign universities to meet the changing labor market needs. Cooperation with business in the design of study programs and internship implementation. Offer alternative trainings targeted at specific needs of the economy and certain groups of users, lifelong (continuous) learning.

Possible indicators: Number of new study programs; Number of updated study programs; Trainings offered and held to external users; Number of training participants.

Strategic activity 1.1.2: **Initiate processes for University Units' international accreditation**: Initiation of processes for international accreditation of University Units is a logical step that will enable an international independent evaluation of the quality of study programs, encourage teaching and methodological innovations, and ensure systematic monitoring of the quality of their implementation. The University Units' international accreditations will be an additional guarantee for the quality, compatibility and international attractiveness of study programs.

Possible indicators: Number of study program international accreditation processes initiated and completed; Progress achieved in the processes initiated.

Strategic activity 1.1.3: **Programs for the development of teaching and associate staff**: Conduct continuous professional development training for teaching staff to improve their teaching skills, pedagogical approaches and knowledge in their respective areas of expertise. This may include workshops, seminars and exchanges with other institutions, while focusing on innovative learning methods and online teaching techniques.

Possible indicators: Number of trainings held for the teaching and associate staff; Number of training participants.

Strategic activity 1.1.4: **Policy and long-term plan for employment of teaching-scientific and associate staff**: Examine and use all possibilities to ensure a continuous inflow of new and quality teaching-scientific and associate staff, while taking a strategic approach to this issue. Special attention shall be paid to the recruitment of best students in classes, particularly those with an affinity for teaching and scientific work.

Possible indicators: Number of newly employed University teachers and associates; Net annual inflow of new teaching staff.

Strategic activity 1.1.5: **Increase application of new technologies in teaching**: Introduce learning management systems, online collaboration tools and digital resources, as well as training for both students and staff to use these technologies effectively.

Possible indicators: New tools and technologies introduced in teaching; Trainings held on using new technologies in teaching.

Strategic objective 1.2. Improve student achievement and support students

Strategic activity 1.2.1: **Develop a comprehensive system for academic and career counseling of students**: An academic and career counseling system that will provide students with personalized guidance throughout their studies, from orientation to graduation by reinforcing the activities of the UKIM Career Center operationalized through the University Units' Career Centers. This system should help students to move more easily through their studies and assist them in their career planning.

Possible indicators: A system of academic and career counseling developed; A certain level of system development reached.

Strategic activity 1.2.2: **Enhance extracurricular activities and opportunities for students**: Increase opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities and programs for leadership development and socially responsible activities. Support students in various fields through involvement in projects, participation in competitions, development of university sports, creation of clubs and organizations, community cooperation projects, support for networking of student organizations internationally.

Possible indicators: Number of participations of our students in competitions and trainings; Clubs and organizations created; Community cooperation projects, etc.

STRATEGIC AREA 2: SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND ARTS
(Responsible entities: Vice-Chancellor for Science, Science Department)

The University strongly supports science and arts for the purpose of development of society and national economy, that is, it encourages research, innovation and scientific research activities focusing on finding solutions to social challenges. To that end, the University will use its reputation to initiate and create opportunities for development of research papers, analysis and strategies meeting the needs of the state, chambers of commerce and the private sector.

Also, the University strongly encourages science and arts without borders, i.e., it will fully engage in deepening its cooperation with international universities, alliances and university associations, thus encouraging the involvement of its scientific and research staff in international projects and editorial and scientific boards.

The University, in cooperation with its Units, will focus in a more targeted fashion on improving and motivating scientific productivity of its scientific research staff by publishing their scientific research outcomes in impact factor publications indexed on Web of Science and Scopus.

In this sense, the University will continuously provide opportunities for education, training and workshops in order to enhance its staff competencies for applying for international scientific research projects as an opportunity for networking in international research teams and greater scientific productivity, improved administrative support and successful writing of high quality scientific papers. Doctoral studies and the introduction of postdoctoral research are only some of the possibilities for deepening the cooperation between University Units, as well as increasing the interdisciplinarity of their study programs.

