



ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI UNIVERSITY - BITOLA

PROGRESS REPORT

January, 2019

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This Progress Report encompasses the activities taken at University level in the past one-year period, in accordance with the recommendations for further institutional development and given in the St. Kliment Ohridski University – Bitola Evaluation Report, EUA – IEP (https://www.iep-qaq.org/downloads/publications/iepstklientreport_final2017.pdf). The preparation of this Report, in fact represents a sort of an interim phase in the completion of the process of external evaluation of the University, together with the obligation to carry out a follow-up evaluation.

Additionally, in the course of the reported period, the University focused on harmonization of institutional legal acts in accordance with the provisions of the new Law on Higher Education (adopted in May, 2018), respecting the prescribed guidelines for institutional development.

The strategic University acts have laid the grounds for practical realization of the recommendations obtained:

- **Executive action through the rectorate to support the re-establishment of the student voice at university level as soon as possible.** The official regulation of the students' "voice" to be heard at the University decision making bodies and working groups, has not been achieved yet since the University Statute (adopted by the University Senate on 10.07.2018), which in accordance with the new Law on Higher Education regulates this matter, has not been adopted by the founder of the University, i.e. the Macedonian Parliament.

- **Continue to reflect on mission and vision to ensure that they are based on well articulated and shared values.** The Annual plan of activity of the Rector and the University involves elements already introduced in the Strategy and the Action Plan. With the external evaluation performed and the latest self-evaluation process completed in December 2018, it is important to underline that there are no changes in the strategic objectives built upon UKLO mission and vision; they are only evaluated and revised with regards to the degree of attainment. This approach is used as an important instrument in improving the quality in the context of University functioning.

- **Strategic development should focus on SMART goals and associated indicators balanced around key strategic approaches.** The strategic development objectives determined in various areas, are based upon the SWOT analysis, which on the other hand has provided better conditions for attainment of SMART criteria, also evident in the detailed Action Plan (S – specific: objectives and activities to be realized per area, M – measurable: expected outcomes and progress indicators, A – agreed upon: the Strategy and the Action Plan are brought and adopted in a procedure that involved all University units, academic and administrative staff, various UKLO committees and managing and decision-making bodies, and above all the University Senate, R – realistic: potential risks that might influence the realization of the defined strategic aims have been taken into consideration, T - time-based: timeframe for realization of every single strategic aim has been determined).

- **The action plan should be streamlined around strategic goals and the revised mission and vision.** As mentioned previously, the Action Plan represents a component of the Strategy, with activities conceived and based upon the strategic objectives (grouped in nine key areas of activity) and the University mission and vision.

- **Consider establishing an International Advisory Board.** The establishment of an International Advisory Board is of substantial importance to the improvement of the University and, hopefully, the idea is going to be realized in future as soon as certain preconditions are effectuated. Still, the legal priority for

the coming period is of course the establishment of a University Council as a body authorized to supervise the University performance, composed of academic staff, students, the University founder representatives as well as representatives of Macedonian employers' associations.

- **Develop a better understanding of a quality concept, its meaning and latest methodologies across the university.** Developing a better understanding of a quality concept is a continuous process which, in the last six months has been particularly intensified due to the fact that, pursuant to the provisions in the Law, the University was undergoing a process of self-evaluation. At the same time numerous activities have been taken in the direction of making popular the significance of the quality concept not only among the academic, but also the administrative staff of UKLO and among the students. During this period an upgrade of the iKnow platform has been made, too, for the purpose of improving the methodology for electronic student surveying, but also for collecting and processing of data necessary for the realization of the University self-evaluation process.

- **Reflect on the appropriate quality management system to be introduced in the university.** The best way to introduce the optimal quality control system would be to hire an external (international) expert in the area who would scan the University condition, would suggest and assist in the implementation of such a system. This is planned to be realized in the future.

- **Reflect on student survey content, timing and follow-up action (closing the feedback loop).** The content of the student survey has undergone several alterations in order to produce a clearer picture of the student opinion about the quality issues in certain areas of the University functioning. Beside the fact that the University is legally bound to conduct the survey once a year, starting with this academic year it will be carried out twice a year, due to the manner in which the educational activity at UKLO is organized (one-semester courses). The self-evaluation committee of the University, in cooperation with the University management, provides the University units with guidelines for using the results obtained through the student survey in function of improving the quality of study programs, learning and instructing techniques, improving learning conditions etc.

- **Develop a Quality Handbook, in addition to the existing rulebooks.** The University Self-evaluation Committee is in a process of designing the Guide for electronic student surveying and the Methodology for collecting and processing of quality indicators that are to be incorporated within the Quality Handbook.

- **Increase the number of external lecturers, including those from outside the Republic of Macedonia.** The main reason for the small number of visiting professors is the lack of financial means. Certain degree of mitigation is achieved by using the opportunities opened up via the ERASMUS+ program in the segment of academic mobility, thus incorporating the incoming staff in the teaching process at UKLO.

- **Consider different approaches to addressing high drop-out rates, including programme design and structure.** A continuous analysis of student expectations regarding the study programs with the support by the adopted indicators for analyzing the study programs and learning outcomes, in the direction of changing the curricula in accordance with the new regulations has been commenced. In order to surmount the financial barriers facing the students on regular basis, an increase in number of scholarships and/or grants offered by employers has been initiated in combination with the possibility for paying the tuition fees in installments. The student support center KREDO, offering also psychological counseling for the purpose of improving student mental health and dealing with certain issues, has been established within the University.

