



**European University Association (EUA)  
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA**

***EUA FOLLOW-UP REPORT***

***June 2006***

## **UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA**

### **UEB**

## **EUA REVIEWERS' FOLLOW-UP REPORT**

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#### **Terminology**

The following terms are used throughout this report:

“UEB” is the University of Economics in Bratislava. This means the whole University, including faculties and institutes. It does not mean simply the Rectorate;

“2002 Report” is the report sent by EUA to UEB in 2002;

“Self-evaluation Report” is the report prepared by UEB in 2006;

“The team” is the EUA team for the follow-up visit in 2006.

## **Introduction**

### **1. The invitation**

During 2002, the University of Economics in Bratislava requested an institutional evaluation by the CRE (now European University Association, EUA). The preliminary, and main, visits took place in May and June 2002 respectively. The EUA evaluation team consisted of Professor Finn Junge-Jensen (Chairman), President, Copenhagen Business School; Professor Dr. Jirí Holenda, Former Rector, University of West Bohemia; Professor Dr. Sérgio Machado dos Santos, Honorary Rector, Universidade do Minho; and Professor Malcolm Frazer (Secretary), former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Anglia. The report of the review was presented to UEB in October 2002.

In the context of the request from the Ministry of Education in the Slovak Republic (MESR) and the Slovak Rectors' Conference (SRC) for EUA to undertake a national review of all higher education institutions in the Slovak Republic, the Rector of UEB, Professor Vojtech Kollar requested EUA for a follow-up visit. This took place from 22 to 24 May 2006.

### **2. The terms of reference**

The national review of all higher education institutions in the Slovak Republic, which is being undertaken by EUA and is commissioned by MESR and SRC, is structured to accord with the EUA Institutional Evaluation Guidelines. These Guidelines stress that each institution is evaluated against its specific aims and objectives and that the evaluation is oriented towards offering recommendations for improvement rather than passing summary judgment or ranking institutions. The evaluation is concerned with a university's decision making and strategic planning, internal quality processes, research capacity and progress in implementing the Bologna reforms.

An EUA evaluation is not an accreditation: there is no "pass - fail" judgement. In two places in the self-evaluation report there is a statement that UEB had "passed" the 2002 evaluation. The team assumes that the word "passed" was used in the sense "passed through" or experienced.

### **3. The evaluation team**

The team for the follow up visit consisted of:

Professor Finn Junge-Jensen (Chairman), President, Copenhagen Business School,  
Professor Johann Gerlach, former President of the Freie Universität Berlin, and  
Professor Malcolm Frazer (Secretary), former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of  
East Anglia.

### **4. The follow-up process**

Since 1998 EUA has offered, as an extension to its institutional evaluation programme, the possibility of a follow-up visit. The rationale is that a second visit can assist the university to evaluate the progress it has made since the original review. What was the impact of the original visit? What use has the university made of the evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up visit is also an opportunity for the university to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

To summarise, the follow-up visit to UEB was about change: barriers to change, experience of change between 2002 and 2006, impetus for change in years to come. It was not intended to be an evaluation of the current situation (June 2006) at the UEB. Readers are advised to bear this in mind when studying this report.

In line with the EUA institutional evaluation programme as a whole, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the university to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the review. The university submits a self-evaluation report which describes the progress made, indicating also the barriers to change. The university also indicates the issues it wishes to discuss with the follow-up team.

The University's self-evaluation report was prepared by a working group appointed by the University management. The working group was composed of representatives of the Senate, the faculties and institutes, the administrative staff and students. The report was based on a wide ranging survey and consultation within UEB. The report was published on the UEB website, and sent to the follow-up team in advance of the visit. The team commends this procedure.

During the two day visit, the team had meetings with the Rector, the five Vice-Rectors, deans, the Bursar, the self-evaluation report working group, the Chairman of Senate and heads of departments, institutes, central management and administration, and students. During the two day visit, the team met over seventy academic, non-academic staff and students. The visit concluded with an oral report on the preliminary findings of the team to the Rector alone; and subsequently to an Open Forum attended by over one hundred academic and non-academic staff and students.

## **Changes made at UEB between 2002 and 2006**

### **5. External factors affecting change**

The last four years have seen some major changes influencing higher education institutions in the Slovak Republic. Two positive influences were (i) accession to the European Union (opportunities for alternative sources of funding, and for increasing staff and student mobility), and (ii) a Higher Education Act, effective from 1 April 2002, which created a legal framework for the implementation of the Bologna Process (opportunities to change the curriculum, improve quality assurance, develop lifelong learning, increase mobility). How well UEB has used these opportunities is analysed in the following sections.

