

# UNIRI 2030 —My University

Work programme of the candidate for the election  
of the Rector of the University of Rijeka in the term  
of office 2025 - 2029.

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# Abstract

The **UNIRI 2030 – My University** programme underlines the transformative role of the University of Rijeka in the current moment of social development, which is confronted with complex social, economic, political and environmental challenges. With a vision of the University as an autonomous, high quality education and research centre with a strong presence in its surroundings, UNIRI 2030 – My University aims to develop an integrated academic community that fosters dialogue, openness and partnership with all stakeholders. In the spirit of community, the programme invites us to **shape the future together** and empower every member of the academic community to recognise their place and proudly identify with the University of Rijeka by calling it **My University**.

Building trust through openness in collaboration, understanding the needs of balanced development, and transparency and decisiveness in decision-making centred on common goals are fundamental principles of the proposed governance model. The strengthening of integration mechanisms emphasises the improvement of **collaboration between the university administration and the administrations of its constituents**, which will allow a synergistic effect in the achievement of the strategic objectives of each constituent and the common objectives of the university. In addition, it is important to strengthen **partnerships with the relevant government bodies, European institutions, the media and trade unions** to enable a coordinated approach with the legal framework, timely monitoring of changes in public policy and effective communication and representation of the interests of the academic community in the broader social context.

The primary mission of the University of Rijeka is to provide **quality education** that ensures the development of relevant competences, critical thinking and readiness for lifelong learning among students. Significant achievements have already been made in the development of personalised learning pathways, flexible teaching options and internationalisation of studies. Nevertheless, numerous challenges lie ahead, such as the continuous decline in student numbers, low graduation rates, reduced vertical progression and insufficient development of practical competences, which require additional efforts to **modernise existing and develop new study programmes**, greater support in **improving teaching competences**, implementation of innovative **models of practical learning** in business and greater **promotion** of the University of Rijeka as an attractive place to study. The University of Rijeka upholds the tradition of being a student-centred institution by developing student-centred policies and promoting their active role in shaping institutional policies and improving student standard. The University continually looks after the quality of student life through the activities of the University Counselling Centre and Student Centre, which provide high quality support for academic success and student satisfaction. Further strengthening the

role of students in the development of the academic community, ensuring quality and inclusive education with special support for vulnerable groups, improving academic and career counselling and constant concern for the preservation of mental health are fundamental for the further development of the quality of student life.

The University of Rijeka is successfully developing its **research and innovation profile** by continuously strengthening international collaboration and supporting the established UNIRI project and funding system, as well as providing strong centralised support in applying for highly competitive projects. Participation in international networks such as YUFE and YERUN improves international visibility, research capacities, promotes researcher mobility and interdisciplinarity. Further development includes **strengthening and consolidating high-quality research teams, improving the scientific infrastructure**, developing **research centres**, increasing the **motivation of researchers and artists** and significantly increasing the number of **doctoral and post-doctoral students**, who represent a fundamental human resource for new breakthroughs in the quality and quantity of research and artistic activities with a relevant social impact.

The University of Rijeka is committed to **knowledge transfer** and close collaboration with society, which is emphasised by the results of a considerable number of internationally relevant projects such as *EDIH-Adria and North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley*, which develop innovation potential and establish important partnerships with the business community. The good co-operation with the local innovation and business ecosystem is reflected in the progress made in building regional innovation ecosystems and connecting the university community with its surroundings through the successful establishment of the regional digital innovation platform RIMAP. A new impetus in the development of the Step Ri science and technology park as a central platform for collaboration with industry, the promotion of innovation in entrepreneurship and the founding of start-ups and spin-off companies will contribute to the valorisation of knowledge. By continuing to actively participate in international networks, strengthening ties with local and regional economic entities and participating in projects that contribute to social and economic progress, the University will position itself as a relevant factor in the development of its surroundings.

The University of Rijeka is developing **international recognition** through active participation in **European networks** of educational and scientific institutions and through continuous efforts to create an **international profile** for its academic community. Further progress in introducing more study programmes in foreign language and attracting a significant number of international students and researchers is based on the rich experience in developing educational programmes with foreign partners and quality education. In the coming period, it is necessary to increase the promotion of study and work at the University of Rijeka in international target regions, create new



accommodation capacities, improve administrative support, develop motivational mechanisms for teachers who teach in foreign languages, and actively engage in activities to overcome regulatory and administrative barriers to the arrival and stay of international members of the academic community.

**Financial stability** is the basis for long-term success and ensures the quality of educational, scientific and artistic activities that enable the development of infrastructure and support for members of the academic community. The upcoming negotiations on a new programme funding agreement provide an opportunity to strengthen stability while reducing dependence on the state budget by **diversifying revenue sources**. The basis for long-term financial sustainability lies in generating continued income from international projects and partnerships with the private sector, as well as opportunities to commercialise intellectual property and run fundraising campaigns. In addition, co-operation with the national and European institutions responsible for funding mechanisms to support universities must be intensified. Operational improvements, such as optimising the use of existing resources, improving internal management processes, digitising operations, developing an optimal model for integrated operations and the necessary strengthening and professional **development of human resources in support services** will also contribute to long-term sustainability.

The development of the **infrastructure** is one of the basic prerequisites for the further growth of the university and the creation of a functional and modern environment for work, research and study. New developments include the improvement of existing component infrastructure, the construction of new teaching and research facilities on campus and the significant expansion of accommodation capacity in student residences. It is also important to focus on **developing administrative capacity** to support academic and teaching work by optimising workload and strongly encouraging staff professional development. The development of sports and leisure facilities, health improvement programmes, a vibrant cultural life and continued efforts to create an inclusive space that recognises the contributions of all members of the academic community will contribute to more efficient operations and greater employee satisfaction, making the University of Rijeka and its components **desirable places to work and live**.

The driving force behind all the successes and achievements we strive for are the **people of the University**. Through their commitment, dedication, perseverance and creativity, the University earns a **high reputation** and public **trust** as an institution that acts responsibly and in a development-oriented manner in the interest of the common good.

# Introduction

We live in a time of profound societal change in which complex challenges resulting from dynamic social, economic, political and environmental pressures are redefining the role of universities. To position themselves successfully in this new context, innovative approaches are required that go beyond the traditional mission of education and research. In the modern world, a university acts as a **relevant authority in shaping the future of society**. It takes on an active role not only as a provider of knowledge and research, but also as a catalyst for change, innovation and social progress.

Due to its importance and prominence, the university must enjoy full **autonomy** from society, which **guarantees freedom of research** as well as **freedom of thought and expression**, manifested in the **independence of decision-making** in organisational, financial, academic and staff development matters.

The University is a place for quality education, scientific research, artistic creation and cultural experimentation, where the diversity of perspectives serves as a basis for the development of new ideas to ensure sustainable social progress. The constant growth of scientific knowledge, the rapid obsolescence of learned material, the accelerated penetration of technology and artificial intelligence into all areas of life, the dynamic changes in the labour market and the increasingly intense competition for education tailored to the needs of employers require **effective preparation of students for future jobs**, interdisciplinary collaboration, lifelong learning and taking an active role in society. In addition to ensuring the **excellence and relevance of scientific and artistic work**, the university also has a **responsibility to strengthen public trust in science** and scientific results and to promote high ethical standards and accountability in the application of scientific discoveries, which are particularly important for societal progress. The university must also play an **active role in tackling complex societal problems** such as climate change, increasing social inequality, the democratic deficit, an ageing population and political and social division.

The future development of the University requires further improvement of qualitative **cooperation with key stakeholders at international, national and local levels** in order to strengthen the position and role of higher education, science and the arts and to promote strategies and actions that increase visibility, recognition and importance for social development. The University of Rijeka should continue its already **recognised active role in the development of the national and European higher education and science area** and further strengthen its position in European university networks and European bodies and associations that shape education and science policy and define a new paradigm for the role of the university in society.

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As a valued centre of knowledge, innovation and social engagement, the University of Rijeka has the ability to adapt to the challenges and changes of our time and, guided by its values, can and should transform them into opportunities for further progress. This task requires a clear vision of development that includes **courage in strategic decisions, innovativeness in approaches** and **collective action** to anticipate future challenges and ensure the relevance of activities in changing circumstances. The current challenges highlight the need to strengthen **community, co-operation** and **mutual respect**. They are addressed through initiatives that promote dialogue, collaboration and teamwork among members of the University community, with a commitment to creating a **sense of belonging** and community in a learning and constantly improving environment.

# Vision

## UNIRI 2030 —My University

as the University of the Future with a position as a relevant entity of social development, attractive for work and study in national, European and global contexts, enjoying stable trust from all stakeholders inside and outside the system.

