

REPORT OF THE EXPERT COMMISSION FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF 'BALTAZAR ADAM KRČELIĆ' SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION FOR BUSINESS AND MANGEMENT IN ZAPREŠIĆ

National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) on its 60th session, held on the 8th April 2009, on the basis of Article 7 Paragraph 1 and Paragraph 2, Item 6, and Articles 16-18 of the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education (OG 123/03, 105/04, 174/04 and 46/07), as well as the Ordinance on Measures and Criteria for Evaluation of Quality and Efficiency of Higher Education Institutions (OG 39/05) passed the Conclusion on the nomination of the expert commission in charge of evaluating quality and efficiency of 'Baltazar Adam Krčelić' School of Professional Higher Education for Business and Mangement in Zaprešić, as follows:

1. prof. Slavica Singer, PhD, Faculty of Economy of the University of Osijek
2. prof. Zvonko Kusić, PhD, Business School of Professional Higher Education in Višnjan
3. Marc Vandewalle, PhD, Catholic University of Professional Education, Belgium
4. prof. Ralf Caers, PhD, Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
5. Morana Jančiković, student of the University of Applied Sciences VERN in Zagreb

In accordance with the evaluation procedure, the Commission reviewed the self-analysis report and self-evaluation tables created by 'Baltazar Adam Krčelić' School of Professional Higher Education for Business and Management in Zaprešić. On 27th May 2009, the Commission carried out evaluation including meetings with the dean, the working group responsible for drawing up the self-analysis, teachers and students. Lecture rooms (two of which are equipped with total of 32 computers), cabinets for teachers, the gymnasium, head office, student affairs office, library, reading space, and area of future cantine were visited by the Commission. During the visit, the members of the Commission agreed that the school had good spatial conditions and agreeable number of permanently employed teachers. While students expressed contentment with studying, it was evident that strategic thinking in the institution was lacking (especially insufficients links with business sector), and that the system for monitoring quality was not adequately developed. At the end of the visit, the Commission presented the following preliminary findings to the School Dean:

1. Agreeable working conditions (teacher-student ratio, space), and studying conditions (that students mainly grade as satisfactory) should be constantly improved, particularly in the framework of more realistic strategic planning regarding the future of the institution;
2. Strategic positioning of the School (putting more focus on fundamental school activities, establishing better links with the business sector, and developing new programmes according to long-term economic needs), would contribute to better positioning of the School (enrollment and employment policies), and support of the local community would surely not lack;
3. Monitoring quality of School business processes would enable more efficient interventions into these processes (i.e., student discontent with the library, insufficient reading space), and would also increase the level of self-criticism necessary for initiating changes;
4. Continual monitoring of student opinions regarding educational processes should become a part of the integral system for quality monitoring of School business processes;
5. Activating the Alumni Organisation would contribute to better links with the economy.

Following insight of the self-analysis and interviews, the Commission submits the following report.

1. Achievement of mission and functionality of the institution

The mission of the School, as extracted from the self-analysis report reads as follows: *‘to establish and carry out professional programmes for business and management, in the fields of economics and general management, and particularly in culture and interdisciplinary areas; to offer good quality professional higher education at reasonable prices to the young and employed, which will facilitate their employment and career advancement’*. The mission stresses quality, affordability, and orientedness at the young and employed, but it is too vague in identifying fields in which it operates. In order for a mission to act as a strategic guide for institutional activities, it is necessary to avoid ‘grasping’ at opportunities that come across at all costs, regardless of focus and resources of the School (e.g., geographic expansion, dislocated study at Biograd na Moru). Proactive attitude of the management concerning these

opportunities is welcomed, yet such attitude and its outcomes (following activities) should be based on the qualitative analysis of educational needs. It is evident from the self-analysis report and visit discussions that the School wants to position itself within quite broad area (from study programmes in the fields of economics, general management, cultural management, interdisciplinary areas /which ones?/, new science and technology park), but there is no timetable to support this vision. Good cooperation with the local community (the town of Zaprešić) and the Institute Ruđer Bošković, as well as existing resources (teachers, space, equipment), should be used to strengthen current fundamental activities (i.e., existing portfolio of study programmes). Rapid expansion with new programmes (e.g., graduate programmes), new dislocated programmes, new institutional arrangements (university of applied sciences), and the development of the science and technology park could jeopardize existing quality of ongoing activities. Before starting such development projects, the School should concentrate on improving credibility of undergraduate and graduate education, and should show, through networking with business, that young people educated at these levels have a lot of practical knowledge that can be used in the world of work.

