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Teacher Education in Europe: mapping the landscape and looking to the future

Enhancing Quality through the renewal of evaluation cultures in Teacher Education

Title of the Paper:
Enhancing the Quality of Higher Education Learning and Teaching
A Case Study from South East European University

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Abstract

This case study provides an active example of how a higher educational institution has sought to enhance self-reflection, focusing on the quality of learning and teaching, staff teaching performance and training and development. The paper summarizes the key historical, socio-economic and educational factors which have shaped the current position in the university and which have influenced the university's drive towards continuous improvement. It also refers to external guidance which has supported development. The study touches on the university's strategies for academic staff appointment, performance management, individual and institutional processes and their influence on evaluative practice. It describes the current Teacher Education offered by the university which includes embedded pedagogical undergraduate courses linked with languages, Master's studies in Educational Management and external training for school Directors. It demonstrates how Teacher Education is integrated with whole institution change through the development and implementation of a Teaching Observation Scheme, describing the scheme's rationale and intended outcomes, the process of development, the pilot project and implementation and monitoring. This is intended to contribute to the debate on renewing evaluation cultures within education and to support the university' mission of high quality teaching and learning as a key pre-condition for the university's success within a competitive educational market.

KEY WORDS in Abstract: quality, learning, teaching, self-evaluation, observation

Introduction

'High quality education and training are regarded as being indispensable in establishing a Europe of knowledge; in transforming European societies into dynamic learning societies; and in assisting the process of European integration for economic prosperity and social cohesion.' *Buchberger, F., Campos, B. P., Kallos, D.,,Stephenson, J. (2000, p. 2).* High quality teachers are seen as one essential component of these educational priorities and South East European University (SEEU) provides an example of how a higher educational institution has sought to enhance critical thinking, self-reflection and evaluation as an institution both within Teacher Education and across every Faculty and Department with a specific focus on the quality of learning and teaching, staff teaching performance and training and development. This focus is endorsed by the Eurydice education network on education in Europe: 'Concern for Quality Assurance in Teacher Education is closely linked to the broader context of the development of Higher Education and the follow up to the Bologna Process.' *Eurydice (2006, p. 3).*

Background

The challenge of developing such an evaluative culture was one of many faced by the university and was not given initial priority in the circumstances surrounding the university's opening. The first 900 students enrolled in South East European University (SEEU) in October 2001. The establishment of the university was only made possible by an amendment to the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Macedonia which allowed instruction in the Albanian language in Higher Education for privately funded universities. Its foundation had been initiated in the spring of 2000 by the then OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel. This so called 'private' higher education institution was to operate in the public interest, for academic and social purposes rather than for economic ones, and help to overcome the limited opportunities for access to higher education by native speakers of Albanian. From its establishment, it consisted of five, socio-economic and contemporary science disciplines: Business Administration, Communication Sciences and Technologies, Law, Pedagogical and Methodology Training and Public Administration.

The government supported this initiative and granted the site for the SEEU campus, but still its creation happened in very turbulent times. It was a period of armed conflict in the country, and the focus of these activities was in Tetovo where the university is based. The Council of Europe's Report on 'Higher Education in South Eastern Europe' stressed the need for 'a satisfactory solution to the issue of higher education provision in the two major languages of the country' The main aims in this period were security, attracting and retaining students whose education had been disrupted, appointing staff with relevant academic and language skills and qualifications and the production of appropriate curricula and site development.

The country was also passing through a transition period in all spheres of existence, with great difficulties. Significantly, the student body was coming from unreformed schools with teacher-centered instruction in which memorization of facts was prioritized and with teachers being the only and ultimate source of knowledge and authority. Critical thinking skills were neither promoted nor valued. The teachers had the same educational background. They were products of the same educational system and were used to practicing it in the same traditional way. Teacher Education itself was still shaped by an 'imbalance between the vocational-

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scientific and professional-pedagogic components' which led to 'the future teacher studying the scientific content but not sufficiently preparing for its modeling and application in the teaching process (they teach physics, but are not professional in helping students cope with the subject of physics).' *Delceva Dizdarvevic, J., Adamceska Damovska, S. (2007, p. 343).* Moreover, the law on Higher Education in the Republic of Macedonia, mirrored by university policies, focused on the value of acquiring qualifications in terms of career and reward rather than on a wider range of professional skills, including the ability to reflect critically and deliver competently. Taking also into consideration the perception that political and family affiliation were crucial in acquiring and keeping any position, the atmosphere was not favorable for developing an evaluative ethos.

