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## Peer Visit to Faculty of Economics

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### Preface

In the framework of the Austrian Project "Support for Higher Education at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University" (thereafter referred to as "the University" or "UKIM"), sponsored by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, peer visits to 6 Faculties (selected by the UKIM leadership) took place on 21-22 October 2003. These peer visits had been requested by the project coordinator at UKIM, and took place in combination with the complex external evaluation of the Faculties executed by three Macedonian experts. The visits benefited greatly by the comprehensive self-assessment reports produced by the Faculties, which were made available to the international visitors beforehand.

The primary purpose of these visits was to provide an independent outside opinion by international experts regarding the quality assurance (QA) and institutional assessment provisions that have been introduced into the higher education system of the Republic of Macedonia in the course of the last year. Moreover, a focus on the theme of Study Programmes had been chosen by UKIM.

"Evaluation is to determine the significance or worth of something by careful appraisal and study ... it is a developmental process that illuminates or enlightens the specific policies, processes and practice of its stakeholders and contributes to collective learning" (CERN - Capitalisation and Evaluation Research Network). Thus, rather than "examining" these UKIM Faculties, the international experts engaged in fruitful, profound and mutually beneficial exchange of experiences and ideas. The accumulated and horizontal findings of the international experts from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, and Serbia during their visits to the Faculties of Architecture, Civil Engineering, Economics, Technology and Metallurgy, Mining and Geology, and Philosophy will be contained in a Comprehensive Opinion paper, to be produced under the project. Selected horizontal findings are attached to this report as well.

The preface and the annex are common to all 6 reports, the main text is written by the visiting expert.

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## Introduction

### *I. Schedule of the visit*

1. Meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Prof. Bobek Suklev, Ph.D and the authors of the Self-evaluation report.
2. Meeting with the lecturing staff of the Faculty for Economics.
3. Meeting with students from the Faculty of Economics.
4. Visiting the premises of the Faculty of Economics.
5. Final Meeting of the joint evaluation team.

### *II. Timing of the visit*

10.00-16.30, 22 October 2003

### *III. Joint Team Members*

1. Prof. Marika Baseska-Djordjieska, Ph.D - Faculty of Economics, Prilep
2. Prof. Gordana Trjakoska, Ph. D - Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Prilep
3. Prof. Jane Miljovski, Ph.D - Faculty of Law, UKIM
4. Prof. Tzako Pantaleev, Ph.D - Navreme expert.

### *IV. Organizer of the visit*

Ass. Prof. Ljubica Kostovska, Ph.D - Vice–Dean for Education Affairs

## Short Review of the Activities Carried Out

### *Meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Economics Prof. Bobek Suklev, Ph.D and the authors of the Self-evaluation report*

The joint team met for the first time just five minutes before the work to start. The Navreme expert explained that: the only document he has gone through is the short English version of the "Self evaluation report" produced in 2002; he has not seen the report from the previous external evaluation visit. So, he suggested sticking to the methodology disseminated by Navreme before the meeting.

The members of the local external evaluation team had the Navreme methodology translated and fully supported and followed it as an instrument during the meeting. The members of the external evaluation team performed a high standard work and were of most use to achieve the goals of the visit. Their experience and professionalism contributed a lot to establish a positive working atmosphere during the meeting.

The Dean of the Faculty chaired the meeting. He expressed his frustration that the Faculty did not have enough time to plan and prepare for the visit because of the short



notice from the Rectorate<sup>1</sup>. Most of the members of the self evaluation team were away on visits that were planned long before. Nevertheless he strongly supported the processes of self and external evaluation and agreed that it is very important to identify challenges and plans for further development of the Faculty.

The first meeting took place at the Dean's office. It was attended by two Vice- Deans, one member of the self evaluation team and two Professors from the Faculty.

#### *Meeting with the lecturing staff of the Faculty for Economics*

A group of not less than 11 lectures was attending this meeting on a rotation principle as most of the staff had lectures at the time of the meeting. Altogether more than 20 staff turned at the meeting.

The meeting took place at the Dean's office.

#### *Meeting with students from the Faculty of Economics*

More than 20 students attended the meeting. Representatives of the Students Unions attended the meeting but they neither dominated the meeting nor were the majority in the group.

The meeting took place in one of language labs of the Faculty.