In order to be a recognized and established academic institution in Europe, the University is attentively following the relevant international rankings of higher education institutions in the world via the services such as QS, THE, Scimago, Webometrics, ARWU, and together with its Units, it will take concrete steps for more significant improvement of their own ranking.

Strategic objective 2.1. Encourage excellence and innovation in scientific and artistic work

Strategic activity 2.1.1: **Encourage excellence in scientific and artistic outputs**: Upgrade the environment that shall support and encourage excellence of scientific and artistic work outputs of University's scientific-research and artistic staff by supporting excellence in order to achieve higher research results, with a steady increase in the number of publications referenced on the Web of Science and Scopus, while ensuring scientific ethics and encouraging increased utilization of international donor program opportunities.

Possible indicators: A continuous result monitoring system; A result measurability system; Improved result evaluation metrics, etc.

Strategic activity 2.1.2: **Improve research infrastructure**: Progressive investment in state-of-the-art laboratories, research facilities and technological tools to support cutting-edge research and access to databases and journals. This includes upgrade of existing facilities and procurement of new equipment and software to facilitate advanced research in various scientific disciplines. Provide systematic technological support for research results and publications through the institutional repository and data archives.

Possible indicators: Laboratories opened, equipped and renovated (descriptively); Technological tools, research equipment and software procured and introduced; Access to new journals and data bases realized, expressed as values – investments in individual items and total investments, etc.

Strategic activity 2.1.3: **Enhance financing of scientific and artistic activities**: Systematic commitment to establishing national funds and finding international funds to support the scientific, development, innovation and artistic activities implemented at the University Units. Maintain and upgrade the institutional system for support of University's scientific and artistic activities. Develop a system for identifying potentials and supporting knowledge transfer, technology transfer, innovation and creativity.

Possible indicators: Forms of support for the institutional system; A system for identifying potentials, etc.

Strategic activity 2.1.4: **Encourage interdisciplinary research and support open science**: Develop policies and procedures to promote and support interdisciplinary science and arts research as interdisciplinary research projects with the involvement of researchers from different areas and University Units in order to address complex societal challenges. Active involvement in international open access initiatives through the development of instruments to support open science, open data access, and open scientific and research infrastructure.

Possible indicators: Policies and procedures developed; Number of interdisciplinary projects initiated and implemented; Science initiatives opened, etc.

Strategic activity 2.1.5: **Enhance innovation potentials**: Strengthen cooperation with both the private and public sector and develop strategic partnerships to improve the potential for innovation, technology transfer, knowledge transfer and creativity. The cooperation includes several forms of transfer, such as the development of training programs, lifelong learning modules, joint research projects, etc. Enhance the potential for innovation by intensifying entrepreneurial education, creating centers of excellence, hubs to encourage inventiveness and creativity, support innovation and accelerate the commercialization of university research in various scientific fields. Develop procedures for identifying scientific results with innovative potential, technological readiness level, support for commercialization processes, spin-off companies, encourage startups, as well as protect proprietary rights.

Possible indicators: Collaborations with the public and private sector realized (contracts concluded, joint projects, number of lifelong learning modules); Centers of excellence, innovation and knowledge transfer hubs opened; Number of spin-off companies; Number of startups; Procedures developed, etc.

Strategic activity 2.1.6: **Support artistic, cultural and other creative outputs**: Support for art faculties and academies, identify spaces for exhibition and performance of works, support for appearances at festivals, exhibitions and events, support for the internationalization of results in the field of art and culture, digitization thereof, etc.

Possible indicators: Performances and exhibitions realized, including other forms of support implemented.

Strategic objective 2.2. Improve internationalization by contributing to scientific challenges

Strategic activity 2.2.1: **Focus on priority research areas**: Develop a system for identification of and focus on priority research areas where the University has the potential to make a significant contribution to addressing both national and global challenges, such as the EU Green Deal, UN Sustainable Development Goals, Smart Specialization, artificial intelligence, green transition and digital transformation. The model developed could include programs to allocate resources, including funding, in order to achieve excellence and recognition in these areas.

Possible indicators: Support system developed; Amount of funds approved; Strategic determination policies, etc.

