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GUIDELINES FOR EXPERTS VISITS AT UKIM (22–25 October 2003)

The project "Support for Higher Education at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (UKIM)" started in spring 2003 and consists of three components: Quality Assurance, Procurement and Mobility. It is implemented by a Austro-Macedonian Consortium (navreme, Salzburg Seminar and DETRA).

The Quality Assurance component includes visits of faculties which have undertaken self-evaluations and which explicitly request consultation by international peers as a way of augmenting the ongoing internal evaluation process through informed external assessment. The day scheduled for the visits of these faculties is 22 October 2003. Visiting experts do not engage in any kind of accreditation of the host institution; rather, they come

- to share their experience in their field of expertise;
- with the hope that their activity will have a positive impact on the quality of the education at the respective faculty;
- to enhance the evaluation process started at UKIM;
- to improve their own level of knowledge and for colleagues abroad.

A generous grant to UKIM by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will cover travel expenses incurred by the visiting experts.

The Consortium will:

- arrange travel for team members and assist where necessary with visa applications. Alternatively, consultants may arrange their own travel and be reimbursed for economy class air travel following the on-site visit. Receipts are required for reimbursement;
- organise a workshop on 23 and 24 October in Ohrid with participation of all visiting consultants and UKIM staff members as well as other stakeholders to discuss observations during the visit and to develop further quality assurance strategies;
- cover all expenses for the experts, such as travel costs, accommodation, meals and local travel;
- provide liaison between the host institution and team members concerning all matters related to the forthcoming visit.

The character of the activities by the Operational Team of Visiting Expert:

Team members are advised that their role is not that of a formal external (quality) evaluation or accreditation visit. It is rather that of a group of colleagues charged with providing constructive advice to peers in similar positions in other higher education systems. The focus of activity should be that of the mission and profile of the host institution, what it is attempting to achieve in its particular environment, and the effectiveness of the ongoing quality assurance provisions to reach these objectives.

Thus the visitors shall:

- analyse the nature of the environment challenges (regional, national and international);
- consider whether the mission and strategic priorities, academic profile and organizational processes are adequate to meet these challenges;
- propose, from international experience, relevant good practice for the consideration of the host university.

The operating style should thus be friendly, firm, courteous and constructively critical. The recommendations should be as specific and detailed as possible and appropriate, leaving the university and faculty in no doubt of actions proposed.

Prior to the experts visit the Consortium kindly asks UKIM (respectively the implementation team) to provide:

At least four weeks before the visit (i.e., by 24 September 2003):

1) An indication of the advice sought from the experts team:

A compilation of topics and questions indicating the advice sought. This should include **an analysis of the issues and problems to be examined**. What is the precise nature and pertinent background of the issues in question? Which attempts, if any, have been made so far to remedy the problem? Why have these attempts not been entirely successful? What are the proposals for change? The analysis should be based on the recent self-evaluation which will allow the Visiting Advisors to gain clear insights into the issues they are expected to address. It is important that the host institution be prepared to engaged in genuine self-criticism. It is recommended that the analysis be produced after internal deliberations and as a joint effort consisting of all groups and individuals who will participate in the program of the visit. Serious preparation and thorough background documentation is essential for the desired outcome of the consultations.

2) Factual information about the host institution, the state of higher education in the host country, and the social, political and economic conditions of the host country (as far as they relate to higher education) as well as any other information deemed necessary which is not contained in the Self-Evaluation Report.

At least two weeks before the visit (i.e., by 8 October 2003):

1) Brief biographies of university personnel (including students) who will meet with the visiting consultants at the given faculty.

2) A list of topics prepared by the relevant faculty outlining the major issues that they would like to see addressed during the visit, and why.

3) A proposed detailed itinerary of meetings scheduled with specific topics for the day-long visit including meetings with all relevant parties (dean, the members of the team that prepared the self-evaluation report, senior professors, junior staff, students, external stakeholders like employers, ministry officials etc, where appropriate).

4) Confirmation of local hospitality (arrangement of visit, and if necessary, interpreters into English).

5) A pre-visit briefing note by a representative of the evaluation agency to be circulated to those who will participate in the meetings.

6) Any additional materials that may be helpful for the purpose of the visit, above and beyond the self-evaluation report.