#### *Visiting the premises of the Faculty of Economics*

The tour around the premises was done together with Ass. Prof. L. Kostovska. Two computer labs, a language lab and the libraries of the Faculty were visited.

#### *Final Meeting of the joint evaluation team*

The members of the joint team discussed their first impression from the visit and agreed on the follow up activities.

## **Evaluative Findings**

### *Observations*

The Faculty of Economics has more than half a century history that is dedicated to development and innovations. It has introduced the first ever postgraduate course in former Yugoslavia in "Monetary and Credit Issues" in the academic year 1961/1962. It follows this tradition to introduce undergraduate and postgraduate study programs in cooperation with prominent Universities from all over the world.

The Faculty of Economics at UKIM is a recognized learning institution and is a member of 6 international organizations (AACB, ASECU, DEAN, MEF, RESEGE and FEM) in the field of economics and management. It is in a process of internationally recognized accreditation and is one of the leading faculties in the region.

<sup>1</sup> Navreme regrets this delay, however, guidelines had been sent to UKIM as of mid September.



The self evaluation report of the Faculty is very well structured and informative. It gives a clear picture on the study programs and the way they were selected and worked out. The undergraduate study programs are in: Economics, Management, Marketing, Accounting and Auditing, Financial Management, Foreign Trade and E-business. The last one is taught in English. The graduate programs are 10 and the Faculty is planning to increase their number.

The study programs within the curricula are very well documented, they are also on the Internet and are presented in English and Macedonian<sup>2</sup>. The Faculty has also published all courses taught in the syllabi (128 booklets in Macedonian and English). The transparency and access to information about what is lectured is at very high level, and this is probably one of the reasons for the great interest of the clients (students, parents, as well as business and industry). The study programs are designed in a way to meet all requirements and standards in terms of timing and content coming out of the European initiatives in HE.

The conversation and the discussion with the students showed that the Faculty of Economics has not only good traditions which attracted generations of young people in the past, but also in the last years it has changed in a way to select graduates who are the most interested and have achieved reasonable achievements from the secondary schools. This is due mainly to the fact that new study programs that have been introduced, and the compatibility of the diplomas with similar programs and universities over the world. The fact that some courses are taught/to be taught in English puts additional value to the learning opportunities offered by the Faculty.

The production of a new study program is a challenge, as it has a long way to go until it is adopted by the Ministry and in some cases even the positive reaction of the Parliament is needed. This time-consuming procedure is discouraging the faculties to even start the process, but it is not the case with the Faculty of Economics as it has renewed nearly all of the study programs since the Republic of Macedonia became a separate entity.

Most of the staff spoke about considering this process of introducing new study programs as a procedure which speaks about an established capacity for innovation and team work. Updates and further development of up to 20% of every subject program is carried out on a yearly basis, so within 4 years in fact each program is renewed. All members of the Faculty stressed the importance of the existing practices to:

- Discuss broadly (i.e. with all stakeholders and partners) the need of introducing a new study program;
- Produce a profile for the new program;
- Develop the program together with all examination procedures and the ongoing evaluation of the students' achievements (usually there are 3 "internal exams" for every course within the term);
- Look for partnership and expertise from foreign Universities to validate the programs, to add value to the compatibility of the study program, and to help in delivering it;
- Produce and find the most appropriate learning materials for the program.

<sup>2</sup> As the self evaluation report and the external evaluation report give enough statistics about the programs and the curricula and it was decided not to overload this report with such information.



The Faculty found itself capable of introducing an e-business program which is unique for the region and is supported in its implementation by Dutch and French universities. The program provides the opportunity to exchange teachers and students between the three Universities, and some of the courses there are delivered in English.

A very positive indication for the postgraduate studies is the fact that about 80%-90% of the students are employed. This is to show that the Faculty is a recognized institution for upgrading not only the knowledge but also the skills for a broader and already experienced part of the workforce in the industry of the Republic of Macedonia. At the same time, the undergraduate students clearly stated that the MA programs do not directly lead to employment thus pointing out that there is still field for shaping the old ones, and introducing new ones, in particular in order to address the general lack of attractive programs for continuing education.

