

Members of the expert Committee in the evaluation of UTILUS Business School in Zagreb:

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Osijek, 12 October, 2009

To: **National Council for Higher Education**

Zagreb

FINAL REPORT OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE

ON THE EVALUATION OF UTILUS BUSINESS SCHOOL, ZAGREB

Pursuant to Article 7, paragraph 1 and 2, point 6 and Articles 16-18 of the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education (Official Gazette 123/03, 105/04 and 46/07) as well as the Ordinance on Measures and Criteria for the Evaluation of Quality and Efficiency of Higher Education Institutions (Official Gazette 39/05), at its 60th meeting held on 8 April 2009, the National Council for Higher Education of Croatia appointed an Expert Committee in charge of quality and efficiency evaluation of the UTILUS Business School in Zagreb, in the composition as follows:

Prof. Slavica Singer, PhD, University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, Faculty of Economics, Osijek

Prof. Dragoljub Amidžić, PhD, Višnjan Business School

Marc Vandewalle, PhD, Catholic University of Professional Education, Belgium

Prof. Ralf Caers, PhD, Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Morana Jančiković, student, VERN University of Applied Sciences

In accordance with the Evaluation procedure, the Committee closely examined the Self-Evaluation and the Tables for Self-Evaluation, made by UTILUS Business School, and on 28 May 2009 visited the school. The Committee held working meetings with the dean and the working group in charge of the elaboration of Self-Evaluation, as well as with teaching staff and students, and made a tour of the school (library, computer lab, classrooms).

The members of Committee agreed that UTILUS Business School is 'stretched' between its dean/founder's university experience and definition of a school of professional higher education that should be mainly be oriented towards practical training. The Committee identified several preliminary issues on which it informed the dean:

1. Neither the structure nor the policies (enrolment, employment) correspond to the vision, which decreases the transparency of numerous processes, but also the credibility of institution with regard to students
2. Inadequate facilities, library and ICT
3. Functioning of the school greatly depends on one person (the dean), which draws the attention to the need for creating a stronger leadership team
4. Insufficient cooperation with the tourist and hotel industry (lack of opportunities for training practice, even for a fairly small number of enrolled students)
5. Need for stronger partnership with the students, e.g. by acknowledging student evaluation as an important contribution to quality improvement
6. Stronger self-criticism is needed (gained through comparison with some good examples of similar schools in Europe or world)

After the visit, and following the Committee's suggestion, on 3 June 2009 UTILUS Business School submitted the written supplement to their Self-Evaluation in the form of SWOT analysis made by 3rd year students on 18 November 2008 (as a requirement within one particular course) and the example of one syllabus.

On the basis of documentation examined and discussions held, the Committee submits the following report.

1. Fulfilment of the mission and functionality of the institutional structure

Definition of the mission as presented in the Self-Evaluation („to create experts, skilled managers ... and ethical, academically educated people“), without identifying the niche in which UTILUS plans to position itself, cannot be a strategic guide for this institution, still a small one by resources available (staff, technology, facilities) and by strength of its relationship with the tourist industry. From the interviews conducted, insight in resource capacities and also documentation provided, the Committee found that the resources are inadequate, as is the system for the reviewing the expected results (e.g. how is the part of the mission defined as ethical training of students (e.g. how is part of the mission defined as ethical training of students actually carried out – how it is monitored and implemented in actual study programme?)

Despite being a professional study, focused on tourist and hotel industry and with a dean/founder who is a world renowned expert in tourism economics, UTILUS does not have any well established business relations with hotel and tourist industry that would allow for designing of study courses in accordance with industry requirements. Both in their Self-Evaluation and during the visit of the Committee, representatives of UTILUS identified the problem of securing practical training for their students.

During their visit, the Committee noticed that no one except for dean/owner of the UTILUS participated in discussion on strategic ‘positioning’, which indicates an insufficient involvement of the teaching staff in strategic activities.

Recommendation:

- (a) If the owner/dean wants to ensure sustainability of UTILUS, it is necessary to create an internal ‘capacity’ for strategic profiling and positioning of the institution. The Committee recommends forming of a team dedicated to such a task.
- (b) For the purpose of strategic positioning, UTILUS should conduct an extensive research of the competition (the offering of programmes and courses of professional and university studies), but also of current development issues of tourist and hotel industry in Croatia (what is it that they are looking for in competences). On the basis of this analysis, UTILUS should further analyse possibilities for strategic partnerships with the institutions focused on tourist and hotel industry but with an insufficient educational offer as is the case with UTILUS.