Strategic activity 2.2.2: **Extend international research collaborations in science and arts**: Improve the University's international engagement by establishing partnerships with leading international universities, research institutes and organizations, university associations, alliances and art academies. Affirm the Center for Advanced Interdisciplinary Research (CeNIIs) for the purpose of Macedonian scientific diaspora networking and massification by involving internationally renowned researchers who will be affiliated to the University. This activity may include joint scientific research projects, joint scientific publications, exchange programs for researchers and students, and participation in international scientific congresses and conferences and art festivals.

Possible indicators: Contracts and partnerships concluded; Projects implemented; Number of researcher exchanges realized; Number of international researchers networked with the Center, etc.

Strategic activity 2.2.3: **Promote the results of scientific research and arts**: Develop a plan for maximizing the impact of Units' scientific research results in order to improve the University visibility by promoting research results and tracking thereof, including analyses. Upgrade the University portal for the purpose of digitizing University's own scientific journals. Support both scientific and artistic staff in the communication promotion of the results of their work through instruments for the popularization of science and arts before the general public (Science Communication, Science Diplomacy, Citizen Science), as well as active use of social media and digital platforms for the dissemination of scientific achievements to the wider national and international communities.

Possible indicators: Plan developed; Number of own scientific journals digitized; Number of participations in public events; Number of popular publications, etc.

Strategic objective 2.3: Raise international rating through scientific research

Strategic activity 2.3.1: **Detect challenges in international university rankings**: Analyze the principles used in the most important international university rankings, consider the University's weaknesses in terms of scope of University's scientific and other results and make recommendations for greater visibility by full coverage of these results in any future rankings, as well as detect other areas for improvement.

Possible indicators: Analysis carried out; recommendations given; Improvements in the visibility of scientists internationally, etc.

Strategic activity 2.3.2: **Improve academic staff research competencies**: Training and encouragement to apply for projects from EU programs such as: Horizon Europe, European Research Council, European Innovation Council, EIT, Maria Sklodowska-Curie Action, Erasmus+, COST, LIFE, IPA, CEEPUS, other donor programs including: NATO, UNDP, WB, SECO, as well as strengthen administrative support for them through the organization of a Project Office and other support forms and initiatives.

Possible indicators: Number of trainings organized; Number of training participants; Number of registered and accepted projects, etc.

Strategic activity 2.3.3: **Support the excellence of academic staff's scientific research results**: Develop instruments to encourage scientific research and artistic work by University Units through supporting the staff to participate in relevant scientific conferences abroad, referenced on the Web of Science and Scopus, stimulate the publication of papers in journals with an impact factor indexed in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, distribute information on the possibilities of publication and participation in conferences by area, encourage participation in editorial boards of foreign scientific journals, strengthen the criteria for doctoral students as the most productive scientific research force in terms of the publication of research results in renowned scientific journals indexed on WOS, Scopus, etc.

Possible indicators: Number of papers published in renowned impact factor journals; Information shared on publication opportunities and conferences; Participation of UKIM staff in editorial boards of journals and conferences; Total amount of support provided, etc.

Strategic activity 2.3.4: **Improve the mechanisms for evaluating academic staff research results**: Harmonize the indicators for evaluation of research results achieved in science among scientific research staff, as well as the results in the fields of arts, as per the research excellence requirements at the international level, in line with the goal of raising University's international rating.

Possible indicators: A mechanism with scientific research excellence monitoring metrics; A mechanism for result monitoring, etc.

STRATEGIC AREA 3: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
(Responsible entities: Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation, International Cooperation Department)

Increasing the visibility of the University through the promotion of international presence and activities of its Units is one of the main University's priorities in the next several years.

The creation of a new University Internationalization Strategy is a goal of great significance for the future of the University, the directions of its development and reforms that should follow in terms of:

(1) Activating the already concluded agreements on cooperation with foreign renowned universities, including concrete annually defined plans of activities,

(2) Networking and joining European university alliances and associations, and involvement in international cooperation initiatives, and

(3) Starting processes for international accreditation of University Units and encouraging study program internationalization, multiplying the mobility of staff and the level of their involvement in international projects and programs such as Erasmus+ or Horizon Europe.