A negative influence on UEB, reported in the self-evaluation report, is the rapid growth of public and private higher education, and particularly a disproportionate increase of new institutions offering studies in economics and management. UEB faces increasing competition. Consequently, student applications in some faculties have declined, while at the same time there are insufficient academics in the Slovak Republic competent to teach these subjects and many staff give lectures and seminars at more than one institution [see also section 6(1)]. The self-evaluation report does not provide quantitative data about this problem and so the team had difficulties in making any concrete suggestions other than to observe that high quality programmes of study attract students. Hence, UEB should make strenuous efforts in quality assurance in order to make continuous improvements in the courses it offers. UEB must find ways of attracting young, well qualified teachers.

## **6. Staff commitment**

A key element for the development of any university is for there to be high morale among the staff. The team has three observations on this crucial issue.

(1) Salaries are low. Consequently, in order to have a reasonable income, many staff undertake additional employment which frequently takes the form of teaching in another university. The result is that staff are overworked and cannot contribute their best to UEB. It was suggested to the team that legislation is needed to regulate staff from one institution teaching in another. The team doubts whether legislation would stop this practice, and considers that it would be more effective to develop systems for rewarding high quality teaching and research. If the current law prohibits UEB paying differential salaries, then the team will suggest that the EUA National Report proposes that the Rectors' Committee put maximum pressure on the new Government to change the law. The problem of low salaries for academic staff must be solved in order to attract young, well qualified, people into academic posts in universities.

(2) In 2002, the team found that there was considerable misunderstanding about the new Higher Education Act. There was apprehension that this would mean more, not less, centralisation. The team found that that there is now more acceptance of the Act and that UEB is now much better integrated. In particular, the Deans were positive about the changes which have been made since 2002. No doubt the strategic planning exercise and the widespread consultation have played a significant part in changing attitudes.

(3) Positive and negative attitudes of staff can be illustrated with an anecdote from the visit. One UEB colleague responded vigorously to a question from the team about obstacles. The response was: "There are no obstacles which cannot be overcome by energy and enthusiasm". The team was impressed by meeting many other colleagues who shared this positive approach, but was concerned with others who had negative attitudes suggesting that nothing can be done to overcome the external pressures facing UEB. The future of UEB depends on having as many colleagues as possible in the former category. The UEB leadership must identify, encourage and, if possible, reward them.

## **7. Strategic planning**

The team discussed UEB's current strategic plan, which is set out in the document: "*The Long-term Development Plan for UEB for the Period 2003 -2007 with the View to 2010*". The team has not seen an English version of this document and so cannot comment on the targets, timescales and financial implications. During the oral presentation of these plans, the Vice-Rectors only mentioned the general aims without describing the implementation measures and framework conditions themselves, which are of immense significance for the realisation of the plans. In particular, a strategic plan must have quantitative indicators, and a systematic and regular review process must be in place. A feature of each review should be the integration of quantitative indicators and qualitative judgements leading to a revised strategic plan and improved effectiveness and efficiency at UEB.

As far as the team could ascertain, the current strategic plan does not envisage reducing the number of departments, although it does refer to increasing inter-disciplinary programmes and research. The team came to the view that there are too many departments, and that there would be gains in efficiency and further opportunities for developing interdisciplinary study programmes and research, if there was a reduction in the number of departments. The team **recommends** that at the next review of the strategic plan the academic structure should be considered with a view to reducing the number of departments.

## **8. Education (Curriculum change, teaching and learning)**

Since 2002, there have been major changes in the curriculum offered by UEB. These are largely as a result of the decision of the Government to implement the Bologna principles. New study programmes have been designed and approved by the Slovak Accreditation Commission. Currently, sixty nine study programmes are accredited at the three levels. The team congratulates all the staff on this achievement. UEB has also taken the opportunity of this major curriculum change to strengthen the credit system, although the self-evaluation report states that further steps are necessary before ECTS will be fully implemented.

However, restructuring study programmes is only part of the Bologna Process: at least as important is ensuring that the education offered by a university is *student centred*.

