

**CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY, VENICE
ITALY**

Massimo Warglien and Manuela Savoia

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports the main elements of the quality evaluation process at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, together with some remarks concerning its impact on the decision making process and on the larger working of the university. It is mostly based on our experience as evaluators, on official documents of the university and on ad hoc interviews made for this book project. It portrays the state of the evaluation process at the end of 1996, two years after its official introduction in our university.

The authors of this chapter are active part of the evaluation process itself. What is reported here is to a larger extent owed to the many people that contributed to such a process in the last years, and especially to members of the Evaluation Unit and of the self-evaluation team of the Institutional Quality Audit project. Nevertheless, this chapter is not an official document of the Evaluation Unit and does involve the personal opinions of the authors only.

2. A SHORT PORTRAIT OF THE CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY

2.1. Mission

In accordance with its Statute, Ca' Foscari University has as its aim cultural and scientific development and the propagation of knowledge through research and teaching. The University's area of activity is not only local, but national and international.

Ever since it was first founded as the Royal High School of Commerce (*Regia Scuola Superiore di Commercio*) in 1868, it has been careful to give its teaching an international collocation and has worked towards the development of knowledge that is not only theoretical but also technical and practical. The Ca' Foscari University has been always pursuing the integration of humanistic training with an economic training and, more recently, experimental scientific training.

On a local level, the relationship between the University and the surrounding area (the town, province and region) is a very close one both because the students (and teachers) tend to come from the area and because the University and the local authorities have always co-operated and interacted, with particularly important results over the last decades.

With the collaboration of local and national authorities, various programmes (diploma, specialisation and Master) have been activated or are being activated in Venice and the nearby provinces.

At the international level Ca' Foscari University is one of the promoters of the project *Venice International University*, which is based on the Island of San Servolo and will involve various universities and international institutions, who are to hold courses and carry out research there. Moreover, Ca' Foscari co-operates in creating the Scientific and Technological Park of Venice, in Marghera, partially funded by the European Union.

Ca' Foscari defines itself as a University that operates non only in Venice but also for Venice, expanding its range of teaching and research and interacting with problems such as the environment, cultural heritage, information technologies and tourism. The aim is to contribute to the solution of Venetian problems of today and, above all, with regard to these themes, to promote occasions for new "intangible" economic activities, and other planning and training activities that can revitalise the economy.

The development of the University constitutes one of the few certain lines of revitalisation of the city. This development is not only compatible with the venetian environment but can be set in motion at once.

The social profitability of an investment in the university in Venice is clear because this University by itself guarantees almost a thousand jobs directly and at least another 500 indirectly and, together with the IUAV (the other University of Venice), brings more than 30 000 students into the city.

2.2. An academic profile of Ca' Foscari

Ca' Foscari University presents a specific profile which is not only due to its location in the centre of Venice, but also to the fact that it covers specialised areas of teaching and research which are ever more closely linked to the special features of the cultural and physical environment of both Venice and the Veneto region.

2.2.1. Teaching

At present there are four Faculties operating within Ca' Foscari University:

- Economics;
- Letters and Philosophy;
- Foreign Languages and Literatures;
- Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences (M.Ph.N. Sciences);

with a total of eleven Degree Programmes and five Diplomas Programmes.

Ca' Foscari University runs, in co-operation with other universities, nine Research Doctorates and is syndicated for another 26.

The facilities for teaching and research consist of six centres (interdepartmental, interfaculty, inter-university), the computerised library services and 21 departmental or inter-departmental libraries.

In the academic year 1994/95, the number of courses taught at Ca' Foscari was 598, which represents an increase of 72 with respect to the previous year, with a consequent improvement in the ratio of

students per course (which went down from the 35 of the previous year to the present 32). If one hypothesises that each student should attend on average four to five courses a year, one can make a rough assessment of the potential congestion, which is somewhere around 160 students per course on average. With these figures, it is easy to deduce that it is only because actual attendance is comparatively low that teaching is regularly performed in spite of potential demand.

The organisation of teaching is mainly based on class lectures. However new teaching methods are now growing, with the use of high technology laboratories.

2.2.2. Research

Basic and applied research is carried out by the teachers and researchers of the University with funds provided by the Board of Governors (*University Research Fund*) and with funds obtained by applying to the Ministry for Universities and Scientific Research, the CNR (*National Research Council*), the European Union.

Furthermore, several agreements have been stipulated with public and private organisations to carry out research, in particular in the chemical sector.

Research activity is carried out by teachers and researchers at the Departments and the Research Centres constituted within the University or Centres in which the University participates as an administrative or syndicated seat (22 centres, syndicates or associations).

The research structures are constituted by 19 departments.

At present, there are no data available on the way the teachers divide their time between teaching activities, research and administrative duties. Although there are great differences among faculties, a rough assessment indicates that, on average, as much time is devoted to research as to teaching.

2.2.3. Diversification

The strategic choices of the university are apparent from the latest opening of programmes. Worth noting are the degree programmes in “Environmental Sciences” and “Computer Science” within the Faculty of Sciences and of “Conservation of Cultural Heritage” within the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. These programmes are particularly agreeable with the nature of Venice.

The unique nature of Venice means that the disciplines should be chosen carefully. It is a general policy of the university to open courses (and areas of research) suited to the nature of the town.

2.2.4. Growth

Within 10-12 years the university population of Venice has increased by about 70 per cent, rising from about 11 000 students enrolled in the academic year 1980/81 to about 15 000 in 1985/86 and 19 000 at present (1994/95).

The Faculty of Economics and that of Letters and Philosophy have been affected by this phenomenon in the same way; although the numbers involved are very different, their growth trends are similar.

The Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, whose numbers have risen less sharply over the last decade, had doubled its students in the previous five-year period.

The Faculty of M.Ph.N. Sciences expanded greatly from the second half of the eighties, with the introduction of new degree programmes.

It must be pointed out that within the Veneto Region, the role of Ca' Foscari has expanded mostly at the expense of the University of Padua, the largest university in the Region. In fact, Ca' Foscari has risen from 14 to 18 per cent of the total number of students, while Padua has gone down from 64 to 59 per cent during the last decade.

The University of Venice employs 350 professors in all (146 full professors and 204 associate professors), to whom must be added 123 researchers. The ratio is on average 56.5 students per teacher, as compared with a national figure of 29.8, in 1992; the situation has worsened since last year when there were 366 teachers, and a ratio of 51 to 1.

In this area too, there are marked differences among different faculties, with a peak figure of 113.7 students in Economics. In this regard, however, it must be pointed out how slow the processes of adjustment are in answer to shifts in demand or changes in didactic systems, and also how complex the procedures are for covering all potential staff-positions.

The constraints on the employment of teaching-staff continue to be a pressing problem for this University. The most serious situations are those of the Degree Course in Computer Science, those of the degree programmes of the Faculty of Economics (where the imbalance between supply and demand has always been marked) and those of the programmes activated without additional resources from the Ministry, the so-called "zero-cost" (for the Ministry) programmes.

