



Draft!

qae

peer visits at faculties

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BRIEFING NOTES FOR EXTERNAL EXPERTS Collection of questions

0 Background

UKIM and the Macedonian Agency for Evaluation have requested that we focus during the one-day on-site visits at various Faculties on the issue of curricula evaluation. Here is what Vice-Rector Prof. Chepujnoska wrote in her letter to Navreme on 16 September 2003:

"It would be of greatest importance for our University if, for a period of a day, we examine and evaluate the curricula in the frames of the study programs at the six faculties, in collaboration with the Austrian experts.

Thus, the following topics can be encompassed:

- *how many curricula are there at the graduate and postgraduate studies;*
- *what is the ratio of size of the general, basic and professional courses;*
- *is the student, according to the content of the study courses, qualified to be an expert, with reference to the diploma he/she acquires;*
- *is an appropriate academic staff for the curricula of the study programs employed;*
- *are teaching facilities (classrooms, laboratories) provided;*
- *is suitable equipment for teaching and practice provided.*

These and other issues are of interest in this phase of external evaluation."

Bearing in mind that a one-day visit is a very short period to get a good idea about such complex issues as they are mentioned in this letter, it seems useful for the external experts to have a common frame of reference for their meetings with UKIM colleagues. The following are some clusters of questions organized around various themes that seem to be of primary relevance with regard to 'evaluating the curricula'. They will hopefully also be helpful to provide a consistency of observations and perspectives among the external experts - when we get together at the end of the day, to compare our notes from the visits and prepare our oral and written statements.

The general approach is a heuristic one: It is not us who would be able to 'evaluate the curriculum' during a one-day visit; but we can ask questions that address some important aspects and thus encourage UKIM colleagues to examine their own curricula

from a more comprehensive viewpoint. Needless to say that this list of questions is not meant to be exhaustive. Ideas, thoughts and changes are most welcome!

1 Definition and Structure

1.1 SELECTION

Who defines the curriculum? Which groups/agencies (e.g. government entities, the Quality Agency) are involved in the formal process of adopting the curriculum? What are the mechanisms to safeguard academic freedom in the definition of the curriculum? Which criteria are used to define the content? How is the employability of students ensured? Which key qualifications are considered? How are interactive teaching methods ensured?

1.2 UPDATING

What is the procedure for regular adjustments and up-dating of the content of the curriculum (inclusion of new literature, new research approaches/results, new knowledge areas)? Is each professor his or her own master, or do these changes have to be communicated to the dean/head of department and/or to be accorded by a collegial body? If you add new elements to the curriculum, do you also at the same time subtract older ones which are no longer as relevant as they used to be?

1.3 DURATION

Are there any given parameters with regard to the number of weekly hours for students, contact hours broken down in lectures, seminars, laboratory exercises, consultation with students, total workload etc? Is there a written syllabus for each of the courses available to students who want to attend? How does a student know which knowledge he or she has to acquire to pass exams? Do you think that the curriculum in your department has the right balance between instilling factual knowledge` (names, dates, formula etc) and preparing students for a life as `permanent learners`?

1.4 INDIVIDUALISATION

What is the proportion between compulsory and elective courses? How much flexibility does a student have to compose his/her own study program? Can students attend courses at other departments/Faculties apart from the one where they are enrolled (credit transfer)? Do you provide guidance or mentorship to students to put together an individualized study program?

2 Objectives and Quality

2.1 REVIEW

When was the last time that the curriculum in your Faculty/Department was subject to a thorough review procedure? Is there an internal mechanism within your department/Faculty (a committee, a vice dean for instruction etc) by which the curricula are regularly being audited and re-examined? (if not, do you think that such a mechanism would be useful and practical?) How would you describe the changes of the curricular content and structure that occurred during the past 12/6/3 years – and how did these changes occur?