The teaching at the faculty is organized to meet international standards and to be compatible with the best practices existing in the fields covered. For the moment the development of the restructured economy of the Republic of Macedonia does not offer a lot of opportunities for co-operation and development of joint practices. The sector of international companies is the one that offers most jobs for the graduates of the faculty. Also the new accounting and auditing rules and standards that are introduced create new job opportunities. Moreover, the banking sector is an employer of the Faculty graduates, and cooperates with it. But all together - according to the staff - there are no great opportunities to organize practical work on site for the students.

The horizontal mobility of the students within the faculty is rather limited at the moment. This is not the case because the leadership is not putting an effort in it (20% of the subjects studied are elective), but a result of the existing limitations in terms of quantification of the curricula.

The discussions with the staff pointed out that a further need for training of the teaching in interactive methods of teaching, discussions, individual work, project and case study work, and team work. This will probably (according to the students) make professors' experience and knowledge more accessible to individual students - not only to large cohorts as it is now. Still in some cases the attendance at the ex-cathedra lectures and the one-to-one reproduction of texts and figures is considered the major merit for good achievement at exams. Now the mobility of the staff is also contributing to the innovative and sometimes simply different approaches in teaching and in faculty life as such. The diversity in teaching is increasing also due to joint programs with partner universities.

All students stated that their secondary education (including the VET one in economics) does not sufficiently prepare students to study and learn at university – not to speak about the continuity between these levels in terms of knowledge and skills. Thus a lot of time and efforts are invested in learning how to learn at the university level from both students and faculty staff.

The Faculty staff noted a very important hindrance for its development. Only recently graduates from other faculties than the ones in Skopje, Zagreb and Beograd are joining the Faculty of Economics at UKIM, and thereby address the absence of more diversity in teaching methods, learning materials and textbooks. The low degree of graduate mobility also explains to a great extent the inertia that was still to be noticed a couple of years ago.



The accreditation and evaluation processes, and the introduction of ECTS are expected to cut the connection between the professors and the subjects and to give opportunities for them to cover fields of knowledge other than exclusively in their own discipline.

The students consider the use of, and the knowledge and skills transferred in, ICT quite insufficient. The practical learning for ICT is still insufficient and the access to the facilities is somewhat limited. The students have a clear idea that – compared with other faculties – they have better opportunities to work with computers and the Internet, but they also stressed the fact that most of the innovations introduced in the study programs can not be utilized without ICT knowledge and skills. This is just to confirm that the Faculty already has its own agenda that binds it to be practically competitive with the industry sector and the partner universities.

Students and all staff confirmed that it is the leadership of a faculty that to a great extent predetermines the values, the attractiveness and the innovation environment for learning. In this respect they feel satisfied in terms of new opportunities which are open to all of them.

The Faculty does not have an alumni organisation which goes beyond informal relations with former students. It is recognized by both the leadership and the Faculty members that the establishment of such organisation can support the learning opportunities (by using the alumni network), and can enhance the public recognition of the achievements.

The Faculty has very good looked-after premises and libraries, and the atmosphere in the building is conducive for learning and studying.

### *Challenges and Recommendations*

The Dean of the Faculty of Economics Prof. Bobek Suklev outlined the following results and challenges that came out of the evaluation process, and which the Faculty thus rightly intends to concentrate on:

- The self evaluation report and the evaluation and accreditation procedures themselves are found very useful for the development of the Faculty by all members – students, professors and the administrative staff. The Faculty therefore decided to produce a self evaluation report every year. The report will judge the progress of work on the recommendations given, and will frame the background for future developments;
- The aging staff is the main challenge for the Faculty – as it is for the whole of the UKIM. Last year the Faculty for the first time appointed new assistants but at the same time 12 professors went on retirement. Having in mind that 10 years in average are needed for the assistants to become good lectures, it is obvious that the generation gap will influence any further development at the Faculty. The intensity of the study programs as of now and the number of staff available do not allow professors the physical time to work individually with the students;
- The Faculty staff is fully aware and dedicated and committed to the values of establishing a common European area for Higher Education, as promoted in the Bologna Declaration and the working groups and fora of the Bologna Process. At the same time, it realizes that it is not possible to start this process and to be successful if you are running alone. It is at the level of UKIM, and in cooperation with the other HE establishments and stakeholders, that a common strategy and



common quality criteria need to be agreed, in order to provide a positive environment for change;

