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The EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

Today, The European University Association (EUA) includes about 750 member universities. Since 1994 these universities have been offered the possibility of being reviewed in order to assess their strengths and weaknesses in quality management. The aims of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are to support the university leadership and management in their efforts to improve institutional management and to promote the university’s capacity for change. The university's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) opens the possibilities to discuss its future and to help it understand its strengths and weaknesses. EUA does not wish to provide the university with a blueprint for its development. The review process is a consultative and supportive one and in the long-term perspective, EUA hopes to contribute to the promotion of a quality culture among its member universities.

During the visits the institution is helped to examine:

- how it defines and implements its long- and medium-term aims,
- how it manages its external and internal constraints and opportunities shaping its academic development and
- how it develops and implements its quality enhancement strategies.

During the Team’s evaluation process, emphasis was placed on UCM’s Self-Evaluation Report (SER) in order to contribute to the Team’s understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

The European University Association (EUA) has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education in the Slovak Republic (ME SR), jointly with the Slovak Rectors’ Conference (SRC), to evaluate the universities and higher education
institutions during 2005-2007. The agreement between the two parties means that EUA Evaluation will examine the following areas taking into account the local, national and international contexts (EUA, 2005a, p. 5):

- Organisation and structures for carrying out the main missions of higher education institutions.
- Effectiveness of internal quality processes and their relevance in decision-making and strategic planning.
- Perceived gaps in the internal mechanisms and frameworks and recommendations for enhancing them.

This evaluation is taking place in a wider context of (EUA 2005a, p. 5):

- The government’s Strategic objective of placing Slovakia in a favourable position in meeting the Lisbon objectives;
- The Governments interest in ensuring the successful implementation of the Bologna reforms;
- The Government’s acknowledgement of the need to increase the transparency and the attractiveness of the sector for the public.

Since 2001 EUA has conducted sector-wide evaluations in order to identify and give recommendations on systemic challenges and common issues shared by all institutions in a given sector. Examples of sector-wide evaluations are the review of the Irish universities during 2004, the Slovakian universities during 2005-2007 and the Portuguese Higher education system during 2006-2007. In the long-term perspective, EUA hopes to contribute to the promotion of a quality culture among European universities, and to disseminate examples of effective strategic management among its member universities.
The EUA Team
The EUA Team of the University of SS. Cyril and Methodius (henceforth referred to as UCM) in Trnava consisted of: Professor Sir David Smith, former President of University of Edinburgh and former President of Wolfson College at Oxford, UK, head of the Team; Professor Helena Jasna Mencer, former Rector of University of Zagreb, Croatia; Professor Öktem Vardar, Vice Rector ISIK University, Istanbul, Turkey; and Associate Professor Airi Rovio-Johansson, Gothenburg Research Institute, Göteborg University, Sweden, secretary of the Team.

A short summary of the working method
The aims of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) are to assist the university senior leadership and management in their efforts to promote the university’s capacity for change and to develop and improve institutional quality processes. The Institutional Evaluation Team’s objectives are to conduct an evaluation of the institution in accordance with these aims and to give recommendations to the dynamics of change.

The visits
The EUA Team made two visits to UCM in Trnava.

During the preliminary visit, March 7 – 9, 2007, the EUA Team met
- the Rector Professor RNDr. Eduard Kostolanský, the Liaison person Assistant Professor PeadDr. Ján Danek,
- the Self Evaluation Group and the appointed representatives of UCM, the deans and the Director of the Institute of Physiotherapy, Balneology and Rehabilitation, vice-rectors, vice-deans, head of Academic Senate, staff and students,
• dean, vice-dean, heads of departments, teachers and students of the Faculty of Mass and Media Communication,
• dean, vice-dean, heads of departments, teachers and students of the Faculty of Natural Science,
• the university management (the rectorate), heads of departments, Director of the Library,
• external partners; for example, representatives of the town, the municipal and the county authorities, and of the employers.

During the main visit, May 1-4, 2007, the EUA Team met
• the Rector Professor RNDr. Eduard Kostolanský, the Liaison person Assistant Professor PeadDr. Ján Danek,
• the Self Evaluation Group and Vice-rectors, Vice-deans, students of Academic Senate, and staff,
• deans and employees of the deans’ offices,
• members of the Academic Senate,
• the management team, heads of rector’s departments, and faculties’ secretaries,
• dean, vice -dean, heads of departments, teachers an students at the Faculty of Philosophy (Arts),
• Director of the Institute of Physiotherapy, Balneology and Rehabilitation, heads of departments, teachers an students of the Institute,
• the researchers and Phd-students of the Faculty of Natural Science, and
• external partners such as representatives of companies and local authorities.