The technical-administrative staff consists of 450 people, about half of them administrative; the numbers are decreasing on account of resignations and departures, creating vacancies which, by law, can only be re-filled to 10 per cent, despite the university's greater commitments and obligations, with regard to the students as well. The situation thus remains highly critical; the staff/student ratio is 1 non-teaching staff-member to every 44 students, markedly worse than the national situation, which is 1 to 25.

The National University Council (CUN) has suggested using a "wealth index" of the individual universities with respect to the technical-administrative staff. The national average index (given by the ratio between the sum of teachers and students, excluding *fuori corso*, and the staff) is equal to 0.899. Ca' Foscari is at the bottom of the list, at the 40th place, with a wealth index of 0.657. Only ten Universities are in a worse position.

Given the budgetary constraints, the situation would be unlikely to improve even if the constraints introduced by the national legislations on recruiting were to be slackened.

Unlike what happened in the Seventies and Eighties, the shortage of teaching staff means that the courses are all at present addressed to *traditional* students. There are no courses for working students, part-time or long-distance students.

However, class attendance is not required and the particular mode of educational organisation in Italy allows all students to fall behind in their studies and to enrol *fuori corso*¹. Apart from certain special cases in some degree or diploma programmes, there is nothing to prevent a student from re-enrolling even if he or she has not passed all the exams prescribed for that year; such delays have no effect upon the final evaluation of his studies. Owing to these rules, almost 100 per cent of the students are *fuori corso* by the time they reach their degrees, so that it has become the norm rather than the exception, at Ca' Foscari and in the whole of Italy, to take longer than the official time allotted to complete one's university career. In the academic year 1994/95, the proportion of *fuori corso* students over the total enrolled students population was 39.4 per cent.

2.2.5. Funding

The financing of Ca' Foscari University is to a large extent covered by transfer payments from the Ministry for Universities and Scientific Research (MURST). In the financial year 1994, the financial statements show that 82.9 per cent of the overall revenues was supplied by the MURST, which funds both the operating expenses and the capital ones.

Fees and charges paid by students made up 12 per cent of the total income, while third-party transactions made up only 1.5 per cent. The remaining 4 per cent came from other transfer payments from public organisations or from assets surplus.

Within this framework, it appears clear that the operations of Ca' Foscari University depend almost entirely on the MURST and the students. Other revenues are definitely of secondary importance.

The students' fees cover 18.5 per cent of operating expenses, while grants from other bodies are almost exclusively connected with research contracts.

Over the last four years, from 1991 to 1994, the students' contribution has more than doubled (+120 per cent), while the grants from the MURST (apart from contributions for construction and renovation of buildings) increased by 49 per cent. The students have been called upon, therefore, to make a greater contribution to the University's finances, even though their quota remains a minor one.

An in-depth analysis of the University's operational costs reveals that the financial and staff resources (teaching and technical-administrative staff) are not very different from faculty to faculty, despite the great difference in the number of students. This means that the students' share of the operating costs vary considerably from faculty to faculty. In particular, the students of Economics pay for almost two thirds of the operational expenses of their faculty, while elsewhere the quota is much smaller (see *Costs Analysis in 1995 Annual Report* of the Internal Evaluation Unit).

1. A *fuori corso* student is an undergraduate who has failed to get a degree in the minimum time prescribed.

2.3. The governance structure of Ca' Foscari

The governance structure of Ca' Foscari University is regulated by the *Statute*, a *Magna Charta* drawn up by the Integrated Academic Senate of Ca' Foscari over three years and finally approved, by the Ministry for Universities as well, at the beginning of 1995.

The rules contained in the Statute derive from national legislative directives but also from internal decisions which have tried to take every advantage of the autonomy conceded by the State.

Reduced to essentials, the governance structure is a complex one for the following basic reasons:

- the great number of subjects involved;
- the different aims of the University;
- the principle of democratic representation.

The *subjects* who hold the original power are the employees of Ca' Foscari (teachers, researchers and technical-administrative staff), the students and some social institutions: the Ministry for the University and Scientific and Technological Research (MURST), Local Authorities, National Research Boards.

The different *aims* of the University are teaching and research, joint products of the activity of the employees.

The *principle of democratic representation* is present throughout the Statute, so that the decisions are always taken collectively and the possibility of deciding is hardly ever delegated to one person.

These three characteristics of the University are so bound up with one another that all subjects are always represented in the collegial governing bodies, whether the decisions concern teaching, research or administration.

The complex democratic structure of Ca' Foscari is illustrated in the figure in the next page.

In the first place, the *representative bodies* of the subjects are constituted:

- students elect a *Council of Students* made up of 30 members;
- teachers are present as members of various bodies, both teaching and research bodies:
 - as far as teaching is concerned, teachers are members of the Councils for Degree programme, the Councils for Diploma programme, and the Faculty Councils;
 - for research, they are members of the Departmental Councils and the Steering Committees of the Research Centres;
- the technical-administrative staff nominate representatives on all the teaching and research bodies;
- society as a whole is represented in the *Board of Social Institutions* through the nomination of one representative each on the part of the Ministry for Universities and Scientific Research, of the Regional Director of Revenue for the Veneto, of the Regional

authorities, of the Provincial authorities, of the Town authorities, of the Chamber of Commerce, of the National Research Council (CNR), of the National Committee for the Economy and Employment (CNEL).

Then there are the *government bodies*:

- a) on the university level:
 - the *Rector*;
 - the *Senate*;
 - the *Board of Governors*;
- b) for teaching:
 - the Dean of the Faculty;
 - the President of the Council for Degree programme;
 - the President of the Council for Diploma programme;
- c) for research:
 - the Director of the Department in charge of the Departmental Council;
 - the President of the Research Centre.

These posts are either elective or are nominated by a representative body:

- the teachers directly elect the *Rector*, the members of the *Senate*, the members of the *Steering Committees* of the Research Centres;
- as members of the various councils, the teachers elect the *deans*, the *presidents* of the degree and diploma-programmes, the *directors* of departments and the *presidents* of the research centres;
- the technical-administrative staff elect representatives on each of the teaching and research bodies and they take part, with a vote reduced to 10 per cent, in the election of the *Rector*;
- the Council of Students nominates representatives on the *Senate* and the *Board of Governors*;
- the Board of Social Institutions nominates a representative on the *Board of Governors*;
- the *Senate* nominates representatives on the *Board of Governors*.

The structure of the institution is completed with the *monitoring bodies*:

- the *Students' Ombudsman*, nominated by the Council of Students;
- the *Equal Opportunities Commission* elected by the staff;
- the *College of Auditors*, nominated by the Senate;
- the *Internal Evaluation Unit*, nominated by the Board of Governors.