The programme aims to create a **unified** university environment that fosters **collaboration, innovation, and collective progress**. It is grounded in values, clearly defined priorities, and objectives, with ongoing progress monitoring and impact evaluation. Key principles of responsible management include ethical leadership, openness, transparency, flexibility, adaptability, and proactive decision implementation.

A culture of continuous learning and the recognition of personal and professional development for all members of the academic community are fundamental for enhancing institutional adaptability and resilience. This approach positions the University as a dynamic organisation that embraces best practices, fosters openness to new ideas, and values constructive criticism as essential for improvement.

The University of Rijeka encompasses 11 faculties with legal personalities, 6 faculties without legal personalities, and 2 supporting institutions, creating a diverse system with varying fields of action and interests. While this diversity provides opportunities to address challenges from multiple perspectives, it also requires efforts to build cohesion and a shared sense of purpose, in a community where **all stakeholders are committed to a common vision of the future**. Strengthening mutual trust, fostering a sense of belonging, and preserving the unique identities of each part enable the University to thrive as a unified and dynamic institution.

Unity in achieving the objectives is realized by strengthening the **collaborative role of the University management** in addressing the challenges of each constituent. Open communication, dialogue, and policies that promote cooperation, understanding, and solidarity enables the building of a strong and thriving university in which **each member is valued, supported and involved in achieving common goals**.

By shaping the future together, we are developing an institution in which **every member of the academic community recognises their place and actively participates** in its progress, proudly identifying with the University of Rijeka and calling it My University.

# Values

By shaping the future through the UNIRI 2030 – My University programme, the University of Rijeka continues to develop its recognition and relevance at national, European and international level as a leading higher education institution and an institution of social and economic progress.

The implementation of the proposed programme is based on the promotion of values that will improve the work and operation of the academic community, ensure excellence in education, scientific and artistic work and improve the experience and satisfaction of all members of the community – students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff.

The fundamental values on which I base the programme are:

## 1. University autonomy and responsibility.

A responsibly managed university respects and preserves the institutional autonomy that enables freedom of action in the management of organisational, financial, human and other resources. Responsibility means not only the conscientious and proper fulfilment of duties and tasks with the acceptance of consequences in the event of failure, but also the ability to respond appropriately to challenges.

## 2. Academic freedom and integrity.

Academic freedom includes freedom of thought, research, expression and action and is inextricably linked to academic integrity, which implies the responsibility of each member of the community to act according to high ethical standards and professional principles.

## 3. Openness and connectedness.

Openness fosters curiosity and courage, while connectivity promotes collaboration and encourages all forms of networking aimed at achieving shared progress, making the University community an open place that values diverse perspectives and promotes dialogue.

## 4. Excellence and innovation.

Promoting and recognising excellence and innovation ensures the realisation of the University's vision as a leader in education for the future, relevant and high-quality research and artistic activity, and responsible community action.

## 5. Diversity and inclusivity.

Diversity is a richness that empowers the academic community. Promoting diversity and recognising inclusive action ensures that all students, faculty, researchers and administrators feel important, welcomed and supported members of the community.

# Principles of governance

Decision-making in the position of Rector is associated with great responsibility and requires wisdom, fairness and transparency. The Rector's actions with regard to the institutional development of the University require an **understanding of the relationship between decision-making processes and the content of decisions** with the **needs and interests of all members of the University community**. In this context, reaching consensus is a fundamental strategy to ensure the acceptance of decisions and to supporting their effective implementation by all stakeholders.

Achieving consensus requires a commitment to open communication with all stakeholders inside and outside the system, to participatory and transparent decision-making that ensures fairness, thoughtfulness and broad acceptance of decisions, which ultimately leads to building trust, harmonious relationships and a more successful university.

In making decisions, I will be guided by the following principles:

## 1. Trust and transparency in decision making.

Building trust throughout the academic community is based on developing a culture of cooperation, mutual respect, regular communication and transparent decision-making. Clear communication of the rationale and process for decision-making ensures community members' trust in the governance process, while transparency increases accountability and contributes to the adoption of common goals.

## 2. Set shared goals.

Aligning long-term goals is critical to the strategic development of the university. Every member of the community should understand and support the university's vision and mission, while commonly defined goals help align the planning and implementation of strategic priorities.

## 3. Participatory and open governance.

Participation by members of the university community ensures that diverse voices are heard in the decision-making process. Active involvement of students, faculty and other staff and consultation prior to major decisions allow for quality discussions and informed decisions that best meet the needs of all stakeholders.

## 4. Flexibility and adaptability.

In a dynamic environment, a willingness to change and adapt is critical to success. Openness to feedback and continuous adaptation based on new information allow us to better respond to challenges, strengthen effectiveness and maintain the University's relevance.

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## 5. Proactive implementation of decisions and evaluation of impact.

Proactive action implies the timely and decisive implementation of decisions. Continuous monitoring of the impact of decisions taken enables the identification of necessary improvements, while effective evaluation mechanisms provide clear guidance for the adjustment of activities.

## 6. Conflict resolution and communication.

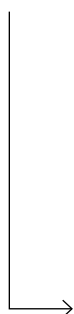
Establishing mechanisms for timely conflict resolution and allowing all members of the community to voice their opinions is key to developing constructive dialogue. Finding common solutions through active communication and co-operation reduces tensions and strengthens the sense of community.

## 7. Solidarity and equitable development.

Every part of the university community must have equal access to resources and support. Solidarity is the basis for equitable development of all constituencies, ensuring that no part of the system is neglected and that everyone has the opportunity to develop.

## 8. Ethics and integrity.

Promoting ethical behaviour and integrity in all aspects of administration provides confidence in the University's decisions. A sense of responsibility, respect for moral standards and the consistent application of ethical principles form the basis for successful and responsible administration.



The recommendations and guidelines of the **University Council** as the supervisory body, the **Student Union** as the representative body of the students and the **Economic Council** and the **International Science Council** as advisory bodies of the University will be of great importance in the decision-making process.

The principles of governance include the consistent application of openness, transparency and co-operation with all key stakeholders, both within and outside the academic community. A particularly important aspect of governance relates to the systematic **strengthening of partnership relationships with relevant government bodies**, including ministries and agencies, as well as with **European institutions**, the **media** and **trade unions**, enabling the University to act in accordance with the legal framework, to monitor changes in

public policy in a timely manner and to effectively communicate and represent the interests of the academic community in the wider social context.

Similarly, it is extremely important to build **a strong collaborative relationship between the University's administration and the administrations of its constituents**. Such collaboration will allow for a synergistic effect in achieving the strategic goals of each constituent institution as well as the common strategic goals of the University. Open and synergetic cooperation will ensure alignment in the implementation of the University's strategy and maximise the contribution of each faculty and institution within the University, which will further promote the growth, innovation and integrated development of the University of Rijeka.

The consistent application of all the governance principles mentioned is the basis for **building trust in the university as a public institution** that acts in the public interest.



# Analysis of the current status and development prospects of the University's core activities

For the basic fields of action, which are also the strategic areas in the University of Rijeka Strategy 2021-2025, an overview of the current state is given by analysing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, while development orientations are derived by identifying favourable aspects within the system and opportunities in the environment.

## 1 / Learning and teaching

The first mission of the university is to provide quality education. Higher education provides individuals with opportunities for personal development, increases their competitiveness in the labour market and makes them active citizens who contribute to their community and participate in decision-making processes.

The vision of this programme in the educational field of learning is to create an educational environment that fosters **critical thinking, creativity** and **innovation** while developing predispositions for **lifelong learning**. It is important to give students the opportunity to acquire the necessary competences to cope in a constantly changing world and to shape them into responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to societal development. Through its educational mission, the university should enable social mobility and contribute to **inclusivity** and the **reduction of inequalities** in society by offering people from different backgrounds the opportunity to realise their full potential and improve their socio-economic status.

The strengths of the higher education system at the University of Rijeka and its constituencies are the result of the continuous efforts of previous administrations to strengthen the quality of education and ensure an excellent position for further development towards the highlighted vision.

The results of regular faculty and student satisfaction surveys show a stable **high level of satisfaction with the quality of the teaching process**, which contributes to a positive atmosphere in the educational environment. The high quality of teaching staff and employees as well as a developed system for ensuring and improving the quality of teaching are further guarantees of excellent teaching. The development of innovation in learning and teaching through UNIRI CLASS projects aimed at innovative approaches to learning, such as the development of interdisciplinary micro-skills, digital citizenship

and practical competences for the future, strengthens the university's capacity. Significant institutional experience in **community engagement** makes the University's education relevant and recognisable. A robust system to support the **digitalisation of the educational process** (through Merlin, ISVURI, Provis, e-Enrollment and other tools), including regulated opportunities for hybrid teaching, provides a favourable development perspective. Mechanisms have been put in place to **provide personalised learning paths** for students (micro-qualifications offer, YUFE educational offers, UNIRI-Coursera educational offers) and a developed system of **recognition of prior learning** enables for effective assessment. The initiation of a strategic partnership with Coursera to establish a platform and availability of programmes to improve the skills profile of students, teaching and non-teaching staff is a significant added value for all stakeholders in the educational process. The University's Counselling Centre provides ongoing high-quality support to students, especially vulnerable groups, contributing to diversity, inclusion and equality. The active involvement of students as co-creators of learning and teaching policies ensures development that meets today's challenges.