Suggestions:

1. The School has good possibilities to capitalize on strategic orientation based on existing resources, which can be an asset, on condition that it chooses its developmental opportunities carefully. Therefore, the management should be strengthened professionally, and business processes of the School should be systematized;
2. For establishing stronger links with institutions from business and cultural sectors, and the local community, the School could set up a panel comprised of experts from these areas. The panel could meet twice a year and serve as a platform for the exchange of information on current state and developments in business and cultural sectors, their educational needs, and School achievements and challenges. This would be valuable not only for the School and its teachers and students, but also for members of business and cultural sectors, and local community.
3. More targeted approach in defining the mission and vision of the School, including set timetable for certain activities, would contribute to better visibility of the School on the education market.

2. Quality of documentation and information technology systems

Apart from several strategic goals in the self-analysis report and in the presentation of the School dean, prof. Nikola Skledar, Phd, there are no formalised policies regarding main aspects of School activities, i.e., teacher evaluation policy, QA policy, cooperation with business sector policy, etc. Since year 2007 the School has been trying to obtain ISO 9001:2008 Certificate (it was obtained on 2 December 2009, for teaching in the area of higher education for business economics and management). However, it was apparent during the visit, that there was the atmosphere of obvious distrust about including students in evaluation of teachers, processes and the institution; furthermore, results of student questionnaires, which are conducted twice a year, were not sufficiently used. The School has numerous documentation that regulates studying and programmes at all levels (the Statute; ordinances on internal organisation, publishing activities, studying, student assessment, final works, disciplinary responsibility of students, conditions of study for top athletes, transfer from other schools of professional higher education, etc.), but during discussions the teachers themselves agreed that there are still many inconsistencies, mainly because these documents are not closely related to the vision for School development and its requirements. School web site (www.vspu.hr) offers well structured information, as well as distance learning support. Since the Croatian Employment Service is the only place where information can be found regarding the demand of educational profiles offered by the school, involvement of the panel is recommended (see Point 1, Suggestion 2 of the Report).

Suggestions:

1. Update existent and create new documents which would consistently link the mission and vision of the institution with systems necessary for their realisation (expected competencies, student enrollment criteria, educational content, pedagogical methods, learning outcomes for each module, student assessment, teacher evaluation, monitoring student employability).
2. Introduce to the teachers employed at the school, as well as external associates, the importance of the existence of consistent activities and systems that lead to expected results, so that both management and teachers have equal understanding of these matters.
3. Analyse student evaluation of teachers, processes and institution, and make necessary changes by using examples of good practice from worldwide, in order to

reduce the amount of subjectivity in these assessments and eliminate distrust in favour of such procedures.

4. Organisation of study and study programmes

Available data on student enrollment at undergraduate level of study, for the period from 2005 to 2008 (three academic years), shows steady interest for enrollment in all three study programmes: cca. 300 in Business Economics and Finances, cca. 110 students in Cultural Management, and cca. 60 in Business Secretary Programme. However, the number of those who apply is almost similar to the number of accepted students, which narrows the choice of students for the enrollment.

The same situation is related to the enrollment in two graduate study programmes offered, with cca. 50 students in Project Management, and cca. 20 in Communication Management. The School collects data on average grades from secondary education of their full-time students, and the type of secondary school attended, but there is no evidence of other enrollment policy elements. During the meetings, undergraduate students expressed their opinions about popularity of the existing programmes. They also positively assessed their communication with teachers, both during and after lectures, as well as by e-mail. Pass rate of full-time undergraduate students for the three academic years is fairly constant (from 70 to 90 percent, measured by transfer into higher semesters. However, the School should pay attention to changes in relation to average grades obtained during studies: fall from 3.02 to 2.95 in Business Economics and Finances, and rise from 2.81 to 3.03 in Cultural Management. The School does not monitor employability of their graduates, nor the satisfaction of employers with competences of graduates they employed. As the School has not developed any formal connections with the business sector, it remains unclear how it receives feedback from employers regarding quality and efficiency of its programmes. Since the members of the Commission did not have opportunity to review syllabuses, it was not possible to estimate if the grading criteria was the same for all courses.

Suggestions:

1. To look closely into reasons for insufficient number of students enrolled in Cultural Management Programme at graduate level, and estimate sustainability of the programme under these conditions.