Finally, the Board of Governors nominates the Managing Director, who is responsible for the management of the administrative offices of the University.

2.4. Centralisation and decentralisation

In recent years, in order to adapt dynamically to the changing institutional context (recent legislation is moving the national system towards increasing autonomy for each university) the University of Venice has re-designed its organisational structure according to the following guidelines:

1. Centralisation of:
 - strategic decision making;
 - management of common or strategic resources;
 - management of resources for which there are relevant economies of scale, of scope and specialisation.
2. Decentralisation of all other activities.

There are logistical and legislative constraints that do not facilitate decentralisation.

As far as *resources* are concerned, the situation is the following:

<i>Resources</i>	<i>Centralisation vs. Decentralisation</i>
Financial resources	Hybrid system with centralised management for general activities and resource allocation and decentralised management (departments) for research funding
Human resources	Centralised management with some peripheral flexibility
Building and locations	Centralised management
Other fixed assets	Centralised management except for some of those at the department level
Teaching resources	Decentralised at the faculty level
Research funds	Decentralised at the departmental level

As far as *services* are concerned, the situation is the following:

<i>Services</i>	<i>Centralisation vs. Decentralisation</i>
Student administration	Centralised management
Student aids	Centralised management
Libraries	Hybrid system with centralised management for some general services (hi-tech) and decentralised management (departments or faculties) for others
Laboratories	Decentralised management at faculty or department level
Computer facilities	Hybrid system with the presence of centralised management (central computer centre)

The organisational structure is still being re-designed according to the following guidelines:

- re-engineering of central administrative processes in order to eliminate non-value added activities and reduce cycle times (simplification and standardisation);
- striking a new balance between centralisation (exploitation of economies of scale) and decentralisation (flexibility and responsiveness);
- *bottom-up* continuous improvement process;
- improving and speeding up vertical and horizontal communication (information systems and groupware).

3. THE SYSTEM OF CONSTRAINTS AND THE CHANGE PROCESS

3.1. The constraints

3.1.1. Governmental laws, regulations, policies, incentives

Finance

Over the last few years the Italian university system has been forced into an ever narrower institutional and financial ambit. In this ambit, Ca' Foscari University has tried to exploit the possibilities of autonomy offered, however few, in particular because it started out at a disadvantage with respect to other Italian universities. In the academic year 1992/93 the average expenditure per student, heavily conditioned by the transfer payments of the Ministry (see section 1.1.6), was 4 500 000 lire, while the average expenditure in other Italian universities was 6 200 000 (38 per cent more), and in universities of middle size, like Ca' Foscari, 7 million lire (55 per cent higher).

A comparison with other European nations, furthermore, makes it clear how little attention is paid in Italy to the strategic importance of university and reveals the need to provide a solution within a European perspective. To cite a few examples, France, with the same number of students, spends twice as much as Italy; the United Kingdom spends much more than Italy with a quarter the number

of students; Germany, with a similar number of students, has three times as many teachers and researchers as Italy.

On the level of financial autonomy, the financial act for 1994 brought in important innovations. The most important is the transformation of the financing of the Ministry for Universities from an aggregate of purposive and non-alterable transfer payments into one single, all-inclusive transfer payment. The new kind of grant has no constraints and the University is allowed to allocate the resources according to its own goals and objectives. This radical change, along with the freedom of raising fees and tuition for students, was given to balance the substantial cuts in the financing of Italian university system as a whole (1 000 billion per year out of a total budget of 6 500 billion, and 22 000 jobs cut, either in teaching and non-teaching positions).

Selection of Teaching Staff

The selection of new teachers in Italy is carried out by means of national competitions which indicate a number of winning names equal to the number of places previously requested by the Faculties of all the Italian universities. The faculties of Ca' Foscari can choose their new teachers from among these winners.

Often the choice falls on researchers who studied at Ca' Foscari University, if they are among the winners.

Another way to obtain teachers is by transfers. In this case it is a question of teachers already working in other universities who move to Ca' Foscari. Given the high accommodation costs and the inconvenient living conditions in the centre of Venice, such transfers often involve teachers from Venice or the Veneto, who, after winning previous competitions and being summoned to other universities, now wish to work closer to their place of origin.

Ca' Foscari University is wholly unable to offer practical assistance to teachers or to provide any compensation such as reimbursements or salary increases for the expenses incurred in moving to Venice; as a result there is an inevitable trend towards an increasing number of teachers from Venice or the Veneto.

On the other hand, current legislation does not require a teacher's constant presence at the university, with the result that teachers from other areas are on average less often present than those based locally.

Finally, it must be stressed that the salaries are set at the national level, so that the University cannot attract professors by offering them better conditions.

Selection of students

The Italian university system became a mass one in 1969 with the liberalising of the syllabus (drawn up according to the students' wishes) and the opening of the universities to students from all categories of schools. The great increase in educational demand was not matched by a rational policy of supply, since it was legally impossible to carry out any selection at the entry level.

The only answer to the problem in later years was a progressive increase in resources for the university system, even though they were never sufficient to equip the nation with an effective system of university education.

Various faculties in Italy have tried (this year as well) to carry out an independent selection of students, but whenever the students have appealed to the law against the decision, the selection has always been annulled. It is only in very recent years that it has been possible to introduce a selection of students, but only for newly instituted faculties or degree and diploma programmes.

In addition, the generalised policy of low university fees has meant that there has not been an automatic, if unfair, selection on the grounds of wealth.

The consequences of these regulations have been the increase in student numbers but also the low productivity of the system as a whole, so that the drop-out rate has reached extremely high levels (above all in the first years of programmes) and the proportion of graduates over enrolments (graduation rate) is on average around 30 per cent in Italy. Furthermore, congestion has lowered the average level of the quality of teaching, to the detriment of the best students.

In Ca' Foscari, the Faculty of Economics, the worst-affected by problems of congestion, has for the last three years imposed a guidance test on aspiring students. The test is obligatory, but a negative result does not preclude the student from enrolling.

Teaching and learning

In Italy, university degrees enjoy a legal recognition. This means that degrees are automatically recognised by the public administration, public agencies, professional organisations. As a consequence of this status, university degrees that are not recognised by the law, are rarely accepted even by private institutions.

In order to be recognised, the curricula have to be approved by the Ministry for Universities. Therefore, the universities have some constraints in designing new programs, as they need to comply with standards.

This apply to all diploma, degree and doctorate programmes (even though, recently, a Ph.D. in Management has been started without government approval by another prestigious institution).

There are no limitation for Master degrees. They have no status from the law, and their value depends only on market recognition.

In order to comply with the law, the University needs the approval for setting new school (faculties). This approval is difficult to obtain, mainly because of the need for a financial support the Government is reluctant to offer. Recently some new faculties have been approved by the Ministry under the condition that their costs were entirely borne by Universities.