Upon arrival:

- 1) The operational team consults in advance as a group to exchange views on expectations, experiences, set up some agenda items of their own, and discuss future procedures. This will be followed up and intensified during the 2 days workshop.
- 2) The operational team will meet with the Vice-Rector and the implementation team of UKIM to summarize the institutional concerns and the agenda for the visit.
- 3) Subsequent individual meetings should be structured according to the concerns identified by the faculties. The faculty should determine in advance which university personnel will meet with the team member(s). The representatives of the university should be familiar with the background analysis sent to the team prior to the visit.
- 4) It is helpful if one or more key members of the Rector's staff are present at all of the meetings to ensure continuity and make sure that all of the information exchanged on various topics is known to the university leadership. A typical meeting would involve:
 - a **brief** presentation of the theme by university staff (but most of the information on the topic should be sent to team members in advance, to save valuable time);
 - questions of clarification by team members, and dialogue with those present- discussion of relevance of western ideas on the theme; and
 - concluding comments by team members and university representatives.
- 5) A debriefing meeting for team members is scheduled after the workshop, to provide a opportunity to discuss the progress of the visits and to begin preparing the individual and reports. Ideally team members begin writing the final feedback during the experts visit.

Focus of the visits:

UKIM has requested the following Focus or viewpoint for these visits:

Curricula in the Framework of Study Programs

The following questions were raised in this context:

- 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.

This Focus will enable the Visiting Experts to start discussion from a concrete topic, but it is understood that general items of Quality Assurance processes will be touched upon equally.

During the workshop 23/24 October:

The team convenes at the workshop. Each visiting expert is asked to draw up a **preliminary oral feedback** (approximately 10-15 minutes) which should include: A summary of the substantive areas covered in discussions, structured as **observations, suggestions and recommendations**.

For each of these areas, internal affairs of the Faculty, and external matters with regard to other authorities and stakeholders should be presented.

After the experts visits:

1) Individual Expert Feedbacks. The written reports by each expert should be submitted until 15 November 2003. These reports will be each about 3-5 pages in length.

2) Comprehensive Final Opinion. The leaders of the Operational Team (Jochen Fried and Cvetko Smilevski) coordinate the writing of the Final Opinion until 15 December. The Final Opinion is reviewed by all team members, and should be sent via email to the Vice-Rector, experts, the Implementing Team of Quality Assurance (Prof.s Arnaudova and Pavlovski) and faculty stakeholders concerned. A preliminary copy of the Opinion is sent to the Vice-Rector with the request that any factual inconsistencies be corrected. The Rectorate is expected to publicize the Final Opinion to the relevant authorities both within the university as well as outside the university.

The Final Opinion provides an in-depth analysis of the specific issues discussed during the visits, and the suggestions and recommendations from the team to the Rector and university personnel. There is no pre-determined format for this document, but in general it should help to create a consensus within the host institution with regard to academic or administrative changes that seem promising in solving problems, improving operations, or achieving objectives that the hosts themselves have identified for consideration. The report shall explicitly commend the university on successful measures implemented so far to address institutional concerns. It is important that the Opinion includes and mentions follow-up activities, including materials promised to the host institution. The Final Opinion will be about twenty pages in length.

3) Follow up. It is expected that UKIM will send the Final Opinion to the relevant authorities both within the university as well as outside the university (e.g. ministries, members of local government, chamber of commerce, etc.). Further, it is understood that UKIM will provide feedback to the Consortium regarding the strategy planned to implement suggestions and recommendations.

The Consortium sees the experts visits as part of an on-going two-way relationship between the team members and the host institution. It is hoped that the experts maintain contact with the UKIM educators and scientists so that suggestions and recommendations made may be implemented. This contact may include on-going advice, provision of materials promised during the visit, or participation in the MOB component.

As the next major and final event under this component, a Inter-University Conference on Quality Assurance and Evaluation Systems is planned to take place in March or April 2004.

4) Evaluation of the Expert Visits. The host institution and visiting advisors agree to cooperate in any activities related to the evaluation of the Experts' Visits, such as responding to the questionnaires about the effectiveness of the visits, their results, and the final report. The Evaluation results will be forwarded to the Monitoring Institution in Austria (Zentrum für Soziale Innovation) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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