- The introduction of ECTS, on which the Faculty is working since 1998 and has started to introduce from 2002, meets some formal obstacles, the major of which is the difficulty in the quantification of the knowledge and learning within the study programs:
  - Students often feel under-informed about the need for the changes towards ECTS;
  - The formal requirements from MoES (minimum of 90 teaching hours for every subject) hinder the process of quantification of the learning material;
  - There is scarce formal flexibility for students to select courses.
- Because of the introduction of ECTS which requires a reorganization of the curricula and the study programs, the previous continuity and sequence of the courses has ceased, and in some cases students suffer thereof. Efforts on both sides are needed to try to adjust and fine-tune the study programs. The existing involvement of students in evaluating the learning process is a positive element, but it could become even more a regular and systemic instrument for development;
- The Faculty staff also stated that state financing is quite limited but they can understand these restrictions. At the same time, the flexibility in operating with the available funds available is also limited – a situation which can, and has to be, overcome;
- In spite of the efforts and investments in new learning equipment, the usage of interactive methods is still not sufficient and needs further efforts of the Faculty members. In some of the subjects, student groups are that large, that it seems impossible to move away from ex-cathedra teaching. At present, the theoretical transfer and reproduction of knowledge is still prevailing over active and student-centred learning.

### *Additional Suggestions*

- There is still substantial space for development of the mobility of students within and between the study programs of the Faculty. The introduction of the credit system provides a golden opportunity for making available an appropriate selection of elective courses – thus providing more space for students to make their own choice from a sufficient offer of courses across (and even outside) the Faculty;
- The visits of faculty members to partner Universities could be used specifically to collect experience in introducing new methods of teaching, and for their active dissemination among colleagues. This is of most importance for the new staff that covers most of the seminars and practical exercises;
- Additional efforts should be invested to overcome the shortage of learning materials (more opportunities for use of ICT, books and textbooks, materials available and accessible on Internet) and the obligation of students to use textbooks produced by Faculty staff members. This should be done ideally without increased financial participation or any additional burdens for the students.



## **Annex: Horizontal Findings**

### *Observations*

High commitment and enthusiasm on the side of internal self-evaluation commissions, and openness and interest of Faculty management for the process resulted in a solid diagnosis, thorough analysis, and a long list of recommendations for change. Moreover, in some cases measurable change was already reached at as a direct result of the self-evaluation process.

### *Challenges and Recommendations*

The over-aging of staff was identified as a time-bomb for UKIM. Filling this gap with young brilliant staff, and use their capacity instead of that of inactive professors without knowledge or practice in modern teaching techniques. There is a urgent need to increase the number of positions for assistants and young faculty at all the Faculties visited.

Study Programmes need to be broader, less, and shorter. Broader programmes are requested by the labour market, where flexible graduates are requested who can swap from one field of action to another, applying so-called core skills and inter-disciplinary experience to a rapidly developing job market.

Continuing training offers, a variety of post-graduate programme (to be organised also jointly with and for industry and commerce), and specialisation courses for employed people are both a growing request from society and a possible source of income. Every University needs to react to the trend towards Life-Long Learning across Europe.

Innovation in teaching is badly needed across faculties. Despite individual successes, on average far too much inefficient ex-cathedra teaching takes place. It is to be substituted by contemporary, interactive and project-like and practice-oriented training and learning styles. Training of staff in this field, and tools for measuring the outputs of the teaching units should be developed therefore. Students' ability to cope with their challenges after graduation is the most important criterion to be used in this respect.

### *Additional Suggestions*

Alumni organisations should be set up. Far beyond their immediate function of telling the Faculty/University what happens to their graduates, in many countries they have been found an extremely helpful source for inspiration, innovation, information on labour market requirements, sponsorship and political contact.

The budget allocated to research is too small at present. Regulations on a 90% percentage allocated to teaching (= staff costs) are counter-productive to innovative and updated curricula. Attractive teaching is key to attract the best students, and to guarantee to them success in their professional life, as competent individuals, and as democratic citizens.

The initiated process of self-evaluation should be re-launched with new tasks, and triggered with new responsibilities. The Commissions should be empowered to undertake further prioritisation and operationalisation of necessary change. Moreover, in order to be acceptable partner for international cooperation, to attract foreign students, and to be visited by top scientist and educators from other countries, the University as a whole needs to be seen. At the end, an institutionalised and regular system of continuous self-improvement and external advice will enable Faculties and UKIM as such to keep the speed of development in international Higher Education.