- **Consider the approach to programme delivery to help enhance soft skills in students e.g. through assessment tasks.** Identifying the needs for adjustment of study programs to better correspond with the labor market demand, was one of the key aims of the WIN-WIN Forum held at UKLO (April, 2018) and of the online research, targeting the employers. Besides, the research helped identify the necessary knowledge and the generic soft skills that employers recognize as indispensable preconditions for increasing student employability.

- **Consider the introduction of an embedded doctoral candidate network, including the development of doctoral candidate conferences to support sharing of experience and best practice.** The new Rulebook on conditions, criteria and the regulations for enrolment of third-cycle students at “St Kliment Ohridski” University – Bitola, presupposes organization of an annual conference with participation of these students from all University units in order to give them an opportunity to present their independent research projects (doctoral project) and certificate issuance for the participants.

- **Prioritize investment in preparing laboratories for national certification/ accreditation and ensure that staff is given relevant training.** In 2018 the University Senate adopted a feasibility study which includes the different activities necessary for preparing University Laboratory Center for national certification (adaptation of the space, purchase of additional equipment and reagents, training of the academic staff, introducing analysis methods and necessary activities for accreditation of the laboratory) in four phases. In the study, the financial costs and the time frame for the different activities are, also included. In the first phase, a significant investment has been done related to the adaptation of the space according the accreditation needs, where the equipment will be relocated. In order to accomplish the pre-installation requirement for this type of analytical instruments, we communicated with authorized representatives for such equipment for our country. It is arranged with them to come in Bitola this spring in order to relocate the equipment, perform validation and basic training for the personnel that are going to use this equipment. During 2018 we also established a good collaboration with managers in the region to meet their needs for analysis to be done in our Laboratory Center. Up to now we bought 5 standards from the Institute for Accreditation of the Republic of Macedonia related to the correct functioning of this type of laboratory.

- **Continue the initiative of annual staff development conference/workshops to support staff competences in writing research proposals etc.** In order to achieve the various strategic objectives, the action Plan, depending on the requirements, foresees organization of annual conferences for improving the scientific-research, creative, innovation and other skills of the staff. Following the annual conference held in Krushevo, the interest for further improvement has increased substantially, resulting in participation in a variety of trainings related to writing project applications, as well as notable expansion in networking. In the course of the past year the following has been achieved:

- Over 15 participations of academic and administrative staff from UKLO in “COST EU cooperation in science and technology” programs
- Over 30 participations of academic and administrative staff from UKLO in IPA-CBC trainings for writing project applications and realization of projects
- Over 5 participations of academic and administrative staff from UKLO in BALKANMED trainings for writing project applications and realization of projects
- Over 10 participations of academic and administrative staff from UKLO in ERASMUS+ trainings for writing project applications and realization of projects

Also, the Committee for cooperation among the higher education institutions in the country and abroad holds regular monthly meetings with current project coordinators to exchange information related to the project realization and help improve project skills of less-skilled coordinators.

- **Establishment of the Technology Transfer Centre as soon as possible after the national law is clarified.** According to the time frame given in the Action Plan, the establishment of the Technology Transfer Center is scheduled for December, 2019.

- **Consider schemes for student engagement with the local community e.g. volunteering schemes.** Student engagement with the local community via volunteering schemes, for the time being is under intense preparation in some of the University units, in a pilot form and the successfulness of it will directly depend on the further implementation and development of this kind of student engagement among the rest of the units. The realization of this activity, in correlation with the units, business and non-business firms and institutions and students, will take place in the course of the second semester of this academic year, i.e. beginning of February.

- **The KREDO Centre should consider whether it can facilitate local events highlighting the work of the university.** In the previous period, in line with several minor, regular-base events, one important, major event was organized that emphasized the University functioning and presented it in front of a wider public, thus strengthening its links with the business and non-business sector in the Region. This event was known under the name WIN-WIN Forum for cooperation between University and the employers in the direction of creating more attractive study programs of increased quality and it gathered about hundred participants who dealt with identification of the necessary knowledge and competences, as per employers requirements.

- **Improve resources to support the work of the KREDO Centre, including the development of an effective university-level alumni association.** For the purpose of improving and enhancing the activity of the KREDO center and in order to develop an efficient ALUMNI association, a firm for creating alumni database linked to the iKnow student service has been hired. In accordance with the agreement obligations, the firm is to prepare a platform for registering of all graduate students and the necessary data for maintaining permanent relation and obtaining further information about the career path of the UKLO alumni. The complete application of such a platform is to be expected by the end of the next academic year. In the direction of increasing the University – Alumni cooperation, a conference is to be held in the course of March, involving a significant number of noteworthy UKLO alumni from the country and abroad.

- **Improve the foreign language proficiency of staff and students to support mobility in relation to education and research; The university should ensure that adequate support is given to staff delivering the planned increase in English language programmes.** To improve foreign language proficiency of staff in relation to preparation of project applications, to academic mobility, but also to delivering quality teaching in English language, the Career center organizes free of charge English language testing in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (APTIS, BULATS, IELTS and the Cambridge Programme). At the time of preparing this Report, just as over the whole previous period, testing the level of English language proficiency of staff is being continuously organized in cooperation with the British Council, and, the results obtained serve as a basis for planning further activities.

- **A more systemic and targeted approach to bilateral agreements with clear links to development goals.** The University, in this immediate period of time as well as the one that follows, is in a process of renewal of previously signed bilateral cooperation agreements and of course, signing new ones, particularly with partner institutions from the Region with which we share similar experience and academic traditions, but also common problems and challenges. What is more, some relations are already functioning well and also there are new initiatives for regional university associating. The identified need for reinforced, and even more important, sustainable bilateral relations, is in function of the fact that joint application for funding through European flagship academic and scientific-research projects and programmes (E+, CEEPUS, H2020 ...) provides for an increased competitiveness and improved positioning.