Discussions with students and teaching staff left the team with the same impression that it formed in 2002, which was that the education offered at UEB is *teacher centred*. The team suggests that the next step in curriculum change at UEB must be to move from a *teaching environment* to a *learning environment*. This change will only be achieved through staff development and we make a recommendation about this in section 14.

Furthermore, the team gained the impression at several of its meetings that the approach to teaching in some areas is still very traditional and theoretical, and suggests, as it did in 2002, that more effort is needed to introduce *action based learning* through problem solving, project work and collaboration with businesses.

The team did notice one curriculum change since 2002, and commends UEB on developing more opportunities for e-learning.

## **9. Research (Applied Research and Development)**

The team was pleased to notice the increased focus on research since 2002 and commends UEB on its achievements. The team asserts that in every country there should be at least one university or faculty with specialisation in economics and business which has a strong base in research and applied research. UEB should be in this position. There are several advantages:

- strong research and applied research is the basis for innovation and entrepreneurship (this is covered in section 10);
- high quality research is conducive to producing a quality learning environment;
- a research university is able to attract staff of high quality.

The team had one concern. The self-evaluation report refers to faculties publishing their own journals in order to give better opportunities for publishing. The problem of some staff being unable to write in a language used by journals with high impact is understood, but it is suggested that the research reputation of UEB will depend in publishing in internationally recognised journals. A system should be established which would encourage staff with language skills to collaborate with colleagues having difficulties with a foreign language.

Finally, the team suggests that the UEB leadership should be even more active in promoting interdisciplinary (cross faculty) research.

## **10. Collaboration with the public and private sectors (Innovation)**

There is now a widespread view within higher education in Europe that universities have three functions: education, research and innovation. The last of these refers to the essential role universities have in using their knowledge and capabilities to promote social, economic and technological development. This section is concerned with UEB's role in innovation.

In the 2002 report, UEB was urged to enhance its collaboration with the business community. The team was pleased to note that much progress has been made, but is of the opinion that even more could be achieved. A leading university or faculty of business and economics should have the widest possible contacts with employers and enterprises. It should be at the forefront of converting research and new ideas into innovations and entrepreneurial activities in the public and private sectors. UEB is particularly active in this field at the Kosice faculty. Experiences in this faculty should be shared with the other faculties. In particular, UEB should clarify its role in regional development.

In the 2002 report, it was suggested that external advisory bodies at faculty or departmental level should be established in order to promote more collaboration with local businesses. The team noted that this has not been done. The University Advisory Body, referred to in the self-evaluation report was established for a different purpose (oversight of finances) and as a requirement of the 2002 Higher Education Act.

The team **recommends** that even greater efforts are made to promote external collaboration and that the next revision of the strategic plan should include the establishment of faculty advisory bodies. Their main purpose should be to promote new collaboration and have oversight of existing collaboration.

The team has a number of suggestions which might enhance UEB's role in contributing to economic and social development. These are to:

- arrange more student internships;
- produce an inventory of all the known contacts with the public and private sector. The inventory could include: contacts with alumni, past and current development projects, internships, staff contacts, etc.;
- be more active (via a brochure, website and open days) in showing the expertise available from UEB to the public and private sector;

- create an atmosphere within UEB that innovation and entrepreneurship are essential functions, and that, although the costs of using the human and other resources of UEB must be fully covered, the prime purpose is not income generation.

## **11. Lifelong learning**

In 2002, the report commended the work of the Centre for Further Education. This has now been renamed the Centre for Advanced Studies. The team met some staff from the Centre and learnt about the development of its work since 2002. Lifelong learning is an essential component within the Bologna Process and so the team was pleased to learn that UEB is making a significant contribution in this field. However, the team's view is that the full potential for providing the community with lifelong learning has not yet been reached. The team suggests that UEB should seek ways of better integrating the work of the Centre with the faculties.

## **12. International activities and mobility**

The team was pleased to learn about the considerable development in international activities since the 2002 visit. The International Relations Office has been restructured and a strategic document *Policy Framework for Development of International Relations* has been prepared. The International Programs Institute and the Institute of Languages have become very active. There have been an increased number of student exchanges and many other international projects. The team congratulates the staff in all the units under the Vice-Rector for International Relations for their enthusiasm and achievements since 2002 and encourages UEB to continue to promote international activities and staff and student mobility throughout the university.

The team was impressed with the increased attention to language training for staff and students, and particularly with the number of study programmes offered in a foreign language.