2. To analyse reasons for changes in the level of average grades attained in Business Economics and Finance Programme (fall), and Cultural Management Programme (rise), and consider using good practice that resulted in the rise of average grade in Cultural Management in defining enrollment policies and organisation of studies in other study programmes.
3. The alumni organisation should be used more for getting feedback on experience of finished students in their employment, i.e. on their employability, taking into account competencies acquired during study, and requirements of working environments in which they find themselves after graduation.
4. Promotion of the School by participation in fairs of higher education programmes and by visiting secondary schools and through better cooperation with business and cultural sector, will attract larger number of high quality students.

5. Teaching Staff

Evaluation of the teaching staff is based on the self-evaluation form and meetings with the teachers during the visit. The number of teachers, both full-time employees and external associates, ensures working in smaller seminar groups, but the current staff age structure, with only three assistants/junior researchers, calls for defining employment policy that would enable sustainable development of the School. Discussions during the visit reveal interested teachers and satisfied students. However, the expressed vision of the management about growing into an university of applied sciences, and numerous activities regarding the technology park point at large disproportion between teacher competences and requirements springing from such new projects, and this should be taken into account. Although we are talking here about the school of professional higher education, and not university, the self-analysis report, as well as visit discussions regarding teacher competences revealed that more emphasis has been put on scientific publications and participation at conferences, and less on improvement of teaching skills, i.e., knowledge transfer skills and connection of teachers with praxis.

Suggestions:

1. Competence and dedication of the teaching staff represent School strengths, and they should serve as a basis for the development of the School, i.e. teachers should be more involved in defining School vision development (see Point 1, Suggestion 1).
2. Analyse needs for teaching staff and their competences in relation to the vision of school growth into university of applied sciences, and the launch of new technology park; subsequently modify or amend the vision with a work plan that includes methods for providing human resources necessary for its realization.
3. Keep on improving methodological competencies of teachers, which would contribute to study effectiveness. Organize regular activities in order to improve these competencies, not only for younger teachers but also for external associates from business and cultural sectors.

6. Space and Equipment

School space is well equipped with furniture and teaching equipment (LCD projectors, Internet connections), and meets quantitative and qualitative requirements necessary to support the teaching process. One of the lecture rooms is equipped with video conferencing system, and two existing IT rooms contain 32 computers in total, which is inadequate number when compared to the number of students. There are several working spaces for teachers, as well as new cafeteria which will give both teachers and students atmosphere of home. The student service office is well located, adequately equipped and staffed. Although it is stated in the self-analysis report that the library and reading spaces are satisfactory, findings of the Commission during the visit, and meetings with the students, proved otherwise. The number of books per title is insufficient, so that the library resembles a small bookshop, rather than 'real' library. The students especially commented on limited working hours, and on the lack of reading places equipped with computers and Internet connections. These are the reasons why they more often use facilities at the National and University Library in Zagreb.

Suggestions:

1. Investment in the library and reading space, as well as more targeted acquisition of librarianship collection necessary to support the syllabus should be priority.

2. The School should reconsider investing in subscription of certain on-line databasis that best suit the school/its profile.

7. The Internal Quality Assurance System

According to the self-analysis report, quality and effectiveness of studying is regularly monitored, yet the interviews conducted and documents checked during the visit did not clarify through which indicators and procedures this is being done. In other words, there is no insitutional policy or system for monitoring quality and effectiveness of studying. There is no separate commission for monitoring quality and effectiveness of studying (according to the self-analysis report and visit findings, monitoring quality of teaching process is done by the Expert Council, the board of teachers, and the commission responsible for ISO:9000 Certification). Student questionnaires are carried out, but there is obvious scepticism regarding the use of their results.

During discussions the priority was clearly given to scientific contributions of teachers, such as publishing works and attending conferences, and less on specific teaching skills, or links with business and cultural sectors. The employment of graduates is not followed in a consistent manner. The Alumni Club of former students that, according to the self-analysis: *'encourages socialising, provides information regarding further studying, and other forms of cooperation with the School'*. However, the Club should be used more for obtaining feedback on efficiency of educational process in preparing students for the world of work. The lack of focus on weak points of the school is partly a cause, but also a result of unsystematic monitoring of quality and effectiveness of studying. In order to eliminate this shortcoming, it is important not to equalize the ISO:9000 certification process regarding institutional quality, with monitoring of quality and effectiveness of studying. It was also evident during the visit that there are different opinions between the teachers and the management in relation to strategic aims and vision of the School.

Suggestions:

1. The management of the School should, as this is one of requirements for obtaining the licence, ensure quality monitoring of educational process.
2. Better involvement of teachers in processes of strategic positioning of the School would certainly contribute to more commitment of teachers for the quality of processes necessary for achieving these goals.