In the past period, several new, attractive degree programmes were launched (Speech therapy, Pharmacy, Mechatronics and robotics, etc.). A particular breakthrough is the development of the **YUFE educational offer**, through which the University of Rijeka already offers educational content to more than 160,000 students, with 2023 being the most sought-after university for enrolment in YUFE courses. A new innovative joint YUFE degree programme, Urban Sustainability Studies, which will accept students from the 2025/2026 academic year, offers excellent opportunities for personalised education with an open curriculum and opportunities for integrated internationalisation (studying at the University of Rijeka while staying at several European universities), which will significantly improve the quality, international profile and competitiveness of graduates. The experience of active participation in the development and accreditation of this unique study programme, which has the potential to award a **European degree**, a new type of qualification currently being developed at the European level, holds special value for the entire university. The announced EU investments for the development of transnational studies that carry the designation of a European Degree provide opportunities for the development of new studies of this type, which will increase the attractiveness and visibility of the university.

Increasing the attractiveness of the University of Rijeka as a place to study will be achieved through the modernisation of existing study programmes, the development of new study programmes and new initiatives to promote study at our university.

The **modernisation of existing study programmes** should focus primarily on enriching study programmes with opportunities for acquiring micro-qualifications, the application of problem-based learning and teaching methods and the development and implementation of models for acquiring practical skills in the

business environment. The additional attractiveness of the degree programme can also be increased by addressing sustainable development issues within the existing degree programme, promoting green initiatives and incorporating sustainable development goals into the course content and the students' school and extracurricular activities. In this segment, the link with the local community in the application of learning through community engagement, which particularly supports organised student activities to tackle problems in their immediate environment, is particularly important.

A particular strength of the University is the potential to develop **new study programmes** that respond to societal needs. The development of strategic micro-qualifications, funded in 2024 and recognised as potential cores of new degree programmes, is an important starting point. The approved strategic micro-qualifications cover relevant areas for potential future degree programmes in emerging technologies, applied mathematics, kinesiology, public policy and artistic endeavours. However, there is a great need and interest in the community to develop new studies in other areas. There is a need to develop a new degree in **data science** that combines a multidisciplinary approach of applied mathematics, statistics, artificial intelligence and computer engineering, allowing the development of profiles in high demand in the labour market. The shortage of qualified kinesiologists in the education system, sports training and healthcare represents a serious challenge for the entire region. Therefore, it is necessary to initiate a new study programme in **kinesiology** that not only meets the needs of the labour market, but also strengthens the resources in the field of sports and health within the university. Multi-year reports from the Croatian Labour Office indicate a persistent shortage of specialists in **educational rehabilitation, social pedagogy** and **social work**. Due to a new EU directive from June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence, a significant need for the education of **sustainable development experts** is expected in the near future. The University has the potential to begin work on the initial accreditation and introduction of all the new degree programmes mentioned and to secure the necessary resources.

In order to further improve the **promotion of studying at the University of Rijeka**, in addition to a more intensive **presence on social media**, it is proposed to revitalise the University of Rijeka **Study Fair** and create a central event to provide information to prospective students. This fair would be an opportunity to highlight the specific advantages and features of the University of Rijeka and provide candidates with comprehensive information on study programmes, mobility opportunities, educational innovations and available resources for academic and personal development.

The weaknesses of the system are reflected in a continuous decline in the number of enrolled students, lower vertical progression, low graduation rates, weakened mental health and the lack of a centralised system to supporting the development of teaching skills.

The **reduced vertical progression** addressed in the University Strategy 2021-2025 through the measure of revising the enrolment policy for graduate and postgraduate studies has unfortunately not been successfully implemented. The rigid conditions for enrolment in graduate degree programmes, which are defined solely by the subject and content competence profile of applicants, have been maintained. Further efforts required to relax these conditions should first focus on **revising the existing expected learning outcomes** of the degree programme, especially the undergraduate degree programme, where it is necessary to reduce the emphasis on the acquisition of competences in the content area of the degree programme while increasing the emphasis on the acquisition of **generic and transversal skills** and competences for **lifelong learning**.

Due to the unfavourable study conditions during the pandemic, graduation rates have dropped significantly. Although a recovery of this indicator is expected in the near future due to the normalisation of conditions, possible measures to **improve graduation rates** must be considered, in particular by examining improvements in the implementation of recommended university standards in the **evaluation and assessment of student performance**, as well as the systematic development of mental health support for students and faculty.

**Good mental health** of all those involved in the educational process is an important element in the successful achievement of educational goals. In addition to supporting the work of the University Counselling Centre, which was achieved through increased funding in 2021-2024 via the UNIRI CLASS programme, a university pilot project **UNIRI Cares** was launched to develop a peer support system for students. Further development aims to create a sustainable support system for the most vulnerable students (at the beginning and end of their studies), which should reduce the need for individual counselling and support while enabling students to adapt to the demands of their studies and overcome difficulties during their studies, as well as prepare for career development planning when entering the labour market.

In other segments to improve teaching, it is particularly important to continue to **promote, recognise and reward high quality teaching staff** while providing organised support for the implementation of innovative approaches to teaching and learning, including the use of digital technologies and methods of community engagement. To this end, it is necessary to create a university framework for the continuous support of teachers in the improvement of teaching skills and the modernisation of study programmes and to develop a specially equipped university **Centre for the development of teaching competences**.

In analyses of graduate satisfaction, the acquisition of practical skills regularly receives the lowest ratings. This challenge will be tackled within the framework of UNIRI CLASS project line A3. A new initiative involves the adoption of the **Model for the acquisition of practical skills in an economic environment** proposed by the university management and the Economic Council for 2024. This

model requires thoughtful implementation, which will take effect in the proposed 2025-2029 mandate period.

A particular external challenge, but also an opportunity, is the unprecedented growth and presence of AI in all areas of life, which is simultaneously accompanied by the weak representation of the use of **AI tools in education**. It is crucial to develop strategies and measures to strengthen the support of teachers and students in the use of artificial intelligence tools and to give students the opportunity to develop relevant skills for the proper and meaningful use of AI.

The University of Rijeka is part of the European Higher Education Area and an active player in the bodies that shape European education policy. This position must be maintained and strengthened in order to maintain its presence and contribution and to improve the University's **recognition** and **international visibility** in the European area, which will benefit students and all stakeholders in the system.

## 2 / Research and innovation —scientific research and artistic work

The highlighted values of this programme include a commitment to maintaining high academic standards in scientific and artistic work, promoting **interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary** and **transdisciplinary collaboration** and emphasising the strengthening of innovation potential. In today's scientific and artistic environment, the need for innovation has never been greater. By creating conditions and an environment that stimulate innovative solutions, especially in areas of global challenges such as climate change and digital transformation, as well as by specifically strengthening and consolidating research teams, promoting the mobility of scientists and artists and developing new collaborations with industry, the university can increase its innovation potential and impact and become a centre of excellence in this field.

The University of Rijeka has shown numerous strengths and opened up opportunities in scientific research and artistic work, but a considerable number of weaknesses and threats require careful strategic development. The vision for further development relates primarily to ensuring conditions that enable the development of **innovative research and artistic projects**, strengthening **scientific resources** and **infrastructure** while strengthening institutional capacity to compete for **external funding sources**. Promoting the use of artificial intelligence in scientific research and artistic work will ensure the transformation of research practises and the development of innovative solutions, with a focus on the ethical use of these technologies.