There are no limitations in designing specialisations within the limits set by the Ministry. At the same time, the specific contents of each course is decided with no constraints by the professor, coherently with the principle of freedom in teaching. Therefore, professors are allowed to design their own syllabus and even at the University level it is not possible to exert control over it. In other

words, the University has little control over curricula (because of the centralised control) and over syllabus (because of professors' freedom).

Financial constraints apply to teaching as well. The University has little autonomy in hiring them when they are needed. Funds for part time positions are limited and regulations restrict the possibility of appointing professors under a temporary agreement. More specifically, only people with a professorship (even from other universities) can be appointed (with some exceptions for new programmes that can use temporary lecturers for a few years). There are restrictions in appointing current junior faculty members as lecturers without supervision of other professors.

The law requires professor to teach at least one course a year (72 hrs), but there is little incentive in teaching more than the minimum requirement. The rigidity of the law-based incentive system allows the choice between full time and part time without substantial differences on duty but with substantial additional earning for full time professors.

There are fairly major differences in "teaching and learning" from Faculty to Faculty, each with its own problems. Obstacles and constraints are for the most part due to the teaching staff/students ratios. There is a highly diversified offer of masters, school of specialisation, diploma programmes, degree programmes, doctorate programmes. This wide array of possibilities only partially prevents courses from being too crowded. The recent inauguration of shorter programmes (Diploma) is intended to solve the high drop-out rate.

The present system of doctorates is well accepted by most professors. Unfortunately, the very limited number of positions seriously hampers the aims of this level of specialisation. The actual doctorate system is such that the tutor is often committed to finding a permanent position for the student after the completion of his studies.

There is in principle the possibility for foreign students to enrol in doctoral programmes, but despite the apparently great demand this is not possible without an actual support. The doctoral students are not allowed to help in teaching and they do not have any other duty apart from their thesis work.

So far, the new born diploma programmes run parallel to the degree programmes (which is to say that they are -- or should be - separate from the degree programmes). This contributes only slightly to solving the problem of student drop-out rates and generates problems of student interchange between the programmes (for example, a student who wishes to change from the degree to the diploma or vice versa). A more favourable system could be realised with *serial* programmes of diploma, in which students enrol at the diploma programme (3 years) and then, if they wish to, pass to the degree programme with one or two more years.

Research

There is little control over the research activity. Research performances are not checked. Only recently research funding within the university have been granted on the basis of some research performance (number and quality of publications).

The career development is the only reason for research and publishing. However, given that the promotions are not controlled at the university level, the institution has non control over this process.

There is a large number of individual projects that are primarily due to the necessity in covering most fields of science. The requirements of competence in the area of teaching obviously involves a large number of diversified research areas. Furthermore, the wish of being original as a requirement for competition for full-professorship adds to the complexity. The large diversification is offset by a poor level and number of facilities for all. One example: the library of the faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences is not sufficient for anybody because there is the need to cover at least the most important journal for each discipline and never reaches a sufficient degree of specialisation in any of them.

The Faculties and the Government provide very few incentives to promote research.

Research suffers from a chronic shortage of funds. The funding for each subject is usually very limited and insufficient for carrying out the project for which the funding has been requested. Researchers are obliged to ask several funding sources and often they have to accomplish different grant proposals with considerable waste of time.

Beside funding problems, what seriously hampers the actual research is the erratic timing with which money is given (for example part of 1994 funding from the Ministry for Universities is still to be given).

Man-power is a serious problem too. For instance, support to scientific research is mostly carried out at the level of students' degree thesis (nine months of work on the part of a student barely able to work in a lab and usually with six examinations still to perform). Post graduate students, that can provide three years of more competent work, can be expected at a rate of one every 5-8 years giving a non-continuous flow of work and results. Post-doctoral positions are zero and the possibility of hiring foreign post-doctorates on a temporary basis is also zero.

3.1.2. Regional or national labour market situation

As already pointed out, the Italian legislation sets a number of constraints that limit the possibility to flexibly govern the interface with the labour market.

Apart from teaching staff, where the degrees of autonomy are extremely low, and where the national job market is extremely rigid, the situation for administrative staff is strictly regulated.

The Ca' Foscari University is located in a fast growing area (North East of Italy) where enterprises themselves find it difficult to properly adjust the quantity and quality of the labour force.

The rigidity of the wage system (regarding all the public administration and, hence, also the university) does not allow to attract skilled workers. Nevertheless, the long standing reputation of Ca' Foscari works as an incentive in the recruiting policies.

Constraints are tighter for semi-skilled workers, while there are some degrees of freedom for the recruiting of skilled people, such as graduates and professionals.

The high cost of living and housing in Venice implies commuting and does not encourage recruiting.

However, given also the budget constraints posed by central government, the management of the external labour market is less important, at the moment, than the management of the internal labour market (skill formation, internal mobility, etc.).

3.2. What changes is Ca' Foscari trying to accomplish?

The directions in which the University intends to develop are differentiated according to the various objectives and to the real possibilities of achieving them. The main constraints are described in more detail below. However, we can point by way of summary to the main such constraints:

- financial resources;
- spatial restrictions (mainly due to the peculiar nature of buildings in Venice);
- national restrictions on the recruiting of teaching and non-teaching staff;
- national restrictions on the opening of new study programmes;
- restrictions imposed by the decision-making structure of the University.

It is clear that financial resources and the question of facilities affect the possibility of carrying out those initiatives that would most surely help Ca' Foscari to get over some of the major problems.

It must also be remembered that if the financial and spatial restrictions were to be eased, this would not automatically lead to a solution of the problems, on account of the other restrictions mentioned.

3.2.1. Efficiency improvements

In order to improve the efficiency of research and teaching, it would be necessary to conglomerate the different branches according to their area of activity, since the present situation with buildings scattered over the city wastes both internal resources and the students' time.

For this reason, Ca' Foscari University is devoting a great deal of energy to combining branches according to faculty, with a consequent decentralising of administrative facilities for the students; at present these facilities are heavily centralised.

With regard to the facilities, a great effort is being made to reorganise the library services, with the aim of computerising them and combining the present 24 libraries, all highly specialised but short of means and beset by access-problems.

In this process, furthermore, an essential contribution is made by computer services, which will help to improve facilities for the students and internal services for teachers and researchers.

3.2.2. Teaching efficiency

Ca' Foscari and Italian Universities in general are regulated by written rules and by time-honoured practices which have made it the norm to employ a vast amount of resources in order to confer a degree on only a third of those who enrol.

There are many reasons for this, some attributable to the behaviour of the students and others to that of the institutions and the teachers. The low level of the fees and the fact that all faculties are open to

anyone, no matter what their former curriculum of studies, act as incentives for many people to enrol, even when they are not sufficiently motivated to get as far as the degree. A third of those who enrol in the first year leave the university in the second year without having taken any exams. On the other hand, it is also clear that an efficient system of tutorship and better conditions of access could improve the result.