3. Monitoring quality of educational process and student competences will help the School to implement quality management procedures, i.e. by using the Deming Cycle or PDCA (plan-do-check-act), which contributes to the vitality of a system.
4. Analysis of the student questionnaire on quality of teaching (content and methods), teacher-student relation, as well as other relevant issues related to the educational process and making changes by using examples of good practice, should help to reduce reservation for this valuable instrument for monitoring quality of teaching process, since qualitative insight can be gained only by combining great number of subjective opinions (already stated in Point 1, Suggestion 3).
5. By including the Alumni Club in the process of monitoring effectiveness of studying (through the feedback on using knowledge in practice), the School will enrich its database that serves as a starting point in making decisions on intervening in educational content and teaching methods.
6. Regular panel meetings with representatives from the local community, and institutions from business and cultural sector (as stated in Point 1, Suggestion 2) will ensure better insight in the needs of the labour market.

8. Students

During discussions with several groups of students, the impression was that they are pleased with their relations with the teachers, and with teaching processes. Serious remarks were voiced regarding the library (it is more often closed than open, with insufficient number of books and journals). The students have also expressed their wishes for stronger cooperation with the business sector and higher education institutions from abroad. Degree of student involvement in the work of the School governing bodies (in term of modes and time) has not been made evident during the talks.

Suggestion:

1. Pay more respect to student opinions – see Point 7, Suggestion 4 of the Report.

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

Neither the self-analysis report nor discussions during the visit revealed much about similarities of 'Baltazar Adam Krčelić' School of Professional Higher Education for Business and Management with comparable institutions and study programmes in the EU. Therefore, foreign members of the Commission concluded that the mode of teaching at the school is similar to those at institutions of professional higher education in the countries of the EU. However, at such institutions in the EU the greater emphasis is given to professional education and its advantages (appropriate teaching methods, practice-orientedness, contacts with business and cultural sectors), than to scientific work (publications, participation at scientific conferences).

Suggestion:

1. Since this is the school of professional higher education, it would be useful to compare content, organisation and teaching methods with similar international institution(s), which would contribute to better strategic and operational activities of the School leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HIGER EDUCATION

After reviewing available documents (the self-analysis report, self-evaluation tables, various ordinances) and conducting interviews during the visit, the Commission 'Baltazar Adam Krčelić' School of Professional Higher Education for Business and Mangement in Zaprešić, with current portfolio of study programmes, fulfills basic conditions necessary to carry out teaching activities. However, it is necessary to solve spotted weaknesses. Therefore the Report provides number of activities to serve as a help in resolving these.

The ambitious management, skilled and dedicated teachers, and satisfied students are probably School strongest resources (although it has been noted that the management ambitions might lead to unnecessary 'burdening' of resources). Well-equipped space is sufficient for the number of students that are currently enrolled at undergraduate and graduate levels of education. However, three major shortcomings have been identified: (1) The lack of systematic monitoring of quality and effectiveness of educational process (ISO:9000 is not

enough); (2) Modification of strategic, organisational and operational processes in line with evaluation results; and (3) adequate library and reading space.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that ‘Baltazar Adam Krčelić’ School of Professional Higher Education for Business and Mangement in Zaprešić should be given a letter of expectation, under two conditions:

1. School should introduce the system of monitoring quality and efficiency of educational process (detailed recommendations in Point 7, Suggestions 1-7 of this Report);
2. School should provide better working conditions in the library and adequate number of reading places, i.e. better access to literature, which has great influence on the effectiveness of educational process.

Furthermore, the Commission has perceived number of shortcomings and gave its recommendations, while their acceptance and implementation depends on decision-making processes of School management.

The Commission has spotted a problem regarding existing requirements for scientific and research activities of teachers, and considered that solving it would contribute to better positioning of schools of professional higher education in relation to universities.

Although these activities contribute to vitality of educational system (if tightly connected), they should not be given as much emphasis as it is currently case in Croatia. In other words, the aim of institutions of professional higher education should not be to resemble universities in their activities, but mainly to focus on providing education resulting in professional competencies, as a result of close connections with the world of work, i.e. with economic fields that ‘dictate’ development of new educational programmes. The problem of better positioning of institutions of professional higher education calls for changes in legal frameworks that define activities of these institutions, as well as for targeted promotion of this very strenght of institutions of professional higher education instituitons to the public (parents, students, the economy, the education sector).

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