Report of the UCA JEDI Strategic Committee
Meeting 20-21 September 2018

Having systematically reviewed UCA’s progress, the committee can report that UCA has forged a vision that is exciting, inclusive, and distinctive, and has developed a plan that is bold, credible, and very likely to succeed. The main challenge now is to consolidate existing gains and accelerate the remaining steps needed to propose the legal status of the experimental university and to prepare for a final presentation to the jury. These include finalizing strategic communications, governance structures, and necessary reforms of administrative processes.

In 2017 and 2018, UCA has been able to seize opportunities such as the possibility offered by the French ministry of higher education to propose experimental universities, and the call for “Ecoles Universitaires de Recherche” (EUR), which has prompted UCA to propose the organization of its research and graduate studies around graduate schools. This reorganization is a bold and modern move, put in place with remarkable efficiency in one single year. UCA should also be congratulated for winning several competitive awards from the PIA3.

UCA now faces two important challenges: elaborating the legal status of the experimental university, before end of 2018, and preparing the final IDEX proposal in 2019. To help UCA to meet these challenges, the SC wishes to make the following remarks and recommendations.
• The overarching recommendation is that after the period of experimentation and exploration, it is now time for UCA to consolidate its project, to share its vision with the UCA member organizations and personnel in order to bring everybody on board, and to communicate on this vision.

• It is nevertheless useful to leave some space for possible (good) new ideas.

• In this consolidation of the plan, we recommend that UCA continues working on its identity and image and put forward what makes its project special among in particular the other IDEX, in order to be attractive to the best students and researchers. UCA has chosen to put emphasis on interdisciplinarity. This is in line with the recommendations of the SC in 2016 and 2017, and we support this choice. It is nevertheless necessary to complement this with a clear identification of some scientific questions or disciplines on which UCA is internationally at the forefront.

• This should also include a clear and compelling definition of the international footprint of the UCA, and a structured priority of the various partnerships initiated with foreign universities.

• And on that path, UCA should explicitly leverage and amplify the assets of the territory.

• UCA should base and elaborate its communication strategy on this identity, both internally and externally.

• The governance structure of the experimental university, in particular its governing Board, should be carefully thought of, and should reflect UCA’s strategy.

• As UCA is now moving up from its period of exploration and experimentation to its scaling phase, we strongly recommend UCA to propose a set of indicators to track and demonstrate the success and the attractiveness of the project.

• The committee welcomes the reformatting of all graduate studies in the form of graduate schools, which puts research at the centre of UCA. It will help strengthening the international reputation of UCA, and should also allow a true implication of all UCA members.

• The relationships between the graduate schools, the international degree programs, and the masters should be clarified and made explicit on the UCA website. Graduate schools are not really visible on the UCA website where this name does not appear explicitly. This name should be consistently used.

• Until the target university is operational, the SC emphasizes the necessary communication, coordination and shared strategy between UCA and the undergraduate entities of "Université Nice Sophia Antipolis".

• We welcome the work undertaken on the evolution of academies. The proposed scheme for trans-disciplinary Institutes and Centers is promising. The SC particularly appreciated the originality of the Deep Law for Tech project.

• The committee commends the work done on the evolution of support functions, and encourages UCA to continue evolving its administrative processes and introducing as much flexibility as possible.

In summary, the strategic committee UCA supports with enthusiasm the vision that has been exposed during the meeting; it believes that this plan is both ambitious and credible, and therefore the SC stresses that the UCA project should be strongly supported at technical and financial level by the French institutions.
COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING THE 3 WORKSHOPS ON SPECIFIC AREAS

Workshop 1: IDEX courses and attractiveness for students

The already existing masters have been completed this year by seven International paying MsCs of a different kind. Interdisciplinary in a wide variety of application fields, organized in cooperation with labs and industries, with long internships, they are each physically situated at an application-relevant place, which can be anywhere in Côte d’Azur. The implied geographic distribution is not easy to handle since Côte d’Azur is narrow but long, with often difficult transportation. But the Council thinks that it is indeed the best way to handle such MScs: being where action happens is fundamental, and bringing the teachers to these places is simpler than bringing all students to a common location. Furthermore, teaching is also performed by members of the institutions or companies involved in the MScs.
The workshop has extensively discussed these new graduate program through the seven MScs put in place in 2018: BioBanks, Data Sciences (with two tracks, one scientific, one business oriented), Flavor and Fragrance (management of industry), Marres (marine resources management), Mod4NeuCog (modeling neuronal / cognitive systems), Smart Cities (engineers training), and SmartEdTech (educational innovation). Altogether, 523 international application from 78 countries have been received of (20% from France), and 95 students from 45 countries were admitted (26% from France). The examination of the applications has visibly been done with great care, with long interviews through Internet.