Furthermore, the *average* length of time taken to graduate (for that small portion of students who do so) is about two years more than that legally established. It is clear that this situation cannot be imputed only to the students, but also to the excessive quantity of notions demanded by all the teachers, who rarely co-ordinate their programmes and show little interest in the overall bulk of notions that the students have to acquire in order to graduate. Furthermore, when they have completed their exams, the students are required to prepare a graduation-thesis which often takes more than a year.

These considerations offer the teachers plenty of food for thought with regard to the efficiency of their study-programmes, if this efficiency is measured in terms of the proportion of students who graduate. To this end, it is important that the teachers of a study-course should work together in order to assess the exact amount of work required from the students; equally, advantage should be taken of every opportunity offered by national legislation to slim down the educational process, especially now that it is possible to continue studies in various forms (masters, specialisation-programmes, doctorates) after the degree.

3.2.3. Diversification of teaching activities

In order to try and make the programmes of study more pertinent to what is actually demanded by students and by the local and national community, the University is trying to increase the variety of teaching activities. However, in addition to the constraints imposed by resources, there are also those imposed by national legislation. New programmes can be started by recycling the teachers already working at the University, or by increasing the work load of each teacher, but national laws require the consent of those concerned and, at the same time, limit the possibilities of remunerating them adequately for the extra work.

Greater resources and new teaching-spaces can be found through agreements with local organisations, public and private, as the University has tried to do by opening up new programmes in the neighbouring towns. However, the need of continual support from other bodies means that these initiatives are always somewhat uncertain.

For this reason new diploma, degree or master programmes can only be created when certain favourable conditions exist and, in any case, the lack of stable resources means that the initial stage is never certain.

As has been illustrated in the previous pages, however, Ca' Foscari University has been very active in this sense over the last few years, devoting a great many resources to the search for external partners.

This diversification of the teaching activities may turn out to be very important with the growth of competition among universities, with respect to national financial resources and the students; competition is likely to take over from the former situation when each university acted more or less in conditions of local monopoly. It must not be forgotten, in fact, that the Ministry for Universities is trying to modify the method of financing for the universities, passing from one based on past

expenditure records to a method based on levels of activities (substantially, the number of students) and levels of efficiency. Furthermore, the continual opening of new university seats and new faculties in the Veneto and in Italy as a whole create conditions of competitiveness that did not exist before. An equally important role is likely to be played by international competition. It is estimated that more than ten-thousand Italian students now attend foreign universities and this number is likely to increase with the hoped-for process of European recognition of university qualifications.

3.2.4. Consent and the university decision-making system

The decision making-structure of Ca' Foscari University, as resulting from the Statute and the national laws, has been described above.

The attribution of areas of competence means that the Rector and the Senate are the most important government bodies in the University. For this reason, the teachers who elect them are the most important subjects.

It is important to emphasise that all the bodies of governance are always kept under close check by the representative body that designates them. This lack of *delegation* is reflected in a lack of autonomy in decision-making on the part of those elected, so that any decision of the Rector must be deliberated by the Senate or by the Board of Governors, any decision of the Deans must be approved by the Faculty Councils, any decision of the Directors of Departments must be approved by the Departmental Councils, and so on.

The complex structure of representation, government and control, the great number and variety of the decision-making bodies, the extensive use of direct democracy and the lack of broad delegatory powers for those elected, all make it difficult for Ca' Foscari University, and Italian universities in general, to work out and pursue single strategies of development. The various people involved are rarely able, or willing, to co-operate in order to achieve common objectives.

The same problems may be diagnosed, assessed and treated in totally different ways by the various decision-making bodies. The same body itself may take contradictory decisions over a period of time, since decisions are based on a majority vote of those present, and these people may vary from one session to another. As is well-known, the sum of coherent individual wills does not necessarily lead to coherent collective decisions.

In practice, the possibility of working out a complex and strategic plan and pursuing it coherently depends on the Rector's capacity to create consent in the various representative and governing bodies of the University.

The University is an institution in which power is exercised principally by the collective will of the teaching staff. It is thus an institution governed by internal bureaucracy, even though subject to internal and external control. It is obvious, however, that in some fields, conflicts of interest may occur between what is socially desirable and what, on the other hand, is considered acceptable by teachers.

4. QUALITY EVALUATION AT CA' FOSCARI

4.1. Introducing the quality culture at Ca' Foscari

Just a few years ago the decision-making organs of Ca' Foscari University decided to enact a process of permanent monitoring of the quality of performance in the university as a whole. However, it would be inappropriate to think that previously the University did not know its actual performance.

It is possible to distinguish between a *first phase*, in which the information and the evaluation about the quality of teaching were used in a non formal and specific way, and a *more recent phase*, from 1993, in which the University decided explicitly to develop a quality monitoring system.

As far as teaching is concerned, in the first phase deans and faculty councils used some data about the students performance in order to rationalise the syllabus and organised some Faculty Conference, involving teachers and students, in order to discuss, for instance, the didactic organisation, the syllabus, the job-finding problem, the tutoring activity.

Furthermore, the administrative offices are still structured around the business of formal administrative acts, such as certifying the career of the staff or the students, and they are not yet equipped to collect information systematically for the purpose of monitoring didactic and research activities.

Important steps were taken towards establishing a culture of quality within the University with the creation of the Studies and Planning Office in 1994, the Internal Evaluation Unit in 1995, and training courses for the technical and administrative staff since 1993.

The University's activities are presented and assessed when the Rector makes his report during the inauguration ceremony for the new academic year and when the Internal Evaluation Unit's annual report is presented (in June).

Since 1992 the Ca' Foscari University participates to the design and to the implementation of the national system for the monitoring and the analysis of the performance of universities promoted by the permanent Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities (CRUI). Till now, this activity elaborated a questionnaire distributed to all universities and a system of indicators able to provide information on the relative position of each university with respect to the average of the figures calculated on a national level.

This consists of a list of about 70 indicators, relating to the main aspects of the activities and functions of the universities, thus including the main parameters for an overall assessment of the strategic management of the universities.

The indicators calculated were subdivided into four groups:

- context indicators (the circumstances in which the university functions);
- resource indicators (the means that are available for the system);
- process indicators (how the system tries to operate in its particular circumstances).;
- product indicators (the results from the processes described).

and for the academic year 1992/93 these indicators were calculated for the different categories of university: according to their location, size and age. For Ca' Foscari, furthermore, indicators were

calculated for the following year, and it is intended to continue the operation in the future, with the purpose of checking the evolution of the parameters (cf.. Studies and Planning Office “*Performance Indicators of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and the Italian University System*” and the “*1995 Annual Report*” of the Internal Evaluation Unit).

The preparation and processing of the data made it possible to bring to the attention of teachers and the technical-administrative staff the general problems connected with the activity of evaluation and to generate a growing interest, both in positive and negative terms, towards the results achieved.