The University and most of its constituencies are characterised by a **strong international commitment** and close **collaboration in competitive projects**

and make good use of university, national and European financial instruments to support scientific research work. The tools developed for **UNIRI Support** of scientists, young researchers and artists through competitive projects, as well as the introduction of the UNIRI Research Professorship/Fellowship title (financial support for scientists with an international reputation) and the continuous increase in the number of young researchers (employment in projects, in particular the YUFE4Postdocs project) contribute to strengthening research potential and recognising excellence. The outstanding success in the long-term recruitment and employment of returning researchers further strengthens the University's scientific research capacity and enriches the environment with new perspectives. A number of research groups at the University have a strong international reputation and increase the University's visibility around the world. The newly established **Centre for Support in Applying for Competitive Projects** provides researchers with important support in applying for competitive projects and thus continuously improves the ability to obtain funding from international competitions. **Networking in the European alliances** YUFE and YERUN, the regional alliances AARC, SEE WBB and UniAdri-on as well as numerous partnerships with foreign universities and institutions help to strengthen research potential and improve the university's recognition in the international environment. The focus on international cooperation has contributed to successful active participation in **strategic projects** such as the *European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH-Adria)*, *North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley (NAHV)*, *Strengthening the capacity for excellence of Slovenian and Croatian innovation ecosystems to support the digital and green transitions of maritime regions (Inno2Mare)*, *Open and Universal Science (OPUS)*, and *Sustainable Careers for Researcher Empowerment (SECURE)*. Active participation in initiatives such as the *Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)* to reform the assessment of academic careers contributes to improving standards in the assessment of research work.

The growth of scientific and artistic production, initiatives and quality of work in the field of open science, as well as the digitalisation of processes for collecting data on scientific activities, increase the University's visibility and reputation internationally and highlight opportunities for further development.

Despite the continuous increase in the number of internationally peer-reviewed scientific publications, the number of competitive projects and artistic production, the number of high-quality publications in Q1 journals is insufficient, the number of high-quality and resource-rich projects is increasing only to a limited extent and the number of completed doctoral studies is insufficient. A greater commitment to the goals of scientific impact and publications in prestigious journals is needed, which means **strengthening the motivation of researchers and artists**, investing in their development and clearly emphasising and **rewarding the best**. A particular challenge is the completion of doctoral studies and the number of defended dissertations. The University of Rijeka's **Doctoral School** is responsible for the quality of doctoral studies, in addition to the hol-

ders, and should continue to work on improving the quality of doctoral studies through special programmes, as well as acquiring particularly important transversal and entrepreneurial competences for doctoral students. The risk of young researchers migrating to more competitive environments, exacerbated by insufficiently stimulating conditions for postdoctoral researchers and limited opportunities for advancement within the system, poses a permanent threat to the sustainability and development of research capacities.

In its future direction, the University should continue to develop innovative financial instruments through **UNIRI project lines**, focussing on supporting **young scientists, scholars** and **artists** who demonstrate **excellence**, as well as supporting **returning scholars**, especially during their adaptation period after their arrival. Strengthening the number and positions of young researchers is crucial for long-term success. Therefore, investment in attracting and retaining talent through incentive programmes and **support for PhD students** and **post-docs** is extremely important for strengthening research capacity. At the same time, increased international co-operation in bidding for **highly competitive projects** will provide access to key resources and open doors for the employment of a greater number of young researchers.

Investment is also needed for the maintenance of scientific equipment and the acquisition of new instruments in order to capitalise on the opportunities for high-quality research work. In this respect, the strengthening and development of the **Centre for Support in Applying for Competitive Projects** is crucial, as it significantly improves researchers' skills in applying for projects and increases success in obtaining funding through financially strong international competitions. The existing high-performance computing (HPC) resource **Bura** represents a strong potential for development in many scientific fields, which needs to be **modernised**, its **capacity expanded** and **support for users** strengthened. Project proposals to improve HPC in Bura require strong university support through appropriate European funding instruments.

Development planning faces threats such as the instability of the **HRZZ funding policy for scientific research projects**, unfavourable **requirements for the promotion** and quality development of scientific, artistic and innovative work, uncertainties in the provisions of the new **collective agreement** on the development of science, art and innovation, as well as unfavourable developments in the global geopolitical situation and potential negative effects on the **EU Framework Programme** for Research and Innovation (research for military and dual-use purposes). There is a need to seize the opportunities to increase funding for basic, applied and development research through the 1st and 2nd pillars of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, while addressing the identified threats of a poorly developed project culture and a strong seniority culture. There is a need to support and develop new models that strongly support proven quality research groups and individuals as well as excellent young researchers.

The further development of activities in **scientific research centres** and the consolidation of research teams can be fostered by establishing the **University Institute** that unites the centres and coordinates their work to create synergies and space for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, resulting in larger research teams that can compete for highly competitive project calls.

The **promotion of scientific achievements** and **scientific communication** are crucial tools for focussing public attention and strengthening public confidence in the results of scientific research. In addition to the strong support for the long-standing successful organisation of the **Science Festival** and the **Researchers' Night**, the CROSCIENCE initiative, organised at the suggestion of the University's International Science Council, represents a special opportunity to **influence policy in the field of scientific research**. In its first edition in 2024, this event brought together a large number of prominent Croatian scientists with international reputations and developed a series of recommendations aimed at the scientific public in Croatia.

The University of Rijeka has strong potential for further development in the field of science and innovation. However, it needs to be supported by a clear strategic direction that includes **strengthening research teams, investing in young scientists** and **infrastructure**, and further **improving international cooperation** and **collaboration** with the business community so that the university can become a leading centre of scientific excellence at regional and European level.

### 3 / Knowledge transfer and cooperation with the community

Knowledge transfer and cooperation with local and international communities are important components of the University of Rijeka's mission. As part of the existing University Strategy 2021-2025, these activities expand the University's academic role and strengthen **its impact on regional economic and social development**. Knowledge transfer includes not only the **transfer of research results** to industry, the public sector and the community, but also **innovations** from research that are applicable in addressing environmental problems.

The system's strengths in the area of knowledge transfer and regional engagement include building a strong position on the international stage, particularly through participation in European projects developed within international alliances and providing access to significant financial resources and innovation networks. The university's international presence in **strategic projects** such as *EDIH Adria*, *North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley* and *INNO2M-ARE* ensures a stable basis for further development and strengthens the university's position as a player in social and economic development on the European and global stage.



The excellent cooperation with the Regional Development Agency and the local innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem is particularly highlighted by the development of the Regional Digital Innovation Platform **RIMAP**, which is recognised as an example of good practise that promotes the active involvement of stakeholders in knowledge assessment activities in a document recently published by the European Commission describing best practises and tools for knowledge transfer.

Strong regional engagement, especially in cooperation with major business companies operating in the area, such as JGL, Infobip, Ericsson, Lürssen Design Centre Kvarner, ACI Gitone and others, is key to further developing **regional innovation ecosystems**, which have already been initiated in the fields of pharmaceuticals, digital technology and shipping.

The university's **Step Ri** Science and Technology Park offers infrastructural and professional support to start-ups, innovative projects and research groups wishing to commercialise their research, and runs various programmes aimed at promoting entrepreneurial skills, international cooperation and innovation initiatives such as the Big Bang Camp. Further strengthening Step Ri is important to attract international investment in innovation and participation in European innovation platforms. Therefore, there are plans to further develop Step Ri's ability to support **start-up** and **spin-off companies**, strengthen **cooperation with foreign investors** and promote **innovative solutions with high societal value**. Particularly valuable is the regular organisation of hackathon events for students and young people, where tasks are solved and concrete solutions are proposed for presented challenges in the environment in teamwork with mentors from companies and business consultants from Step Ri.

Despite strong foundations, there are challenges related to slower implementation of key initiatives and limited capacity for funding interdisciplinary research that strengthens innovation capacity, which slows down the achievement of strategic goals. Insufficient visibility of the University's achievements, both within the community and at a wider international level, reduces the University's recognition and attractiveness in this area. The lack of stronger and more permanent links between the university and business can reduce the effectiveness of knowledge transfer and innovation to the real sector, despite existing initiatives. Economic instability and a changing regulatory environment pose a threat as they can limit access to funding and increase the pressure on the university to adapt quickly to changes in policy and the corresponding regulatory framework. In this regard, regular and substantive consultation with the **University's Economic Council** is necessary.

The brain drain poses a serious threat to the long-term sustainability of the university's innovation capacity, especially among young researchers and experts. In addition, the university faces increasing competition within the European Higher Education Area, where it is crucial to continuously invest in **visibility**

and **recognition** to attract new students, researchers and investment. Innovation platforms such as RIMAP need to expand and involve a larger number of companies and stakeholders at an international level, including the European area and the Western Balkans region. Initiatives such as the interdisciplinary UNIRI-INOVA projects should be further developed to enable a better link between scientific research and industrial needs and explore their commercial potential. Particular opportunities to support students and young researchers in the area of knowledge transfer and collaboration with the community are offered by participation in *YUFE Challenge Teams*, *YUFEthon* competitions and the YUFE Ideas Lab programme.

Also of great value is the initiative launched by the University of Rijeka to bring the headquarters of the *Knowledge and Innovation Community for the water, marine and maritime sector and ecosystems (Knowledge Innovation Centre - KIC Water)* to Croatia, supported by the relevant ministries, the City of Rijeka and the Primorje-Gorski kotar County.