2.2 STANDARDS

What are standards of quality for you with regard to the curriculum:

- the academic merits of the professors ('good professors are equivalent to a good curriculum');
- the compatibility with the requirements at other universities ('our students are learning the same as their counterparts in Zagreb/Vienna/Harvard');
- the acceptance of the degree on the national/international market ('our students get good jobs with international companies/get scholarships and positions at prestigious universities abroad');
- other standards?

2.3 MEASUREMENT

How do you measure the effectiveness of your teaching:

- exclusively by cognitive criteria (the amount of knowledge that students have accumulated in the course of their studies);
- by meta-cognitive criteria (the personal development of your students and their skills in terms of communication, reasoning, self-motivated learning etc);
- by external outcome criteria (e.g., the employability of your graduates)?
- other criteria?

(If it is a mixture of various factors, what is the relative weight of the individual elements and how are you trying to promote these different objectives in the classroom?)

2.4 METHOD

Do you consider pedagogy and different methods of instruction to be of importance for the quality of your curricula (e.g., the 'traditional' method of one-way lecturing, rote learning, memorizing of facts as opposed to active learning methods)? Are you discussing different methods of instructions at your department/Faculty or is each professor left at one's own devices in the classroom? Would you find it desirable to have a common approach to general principles of instruction at your department/Faculty? Are you in favour of making the quality of teaching a criterion for the promotion of academic staff?

2.5 FEEDBACK

In your view, what role should students have in assessing the quality of instruction? How do you think they can be involved in a constructive manner in the review and improvement of curricula?

2.6 CRITICISM

How do you react to public allegations or suspicion of cases of corruption and other irregularities at your university (prompted e.g. by the publishing of the survey "Corruption in Higher Education in the Republic of Macedonia" by the Open Society Institute Macedonia this summer)? Do you see a need for a general discussion about basic professional rules of conduct and a code of ethics at your university?

3 Relevance and Scope

3.1 COMMUNITY

What is the focus of your curricula? How do you know that your curricula are relevant to the needs of society? How far can only academics form an adequate judgment on issues of academic nature? How much do you think it matters what various parts of the society/stakeholders (politics, companies and employers, civil society, parents of students etc) think the university ought to be doing? How are students prepared for the role as members of social community?

3.2 CITIZENSHIP

How do you try to ensure a balance between academic knowledge requirements of graduates of your University on the one hand, and what they need to know for their future professional life and for their role as citizens? Do you monitor the changes on the job market for your graduates and react to it by shifting the scope and focus of your curricula? Which democratic procedures and behaviour at the University prepares students for an active participation in a democratic society?

4 Planning and Strategy

4.1 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

What will the future bring in terms of curricula and study programs? Will there be substantial changes? Do you have ideas, plans, aspirations for a more thorough-going remodelling and renewing of the existing curricula at your department/faculty? Are you considering to open up completely new curricula as an addition or an alternative to the existing ones? How do you go about in drafting new types of curricula? Do you establish a commission which develops a proposal including needs assessment, the demand for new academic staff with suitable qualifications, a 'market analysis'? Which substantial changes do you foresee for the role of universities in general?

4.2 BOLOGNA PROCESS

All signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration and the subsequent Communiqués will undergo deep changes in the structure of their university curricula to adopt the two-tier BA/MA model throughout these countries by 2010.

How well do you feel informed about the Bologna Process? Have there been discussions at your department/faculty to restructure the curricula according to the Bologna criteria? What is the current state of these discussions (if not, why not)? In your view, what are the possible advantages of this new curricula model for your department/ faculty/ country? What are the threats/ obstacles/ downsides/ reservations? Is each department/ faculty working on its own to create BA and MA study programs? Is there a common strategy for the entire university with regular meetings and mutual consultations among those involved in drafting these programs?

4.3 ECTS APPLICATION

Which action did you undertake in order to implement the 2001 University Rulebook on ECTS (to be implemented at the latest in 2003/4)? How have you ensured that students can change between different study programmes? Did you provide for recognition of studies at other departments, faculties or universities in Macedonia, and universities abroad? How will external or foreign students be able to get recognition for their studies at your faculty?