Strategic objective 3.1. Improve international mobility for students and employees

Strategic activity 3.1.1: **Increase participation in international exchange programs**: Stimulate Units to create and actively participate in international exchange programs, such as CEEPUS, COST, MSCA and the other, complemented by study program internationalization through the introduction of dual or shared degree programs.

Possible indicators: Participation by teaching staff and students in exchange programs achieved.

Strategic activity 3.1.2: **Strengthen existing and introduce new services to support international students and scholars**: Establish a protocol and mechanisms for comprehensive support services to international students and visiting scholars, including orientation programs, language support, visa and housing assistance, as well as cultural integration activities. These services can enhance the international students and scholars' experience and contribute to the increase thereof.

Possible indicators: A protocol established and support mechanisms introduced (descriptively).

Strategic activity 3.1.3: **Develop a global alumni network**: Develop a global alumni network in order to develop relations with graduates living and working abroad. These networks can support international collaboration, provide internship/mentoring opportunities for current students and enhance the University's global reputation and reach.

Possible indicators: Level of alumni network development reached (initiation, establishment, number of members).

Strategic objective 3.2. Extend and strengthen international partnerships

Strategic activity 3.2.1: **A series of activities related to participation in the AcrossEU Alliance**: In line with the Alliance's commitments, establish intensive cooperation with partner universities that are members of this Alliance, in the field of exchange of experiences and good practices, mobility of students and teaching and research staff, development of joint study programs, preparation of project proposals for the calls announced by the European Union, deepening the cultural exchange and dissemination of European values.

Possible indicators: Number of participations in events organized by the Alliance; Number of mobilities realized between Alliance Members; Number of joint project applications and joint study programs accredited.

Strategic activity 3.2.2: **Establish new strategic international partnerships**: Identify 4-5 universities, research institutions and organizations worldwide that are aligned with the University's academic and research priorities and with which strategic relations can be established. The focus shall be on establishing long-term partnerships that offer mutual benefit, such as joint research projects, staff and student exchanges, and dual degree programs.

Possible indicators: Number of strategic partnerships established and joint activities realized as a result of agreements.

Strategic activity 3.2.3: **Increase presence in international networks and consortia**: Intensify the activities within university associations where we are members, as well as join new associations that we consider to be of interest for the achievement of our strategic objectives. Develop metrics to monitor and evaluate our activities and contribution to international networks and consortia relevant to the University's areas of expertise. This involvement can improve the University's global visibility, provide access to international funding opportunities and facilitate joint research and educational initiatives.

Possible indicators: Participation achieved in international networks; Projects implemented within such networks and consortia; A total of 18 financial inflows realized for UKIM based on joint projects.

Strategic activity 3.2.3: **Host international conferences and symposia**: Stimulate UKIM and its Units to organize and host international academic conferences, workshops and symposia that gather scientists, researchers and practitioners from around the world. These events can serve as a platform for knowledge exchange, networking and showcasing the University's research and education strengths.

Possible indicators: International academic events organized by the University and its Units on an annual level; Number of participants.

STRATEGIC AREA 4: FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT
(Responsible entities: Vice-Chancellor for Finance, Finance Department)

The allocation of funds from the budget to finance higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia is insufficient. The state mainly covers the costs of part of the salaries, salary contributions and overhead costs with its budget funds.

Revenues generated from tuition fees determined more than a decade ago, are far below the market price of the cost of studying, and are therefore insufficient even to cover the operation material costs. Other sources of higher education financing, such as commercial services, training, analyses or studies are irregular and have a negligible share in total revenues. Some of the Units participate in international projects, but most often these funds have a specific purpose strictly defined in line with the budget and rules of international donors. From such projects, modest funds remain available to the Units themselves, which can be used to finance Units' operations.

This way of higher education financing threatens the normal operation of the University itself, while its Units continuously face challenges in funding their own development, investments in infrastructure, digitization, teaching, research and administrative capacity of their human resources. In order to ensure the higher education financial sustainability in general in the country, in addition to using all alternative possibilities for providing additional income, it shall be required to create a new modern funding model unencumbered by the treasury operations bureaucratic procedures in terms of disposal of higher education's own funds.