4.2. The Internal evaluation unit

The Internal Evaluation Unit was formally instituted in May 1995, to meet the requirements of the two national laws (29/90 and 537/93).

The Internal Evaluation Unit of Ca’ Foscari is made up of both University teachers and external members, including the members of the College of Auditors.

The Unit presents its findings to the Rector, formulates proposals to improve the efficiency of research activities, teaching and administration. The Unit makes use of the technical assistance of the Studies and Programming Office in collecting and processing the information necessary for the evaluation.

So far the Unit produced its first annual Report in 1995, based on material already available, provided by the Studies and Planning Office and by other work-groups in the University.

4.3. The quality evaluation process

4.3.1. Institutional quality assessment

At the highest level of its quality evaluation process, Ca’ Foscari has participated to the international institutional quality assessment programme of the Association of the European Universities (CRE).

The evaluation was a peer review process conducted by a team of European experts and was aimed at providing an evaluation of the university as a whole, assessing its position in the European university system and possible ways to improve Ca’ Foscari quality standards. The evaluation implied as a first step writing a comprehensive self-evaluation report by an internal team, following CRE guidelines. The report helped to assess the internal working of the university and its system of constraints. A team of European experts visited twice the university and could meet a large number of actors (about 100), including most key decision makers and the main governance bodies. Also external subjects such as the local press and local government were interview by the auditors’ team.

The evaluation outcome, delivered in fall 1996, was a detailed report concerning among other subjects:

- relationships among constraints and opportunities;
- the strategic guidelines of the university and of its structures;
- competencies and relationships among governance bodies;
- the management of teaching and research;

- internal communication;
- relationships with the local environment;
- funding strategies;
- the internal diffusion of the evaluation culture.

The report highlighted current problems in quality management at Ca' Foscari and stressed the need of a coherent, shared change strategy.

As a first step towards the implementation of the report's recommendations, the university has organised a workshop in co-operation with the Italian Conference of Rectors, making public the evaluation outcomes and discussing them in the context of the national quality assessment experiences. The drawing of new guidelines for the university development, which had to be the second step in the utilisation of the CRE report, is currently in stand-by, due to new Rector's elections held after the past Rector was called to central government charges.

4.3.2. Evaluating teaching quality

One can conceive the evaluation of teaching activities as unfolding at two levels.

At the first level, it tracks the different steps of the flow of students from selection and enrolment to their insertion in the labour market after graduation. The evaluation of course quality, failure rates, students' cycle time and career performance typically take place at this level. With a somehow rough metaphor, this level maps the process of transformation of the "raw material" student into a finished product ready to face the labour market.

At a second level, efficiency in the use of teaching resources and other facilities and equipment is evaluated.

The main moments of the first level of the evaluation process can be summarised as follows.

- At the entry level, potential students have to go through a self-evaluation test. The test is not binding (there is no *numerus clausus*) but provides a sort of predictor of the student's performance within the chosen field of studies. The validity of the test has been controlled, showing some significant correlation between test outcomes and the subsequent student university performance.
- As students enrol, the statistical data from their families' incomes are analysed, providing indicators of the economic and social status of the students' population at the entry level.
- As enrolled students start their university life, a few key indicators are monitored such as their drop-out rate (the percent of students that each year, and for each enrolment year, quit the university without completing their studies) or the average number of exams passed. A more detailed analysis of their performance in the first two years (aimed at singling out the main bottlenecks in students' progression, and how their early performance predicts their longer term success) has been experimentally undertaken last year in one faculty.

- At the same time, all courses are evaluated through questionnaires distributed to students, and some other data on the working of teaching activities are collected at the course level.
- As students complete their studies, other indicators are collected: the success rate (the percent of students successfully completing their studies), their average score, and data concerning their “cycle time” (how much did it take to complete their studies).

Finally, some monitoring of past students’ performance in the labour market has been undertaken. There has been a first, exploratory analysis of the professional fate of Ca’ Foscari former students, conducted directly by the university staff, and now a systematic, periodic analysis of their after-graduation career is being outsourced to a major private research institute.

The second level of evaluation is mainly concentrated on the distribution of teaching loads. In particular, three main aspects are monitored.

- The distribution of teaching loads in terms of the yearly average number of exams per professor, department, faculty.
- The distribution of teaching loads in terms of thesis supervision (in the Italian Laurea system, every student has to write a rather demanding thesis work before graduation, and thus thesis supervision is an important component of teaching loads).
- The distribution of attendance to courses. Since in the Italian university it is very common to pass an exam without attending the corresponding class, there can be courses which exhibit many exams but little attendance to lectures. This last monitoring activity has started just during the ongoing academic year.

Since the Ca’ Foscari University shows highly unbalanced teaching loads among single professors, departments and faculties, these data have been the object of a relevant debate on re-equilibration policies, shortly discussed in the next paragraph.

On the other one hand, minor attention has been devoted up to now to teaching supports such as libraries and teaching equipment, with the possible exception of the classroom space issue, which has been actively monitored given the relevance and the peculiar constraints of the problem of space in Venice.

4.3.3. Evaluating research quality

While the law imposes a set minimum of teaching hours, no such lower limit is established with regard to research activities. Italian law and the internal regulations of the University carry out almost no checks on the research activities of the teachers.

Researchers, associate professors and full professors are subject to a three-year trial period. At the end of the three years they are confirmed in their role, after an assessment of the scientific work they have carried out. The assessment is made by a national commission nominated by the Ministry.

For other teachers, the only formal requirement is that they should present (without any assessment) their scientific production to the Faculty Council, which takes formal note of it.

As a matter of fact, once they have been confirmed in their position, the teachers only have their work assessed if they take part in competitions to pass on to the next teaching-grade. Consequently, all research is left entirely to the discretion of the individual, and is influenced by his wish to improve and, partly, by his concern for his reputation with his colleagues.

The lack of incentive is further exacerbated by a lack of resources. Most research is financed by outside sources, through the applications for funds that the teachers, individually or in groups, send to external organisations, both public and private, national and international (CNR, UE, Ministries, Local authorities, Research Institutes, enterprises).

There is also a University research fund; in 1995 this amounted to 1 billion 200 million lire (about 2.5 million liras *pro capite*), the aim of which is to finance activities not directly finalised towards specific research and to sponsor updating projects. Traditionally the University research fund was always divided indiscriminately among all teachers, in order to give everyone a minimum research fund. Recently Ca' Foscari has introduced criteria of apportionment linked to the quality of scientific production of the last three years, so as to make an explicit connection between the productivity of the individual teacher's research-activities and the granting of funds. Criteria for evaluating individual publications have been delegated to each department, with the constraint of conforming to a general grid enacted by the Academic Senate.

Furthermore, last year a special fund for "department characterising projects". Each department has to select a single project that should characterise the department collective -- rather than individual - research effort. The aim of such fund is to further push the culture of research evaluation and to stimulate departments to define a research strategy which is not the simple sum of individual research activities. Thus, such projects have to be selected according to criteria including projects' members scientific productivity and peer review on the strategic relevance of the project itself. Ex-post evaluation of the projects' outcomes will be performed by a committee including external evaluators.