However, no part of a university can stand still, and so the team suggests that even more might be done to promote international collaboration with potential partners by better "branding" of UEB demonstrating its unique features and the added value that a partner would receive.

### **13. Quality Management (Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement)**

Quality management should cover all aspects of UEB activities outlined in sections 8 - 12). It was in the area of accountability and internal quality management that the 2002 report was most critical and several recommendations were made. The team was surprised to learn that progress has been rather slow. An ESF funded programme *Creation and Implementation of an Integrated System of Quality Management* only commenced at the beginning of 2006. The team fully endorses the objectives and proposed actions of this ESF programme, and expects it to have a major impact on quality at UEB.

The team was disappointed to learn that it has taken UEB four years to implement the strong recommendations in its 2002 report for the need to develop a comprehensive university-wide system of quality management and to establish an Office for Quality Support and Management. The problems of identifying and appointing suitable personnel to staff this Office are understood. The team were pleased to meet the person who has now been appointed, but wishes to emphasize that her task will be impossible without support from the leadership across UEB. Consequently, the team **recommends** that:

- a Vice-Rector should be appointed to have overall responsibility for quality assurance and improvement (not only of the education activities, but also of the research and innovation activities, and management functions at UEB);
- a Vice-Dean in each faculty should be given responsibility for quality assurance and improvement;
- a staff development programme for preparing staff for their roles in quality assurance and self-evaluation should be established (see section 14).

Furthermore, the team suggests that:

- those appointed to be directly responsible for quality should familiarise themselves with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* prepared by ENQA and endorsed by the Bologna higher education ministers at their meeting in May 2005 in Bergen;
- much can be learned from quality assurance practices in other countries;
- there should be benchmarking exercises with comparable foreign universities;

- there are many well established methods for reviewing the quality of learning, and issuing questionnaires to students asking their views about teaching is only one of them;
- if student questionnaires are to be used, there should be a systematic approach to their analysis. These surveys have so far been organised by the students. It should however be the responsibility of the deans – working together with the students – to see to it that the results are published and that the consequences to be drawn from these surveys are discussed with all the teaching staff and students;
- when weaknesses are identified, there should be corrective action, or if this is not possible, reasons for lack of action must be explained to respondents;
- a quality improvement programme which has the objective of identifying and celebrating excellence in teaching (defined as excellence in promoting learning) should be introduced. Local international businesses might be invited to support the programme by offering annual prizes for the “best teachers”;
- the staff development programme on quality (section 14) might include dissemination of the experiences of UEB staff who participated in the EUA Quality Culture project.

#### **14. Staff development**

Staff development should cover all aspects of UEB activities outlined in sections 8 - 13). For a university to be successful today, it must constantly innovate and react to fast changing external pressures. Consequently, university staff at all levels, including the Rector and the leadership, the academic staff and the non-academic support staff, must develop new skills and keep up to date in all areas of their work. Today, staff development cannot be an optional luxury. In the 2002 report there was a recommendation for UEB to have a comprehensive programme of staff development. The team was disappointed to find that, with exception of some activities by the Department of Pedagogy, very little has changed since 2002.

The team recommends that the Rectorate and Senate take urgent action to plan a programme of staff development and to make strenuous efforts to generate the resources needed. A section of the next version of the strategic plan should be devoted to a

comprehensive programme of staff development. This should include targets, estimates of costs and sources of funding.

There is often a misconception that staff development requires staff to attend a course of lectures. On the contrary, staff development should start with each member preparing a statement of his or her needs; this should then be discussed with his/her immediate manager. An individual staff development plan is then available for every member of staff. As resources and opportunities become available parts of the plan can be implemented. Experience in other universities has demonstrated that some very effective staff improvement can take the form of seminars for staff with similar development needs.

The team considers that particularly urgent at UEB is staff development for:

- quality management and self-evaluation;
- moving from a teacher centred to learner centred approach to education, including project based and action learning;
- organising and leading interdisciplinary research projects;
- entrepreneurship and making contact with the business world;
- generating income.

The team **recommends** that oversight of staff development should become a responsibility of one of the Vice-Rectors. It might be appropriate for this responsibility to be combined with that for quality management.