For the further development of knowledge transfer, opportunities arising from the use of new, announced EU programmes and funding mechanisms for the further development of research and innovation as well as from the regional possibilities of investment funds for financing technology transfer (e.g. Vesna Venture Capital) must be used. The recently published European Commission document entitled *Align, Act, Accelerate* proposes new policy measures to support R&D&I to achieve a strong innovation momentum by increasing funding for the Framework Programme by an additional €220 billion, which should bring Europe global competitiveness, sustainability and resilience. It is therefore necessary to continue to proactively **build collaborations in international networks** and further strengthen links with **local and regional industry** entities in building innovation ecosystems and participating in large **innovation projects**. The university should also strengthen the offer of **lifelong learning programmes**, especially with a focus on **digital skills, sustainable development** and **entrepreneurship**, which attract new groups of students and participants, professionals and experts interested in continuing education. Lifelong learning programmes should focus in particular on areas of green and digital transition and their development should be carried out in close cooperation with the business community. Vocational training programmes should, whenever possible, be aligned with the Croatian Qualifications Framework in order to take advantage of the recently introduced voucher system in the education sector.

## 4 / Internationalisation

Internationalisation is an important element of sustainability, increasing competitiveness and strengthening the international reputation of the University of Rijeka. The University of Rijeka Strategy 2021-2025 defines internationalisation as a strategic area and places particular emphasis on **strengthening interna-**

**tional cooperation**, promoting student, teacher and researcher **mobility** and participating in **European and global educational initiatives**. The current demographic situation in Croatia, which is characterised by a continuous decline in student numbers, poses a threat to the long-term sustainability and further development of the university. From a global perspective, the number of students enrolling in higher education is constantly increasing, with a particularly strong increase in interest from applicants from Central and Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The economy of the Republic of Croatia is struggling with a significant shortage of qualified personnel in almost all sectors, which is partially compensated by the temporary import of unqualified labour, which is not a sustainable solution for long-term economic growth and development. A promising solution to this problem is opening up to international students and ensuring conditions for their professional development and retention in Croatia.

The University of Rijeka consistently shows the **best results in the field of internationalisation at the national level** (the largest share of full-time foreign students, the largest share of foreign academic teaching staff and the largest number of returning academics), thus creating a solid foundation for further development in this area. The university's strengths lie in the **high quality** of its **study programmes**, the quality of its **human resources**, its support for the development of **teaching skills in English** (EJVIN programme – English Language in Higher Education) and its rich experience in actively participating in the **development of educational programmes with foreign partners**, especially within the framework of the YUFE alliance. However, progress has been slowed down by certain weaknesses, such as the limited number of **study programmes in foreign languages**, insufficient **administrative support** for foreign students and **motivation mechanisms** for teachers giving lessons in a foreign language.

The development of foreign language study programmes must be encouraged primarily through mechanisms of *internationalization at home*, i.e. by encouraging and enabling the teaching of parts of foreign language education in study programmes that are otherwise held in Croatian, through guest lectures by foreign professors, by integrating foreign students into mobility in regular study programmes, by using the educational offer of YUFE in the curriculum, etc. An important prerequisite is also the development of systematic **support for academics teaching in foreign languages**, as well as their recognition and reward.

Threats to internationalisation highlighted include **strong competition from other universities** in the area and significant **administrative and regulatory barriers** to the arrival and longer-term stay of foreign students and academic staff from outside the EU. A particular problem in attracting foreign students is the lack of an interface for a national centralised application system in English. The actions of the University of Rijeka to address these challenges have been initiated since 2019 by the Rectors' Council of the Republic of Croatia, which aims to create space for cooperation with the relevant state bodies (MZOM, MUP, MVEP, HZZO, AZVO, AMPEU, etc.) and to achieve their inter-ministerial

cooperation. In 2023, the Rectors' Council adopted the document **Strategic Framework for the Internationalisation of Croatian Universities**, which was prepared under the leadership of the University of Rijeka. It proposes activities that are necessary for the development of internationalisation in a number of elements: Identifying **target regions** for the recruitment of foreign students, ensuring support abroad in **promoting** and **communicating** with candidates for study or work at the university, **reducing obstacles** to the arrival of foreign students and academics in Croatia (including procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits, obtaining student rights, health insurance rights, etc. the continued active participation in activities at the level of the Croatian Ministry of Education and Science (including procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits, obtaining student rights, health insurance rights, etc.)), ensuring continuous **support during the stay and studies** of foreign students and scientists and creating conditions for **career paths** to increase the prospects for their long-term stay. Continued active participation in activities at the national level as well as independent activities to address these challenges are essential for the development of the university's international profile.

Given the favourable opportunities, including its position as a safe and attractive place to study, the university has considerable potential to improve its international dimension.

In terms of strengthening the **international mobility** of students, teachers, academics and administrative staff, there has been quantitative growth, but this has fallen short of expectations in terms of both volume and institutional impact. In particular, a still significant number of mobility students are not sufficiently integrated into regular teaching, while mobility students leaving the country occasionally encounter obstacles to the recognition of learning outcomes acquired at a foreign institution. As far as outgoing mobility of academic teaching and administrative staff is concerned, a strategic approach to improve the development of **institutional impact** is lacking. Outgoing mobility is currently assessed on the basis of personal experience and satisfaction, but there is a lack of monitoring of the dissemination of experience as well as assessment of institutional impact on development (through new inter-institutional collaborations, etc.). The development of internationalisation is closely linked to the problem of insufficient accommodation capacity within the student centre, which underlines this challenge.

The future development of internationalisation at the University of Rijeka will be based on several priorities, including the development of modalities for internationalisation at home, the development of new study programmes in foreign languages (independent or joint studies in cooperation with European partners), the systematic encouragement of teachers to teach in foreign languages, strengthening the capacity of administrative services to support foreign students and academics, and ensuring quality accommodation for foreign students and academics.

## 5 / Business operations

Financial stability is a necessary condition for the long-term success and sustainability of the University of Rijeka. It affects all aspects – from the quality of educational, scientific and artistic activities to the development of infrastructure and support for students, teachers and administrative staff. Therefore, it is important to create a **stable and diverse financial model** that enables growth and adaptability in a changing global and local environment.

The conclusion of the last programme funding agreement for the period 2018-2022 has resulted in a three-year period of unfavourable and unstable funding from the state budget, which has further jeopardised strategic planning and development opportunities. By entering into negotiations for new **programmatic funding for the period 2025-2029**, the university has the opportunity to ensure long-term stability and extend financial support for the key activities of the university and its constituencies. In this context, a well-prepared negotiation process can strengthen financial stability and create space for the realisation of all strategic development segments.

The prevailing dependence on the state budget continues to be a major challenge, so **diversification of revenue sources** is key to the university's financial stability. Key objectives for the coming period include increasing income through international projects, partnerships with industry, commercialisation of intellectual property and philanthropic donations. Securing additional funding will make it possible to finance innovative projects, scholarships and investments in research infrastructure, giving the university the necessary flexibility and stability. It is also necessary to **intensify co-operation with all institutions** responsible for the financial mechanisms supporting higher education, both at state and European level, including **ministries, agencies and European financial institutions**. Active monitoring of available opportunities as well as active participation in the design of funding policies will be crucial to ensure additional sources of revenue and a stable financial framework.

An important aspect of financial stability is the **optimal utilisation of existing resources**, including campus infrastructure and research equipment. More efficient use of these resources, as well as fostering collaboration with the private sector and other institutions, can generate additional revenue. Better coordination and communication between all constituencies of the university is necessary to accelerate strategic decisions and respond more quickly to market needs and funding opportunities.

Improving internal management processes is also of great importance for financial stability. The introduction of **modern management practises**, the further **digitalisation of business processes** and the **professional development of administrative staff** can optimise costs and significantly increase

operational efficiency. Regular financial analyses and the use of data to monitor impact help to make informed decisions and identify areas for optimisation.

The trend of declining enrolment numbers poses a challenge to the sustainability of the university's income. In order to increase the attractiveness of the University of Rijeka in the face of growing competition from other universities in the region, efforts **to attract domestic and foreign students** must be intensified, especially through a new dynamic in modernising study programmes and their promotion, improving infrastructure and increasing student satisfaction with all aspects of studies and the experience of studying at the University of Rijeka.

Revenue diversification, effective financial planning, data-driven decision-making, as well as strengthening human resources and cooperation with external stakeholders are fundamental pillars for achieving the University's financial stability and ensuring long-term growth, stability and the continuation of the university's mission to promote knowledge, innovation and social progress.