A University *Register of Research* is under construction, together with an annual publication of the *Year-Book of Research*.

4.3.4. Evaluating administrative activities

The evaluation of administrative activities is still at a very preliminary phase.

In accordance with national legislation the University must draw up a formal organisation chart on the basis of the analysis of work-loads. The staff is distributed among the offices by the Rector. The staff is generally obliged to respect an average time table of thirty-six hours a week.

Work attendance is checked by a computerised control system, while the head of the office checks the work result and the achievement of objectives. The head can request the intervention of the central administration which, after an enquiry, can proceed to impose a sanction on the employee. The sanction can be a various type (for example censure, a wage cut, temporary suspension from work) and can even go as far as the sack.

The organisation chart has now been defined and the Evaluation Unit is stimulating the definition of goals and performance indicators for the administrative units of the university. A new accounting system is under development, which should allow to better define centres of responsibility and a more coherent set of control parameters.

A first analysis of work flows has been performed by an external consulting firm, as a preliminary step towards defining a richer set of indicators for process performance.

5. THE IMPACT OF EVALUATION

As the former paragraph makes clear, and despite relevant aspects of the monitoring process still waiting to be defined, the evaluation system at Ca' Foscari is now well in place and covers a broad range of issues. The Evaluation Unit is entering its third year of life and some early evidence concerning its impact starts being available, although mostly in an anecdotal way rather than in a systematic one. Thus it is possible to make some cautious, early remarks on how the evaluation activity is affecting organisational life.

Most actors involved in Ca' Foscari decision making would agree on the fact that the impact of the evaluation process on daily decision making is still missing to a large extent, although early signals of its direct relevance can be detected. Not all information produced by the process is used for decision making purposes, and the recommendations of evaluators often remain a dead letter. Part of this may be due to the recent introduction of the evaluation system; but it may be related as well to structural features of decision making in universities (Cohen and March 1974; Friedberg et Musselin 1989). However, the same people that express this discomfort usually find that evaluation is useful. The evaluation process seems to have virtues that go beyond its immediate practical consequences. In order to better understand this ambivalent feelings, we shortly describe some current uses of the evaluation process in the context of the Ca' Foscari university. Our remarks are based on ad-hoc interviews with relevant decision makers of the University and on daily collection of evidence from the authors as key actors of the evaluation process.

5.1. Evaluation as a source of legitimacy

Although evaluation is usually thought of as a support to university decision making, it also provides a powerful function as a source of legitimacy. Organisations, especially when their output is difficult to measure, need to respond to the normative pressures of their environment in order to legitimately claim for resources (Meyer and Rowan 1977). This is especially true of universities, who add to the well-known ambiguity of their output (Cohen and March 1974) the nature of fiduciary institution (Stinchcombe 1990), to whom crucial societal functions are delegated.

In the past years, universities' legitimacy in Italy has become more problematic, in consonance with a general international trend. In particular, the legitimacy issue has become more critical as:

- central funds have been shrinking and there has been a general pressure towards greater efficiency in the use of public resources;
- fees paid by students' families have increased;
- societal thrust in the ability of universities to keep their near-monopolistic position in supplying high quality research and education has started to waver (Noam, 1995).

In such a context, the evaluation process plays a role that goes well beyond its practical success in affecting research, teaching or administrative activities in the university. It reassures the broader social and institutional audience that the university is undertaking an effort of being more rational, of

making its output more transparent and of managing more efficiently its resources. In general, this effect comes before any significant consequence of the evaluation process may be displayed, and it may hold even in the absence of visible results.

The Ca' Foscari university has been actively pursuing such a legitimating strategy in managing its evaluation process. It has aggressively undertaken actions that might legitimate its role as an innovative, transparent, efficiency-oriented institution. It has been one of the first Italian universities to comply to the normative prescription to create an institutionalised evaluation activity through the constitution of an Evaluation Unit. It has stressed the need for external evaluators within such Unit. It has been the first Italian university to undertake the international institutional quality assessment program of the Association of the European Universities (CRE). Finally, Ca' Foscari has been very active in the national arena of evaluation policies, through the Italian Conference of Rectors (CRUI). More generally, the evaluation policy has been a relevant piece in the Rector's strategy of making Ca' Foscari more visible, attractive and accountable to the social environment, fitting together with initiatives like the Science Park, the inclusion of external trustees in the University Board of Governors, and a pro-active role in national higher education policy-making. Evaluation has become a tool not only for internal management, but also for external communication. There is little doubt that this evolution, coherent with the broader university strategy, has been considerably favoured by the institutional closeness of the Evaluation Unit to the Rector in the governance structure of Ca' Foscari.

5.2. Evaluation and accountability

The evaluation process also responds to a need of greater accountability for university management. As pressures for university legitimacy increase, so do pressures for more accountability towards the university main stakeholders. It has been a major achievement of the new Ca' Foscari statute to make more explicit the role of different stakeholders -- including government bodies, students, and the regional economic system - and to represent it into the governance structure of the university. The new composition of the Board of Governors and the institution of a *Committee of Social Referents* clearly reflect this trend.

The evaluation process contributes to accountability by making more transparent the process and the outcomes of the university management. It helps to introduce performance measures, to establish management objectives and to assess achievements.

From this point of view, the evaluation process may help to establish higher levels of accountability, especially with respect to external stakeholders (professors and the internal personnel already benefit of strong control mechanisms through the democratic governance structure of the university). The current institutional position of the Evaluation Unit partly limits this effect, however. The Unit directly responds to the Rector, and has only limited and indirect links with the other main governance structures of the university. The evaluation reports are obviously public, but there are currently no other channels than the Rector through which such governance structures can interact with the Unit. There is actually no direct way through which, for example, the Board of Governors might affect the evaluation agenda or require specific information.

5.3. Evaluation and resource allocation

As far as the decision making process is directly affected, the evaluation process has been mostly involved in resource allocation processes, although still in an embryonic way.

The main decision arena which has been affected by evaluation is the so called re-equilibration process. Ca' Foscari shows highly unbalanced figures concerning the teaching load of different faculties and departments, that generate relevant issues of internal efficiency and fairness. Thus, it has undertaken a re-equilibration process that (on an incremental basis) redirects resources towards faculties with the highest student/teachers ratios. The evaluation process provides the basic figures on which re-equilibration decisions are taken. These decisions are not automatic, however, since there is important room for corrective factors and negotiation among faculties. At a lower level, similar issues arise among departments, especially in the Economics faculty, which is by far the most overloaded.

At both levels, it appears that the main “users” of the evaluation process have been the Deans of the faculties.