Strategic objective 4.1. Ensure financial stability and sustainability

Strategic activity 4.1.1: **Diversification of funding sources**: Develop an action plan to diversify the University's funding sources beyond traditional government funding. This may include fostering alumni relations for fundraising purposes, engaging with philanthropic entities, public-private partnerships, and applying for international grants and projects.

Possible indicators: Action Plan developed; Planned activities implemented.

Strategic activity 4.1.2: **Implement best financial management practices** by increasing revenues and establishing a sustainable and long-term funding model with special emphasis on self-financing activities: Best financial management practices may be identified from among foreign partner universities and established within our context. This may include transparent budgeting processes, regular financial reporting and the use of financial analytics to make finance-based strategic decisions.

Possible indicators: Best practice analysis conducted; Conclusions drawn; Changes to our financial practices implemented.

Strategic activity 4.1.3: **Cost optimization**: Thorough analysis of all costs to identify areas for cost optimization without compromising the quality of education and research. This may include energy savings, strategic procurement and efficient resource use.

Possible indicators: Cost analysis carried out; Optimization opportunities identified; Savings recommendations implemented.

Strategic objective 4.2. Capital investments in facilities and equipment, and investment in high growth potential areas

Strategic activity 4.2.1: **Investment in facilities and equipment**: Complete the construction of facilities started, modernize and maintain existing facilities, invest in new technologies, maintenance.

Possible indicators: Facilities started and completed; Modernizations implemented; maintenance activities realized; Total amount of funds invested.

Strategic activity 4.2.2: **Targeted investments in strategic initiatives**: Identify and invest funds in strategic initiatives that have the potential for high growth. This may include new academic programs in emerging areas, research centers of excellence or infrastructure projects that will enhance the University's capacities and attract additional revenue.

Possible indicators: Investment projects implemented; Total amount of investments.

Strategic activity 4.2.3: **Develop entrepreneurial ventures**: Encourage and support the development of entrepreneurial ventures within the University community that can contribute to the University's financial empowerment. This could include the establishment of clear incentive programs that will enable both professors and researchers to establish spin-offs for the commercialization of university research and collaboration with industry in joint ventures.

Possible indicators: Incentive programs established; Ventures carried out.

STRATEGIC AREA 5: THE UNIVERSITY'S SOCIAL ROLE AND POSITION IN SOCIETY

(Responsible entities: Chancellor, Vice-Chancellors, responsible Departments)

The University has been relentlessly building its reputation in higher education in both the Republic of North Macedonia and the region for decades, and it is quite deservedly considered a national university brand. This well-deserved national status of the best university in the country will at the same time oblige it to once again win its key role in the creation of all national strategies, policies, programs and projects for the development of society and national economy, particularly those related to education.

In addition, the University will establish a number of socially responsible activities and sustainable initiatives for community development and advancement. It will also focus on encouraging civic awareness among its students and employees with the aim of their active involvement in decision-making processes and engagement in solving major social problems.

Reclaiming its rightful place in society as a result of its decades-long pivotal role in laying the scientific, cultural, artistic and economic foundations of this country will be a top priority for the University.

Strategic objective 5.1. Strengthen UKIM's social role and position both at the national and global levels

Strategic activity 5.1.1: **Strengthen the role of experts and scientific facts for the purpose of social development**: Support critical thinking and enhance the role of academic and scientific expertise related to current social topics and impose fundamental values, such as national and cultural identity protection, tolerance and environmental protection. With its scientific and professional potential, UKIM will act as a policy corrector, driver of change, initiator of new ideas and projects, and public opinion creator. A commitment for UKIM experts to be regularly involved in the preparation of state documents of strategic importance, legislation, decisions, analyses, plans, etc. Intensify communication with the public, support public visibility and promote the achievements of University Units, employees and students for the purpose of social prosperity. Through its participation in the media, public hearings, presentation of views on social media, initiation and implementation of independent research and projects supported by the state and international institutions, UKIM will continuously contribute to social development.