The Self-Evaluation Report gave a lengthy description and a general overview on UCM although it lacked in-depth analysis of the institutional strengths and
weaknesses (UCM Self Evaluation Report, 2007). At the end of the Preliminary Visit the EUA Team asked for additional information for the Main Visit, regarding the organisation, the Strategic Plan and concrete figures about study programmes and numbers of students in each programme, the number of drop-outs from each programme, the administrative decision structures, the number of the staff and the students in each programme, the international relations and the actions and the priorities intended for the future of UCM.

The EUA Team wishes to acknowledge that both visits were superbly organised and was pleased to note the good working relationship between the Rector and the organising team. The EUA Team thanks the Rector and his teams for the generous hospitality of UCM.

After this introduction, the second part of the report gives an analysis of the constraints that influence the opportunities and policies of the UCM and the institutional regulations under which the University is operating. The third part of the report analyses the University’s capacity for change and possible areas for improvement. The fourth part consists of the recommendations the EUA Team wishes to make.
CONSTRAINTS AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The European Higher Education Area and the Higher Education in Slovakia

After 1989 new conditions were established for Higher Education institutions in the former Union of Soviet Socialists Republic (USSR). In the Higher Education Act 1990, a two-tiered system of undergraduate education was introduced. In 2002 the Government announced a new Higher Education Act for higher education institutions (Ministry of Education of the Slovak republic, 2002) valid since April 2002, which outlined the legal status of higher education institutions and their field of studies. This was an extensive transformation of higher education institutions in Slovak Republic, which, among several things, introduced the three cycle system as well as the credit system of the Bologna reform, and established national accreditation procedures. Today, the Slovak Republic has four State universities, 19 Public universities, and one Private university (National Report – Slovak republic, 2007).

The institutions of higher education in Slovakia, including UCM, are in a transition process - a transition towards a more open and responsive higher education system, based on traditional European values in an international context. One aspect of the educational restructuring and transformation is the governing of education – moving some responsibilities from government to the institutions themselves – which also implies a changing role of the state. The Glasgow Declaration states that “Europe needs strong and creative Universities as key actors in shaping European knowledge society through their commitment to wide participation and lifelong learning and by their promotion of quality and excellence in teaching, learning, research and innovation activities” (EUA, 2005b, p. 2). This Declaration enlarges the perspective of higher education by pointing out: “This will be achieved by self-confident institutions able to determine their
own development and to contribute to social, cultural and economic well being at regional, national and European and global level (EUA, 2005b).” On the one hand, the engagement of universities in society is enriching, and on the other hand the universities have to take “the responsibility for providing a broad research-based education to students at all levels in response to society’s growing need for scientific and technological information and understanding” (EUA 2005b, p. 4).

The Bologna process (Bologna Declaration, 1999) and its three cycles induce new pressure on institutions in the EU countries. The need for new educational programmes is obvious as well as the change of focus from teaching to learning in all modules and programmes in third level education throughout the European Higher Education Area. This shift of focus calls for a new educational culture in undergraduate and post graduate education. Teachers in higher education need to become aware of the increasing needs to acquire new skills and to change roles from being the authority and communicator of knowledge, to becoming a creator and facilitator of learning and a monitor of new learning possibilities offered to a variety of student groups (Reichert and Tauch, 2005).

One of the main features of the Bologna reform is the need to improve the traditional ways of describing qualifications and qualification structures (EUA, 2007). Students’ learning outcomes are what students are expected to achieve and how students are expected to demonstrate that achievement. Learning outcomes are used to define and introduce to the students the demands of knowledge and skills of each course and each programme at each level of studies. There are two broad divisions: (a) subject specific outcomes, relating narrowly to a defined set of knowledge; (b) generic outcomes, describing general skills enhancing employability. Programme outcomes should be connected to the courses (modules) to guarantee systematic and organised provision of material and of
competence related to each and every individual outcome. Learning outcomes of courses (modules) should be identified further together with the associated assessment methodologies. The learning outcomes should be general enough to capture important learning, but clear and specific enough to be ‘measurable’. Specific action verbs should be used to describe what students are expected to demonstrate, such as ‘know’, ‘describe’, ‘apply’, ‘analyse’, ‘design’ or ‘evaluate’.