- (c) For the purpose of improving its relationship with tourist industry and local community, UTILUS should form a panel of experts from tourist and hotel industry (small, medium and large businesses from various sectors). Twice a year, in a joint discussion with teachers and students, this panel could share valuable information on the situation and trends in tourist and hotel industry, which would in turn allow for 'updates' and/or changes in programmes and methods of teaching.

2. Quality of documents and information systems

Part of strategic guidelines of UTILUS Business School – to become and stay a small, “boutique” school for educating hotel and tourist managers - are found only in Self-Evaluation and presentation of the dean/founder, prof Boris Vukonić PhD. However, the Committee did not find any evidence on the existing of policies or operational systems for achieving this strategic vision (“boutique” school) and mission („to create experts, skilled managers ... and ethical, academically educated people“) neither in the Self-Evaluation and other documents submitted by the school (Ordinance on appointing teachers and associates into positions, 2008; Ordinance on studying and requirements for the enrolment of students, 2005; Amendments to the Ordinance on studying, 2008, and additionally – received on 3 June 2009, after the visit – an example of a syllabus for the Human Resource Management course), nor in discussions held during the visit. Moreover, in their Self-Evaluation it is stated that they “do not use any specific information on employment” when defining the enrolment quota because “we define the number of potential students in accordance with the capacities and our own decisions on how to organize a successful study programme” (p. 26). There is no student survey implemented, and during discussion some representatives of UTILUS openly questioned the judgement and competences of students for the evaluation of their professors’ work.

More than lack of formalized procedures, what raises concern is the lack of understanding for the significance of monitoring the quality of educational process. The text of Self-Evaluation itself indicates the lack of understanding for such an activity, considering the dominant polemical tone directed at the unidentified policy-makers from the area of higher education instead of a critical analysis of own strengths and weaknesses (in the page 2, for example, it is stated that “although we do encounter some difficulties in our work, they generally come from the outside – there are far less problems generated by the institution itself”, which has not been corroborated neither in the analysis submitted nor in discussions held).

Recommendation:

- (a) To complete and draft the necessary documents that shall establish correlation between mission and vision identified, and systems necessary for their realization (competences expected, criteria for the enrolment of students, educational content, pedagogical methods, evaluation of students' work, evaluation of professors' work, monitoring the employment of students, etc.)
- (b) To familiarize all the employees (full-time and part time employees) with the importance of maintaining activities and systems that allow for realization of expected results.

3. Organization and implementation of study

Since no enrolment policies were made available, the Committee was not able to evaluate the adequacy of the enrolment policy with regard to the quality criteria to be attained through the educational process. It is evident from Self-Evaluation that in the last 3 years almost 80 percent of the applicants were enrolled (around 50 students per year), which indicates that there are few candidates interested in enrolling UTILUS. UTILUS does not provide any information on the employability of their former students and their position on the labour market, i.e. interest of employers and whether they are content with UTILUS students' skills and competences. Both students and teachers maintain that they have a good communication and students point out that their professors are always available for consulting. It wasn't possible to evaluate whether the grading criteria are standardised, since the Committee was not given the opportunity to examine syllabii (one was provided later on). The efficiency of study (measured with passing grade indicators through more than one semester) is low. The fact that the percentage of students who achieved more than 2/3 of available ECTS' dropped from 75 percent in the first generation of enrolled students to 50 percent in the second, combined with the fact that no analysis has been carried out thereupon, is a reason for concern.

Recommendation:

- (a) To thoroughly examine the reasons for low efficiency (level of former education – enrolment policy, study programme content, pedagogical methods, availability of education materials), and reach a decision regarding the enrolment policy, orientation and organization of programme and implementation of the programme.
- (b) To establish where did former students find employment and to find out their opinions on skills and competences received, and how they correspond to the requirements of the labour market
- (c) To ensure larger base of potential candidates through presentations at higher education fairs, in high-schools, but also through establishing better relationship with the industry.

4. Teaching staff

Considering that the Committee did not evaluate the curriculum and that it didn't receive any information on implementation of individual courses, the evaluation of teaching staff is based solely on Self-Evaluation and discussions held during the visit. As with the Self-Evaluation, the discussion was dominated by the dean. The teaching staff is mainly oriented towards scientific publication and participation in conferences, and less on improving their teaching competencies. The opinion of the dean is that this issue is defined by legal regulation. It was pointed out that the teaching staff comprises experienced university professors.