# Student-centered University

The University of Rijeka prides itself on a long tradition of promoting policies that place students at the center of its activities. These policies emphasize the key role of students as active participants in shaping development activities, ensuring their systematic participation in decision-making through the representation of student representatives in all relevant bodies, including faculty councils, committees, expert commissions, and the Senate. This approach enables students to **actively participate** in **creating educational, research, and development policies** and directly engage in shaping the university's future.



Collaboration with the **Student Union** of the University of Rijeka plays a key role in realizing the concept of a student-centered university. The Student Council not only represents the interests of the student population but also actively contributes to developing new initiatives, raising student standards, and creating a stimulating and dynamic academic environment. Through a partnership with the university, the Student Council regularly initiates and implements projects aimed at improving education, involving students in scientific research, promoting academic excellence, and encouraging a wide range of cultural, sports, and recreational activities.

Future development of the University of Rijeka should specifically target further **strengthening the position of students**, emphasizing their active participation in all segments of academic life and ensuring high-quality, inclusive education tailored to the needs and interests of students.

**Inclusivity in education** should be encouraged through adjustments to the regulatory and administrative framework that allows flexibility in designing, organizing, and delivering studies, along with wide application of mechanisms for recognizing prior learning, to meet the needs of a diverse student population and achieve a positive effect on access to higher education, transitions between studies, and graduation rates, as well as mobility.

Particular attention will be directed towards **strengthening student representation** by encouraging active participation of student representatives in university, national, and European bodies that shape higher education policies. Furthermore, the exchange of experiences through participation in international projects and conferences will be promoted, as well as the joint organization of educational programs on student rights, advocacy, and active participation in social processes. Additionally, student representatives will be encouraged to develop skills in public speaking, negotiation, and policy-making to become stronger and more effective advocates for their peers' rights.

Special emphasis is placed on systematically strengthening student standards across all segments that **support the quality of student life**. The quality of life

for students directly influences their academic achievements and overall satisfaction with the study experience; therefore, strengthening advisory **support** for students, empowering **student associations**, **improving student standards** in accommodation and dining, as well as enhancing the **sports and cultural life** of students are important developmental priorities for this mandate.

## Consultative support

The **University Counselling Centre** (UCC) is an institution of the University of Rijeka that offers various forms of support and assistance to students and employees of the University of Rijeka. These include psychological counselling, academic adjustment counselling and career guidance and development counselling. These counselling services offer a wide range of services – professional psychological help and support to achieve academic success, increase the efficiency of studies and improve the quality of life, support for students with disabilities and other health problems to ensure the conditions for successful and quality studies, development of career management skills in students, monitoring their entrepreneurial intentions and a range of educational programmes that support the quality of studies and personal development planning.

The development vision of counselling support at the University of Rijeka includes a strong expansion and improvement of existing services in order to adequately respond to the growing needs of students in an increasingly complex academic and social environment. In this context, it is important to strengthen the capacity for **academic counselling** by increasing the number of professionals and developing new services that meet the challenges of modern university life.

Of particular importance is a wider application of **mental health** preservation and **psychological** support programmes, with a particular focus on stress prevention, depression and other challenges that can affect students' academic and personal development. Further development of peer support as an important tool for ongoing student support, highlighted by the **UNIRI Cares** programme, which has the potential to become an example of best practise at national level, is needed.

Further development of services for students with disabilities and other health issues includes ensuring access to modern technology and resources that enable full inclusion and equal access to educational resources.

The Counselling centre for **career guidance** and development will expand its activities to monitor the dynamic changes in the labour market and provide new opportunities for students to connect with employers through the development of the My UNIRI Career project and gain practical skills through initia-



tives aimed at developing entrepreneurial competencies. By collaborating with academic and industry partners, the counselling service will provide students with better opportunities for their professional development. The successful **UNIRI - Career Day** project, run by the ALUMNI UNIRI network in collaboration with the UCC's Counselling Centre, needs to be continued and improved by widening access to a larger number of employers and motivating a larger number of students to participate.

All these initiatives aim to create a comprehensive support that guarantees students not only academic but also personal growth and development, creating a positive, stimulating and inclusive university environment.

## Student standards for accommodation and nutrition

Through active participation in the work of the Student Centre Management Board, the university should systematically ensure the high quality of all services provided by the Student Centre to students, while working to ensure its optimal operation. The improvement of students' standards in terms of the availability and quality of all accommodation and catering services as central services of the Student Centre Rijeka (SC) is encouraged. An important element in this process is supporting the university in **expanding accommodation capacity** by building new pavilions and defining a clear strategy for the future provision of services at the two student residence locations – Trsat Student Campus and Ivan Goran Kovačić Student Campus. As the Ivan Goran Kovačić Student Campus offers a lower standard of accommodation, it is essential to make developmental decisions to improve conditions for all students. In order to meet the growing demand for local students from other parts of Croatia as well as the increasing number of international students, a significant increase in accommodation capacity is required.

The university must also be actively involved in ensuring **quality provision and availability of food** for students, which requires continuous promotion of co-operation in monitoring quality and promoting development opportunities for SC in this segment.

## Cultural life of the students

The Student Cultural Centre (SKC) is an important platform for the promotion and development of student culture and art. Over the past decade, it has developed into a dynamic centre of student engagement, fostering creativity and innovation and providing a space for students to express, collaborate and realise their own projects. In addition to organising cultural events, festivals and educational activities, projects such as the International Student Film

Festival (STIFF) and the Impulse Festival stand out, bringing students together and promoting urban culture. The SKC also finances student cultural projects and offers students the opportunity to realise their own ideas.

The further development of the SKC should focus on **expanding cultural programmes** and partnerships as well as improving the accessibility of cultural activities and content for all university students. New projects, such as the collaboration with the *Cinehill Film Festival*, enrich the cultural scene and open up new opportunities for students interested in cultural and artistic creation. Strengthening co-operation with local and international institutions is also important to make the SKC an even stronger player in the regional and European cultural scene.

# Development perspective in other elements to promote the quality of life and work at the university

## Development of the infrastructure

The University of Rijeka is at a crucial point in its development, and the further improvement of its scientific and teaching infrastructure is crucial for achieving ambitious strategic goals. It is necessary to update and implement plans for the **construction of new teaching and research infrastructure** facilities on the Trsat campus. This includes expanding the existing infrastructure and prioritising the construction of new buildings for the Faculties of Medicine, Engineering and Economics and, in the long term, for the Faculties of Law and Maritime Studies. In addition, the possibilities for the **construction of the Innovation Arena** as part of the INOVA project and the Rijeka Institute for Physical Activity (RITA) must be examined. These investments would not only improve the quality of teaching and research, but also create a modern environment that would attract both domestic and international students and researchers. In parallel with these plans, it is necessary to work on developing the infrastructure of other faculties that will not be moving to the campus. Integrating them into a wider plan to improve the university is key to ensuring balanced development of all constituencies to achieve optimal quality of learning, teaching and research across all faculties.

The construction of new **accommodation capacity** for the Student Centre, which is intended for students and faculty members, is an urgent requirement. The current capacities are insufficient given the structure of the student population at the University of Rijeka, where almost half of the students come from other parts of Croatia. Increasing the capacity of student residences and flats for visiting academics is essential to make the university more competitive on the international education market and to provide adequate conditions for residence and work.

To ensure the financial sustainability of these investments, it is necessary to apply a strategy of **diversified funding** that includes several potential sources: Funding from the state budget through programme contracts, funding from domestic financial institutions (such as HBOR), international funding (through EU projects, EBRD, World Bank and similar institutions), strategic partnerships with the business community (especially in sectors with high innovation potential), the establishment of special foundations and funds aimed at infrastructure development (raising funds through donor and philanthropic campaigns), and the development of opportunities to provide innovative services in collaboration with the local and regional community.

## Development of administrative capacities

Developing administrative capacity that effectively supports the needs of the entire academic community is important to ensure the stable functioning of the university as a whole and to support the work of academic staff and faculty administrators.

The current shortage of administrative staff in some university constituencies is creating significant pressures that are affecting optimal performance and efficiency. Targeted investment in **developing and strengthening administrative human resources** is critical to addressing these challenges. In addition to analysing current needs at the level of all departments to identify the areas with the highest workload, it is necessary to build appropriate administrative teams, especially in faculties with a growing number of students and projects, to ensure continuity in **supporting teaching and research activities**.

Equally important is the aspect of capacity building in relation to **staff development services**, which should play a key role in strategic planning, attracting and retaining talented staff and creating **professional development** programmes for all staff. Additional resources and opportunities for continuous professional development must be secured, with a focus on developing new skills such as project management, digital competencies and organisational skills. This will ensure a stable and effective functioning of the university and strong support for its further development.