At the university level, Deans have been using figures on teaching loads as a basis for their bargaining strategies. The “objective” and impersonal nature of figures has proved useful both in providing a natural focal point for bargaining and in supplying “fairness” criteria coherent with the egalitarian tradition of universities, thus making acceptable to all participants the outcomes of the re-equilibration process (Friedberg and Musselin 1989). Notice that although anchoring re-allocation of resources to figures may look as bureaucratic and as disregarding contents, in the context of the inertial decision-making process of the university it has produced the opposite effect, highlighting issues of change and critical re-examination.

At the lower level of intra-faculty resource allocation, evaluation has proved a tool for justifying (sometimes post-factum) decisions made by Deans, providing a strong rhetorical argument in support of their choices. This usage has been sometimes pushed to the level of negotiations with individual professors about the content of their courses and their individual teaching load. In the most overloaded faculty, that of Economics, usage of the evaluation process have started to be more diffuse, actively involving Department Heads in processing figures and proposing new indicators related to the resource allocation process.

It has to be stressed that those early impacts of the evaluation process are still sporadic and concern only single choice episodes, rather than affecting systematically the decision making process. Furthermore, information provided by the evaluation process seems to be more used than the recommendations arising from such a process (e.g. from the Evaluation Unit annual report). Nevertheless, interesting trends are observable and provide precious input for further strengthening the future impact of evaluation policies.

A second area of impact of the evaluation process on resource allocation has been the internal research funds assignment. Although the mass of internal research funds allocated to departments and individuals is not too relevant, last two years have seen a shift from assignment criteria based on uniform distribution of funds to individual academics (biased only by hierarchical status) to a system based on individual and collective research output (see § x). Such a system substantially delegates to Departments the definition of evaluation criteria (based on the weighting of the different kinds of publications), while the Evaluation Unit acts as sort of intermediary between the Departments and the

Academic Senate, which has in turn to approve such criteria. Mostly, the Evaluation Unit has been checking the compatibility of criteria proposed by single departments with the guidelines defined by the Academic Senate, helping in some case the departments to redefine their criteria in more appropriate ways.

The effect of such re-orientation of research funding is still hard to judge. On the one hand, changes in research funding take some years to produce visible outcomes; on the other one, the amount of the internal research funds allocated in such way is rather modest, so that the impact of funds allocation on research activity cannot be expected to be dramatic. The most interesting effects already observable are more of the symbolic type: the new allocation system has produced in some departments the beginning of a debate on evaluation criteria and how they should reflect what has to be considered important and has priority.

The attempt to push departments to formulate an embryonic research strategy has been further pursued with the introduction, during last year, of special funds for “department projects” (see above): departments must select each year a project to be funded by the university and that should characterise the department research profile. The selection should reflect two components: the average evaluation of the publications of researchers in the team of each project proposal, and a further discretionary evaluation of the project quality by a committee of department members. The results of the first round of department project selection show discrepant tendencies. Only one third of departments had real competition among multiple projects, while the remaining two thirds had only one project presented, sometimes with too numerous participants given the limited amount of resource available. In the final project selection, wherever there was competition, the discretionary evaluation turned out to be more relevant than publications. All this shows some reluctance of departments to use research productivity as a key indicator for resource allocation. Nevertheless, in order to justify discretionary quality evaluation committees had to define what kind of research was considered relevant for the department, and how the quality of proposal should be evaluated. This happened not only in traditional scientific disciplines, but also in departments in the field of Humanities. Once more, this shows that some small steps towards a more evaluation-oriented culture of research management are being made. Once more, it is too early to understand whether such small steps policy will suffice to produce a true re-orientation in the research policy of the university.

5.4. Evaluation as a source of feedback

Evaluation is also source of feedback for daily activities performed by individuals in the university. As such, the evaluation process in Ca' Foscari has had a quite limited impact.

The use of course evaluation through students' questionnaires illustrates well this point. The use of questionnaires is now pretty much consolidated within the faculty of economics, while it is very recent in the rest of the university. Anonymous questionnaires filled in by students are collected in all courses close to the end of each term, and provide judgements over the course structure, teaching quality and other related aspects. The questionnaires are at present to a large extent under-utilised -- if ever used. Individual professors receive the results of their own course evaluation -- but the process of questionnaires' processing is too slow, and thus feedback is untimely and it comes when teachers have already redesigned their course for next year. Deans receive detailed information over each course's evaluation, but they don't use it, or in the best case communicate to the faculty some aggregate result (which is usually scarcely informative).

Furthermore, there seem to be some biases in questionnaire evaluation that suggest caution in using them. So, for example, it was reported that in some courses unsatisfied students ceased attending lectures during the first month, leaving in the class only a few (but satisfied) students. Of course, the questionnaire captures the voice of those attending the course, but not that one of those that left. In a university system where most exams can be passed with success without attending courses, this may be a strong source of bias.

Finally, when talking about potential usage of questionnaires, people often tend to see them more as a tool for correcting negative situations than for highlighting positive ones -- they emphasise punishment rather than reward.

Thus, problems of timeliness, scarce attention by academic hierarchy, participation bias, and a perception focused on negative aspects tend to reduce the potential impact of the course evaluation as a source of feedback.

5.5. Trends in the evaluation process

Partly as a natural evolution of its former activity, partly as a reaction to the aforementioned difficulties, the Evaluation Unit is trying to orient its role and its action in a few directions.

- In terms of institutional role: the Evaluation Unit is planning to report more directly to the Academic Senate and the Board of Governors. The strengthening of such institutional links should help to create a more balanced position of the Unit in the governance system of the university, complementing its quite close relationship to the Rector.
- In terms of integration with the decision making process: the Unit is trying to involve more directly the university decision makers in the evaluation process and in using its results. Thus, it is organising meetings with groups of university managers (the Deans, the administrative management, etc.) with the aim of strengthening relationships with such organisational actors and committing them to interact more with the evaluation process and to use its outcomes.
- In terms of contents: in general, following also recommendations from the CRE report, the Evaluation unit is trying to make the evaluation process increasingly useful for decision making and in particular more tied to issues of strategic management of the university. This implies better defining, in interaction with Ca' Foscari management, the strategic priorities that should drive the evaluation effort (evaluation is a costly process and it evaluators' attention needs to be better allocated). For example, increasing attention is devoted to the problem of the excessive length of the "cycle time" of students, according to a diffuse perception of absolute priority of this issue. Making the evaluation process more tightly linked to strategic issues also implies defining evaluation parameters in ways that facilitate their use not only for internal comparisons, but also for assessing the competitive strength of the university. For example, ongoing developments in the evaluation system include benchmarking in research evaluation and the monitoring of the comparative success of Ca' Foscari graduates in comparison to other universities' graduates.

Furthermore, the Evaluation Unit is trying to complete its monitoring scheme, by filling the hole in the teaching quality assessment, and especially in deepening the research evaluation process and opening a larger window on administrative processes, that have been up to now a rather secondary issue in the evaluation agenda.