These new MScs are quite different from the standard masters in French universities, since they require paying fees with several levels according to the student resources. Even if the fees are reasonable compared to what can be found at an international level, the idea of building such paying MScs was clearly not popular with all UCA teachers, some considering that the University-level training in France should be free or at least with low fees. But it is backed by the committee: such MScs are indispensable for the international reputation of UCA.

For each program, the organizers looked very involved and they explained their strategy and actual actions well. We note that there is still progress to be made concerning the slides and the web sites.

The SC members were very impressed by the innovative design of the new Masters of Science programs that UCA has developed, the choice of their technical programs and partners, the chosen technical areas, and the engagement of their promoters and organizers. It shows a real commitment to not only accomplishing the goals of the University but also providing real supports to the local and regional economy through highly trained individuals coming into the work force. The programs are flexible in order to allow the students who intend to go into research to be able to take a track that will thoroughly prepare them for that as they complete their Master, but they also allow for a separate track within the same program that will also thoroughly prepare an individual to enter the workforce upon graduation with real world experience and an industry mandated skill set.
The research projects presented were mostly interdisciplinary, as they should be based on the Academies Philosophy. Digital seems to play a very important and transversal role, in particular linked to the biology and to the law/sociology/economy domains.

We note that the level of maturity of the five academies is different, some are more successful in bringing the various institutes and laboratories to work together.

Most of the workshops and scientific congresses organized by the Academies were successful; they can help UCA to build its image, and even bring money if open to the economic world.

International dimension is key both in term of speakers and visiting professors; UCA research attractiveness remains an important topic. The question of involving a larger number of international professors and personalities from the economic world in the selection of the projects supported by the IDEX has been raised.

IDEX funding should be used to leverage Industry and Europe funding of more ambitious projects. Current UCA Research statistics do not show yet strong growth of research results (ERC and PhD) thanks to the IDEX, it will probably take more time to demonstrate positive results.

Academies should try to strengthen their link with regional SMEs and Companies to fuel their research topics.
The focus of Workshop 3 was on innovation and the ways in which it is being fostered by UCA in four contexts: (1) technology transfer, (2) partnerships with companies, (3) entrepreneurship on the part of its students, and (4) life-long learning. Innovation is, of course, a topic of great interest when it comes to the contribution that a university can make to society today. At the same time, it is always easier to talk about innovation in broad terms than to deliver it. The members of the strategic committee who attended this Workshop – based on the presentation and discussion of a series of case studies – ended with a positive sense that UCA is moving in the right direction. Not only has the University taken up the challenge of placing innovation as a top priority in its vision looking forward but it is starting to make it happen.

The university should continue reinforcing its execution skills to make sure that all the initiatives meet the expectations of the corporate community, which is clearly the case for the most advanced ones.
ANNEX

Slides

The slides presented in workshop 1 were very much marketing-oriented, with lots of bright colors and diagrams but some lack of facts and numbers, in particular for what concerns the program’s partners who play a primary role. This makes them quite difficult to exploit afterwards. Hopefully, enough detailed information was given orally during the workshop. But such slides deserve to be less flashy and better usable by the Council after the meeting.

Web site

Currently the program is not presented on UCA’s website in an efficient enough way. It can be found under “International Degree programs > Find an International Degree Program”, but the term “graduate school” that was used during the 2 days of the meeting never appears on the site. For what concerns the individual program, there are two sets of pages: one at the UCA level, and one for the program proper. Some of these pages, supposed to be in English, still have parts in French (see BioBanks and Modellife). There are misspellings (BioBanks) and logo problems (Idex logo in SmartEdTec). Some links from the UCA pages to the MScs pages are wrong or broken: the “Diploma’s Website” button of the BioControl and High-Performance Computing points to the main UCA French page, and the link from the same button in Smart Cities is broken. These problems were immediately found during a short navigation. It is essential that the sites are checked enough to become impeccable, especially because they are the entry point for foreign students.