The curriculum is expected to ensure that the programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment strategies are all aligned. A Diploma Supplement summarises and communicates this information to the outside world, for instance, to the employers (EUA, 2007).

Qualification frameworks are being developed in Europe as a common reference framework and as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels. A set of reference levels based on outcomes, rather than inputs, is adopted for the first time. Based on ‘Dublin descriptors’—(http://www.jointquality.nl/content/ierland/Complete_set_Dublin_Descriptor_2004_1.31.doc) and ‘European Qualifications Framework –Life Long Learning’—(http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/com_2006_0479_en.pdf), various nations have produced (or are in the process of producing) their national frameworks for qualifications.

**UCM**

In 1997 the University of SS. Cyril and Methodius (UCM) was established in Trnava. UCM is a new public university, just ten years of age. Congratulations are due for everything that has been achieved since it was founded only ten years ago. Some of its faculties are now well-respected across the whole of Slovakia, and its graduates in some subjects are already highly rated. When we interviewed one group of students, some of them volunteered that they felt proud to belong to this university.
Like other Slovak universities, resources - especially finance - are in very short supply. Additionally, as a new university, there are also problems with a shortage of buildings, lecture rooms of inadequate size, very meagre facilities for students, and so on. Furthermore, the Slovak university system suffers from more restrictive government legislation than occurs in many other countries in the European Union. However, in every country where the government has given increased autonomy to its universities, it has found that the universities function better and more efficiently. So it is very likely that sometime over the next ten years the Slovak government will give greater autonomy to its universities.

In terms of resources

The Governmental budget of most European countries today imposes restrictions on the operation of the higher education institutions and this affects negatively their research, teaching, and services to the students. Most of the institution’s resources come from government. The problem here is that the Slovak government allocates just 0.6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to education, research and development - the third lowest of any European nation. The EU ministers have agreed a target over four times greater than this - 3.0% of GDP.

A low budget, further, means:

- Scarce finance for research;
- Scarce money for investing in new equipment and improvement of facilities;
- Insufficient funds to support mobility of students and staff;
- Low investment in new books and other resources in the Library;
- Low income of the employees.
This severe shortage of resources causes all kinds of problems for the university. The problem of inadequate buildings and lecture rooms has already been mentioned. The very meagre provision of services for students can be illustrated by the fact that those from the Institute of Physiotherapy, Balneology and Rehabilitation told us they had nowhere to sit and study between lectures. Another consequence is the poor library provision across the university. There is a scarcity of key textbooks, and some in the library are quite old. An acute shortage of copying machines and computers exacerbates the problem. There are fewer computers available for students than in many other countries. There is a shortage of dormitories and hostels. UCM complains rightly about the budget being inadequate to meet the needs of the University and to fulfil its mission.

The EUA Team was informed that the resources do not come to the UCM as a lump sum. Unfortunately, the allocation criteria used by the Ministry dominates all internal allocations and leaves little room for strategic initiatives. There are not a variety of sources to enlarge the revenues of the University’s budget due to the formal restrictions for public and for private institutions. Unfortunately, these are all matters beyond the control of the university. Nevertheless the university could make an effort to shift internal allocations according to its priorities when once such priorities are established.

**In terms of teaching**

UCM realises that it is central for its academic performance and its quality assurance programme to modernise and restructure its academic schedules of education in order to give its students more space for self-study.

This is an area in which changes *could* be made to enable the university to become more compatible with the wider European university community. Most importantly, it needs a much more formal culture of quality assessment. Its
present approach is too informal, traditional, and based on ‘the professor knows best’ approach.

As part of their quality assessment strategy, many universities issue questionnaires to students for them to give their opinions anonymously about the courses they have received. We were disturbed to read in the self-evaluation report that, most unusually, few students completed questionnaires at UCM, the reason given being “. . . lack of belief in anonymity resulting in fear of possible restrictions from the teachers”. When we asked one group of students about this, it transpired that hardly any of them had actually seen a questionnaire.

Several groups of students raised concerns about the number of courses in the curriculum and the very heavy teaching loads they experienced. This indicated to us that the curriculum may be too oriented towards teaching, and not enough towards learning. It suggests the university needs to move from teacher-centred teaching to student-centred learning. This should be borne in mind as UCM introduces the Bologna process - which is not simply about introducing the three levels of Bachelor/Masters/Doctorate. It also aims to promote compatibility between European universities in matters such as the balance between teaching and learning. At the same time, the university needs to pay closer attention to ECTS (the European Credit Transfer System), which prescribes that one credit equals 25 - 30 hours of teaching and student study load.