Recommendation:

- (a) To strengthen the relationship between the teaching staff and professionals from tourist and hotel industry, especially considering that the majority of teachers has previously been working at universities.
- (b) To develop teachers' competencies (an important factor in ensuring more efficient study). To establish regular activities for strengthening those competencies, not only for junior staff but also teaching associates from the industry.

5. Facilities and equipment

Facilities and equipment do not meet the requirements for carrying out of a study programme – even for the existing number of students. The issue of inadequate facilities has been identified in the Self-Evaluation, even though the computer lab and library have been described as ‘satisfactory’.

However, the fact is that the school’s computer lab barely has a dozen workstations with outdated computers, and that one room containing books does not constitute a library as it cannot provide a single function of a library. In addition, there are no faculty offices or areas for the individual work of students.

Recommendation:

- (a) UTILUS has to solve the issues of inadequate space and equipment (either by renting or investing) before any further enrolment of students, as the continuation of present situation may damage the reputation not only of this school but of higher education institutions in general.

6. Internal quality assurance system

There is no quality assurance system in place (there is no specific person or body dealing with QA), there are no regularly followed indicators, student survey is not conducted and no institutional cooperation with the representatives of tourist or hotel industry. Moreover, according to the dean, a number of finished undergraduate students are waiting for the continuation of their studies in the specialist professional graduate study, since employers don’t recognize their current competences (it has to be noted that the number of students in question is around ten. Five of them are employed, with the additional ten graduates that are waiting for the enrolment in specialist professional graduate study – total number is therefore too small to generalise). Lack of awareness of the significance of quality assurance and institutional responsibility for the quality of processes and their effects was very obvious in the Self-Evaluation and was confirmed during the visit. As it was already mentioned, a school exercise (within one particular course) in which the students conducted a SWOT

analysis was not used even for the internal discussion, and the information itself was obtained during the conversation, upon insisting on systemized information on the positioning of institution.

Recommendation:

- (a) The management of UTILUS has to ensure the monitoring of the educational process quality, since this is the requirement for accreditation. The fact that the school has a small number of students makes this task easier.
- (b) Monitoring the quality of educational process and student competences will help in creating strategic partnerships with companies and associations from tourist and hotel industry, which will help establish the credibility of UTILUS as an institution that contributes to the quality of industry towards which the school wants to position itself.

7. Students

A small number of students allows for good communication, a fact which has been confirmed by the students during discussion. It is not clear, however, neither from discussions held during the visit, nor from the Self-Evaluation, how exactly do the students participate in the work of the institution (expert council and management council), apart from submitting suggestions to the dean in the suggestion box provided.

Recommendation:

- (a) To establish a system of continuous student evaluation of the educational process quality (academic content, teacher preparation, organization and implementation of study, availability of necessary literature, technological support, practical training...).

8. Comparison of the institution and its programmes with similar in EU

Nothing was mentioned in the Self-Evaluation on the comparison of UTILUS with similar institutions and study programmes in EU. It was not stated with whom and how does UTILUS compare itself.

Recommendation:

- (a) Considering that UTILUS is a school of professional education, it would be a good idea to find an institution from the same professional area for international comparison, which will surely help in comparing curricula, organization and teaching methods and also create a basis for interventions regarding strategy and operational management of the school.

Recommendation:

After reviewing documentation submitted by UTILUS Business School (Self-Evaluation, Tables for Self-Evaluation, Ordinance on appointing teachers and associates into positions, 2008; Ordinance on studying and requirements for the enrolment of students, 2005; Amendments to the Ordinance on studying, 2008, and an example of a syllabus for the Human Resource Management course, submitted additionally), and after interviews carried out during the visit, the Committee identified a number of issues that need to be addressed.

The effort that school has to put in to resolve these problems involve different resources (human, material, time), but without doing so, UTILUS Business School cannot fulfil the expectations defined by the founders of the institution („boutique school“ specialised in educating managers in tourism and hotel industry) or the expectations held by students entering that level of education (professional bachelor degree.)

The Committee therefore reached the conclusion that UTILUS Business School should not enrol any new students before these issues are resolved. At the same time the Committee suggests to the management of the school to look for the opportunities of merging with other business schools of similar type in order to resolve the problems with capacity (strategic, operational, organizational) more efficiently.

The Committee also suggests to the National Council for Higher Education to consider intervening into legislative framework to enable – as well as stimulate, with public policies in the area of education – the merging of educational institutions of similar types, which would strengthen their business capacities (strategic, operational, organizational.) These processes are common in number of EU countries (for example in Belgium, as was confirmed by foreign members of this Evaluation Committee, but also in Finland, UK, etc.)

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