Possible indicators: Number of popular articles about academic and scientific achievements; UKIM's experts involved in consultative forms and decision-making bodies; Participation in creating strategic state documents; Participation in public hearings; Publications in the media and on social media of UKIM and UKIM Members; Events aimed at improving social conditions realized, etc.

Strategic activity 5.1.2.: **Monitor the University's activities through the lens of their impact on society**: Implement a system of monitoring the activities impacting the community.

Possible indicators: System introduced for monitoring the University's activities and their impact on society; Activities implemented to impact the community.

Strategic objective 5.2. Promote green, sustainable and socially responsible practices at the University and in society

Strategic activity 5.2.1: **Provide and organize activities for sustainable development, social responsibility and active citizenship**: Adopt a policy that encourages organization of activities on topics of sustainable development, active citizenship and social responsibility in higher education and continuous learning, as well as encourage scientific research to the same end. Sustainability activities will provide guidance on how to link the results achieved to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals to which they contribute the most. Promote research projects focused on sustainable development, environmental conservation and climate change solutions by including academic staff and students in these efforts.

Possible indicators: Changes introduced in the curricula; Projects realized regarding the topics mentioned.

Strategic activity 5.2.2: **Implement green campus initiatives**: Develop and implement initiatives aimed at reducing the University's environmental footprint. This may include energy saving measures, waste reduction programs, greenhouse gas emission reduction, sustainable transportation options for students and staff, and the use of green technologies and materials in University's facilities.

Possible indicators: Measures implemented; Total amount of investments.

Strategic objective 5.3. Enhance community engagement and social impact

Strategic activity 5.3.1: **Establish community service programs**: Develop structured community service programs that enable both students and staff to engage and contribute to their local communities. This may include partnerships with schools, healthcare facilities and other organizations to meet community needs through volunteering and civic engagement projects.

Possible indicators: Partnership agreements concluded; Community service activities implemented.

Strategic activity 5.3.2: **Promote social entrepreneurship and innovation**: Encourage and support social entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives within the University community. This could include creating incubators or accelerators for social companies, offering social entrepreneurship courses and workshops, and organizing competitions for social innovation projects.

Possible indicators: Social entrepreneurship trainings held; Iincubators and accelerators opened; Accelerator activity indicators.

Strategic activity 5.3.3: **Enhance access to education**: Use programs to increase access to higher education for underrepresented and socially vulnerable groups. Initiatives could include scholarship programs, outreach and preparatory programs for prospective students from marginalized communities, and support services designed to promote inclusivity and diversity on campus. To this end, the instruments of the University's foundations will be intensively used.

Possible indicators: Activities implemented to support inclusivity; Scholarships granted.

PROCESS SUPPORT STRATEGIC AREA 6: UKIM'S DIGITIZATION AND PREPARATION FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
(Responsible entities: UKIM's Secretary General, IT Department, Heads of Departments)

Both our University and other universities in the region are facing numerous challenges in the management of data and information about the operation of University's Units and Members. This often includes repetitive collection and processing of data and information on students, employees, professors and assistants, researchers and their titles and advancement, courses they teach in the different cycles, their publications, projects in which they participate, etc. The main difficulty stems from the variety of ways and procedures for archiving information, fragmentation thereof, storage in diverse databases or formats that are difficult to manipulate and combine and where a large amount of data is often unnecessarily duplicated, which is a source of confusion and errors. For a better digitization of information, the University will consider the possibilities of implementing a professional and centrally placed HR software in which all Units and Members will update their information and which will allow a complete, updated and accurate view of the key operation indicators.

Although the University's main focus will be on digitization or software unification and centralization of operational information, the University's very processes will be subject to mapping and potential standardization, and then their digitization, all with the aim of their simplification, acceleration and grater transparency, as well as making them easily accessible and user-friendly.

Also, the University will, at an accelerated pace, continue towards full functional completion of the iKnow system, which can become a basis for any future processes of digital transformation via its improvement through the introduction of additional modules and user tools for the users themselves, as well as improvement of user experience therewith.