## Development of digitalisation processes

Effective and modern digital support is one of the key factors for the successful operation of the university, especially in the context of the accelerated digitalisation of educational and administrative processes.

The digitalisation of the educational process is developing dynamically through the ISVU and ISVURI information systems, which support enrolment, registration, planning and implementation of the teaching process and the issuance of degree documents. The support for the development of **ISVURI** and the good co-operation with the **SRCE**, which ensures the sustainability of these systems, must be continued. The introduction of the **Provis** system has enabled the digitisation of numerous processes to support the educational process and business operations in a variety of departments and it is necessary to support its sustainable and effective use. The **SEAP** digital platform developed to capture data required to monitor the strategic objectives of the university and its departments meets current needs, but further development and application in management processes must be supported.



To support the development of digital processes in the university and its departments, it is essential to strengthen the capacity of the **University Computing Centre** (SIC) by increasing the number of experts and improving technological resources. In other areas of digital process development, the focus should be on further **improving the digitalisation of business processes** and developing systems for cybersecurity and the continuous improvement of **data protection** measures.

## Development of the information and library system of the University Library of Rijeka

The University Library Rijeka (SVKRI) provides extremely important support for the research, educational and cultural mission of the University, and its further development is of strategic importance for the successful achievement of all the University's goals. The development of the information and library system is based on a strategic document that focuses the library's work on five main goals: Teaching and research as foundational library services, supporting university research programmes through quality development, building collections and services, creating and maintaining modern physical and online learning environments, and building library collections while sustaining cultural and educational programmes within the community.

SVKRI's work is highly responsive to the needs of the academic community, with tangible ongoing improvements in services and infrastructure. SVKRI provides excellent support for the development of open science strategies at the University and contributes significantly to the University's visibility through its prominent involvement in the YUFE and YERUN networks. Involvement in the YUFE Library Working Group enhances the visibility and quality of services and ensures modern support for researchers and students in a digital environment. Through the **Centre for Open Science** (COZ), the Library coordinates the promotion and implementation of Open Access and monitors the University's scientific productivity by providing bibliometric data and support for the University's ranking in international lists. The SVKRI continuously develops and improves its services, including the **Centre for Electronic Publishing** (CEN), which manages the University's electronic publishing activities and supports academic staff in the use of tools to create interactive teaching and scientific materials, improving their quality and accessibility. The SVKRI runs a number of **educational programmes**, including workshops for young researchers on the use of information tools and open science, to ensure the continuous development of the skills needed to work in a modern digital academic environment. SVKRI's involvement in projects such as the Croatian Scientific Cloud and participation in the Doctoral School confirm the key role of the University Library in realising the strategic goals of the University of Rijeka and

strengthening its contribution to the academic community and the broader societal context.

In the future, it is necessary to ensure further support for the development of the library system and its functionalities by providing additional resources for the **improvement of digital capacities, infrastructure** and **services** for users, as well as for the strengthening of the Centre for Open Science and the management of scientific information, which play a crucial role in the implementation of open science at the University. The support should also be used for the continuous **modernisation of physical and digital learning spaces** as well as for the improvement of **educational programmes** for students, young researchers and scientists to ensure that the University Library remains a driving force for the progress of the University of Rijeka.

## Development of sports, leisure and sports policies

The University of Rijeka should continue the development of activities in the sports centre aimed at improving the quality of life of students and staff, strengthening social ties within the academic community and promoting a healthy lifestyle. The development of sports and recreational activities, the expansion of sports infrastructure, the establishment of support systems for student athletes pursuing a dual career (academic and sports) and the introduction of a new degree programme in kinesiology are important steps towards **improving the work of the Centre for Sports** and strengthening the position of the University of Rijeka as a sports-friendly institution. In this context, it is important to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the Centre and to strengthen its relationships with the relevant stakeholders in the system.

In addition to the existing and new sports facilities and programmes, it is necessary to further develop the **sports infrastructure** in order to meet the growing needs of students and staff for high-quality training and competition facilities. The construction of new sports fields and the improvement of existing halls is necessary to create a balanced programme that meets the needs of both recreational and competitive sports. It is also necessary to equip gyms, team sports halls and outdoor areas for athletics, cycling and other recreational sports. A high-quality sports infrastructure can also increase the attractiveness of the university for international students and the general public and open the doors to the organisation of major sporting events.

Particular attention should be paid to developing support for **student athletes** so that they have flexible conditions to realise their sporting and academic ambitions. This support includes adjustments to study programmes, study conditions, and study dynamics as well as special academic counselling and mentoring services.

Linking the Sports Centre with the **Department of Sports Law, Politics and Diplomacy** and the Jean Monnet Chair in Sports Law, Politics and Diplomacy at the Faculty of Law will further enhance collaboration and research opportunities in the fields of sport and sports policy, while strengthening the University's academic offering in this growing area.

## Development of a quality culture

The University of Rijeka has a long tradition of continuously developing and applying high standards in quality assurance and improvement, which has earned it special recognition in the national and European context. A quality culture serves as a fundamental pillar for achieving the defined vision and permeates all aspects of university operations – education, research and public mission, as well as strategic positioning in the European networks YUFE and YERUN.

With the adoption of a new quality assurance system in 2023, the foundations have been laid for the further development of a quality culture that meets the needs and expectations of today's academic and research environment. The new mechanisms for internal quality assurance focus on building **continuous dialogue** and **collaboration between the university bodies** responsible for monitoring and improving quality in the implementation of development strategies, the quality of study programmes, learning methods, teaching and the assessment of learning outcomes, as well as in scientific, artistic and professional activities, the work of administrative staff and international cooperation and collaboration with the community. Continuous communication and exchange of experience between stakeholders will promote inclusive action and more effective monitoring of progress.

A particular challenge is to ensure and improve quality in the area of **institutional governance**. In this area, it is necessary to develop criteria and evaluation systems that include the introduction of specific performance indicators and customised procedures for monitoring progress. The results of regular **institutional research** provide important information for monitoring and evaluating the quality of work and for informed decision-making that supports the achievement of the institution's strategic objectives and identifies areas for development. In this regard, it is necessary to encourage all sub-administrations to effectively incorporate research findings into decision-making and strategic thinking on development through new mechanisms.

The Lifelong Learning Programme *Quality Assurance in Higher Education* is an important tool to enable all members of the academic community to **apply quality principles and develop a quality culture**. The continuous implementation, modernisation and extension of the programme to new fields of action will further strengthen the quality culture and contribute to increasing

the competences of teaching, research and administrative staff to implement high quality standards and to realise the vision of the university as a place of excellence and its recognition in the national and European framework.

## Developing a culture of diversity and inclusivity

The University of Rijeka was the first university in Croatia to adopt a **Gender Equality Plan** in 2021 – a strategic document that systematically ensures an institutional culture of equal opportunities, respect for diversity and promotion of inclusion. This plan integrates gender equality into all areas of work and life at the university, from study programmes to the transfer of knowledge to the community, with a particular focus on strengthening gender equality in career development, especially in scientific and artistic research. The plan emphasises zero tolerance of discrimination, harassment and all forms of inequality, making the University a safe and fair environment for all its members.

In the new legislature, activities to promote gender equality will continue, as will the adoption of a new institutional plan that reflects responsibility to the academic and wider community. In addition, the University of Rijeka is actively working towards joining the global network of **Age-Friendly Universities** (AFU) in order to broaden the scope of inclusivity and emphasise the institution's profile that recognises and respects the specific needs and contributions of all generations. Joining the AFU network will create an encouraging environment for people of all ages, adapt educational and research activities to meet the needs of older community members and retirees, provide opportunities for intergenerational learning, and understand the dividends of longevity and the richness that ageing brings to our society.

In the future, the importance of inclusivity in all forms will be further emphasised by promoting equality not only on the basis of gender, but also on the basis of all other differences, including age, ability, cultural background and socio-economic status.



