



# qae

## Peer Visit to Faculty of Philosophy

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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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## Introductory Remarks

Unfortunately, because of the brevity of my visit to UKIM, I could spend only a few hours with the members of the Faculty of Philosophy. On Wednesday, October 22, I had **meetings**

- with the Dean (Trajan Gocevski), Vice-deans, Secretary, 2 members of the Commission for Self-evaluation, 2 professors (10 a.m.)
- with the Commission for Self-Evaluation (11:30 a.m.)
- with professors (12:30 p.m.)
- with students and representatives of the Union of Students (1:30 p.m.)

I was deeply impressed by the Dean's and the Vice-Deans' "performance", their excellent status of information and their mode of running the Faculty. The discussion with members of the Commission for Self-Evaluation was very interesting and lively and so was the meeting with the students. A little bit more difficult was the discussion with the academic staff, but that was - maybe – my fault.

In addition I got the "**Report on the Self-Evaluation of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje for the Period of 1997-2002**". The quality of this report and the Faculty's self-evaluation are very high and the seriousness of the whole evaluation process is extraordinary.

It must also be mentioned that I had the chance to **visit five classes** (with different settings and sizes) in a kind of short surprise visit. In all classes I noticed a very good working atmosphere and much concentration.

## Curricula and Study Program

### *Observations*

#### a) Structure

Like almost all Faculties of Philosophy (Humanities etc.) in the world, the Faculty of Philosophy of UKIM is a very complex and multiple institution. It offers 10 undergraduate programs in 10 institutes (one program - one institute) and 12 post-graduate study programs in the 10 institutes and two departments. PhD studies have not been introduced yet. The undergraduate and post-graduate study programs qualify also personnel for education provision and research work within the range of the scientific areas covered with the study programs accordingly.

According to the information given by Dean Gocevski there are 30 to 32 different courses in various study programs - about 500 different subjects. The teaching is conducted by 176 professors and assistants. Professors have to teach 8-12 hours. There are 130 employees at the Faculty, 20 to 30 part-time associates from other faculties, as well as other 10 to 15 acknowledged experts coming from outside the University. There are also 20 to 25 demonstrators (graduated students). During each year there are about 100 European university professors visiting and teaching at the Faculty.

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The Faculty of Philosophy has about 4300 students, 3000 of which are regular students. The lectures take place in 3 buildings (8000 m<sup>2</sup>), 2 amphitheatres with 600 seats, 20 classrooms, 3 laboratories, one information technology cabinet, 2 multimedia centers, 10 libraries (280 000 books) with reading rooms.

There is also an educational information center, financed partly by the Faculty and partly by the Open Society Institute, where the students can get information on all universities in the world. This Center will be especially useful with the introduction of the Credit Transfer System (CTS).

There is a student service with computers, 2-3 photocopiers, where the students can produce their research papers and other projects at a symbolic price. The last three years there have been significant investments in information technology, and there is a LAN connecting the professors, administration and the student service. The server supports the whole system of 180 computers. The LAN is connected to the Internet and a software is expected from France, which will enable easier connection to the European Credit Transfer System technology.

#### b) Curricula

A new study program is expected to begin in 2004. This year (2003) is considered a pilot year. The general problem lies with the departments having larger numbers of students.

Proposals for the new curriculum will be given at the Institutes. They will then be forwarded to the Dean. The Academic Council adopts it. It then goes to the Rectorate. Finally, it reaches the Minister. However, the curriculum becomes official when the Rector signs it. The contents of the curriculum are decided by the Faculties.

#### c) Evaluation of teaching

There is obviously a complex system of control to secure the quality of lectures. The system seems to be so complicated that I was not able to see how the system works. On the one hand I was informed that there are two surveys: The first is at the level of the University. It is conducted annually. It is anonymous. The other is done by the Students' Organization. It is done quarterly and the results from these two surveys are forwarded to the Academic Council. Due to the lack of established standards and criteria of "good" and "bad" professors such surveys have never resulted in anything specific.

On the other hand I got the information that there are the following levels:

- 1) the students - in order to get their signatures, they have to attend classes regularly. Since some of them participate financially, they have the right to demand better conditions. For the past 2-3 years the students have been conducting an anonymous survey expressing their opinion of the professors;
- 2) control on behalf of the management. The academic council adopts an overview on who does what, who teaches which subject, how many hours and how many students. All this information is readily accessible and clearly presented. This enables easy assessment of whether the lecturers hold classes regularly. Each professor prepares a

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monthly report. The report is being checked by the Head of the Institute, and is later sent to the Dean. Given that there is a variation of salary of about 20%, in this manner the monthly payment is eventually calculated.

#### d) The Self-Evaluation Report

It is, as I said before, an excellent paper with a careful analysis. But my impression is that the "diagnosis" is until now done better than the "therapy". It is of major interest for the Faculty to continue with this work.

#### *Challenges and Recommendations*

a) The complexity of the Faculty raises the question whether this institution is coherent or – more or less – "only" an agglomeration of institutes. For me it is no question that the "leading team" is well accepted by the members of the Faculty and that there is a kind of "corporate identity". But on the other hand I got the impression that in the field of studies there is too little interdisciplinary cooperation between the institutes and their specific subjects. The "one institute – one curriculum" formula is possibly an obstacle to the establishment of new und interdisciplinary programs. It seems as if the Faculty were – in the field of studies - a kind of puzzle, not a picture.