Process support strategic objective 6.1. Improve digital infrastructure for a modernized University

Strategic activity 6.1.1: **Digital infrastructure upgrade**: Develop a program for investment in a robust digital infrastructure to support advanced IT services across campus. This includes fast internet access, secure data storage solutions and the hardware and software required to support the digital needs of both students and staff.

Possible indicators: Activities implemented (descriptively); Total amount of investments.

Strategic activity 6.1.2: **Promote integrated management systems**: Promote a comprehensive integrated management system that includes student information systems, learning management systems and research management platforms. In order to enable streamlined and efficient university operations, the system shall, to a certain extent, be adjustable to the Units' specific needs.

Possible indicators: Plan for management systems improvement developed; Level of project implementation.

Strategic activity 6.1.3: **Introduce cloud-based solutions**: Transition to cloud-based solutions for data management, collaboration and communication in order to ensure flexibility, adjustability and cost-effectiveness.

Possible indicators: Solutions introduced (descriptively).

Process support strategic objective 6.2. Foster a culture of digital literacy and development

Strategic activity 6.2.1: **Develop digital competence programs**: Establish training programs and workshops for the improvement of digital competencies of both students and employees. This may include new software learning, understanding data analytics and keeping up with new digital trends relevant to their fields of study and work.

Possible indicators: Trainings and workshops implemented; Number of training participants.

Strategic activity 6.2.2: **Innovation in teaching and learning processes**: Implementation of digital technologies in teaching and learning processes. Encourage and under certain conditions, make mandatory the use of online platforms, digital resources and interactive tools in order to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Possible indicators: Digital platforms and tools introduced; Level of adoption and implementation.

Process support strategic objective 6.3. Improve the quality of all UKIM's processes and activities

Strategic activity 6.3.1: **Establish a Quality Management Office and a Quality Management Rulebook**: Systemic management of University processes in order to achieve efficiency and excellence at all levels and domains of action.

Possible indicators: Office established.

PROCESS SUPPORT STRATEGIC AREA 7: FINANCIAL, STAFF AND FUNCTIONAL AUTONOMY
(Responsible entities: Chancellor, Vice-Chancellors, responsible Departments)

Higher education in the Republic of Macedonia is based on autonomy, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, ratified international agreements and the Law on Higher Education. The University performs its activity based on the principle of academic autonomy. The autonomy of higher education institutions includes academic freedom, management autonomy, inviolability of space, financial autonomy and staff autonomy. Although the inviolability of autonomy is a basic principle in higher education, we have been witnessing continuous encroachments on the autonomy of universities, especially in the area of finances and employment. Insufficient financial autonomy significantly hinders the University's planning of staff, infrastructural and organizational development.

The University has always been an example of zealous respect for laws, freedom of speech, moral norms, human rights and the diversity existing in society. This gives it the right to loudly demand a fair revision of the higher education funding model. This is the first battle that should lead to ensuring that the political elites in the future will fully respect the constitutionally guaranteed academic, staff and financial autonomy of universities.

Process support strategic objective 7.1. Improve the University's financial autonomy

Strategic activity 7.1.1: **Proactive cooperation with policy makers (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance) and other external stakeholders in order to change the relevant legislation and ensure an adequate share of public funding in higher education**: Ensuring and guaranteeing UKIM's financial autonomy, as well as providing an adequate and predictable share of public funding in accordance with UKIM's significance in higher education is imperative for the stable operation and development of UKIM.

Possible indicators: Actions taken to bring these views closer to policy makers; Specific proposals submitted to amend the legislation regulating this issue.

Strategic activity 7.1.2: **Develop internal revenue generation mechanisms**: It is required to stimulate new revenue generation processes and activities, such as continuous education programs, consultancy services, laboratory testing and facilities' rental that can provide the University with additional financial resources and reduce its dependence on external funding sources.

Possible indicators: Income realized from additional activities.

Strategic activity 7.1.3: **Introduce internal control mechanisms for the introduction of a revenue control system at the University**: Establish a digital model of control of revenues received by University Units. This model will enable the University to make strategic decisions about allocating funds to its Units for projects, event support, student scholarships, etc.