## **15. Alternative sources of funding**

UEB is not well funded. It was recognised in 2002 that future development would depend on securing alternative funding from non-Governmental sources. It was recommended that the highest priority should be given to developing a strategy for obtaining alternative sources of funding, and furthermore that this was not simply a problem for the Rector, but that the whole community at UEB should be involved. The team explored what had been achieved so far. The team was pleased to note that some progress has been made particularly by the International Programs Institute (*e.g.* European Social Fund), and from the activities of the Centre for Advanced Studies. It appears that most of the income from non-Governmental sources generated at UEB is for specific projects, and the element of non-committed funds is small. The priority at

UEB is to increase the amount of non-committed income, for example by charging a percentage for overheads on all income generated.

The team has the view that the full potential of UEB to generate non- Governmental funds has not yet been reached. The 2002 report also recommended that serious consideration should be given to investing in the establishment of a central office for coordinating fund raising and sponsorship. It was disappointing to find that this recommendation had not been pursued and that consequently an opportunity for significant fund raising had been lost. Coordination of fund raising through a central office is commonplace in many European universities. An office would have expertise to advise on: (1) applications for funding from national and international bodies; (2) how best to approach potential sponsors and donors ensuring that they are not approached simultaneously by separate parts of UEB, and ensuring that overhead costs are included. Such an office could also maximise the interest gained on the funds obtained. However, the office would not in any way control the actions and spending of the units which have generated the income. The main task for an office at UEB would be to increase the amount of non-committed income.

The team has a number of suggestions for fund raising activities. (1) It is recognised that fund raising from alumni and other donors has not been the practice in the Slovak Republic. The team suggests that the first universities in the Country, which make efforts of this kind, are likely to be the most successful. Some of the emerging private enterprises might well wish to support a particular initiative because of the prestige of having its name associated with UEB. The axiom: *“if you don’t ask, you won’t receive”* summarises the team’s view. (2) UEB might wish to mount a campaign to encourage more individuals (*e.g.* students’ families) to donate 2% of their taxes to UEB. Parents and friends of students should be invited to special occasions at UEB in order to create a favourable climate for encouraging donations. (3) International companies operating in and around Bratislava should be asked to provide scholarships for outstanding students and young academics. The sponsors should have a part in the selection procedures, as they would thus be able to meet and offer jobs to top-class people for their companies. This is a cheaper and better way to find good staff than advertising. (4) There should be greater efforts to communicate with the region in order to increase liaison and to publicise the “branding” of UEB.

The team **recommends** that (1) the establishment of a fund raising office be reconsidered, (2) a Vice-Rector is given responsibility of oversight of all income generating activities and (3) the suggestions in the preceding paragraph are actively considered.

## **Conclusion**

The last four years have seen major changes at UEB. Some of these were a result of the EUA evaluation, but more important have been external pressures such as the implementation of the Bologna Process. Overall, the team was impressed with the way that UEB has reacted and adapted to these pressures and congratulates all the staff for what has been achieved. There is no doubt that UEB is a stronger institution now than it was in 2002. But no university can stand still and so the team hopes that UEB will address the five **recommendations** in this follow-up report. These are:

- there should be review of the academic structure so that the number of departments can be reduced ( section 7);
- greater efforts are made to promote external collaboration, and faculty advisory bodies should be established (section 10);
- quality management (section 13) should be strengthened by:
  - appointing a Vice-Rector to have overall responsibility for quality assurance and improvement,
  - appointing a Vice-Dean in each faculty to have responsibility for quality assurance and improvement,
  - a staff development programme for preparing staff for their roles in quality assurance and self-evaluation should be established;
- staff development should become a high priority and be overseen by a Vice-Rector (section 14);
- a renewed action programme to generate alternative sources of funding is established (section 15), in particular by:
  - the establishment of an office for coordinating fund raising,
  - appointing a Vice-Rector with responsibility for oversight of all income generating activities.

This report ends with the most important component of any university - its students. The team had useful meetings with representatives of the students. They were

supportive of the education and facilities provided by the UEB, and it is clear that they have an opportunity to contribute to its future development. The team was impressed with the high level of spoken English of the students it met.

### **Envoi**

The Rector, Professor Vojtech Kollar, the Vice-Rector for International Relations, Associate Professor Gizela Lénártová (Project Coordinator), and many other colleagues are thanked most sincerely for their warm reception and generous hospitality. The open approach of all members of UEB at the various meetings with the team was greatly appreciated, and helped to make the follow-up visit a positive experience for all concerned.

The team is confident that UEB will continue to develop, and adapt to changing circumstances, effectively and confidently.