As the Dean told me, there are subjects which are being taught at several institutes, which means that there is a cooperation between the institutes, but I think that this cooperation could and should be improved. New and modern programs (e.g. Gender Studies) are not always a question of budget but also a question of dynamics and cooperation. Cooperation of this kind also could and should include other Faculties of the university.

This (interdisciplinarity and cooperation) should also be considered when the Faculty starts offering PhD studies, which should be done as soon as possible.

Finally, the introduction of a "Dean of Studies" should be discussed.

b) The teachers' evaluation seems very complicated to me. I think that the procedure could be simplified. Much research has been conducted on this process: A joint committee (!) of students, faculty and administration is normally assigned the task of researching professional evaluation and developing the appropriate instruments and procedures.

c) The creation of new curricula is very complicated. On the one hand there is a bottom-up process - proposals are given by the institutes; the final decision is made by the Minister. In spite of the fact that this may be the "normal" procedure in many countries, one should consider that the present trend in Europe is to give the universities more autonomy also in deciding on the curricula.

d) It was of course impossible to discuss the content of ten different curricula. My impression is that:

- the curricula are very strict, that means that the students cannot choose the professors, they have little freedom to select their courses and to concentrate on their own fields of interest;

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It is part of the age-old academic argument about specialization versus a more liberal approach to higher education. I am of the view that this question should be considered carefully, given a widely held international view that one's undergraduate education should produce an individual prepared to enter and benefit from several career options. Employers want employees with a broad education, able to enter the employment market but also prepared to benefit from required life-long learning education. Today, an undergraduate degree is only the first step in a lifetime of learning; indeed, more - even graduate - programs are becoming multidisciplinary in nature.

- there may be a lack of theory and theoretical discussion and that knowledge is more important than (soft) skills;

I think it is important to develop verbal and quantitative skills, to enable the students to think creatively and to deal analytically with complex problems. University preparation also serves as the basis for future life-long learning. Ideally, a university education produces a person who provides community leadership while at the same time has a sound concern for fellow citizens - in short, a humanitarian.

- greater presence of practical work is needed;
- there is too much ex-cathedra teaching;
- the current curriculum is explained only in content terms (no word on theory, methods, modules, no critical approach).

### *Additional Suggestions*

a) It is no question that the introduction of ECTS is very important and the University has of course to take part in the Bologna process. But in the discussions I got the impression that Bologna and ECTS became a kind of "magic formula" as if the new European architecture of studies would "automatically" solve all the problems in this field. (One can find similar views in other countries, also in Austria.) ECTS and Bologna can only offer a kind of setting, nothing more.

I want to mention that one member of the academic staff made the important remark that the implementation of ECTS is considered a simple one, but that in reality ECTS is very hard to implement. Mechanisms are needed to focus the professors on the Faculty and induce greater engagements on their behalf. Assistance is needed in establishing such mechanisms. The reform of the University is not a reform that could be done solely for the inside, but it relates to the society as a whole.

b) We did not discuss the University entrance system (because of the lack of time). Obviously the Faculty wants to allow more students to enroll. Due to the problem of increased unemployment, usually after graduation, a large number of young people enroll at universities. By admitting a greater number of students the quality of lectures is jeopardized. The number of students increases, and the number of staff and the money remain the same. That is the reason why the financial participation was introduced.

All these problems are also well known in other countries – and the solution is not easy at all. In any case it is evident that a good entrance system is a must, and should precede any revision of teaching methods at high schools and tertiary institutions. As

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the University strives to grow in quality and stature it is critically important to maintain high admission standards.

c) We also could not discuss the question of distance learning. Distance learning can be used to reach a much broader market. I believe that continuing education and distance learning represent a great opportunity to serve greater educational needs and produce an important source of income. It would be a good idea to combine distance learning with the aspect of lifelong learning that contributes to human fulfillment and positive social change.

### The Career Advancement Process

The government placed the Faculties within the public administration, and there was no change in the staff. This year 150 young professors are expected to enter the University, replacing the professors pending retirement. Human resource policy at the Faculty is having a replacement for each retired professor. The Faculty should make use of the chance of rejuvenating its academic staff.

The Faculty should also try to hire teachers from outside the university and from outside Macedonia ("fresh blood argument"). But it also has to take care of the advancement process of its own young rising generation.

A junior assistant can be elected to the same position only twice, i.e. for 6 years. An assistant can be elected 3 times, but after getting their Ph.D. they can become lecturers, or remain assistants indefinitely. There are three more titles in this line: docent, associate professor, and full-professor. Every 5 years there is a re-election.

### Mobility

It is no question that academic mobility first of all is a question of money. But there are many scholarships, many networks, many mobility programs in Europe and in the world. The Faculty does not offer assistance in the form of funds, information, recommendations. It should be one of the objectives of Faculty's policy not only to provide the students with free Internet access but also to assist them in getting information, etc.

### Supplementary Remarks

- My impression is that there is a lot of dynamics in UKIM and the leading persons are excellent and motivated in developing a new and even better university. But what is UKIM? For me it seems to be an agglomeration of very independent faculties. I think it is very important to "unify" these units.
- Obviously there are lots of committees, councils, boards, etc. in the universities. Should not the Rector and the Deans be the decision makers?

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## 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 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.

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