# Goals for the 2025 - 2029 mandate period

## Studies and students

Goal	Tools	Target
Increase the number of students enrolled at the 1st and 2nd levels of the degree programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Promotion of studies</li> <li>—Enrolment policies</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Revise the conditions for enrolment in graduate studies (taking into account the required profile of a completed undergraduate degree)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Enrolment policies</li> <li>—Curriculum development</li> <li>—Recognition of prior learning</li> </ul>	In 20 % of study programmes
Enable a free (optional) semester in 1st and 2nd level studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Syllabus</li> </ul>	In 20 % of study programmes
Revision of the learning outcomes of the degree programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Continuous Professional Development programmes for the design of learning outcomes</li> <li>—Curriculum Development</li> </ul>	In 75 % of study programmes
Introduce a model for students to acquire practical competences in a business environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Guidelines provided by Economic Council</li> <li>—Cooperation with companies</li> </ul>	In 25 % of study programmes
Improve graduate satisfaction with the assessment of the elective part of the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Curriculum development</li> <li>—Development of micro-qualifications</li> <li>—Facilitating enrolment in micro-qualifications intra-curricularly</li> <li>—Facilitating enrolment in the YUFE education intra-curricularly</li> <li>—Recognition of prior learning</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Improve graduate satisfaction with the assessment of learning and teaching methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Continuous Professional Development programmes in L&amp;T</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Increase the average number of ECTS credits recognised in the context of mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Application of the methodology of recognition of prior learning in the recognition of learning outcomes acquired in the context of mobility</li> </ul>	29 ECTS / semester
Increase the number of micro-qualifications that can be enrolled intra-curricularly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Development of micro-qualifications (projects)</li> </ul>	By 20 %
Increase the number of University of Rijeka students enrolled in the YUFE educational programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Promotion of the YUFE educational offer</li> <li>—Recognition of prior learning</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Establishment of the regular UNIRI Education Fair event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—UNIRI organisational and financial support</li> <li>—Cooperation between all constituencies</li> </ul>	1 annually
Increase the number of study programmes conducted in a foreign language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Application of internationalisation-at-home concepts</li> <li>—Development of recognition and reward mechanisms for teachers who teach in a foreign language</li> </ul>	By 30 %
Successful enrolment of students in the joint YUFE degree programme in Urban Sustainability Studies at UNIRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—UNIRI support with promotion, admissions and administrative matters of the programme</li> <li>—UNIRI support in the realisation of study</li> </ul>	4 generations
The joint YUFE programme in Urban Sustainability Studies is awarded the title European Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Participation in the European programme for the development of the European Diploma label</li> <li>—Participation in the YUFE committees overseeing the YUFE joint study programme</li> </ul>	Archived ED label
Accreditation of a new joint study programme with the potential to award a European degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Participation in the YUFE committees developing new studies</li> </ul>	1 study programme

## Research and innovation

Goal	Tools	Target
Increase the number of scientific publications (WoS, Scopus)	—Stimulation of scientists to publish papers that are cited in WoS and Scopus —Flexibility of the workload ratio (class work/ research work/institutional contribution)	By 15 %
Increase the number of competitive research projects	—UNIRI project lines and grants —Operation of the Center for supporting applications for competitive projects —Flexibility of the workload ratio (class work/ research work/institutional contribution)	By 20 %
Increase the number of highly competitive research projects	—Operation of the Center for supporting applications for competitive projects —Stimulation grants for positively evaluated projects that were not accepted for financing	By 30 %
Increase the financial volume of competitive and highly competitive projects	—Operation of the Center for supporting applications for competitive projects —Stimulation grants for positively evaluated projects that were not accepted for financing	By 30 %
Increase investment in scientific research, scientific infrastructure and artistic activities from the state budget	—Negotiation procedure for concluding a program contract	By 30 %

## Knowledge transfer and collaboration with the community

Goal	Tools	Target
Increase the number of scientific publications (WoS, Scopus)	—Cooperation with the economy —Reform of evaluation of academic careers	By 30 %
Increase the number of research, development and innovation projects (applied research)	—Cooperation with the economy	By 20 %
Increase the financial volume for professional and research and development projects	—Cooperation with the economy	By 30 %

## Internationalisation

Goal	Tools	Target
Increase the number of full-time foreign students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–International promotion of studies at UNIRI</li> <li>–New communication channels for promotion in target countries</li> <li>–UNIRI/constituents administrative support for foreign students</li> <li>–Cooperation with state authorities to remove administrative and regulatory barriers to the arrival of foreign students from countries outside the EU</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Increase the number of international staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–UNIRI/constituents administrative support for foreign employees</li> <li>–Cooperation with state authorities to remove administrative and regulatory barriers to the arrival of foreign scientists from countries outside the EU</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Increase the number of returning scientists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Cooperation with the MZOM on maintaining support for the employment of returnee scientists</li> </ul>	8 annually

## Business operations

Goal	Tools	Target
Increase funding from the state budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Negotiation procedure for concluding a program contract</li> </ul>	By 15 %
Increase funding from own and earmarked revenues at university level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Professional projects for the economy and the public sector</li> <li>–Commercialization of intellectual property</li> <li>–Optimization of the use of spatial resources (rent)</li> </ul>	By 20 %
Optimised model for integrated operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Cooperation of UNIRI/constituents in the design of the model</li> <li>–Work of the Expert Council for Financial Operations</li> <li>–Work of the UNIRI Budget Committee</li> </ul>	Model developed

## Quality Assurance

Cilj	Alati	Ciljna vrijednost
Progress in ratings of SDG criteria in external evaluation processes	—Work of the QA Committee at constituencies / sharing of good practices through the UNIRI QA Committee	75 % of constituencies
Successful completion of external QA evaluations	—Encouraging participation in the professional development program "Quality assurance in higher education" —Directing policies and activities of UNIRI/ components to increase quality according to SDG standards	All constituencies
University Centre for the development of teaching competences	—UNIRI strategic decision-making on the need to establish a center —UNIRI/FFRI (Centre for teacher education) cooperation	Established and active
Indicators for quality assurance in business processes and monitoring process	—Cooperation between UNIRI/members of the QA Committee and the Expert Council for Financial Operations	Developed

# Let's shape the future together.

The proposed program **UNIRI 2030 – My University** for the mandate period 2025 – 2029 is designed to achieve ambitious goals that will enable the development of the University of Rijeka as a dynamic, innovative, and internationally recognized institution and to fulfill the vision of a university of the future with a position as a relevant entity in social development and an attractive place for work and study in national, European, and global contexts.

The foundation of this vision is the **building of community, mutual trust, and a sense of belonging to the University of Rijeka community**, achieved through openness, responsibility, and a clear focus on achieving common goals. We create a successful future for the university through dialogue, understanding, solidarity, and commitment to the vision, thereby strengthening our shared identity.

The program recognizes and emphasizes the importance of **excellence in all aspects of university work**: in education, scientific research, artistic activities, and in the development of international partnerships, collaboration with the economy, and community engagement. Through strategic initiatives aimed at modernizing studies, enhancing infrastructure, promoting research excellence and innovation, ensuring financial stability, strengthening administrative and digital support, and continuously developing a culture of quality, we can position the university as a key player in addressing contemporary social challenges.

However, the greatest strength and potential of our university lie in its **people** – students, teachers, researchers, and all members of the academic community. They are the driving force behind all the successes and achievements of the university, and through their creativity, innovation, and dedication, the university builds its reputation and public trust. When people are at the center of the university's mission, they feel, think, and act for their university and proudly call it **My University**.

# Curriculum Vitae



Prof Marta Žuvić, Ph.D., is scientifically, educationally and professionally active in the fields of biophysics, medical physics, innovative education and quality assurance and has extensive experience in the academic and research community.

She was born in Rijeka, where she completed primary and secondary school and graduated from the Faculty of Education at the University of Rijeka in 1988 with a degree in mathematics and physics. She gained her first professional experience as a programmer and system analyst at the computer centre of the "3rd Maj" shipyard. In 1989, she joined the Department of Physics and Biophysics at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Rijeka as a junior researcher.

In 1995, she completed her Master's degree in Molecular Biophysics at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Zagreb and in 2002 she obtained her PhD with a thesis on the study of the structure and dynamics of cell membranes using electron paramagnetic resonance, under the supervision of prominent scientists from Zagreb and Ljubljana.

During her academic career, she worked at the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Biotechnology and Drug Development and had several other engagements at other faculties. In 2005, as part of an EU project, she founded the University IT Academy and the E-Learning Centre, which was transformed into the Centre for Learning and Teaching Support in 2010, offering LLL programmes in the field of ICT and support in the development of e-learning via the MudRI (Moodle) platform.

In her scientific research, she has collaborated with research teams from renowned institutions such as the Ruđer Bošković Institute, the Jülich Research Centre, the Botanical Institute of the University of Bonn, the Institute for Medical Research, the Clinical Centres in Rijeka and Zagreb, the Selvita company and others. She has published 47 scientific papers, given 36 presentations at scientific and professional conferences, participated in 12 research projects and led 7 professional projects. She is also the author of university textbooks and reference books.

As a member of the EUA Learning & Teaching Steering Committee (2020–2024), she worked on the development of European strategies and guidelines in higher education and played a key role in the organisation of the annual EUA L&T Forum. Her professional development includes certifications in e-learning, project management and quality assurance in higher education.

Since 2019 she has been Vice Rector for Quality Assurance and since 2020 Vice Rector for Students, Studies and Quality Assurance at the University of Rijeka.

She is the proud mother of two sons, Petar and Marin.