Strategic activity 7.1.4: **Optimize fund allocation**: Implement a resource allocation model that is transparent, flexible and aligned with the University's strategic objectives. This model shall enable the University to allocate funds to its Units such that they can effectively and efficiently achieve their goals.

Possible indicators: New model developed and implemented.

Process support strategic objective 7.2. Employee development and functional autonomy

Strategic activity 7.2.1: **Strengthen autonomous decision-making**: Authorize academic and administrative units to make independent decisions regarding the implementation and management of activities that enable additional income such as projects, programs, etc. To ensure uniformity and minimize problems, it shall be required to build mechanisms, tools and systems that will enable these units to make informed decisions that support the University's strategic vision.

Possible indicators: Changes implemented in the decision-making system (descriptively); New mechanisms, regulations, decisions adopted, etc.

Strategic activity 7.2.2: **Develop a culture of responsibility and accountability**: The Units' acquisition of functional autonomy also implies the introduction of accountability and responsibility for the results. It is therefore necessary to stimulate the development of a culture where faculties and administrative units will have the autonomy to manage their operations, but will also be held accountable for their results. This includes setting clear performance indicators and reporting on progress regularly.

Strategic activity 7.2.3: **Ensure staff autonomy**: Staff autonomy implies the possibility of hiring the best students based on criteria and performance indicators established by the University, while not being restricted by the state.

Possible indicators: A system of efficiency and performance indicators established at the University Units.

PROCESS SUPPORT STRATEGIC AREA 8: ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT
(Responsible entities: Chancellor, Vice-Chancellors, UKIM Secretary General)

The University transformation implies the adoption of a number of organizational, technological or managerial changes. However, their successful implementation often largely depends on change initiation in the existing organizational culture and creation of new relations between people, departments and processes. Creating and sustaining flexible and adaptable potential among employees, and embracing change as a normal way of acting and working is of great importance for the development of University staff. Supporting the development and improvement of the total human potential is a prerequisite for University's quality structural reforms in the future.

Process support strategic objective 8.1. Guide administrative staff professional development

Strategic activity 8.1.1: **Customized training programs**: Develop comprehensive training programs tailored to the needs of administrative staff at various levels. They should cover areas such as modern skills and competencies, application of modern technology in operations, and following the higher education administration trends.

Possible indicators: Trainings conducted; Number of training participants.

Strategic activity 8.1.2: **Performance management system**: Implement a performance management system that includes regular appraisals, feedback mechanisms and recognition of outstanding performance. This system shall be designed to set clear expectations, provide constructive feedback, and foster a continuous improvement culture.

Possible indicators: A performance measurement system established; System implementation.

Strategic activity 8.1.3 **Career advancement paths**: Develop clear career advancement paths for administrative staff. Offer mentoring opportunities and participation in leadership development programs to prepare staff for higher responsibilities and roles in the University's administration.

Possible indicators: Employee development plan; Trainings conducted; New competencies adopted; Number of career promotions.

Process support strategic objective 8.2. Improve efficiency and effectiveness of administrative offices

Strategic activity 8.2.1: **Process optimization**: Map and optimize administrative processes to eliminate inefficiencies, reduce duplication and streamline workflows. This may include introducing new software or reengineering existing procedures.

Possible indicators: Mapping implemented; Changes proposed; Changes implemented.

Strategic activity 8.2.2: **Promote cooperation between UKIM's offices and Units' offices**: Stimulate a culture and processes of cooperation and communication between the different administrative departments of both the University and the Units. Encourage the formation of

joint teams that will work on projects and initiatives to facilitate work processes and improve efficiency and transparency, which shall require a coordinated approach, while taking advantage of administrative staff's different skills and perspectives.

Possible indicators: Cooperation improvement level assessment; Joint activities implemented.

APPENDIX

Table 1. RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

RISK EVENT DESCRIPTION	RISK ASSESSMENT			Risk response activities	Responsible entities
	Likelihood of risk occurrence	Risk impact	Overall risk severity score		

Note: The risk occurrence likelihood and the risk impact are indicated either by numbers (from 1 to 5), descriptively (low, medium, high) or by percentages. The overall risk severity score is a result of likelihood and impact.