Many universities monitor their student ‘drop-out’ rates, for this may sometimes provide helpful clues to deeper problems. We were therefore disappointed that UCM was not able to provide data on their student drop-out rates.

Finally, relatively few examples were noticed of interdisciplinarity during the visits. By this we mean providing students with opportunities to select some
courses from other faculties. Also, some concern was expressed as to whether language teaching could be more efficiently structured between faculties.

The EUA Team agrees that a low proficiency in foreign languages on the part of the academic staff as well as on the students is an obstacle to achieving quality. It not only reduces mobility of staff and students, but also minimises the participation in multi-national programmes and interferes with the understanding and reception of international scientific research.


We recommend that the problems associated with sharing of faculty members’ expertise across various faculties are solved (e.g., how the financial responsibility is borne for a member of one faculty teaching a course in another faculty).

Accreditation of all master and PhD programmes seems to be the major strategy issue in all departments. This is not realistic since there is a lack of qualified teaching staff and researchers to perform doctoral study programmes. It looks as if they are competing with each other for a good image.

The EUA Team also recommends that UCM reduce the teaching hours of PhD students, even if it requires a small increase in the workload of full professors (and see the following section on research).
In terms of research

For a new university seriously starved of resources, conducting research is inevitably difficult. Because of this, there is a particular need to develop institutional guidelines and set policies for priorities in research areas.

The university is understandably preoccupied with gaining PhD accreditation across a wide range of subjects, but it needs to think beyond this objective. We were also concerned with the high number of hours per week that some PhD students were required to teach, for this would inevitably restrict their capacity for research. If full professors marginally increased their teaching loads, those PhD students with heavy loads might then be decreased to the benefit of their research capacity.

Having a relatively low number of research projects will minimise the possibilities of cooperation with other universities. As a matter of fact, the more specific contacts a university has established in an international network, the more academic profit it can take from networking.

In terms of organisation

The current organisational structure of the university is heavily determined by government legislation. However, it should be borne in mind that, as in most other European countries, it is very likely that Slovak universities will be given significantly more autonomy sometime in the relatively near future. Some European universities have derived significant benefit from planning ahead for such increased autonomy. For example, the management of the university might need to be divided between two bodies: a Governing Council, responsible for matters such as finance, buildings, personnel, efficient use of resource between faculties, and developing a coherent, unified identity for the university; and an Academic Senate, exclusively concerned with academic issues (and thus relieved
of the substantial amount of time it currently devotes to allocation of financial resources). With greater autonomy, significant responsibility shifts from committees towards individuals. This enables those with leadership qualities to bring about beneficial changes more rapidly and efficiently. Increased autonomy always comes with increased accountability; thus provision of the latter may accelerate the gains in the former.

The great majority of European universities each have some kind of formal student organisation. This generally enables the management of the university to get a reliable picture of the needs and opinions of their student body. There will also be a need to think ahead to assess what entrepreneurial activities might be explored to earn money for the university - even if some are considered illegal under the current restrictive government legislation.

The non-participation of students in the decision-making process in the past weakened the decision-making processes in the university. This was apparent at least in all affairs of teaching and learning, where, with no student feedback to academic staff, the quality of study programmes and of teaching suffered, as the Self Evaluation Steering Group reported.

Another important organisational innovation is the establishment of an informal advisory structure to help the Rector to develop the policy of the University.
THE CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

The mission
The most important challenge to universities is the internal and external pressure integrated in the cultural and social aspects of changes. The EUA Team acknowledges that work on the processes of transformation and change within UCM is in progress. A central general competency of higher education institutions is the capacity to change and an ability to adapt to new prerequisites and new working conditions. The rate of change is fast, so the university will need a clear mission statement with specific aims and which may need to be frequently revisited as circumstances change.

In the UCM’s Self Evaluation report (2007) the aim of the university is developed several times in the text. However a clear mission statement is lacking, as is also a strategic plan and an action plan of the institution.

Constraints, opportunities and challenges
As well as opportunities, the university also faces many constraints and challenges. The Bologna reform is an opportunity and a challenge for UCM. The expectations underpinning the Bologna reform (Froment et al., 2006) mean that each European university is expected to improve its infrastructure, physical facilities and equipment; and to provide students with more working space, better learning resources and more accommodation and social facilities. All these provisions have the aim of improving the educational conditions at European universities. This reform also emphasizes the development of research in a national and international perspective. The Bologna reform elucidates the importance of the university’s relations to its stakeholders as well as its social
responsibility to the surrounding society region and community (Rovio-Johansson and Bull, 2006).

Understandably, for a university that is only ten years old, international contacts are relatively few. To raise its international status both for research and for student mobility, the university must grasp opportunities more fully. This includes - as indicated several times above - implementing Bologna in spirit, and not just as the three level degree structure.

There are also regional and local opportunities. The evaluation team was very impressed by the strong goodwill towards the university shown by the private and public sector representatives it met. The team therefore considered that there might be a real opportunity for formal meetings between the town’s universities and such local/regional representatives to discuss how the economy of the area is likely to develop, and how the universities could facilitate this. Such meetings could also be used to exchange views on employers’ expectations from the university’s graduates - in matters such as, for example, the presentational skills and teamwork abilities of new graduates. The EUA Team recommends that UCM develop systematic, formal platforms to exchange views on employers’ expectations from the UCM graduates.

This leads to another possible opportunity: that of cooperating closely with the neighbouring university. An institution’s sense of independence can make the initiation of such cooperation difficult at first - but the outcome often brings strong benefits to both sides.

To sum up what the UCM needs to enhance:
1. Restructuring and accreditation of the educational programmes so that they align more closely with Bologna reform
2. Development of the quality of teaching and promotion of the pedagogical training of teachers,

3. Expanding the possibilities of using new teaching materials, increasing the numbers of books in the Library, improving premises and the amount of student accommodation,

4. Improving national and international cooperation in education and research,

5. Increasing the number of contracts with foreign universities and

6. Developing a quality culture and quality mechanisms for teaching and research
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The EUA Team gives ten recommendations to the UCM. The first nine are for the university to consider and are set out in order of priority. The tenth recommendation is for the Slovak government to consider, and is regarded as very high priority.

In terms of strategic management

1. The university should prepare a detailed strategic plan with objectives, methods of achieving them, benchmarks and timings.

The EUA Team recommends that UCM formulate a Strategic Plan and an Action Plan to accelerate the process of change. The EUA Team recommends that UCM set priorities, and state clearly which actions and concrete steps have to be taken first to move the ongoing development further.

In terms of quality management

2. A centrally steered, formal quality management system should be established. It could be led by a Vice Rector for Quality who could chair a committee with authority to act on major issues such as: the shift from teacher-centred teaching to student-centred learning; curriculum structure; and developing efficient and effective means of getting student opinions.

In terms of teaching

3. The basic philosophy and principles of Bologna should be implemented, with its emphasis on learning outcomes and its own particular credit system (and it should be remembered that that the Slovak government was one of the signatories to the Bologna agreement).
4. More interdisciplinarity should be stimulated, so that students can select elective courses to satisfy their own interests, and so that there are sufficient slots in their timetables to enable them to do this.

In terms of research

5. Research: where appropriate, promote shifts from individuals working on their own to group/network research, and cooperative research at a national/international and global level.

In terms of student organisation

6. Encourage the development of some kind of University Student Association. It might need small subscriptions from students themselves to get it going - but the university should bear in mind that the European Students Organisation has sometimes participated formally in institutional evaluations.

In terms of internationalisation

7. Promote internationalisation by strengthening the International Office, establishing a committee with a representative from each faculty, and ensuring the provision of advice for students coming from, or moving to, other universities.

In terms of Life Long Learning

8. The university should contribute to societal and regional benefits by providing life-long learning courses of interest to serious-minded local citizens. These should be paid for, and the payments not considered illegal.

In terms of societal and regional development and fund raising

9. Other entrepreneurial activities without restrictive legislation should be explored. They should increase funds available to the university, and benefit the local economy.
Recommendation to the Government.

10. The government must increase the funding of education, particularly in the light of the European agreement to the target of allocating 3.0% of GDP towards education, research and development (and certainly rising well above the current Slovak government expenditure of 0.6% GDP).

ENVOI

We extend special thanks to the liaison person Assistant Professor PeadDr. Ján Danek, and his colleagues for their helpful efforts and careful attention to all our logistical arrangements, to the Self Evaluation Group, and to all students, academics and staff, department heads, deans, the director of the Institute of Physiotherapy, Balneology and Rehabilitation, vice-deans, and the executive officers for their time and attention. Finally, we thank the Rector Professor Professor RNDr. Eduard Kostolanský, the vice-rectors, and the management team.
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