In both the specific and wider context, therefore, SEEU was seen as 'a great experiment not only in resolving an old Balkan quarrel but also introducing new ideas and methods of higher education.' *Farrington, D. (2005, p. 13).*

Initial developments and external influences

Despite the challenging social, economic and educational environment, the university sought to model itself on internationally established good practice and aspired to initiate, develop and lead forward educational thinking within the Republic of Macedonia and the region. It has worked towards this by both internal and external means. For example, the first teaching offered by the university was in English Language. This was chosen purposefully in order to foster the university's mission on language, equality and integration and to promote new models of learning and teaching and a change to a more interactive teaching/learning approach. This work was supervised by Indiana University, which has been a partner of SEEU from the very beginning. Indiana University also organized and sponsored professional development opportunities for SEEU teaching staff, offered on site seminars led by their professionals and facilitated visits to IU campus and student exchange. This use of external, collaborative partners exposed SEEU to different approaches and strategies and helped to create an environment where new ideas and concepts were considered and accepted.

The Department for Pedagogical and Methodological Training was also a part of this from the beginning and has sought to put in practice 'expert training whose goal is to build the professional competency of teachers', including the 'nurturing of innovative spirit and creation' and having' a positive direction leading towards educational changes' in which 'human potential involves a process which continuously gains in quality.' *Delceva Dizdarvevic, J., Adamceska Damovska, S. (2007, p. 343).* The Department prepares language teachers for primary and secondary schools. The curricula for these studies were created in cooperation and consultation with experts from Indiana University to be in line with the latest developments in teacher education. Methodology courses, for example, first define theoretically the most important pedagogical areas but then crucially, apply these theories in practice. For example, students and teachers create forms that are used for analysis and evaluation when they observe the language teachers in the Language Center. The purpose of the forms is to develop in these future teachers an awareness of the necessity of critical reflection about someone else's teaching, and a positive commitment to self-monitoring and self-evaluation of their own teaching at a later stage. Then, these students prepare one language class for the students at the Language Center, with the teacher being there to comment on their teaching. The final stage is teaching a real language class in a local secondary school. In this way, future teachers not only learn by seeing how other teachers

are doing their job, but also get used to constant monitoring of quality as part of self and institutional improvement. It is a powerful partnership between trainee and experienced teacher based on collaboration and trust.

This modeling of an evaluative culture with future teachers is further developed through peer observation on the Master's program in English Language Teaching. At this stage, the students, some of them being teachers already, observe their peers using the same procedure of writing comments and reflecting critically on their own teaching, through observations of somebody else's practice.
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The university also offers a successful external training program for School Directors. The Certificate Program for Professional Leadership of school directors offers a specific module on teaching observation good practice. With this, the aim is to get school directors acquainted with the benefits of the observation process and the teaching strategies they need to observe and promote. The module supports their own plus their staff's development in critical thinking and quality management. In this way, they can implement an active observation process in the schools they manage and contribute further to creating a culture of teacher evaluation.

However, 'initial teacher education can only provide a basis for the development of a teacher's competencies, which may be further encouraged in the framework of in-service teacher education'; 'neither initial nor in-service teacher education is solely responsible for creating 'good' teachers'. Quality control is also seen as crucial, though such measures are 'relatively new, so their actual effectiveness and impact in maintaining and improving the quality of provision still remains unclear.' *Eurydice (2006, p. 70)*. South East European University views the development of such quality assurance and management systems as a key strategy.

An institutional approach

So, how does an institution such as SEEU continue this development of evaluative cultures both in its teacher education programs and with its teaching staff in general? The answer lies in the approach taken above, that is, in a commitment to training both teaching staff and managers and in developing an integrated institutional approach. The analysis and promotion of evaluative educational theories, and the teaching of how to implement these in practice within the teacher education field is of crucial importance, but it is not enough, especially in a situation where theories are often described and analyzed but not demonstrated or activated in practice, or where the implementation lacks objectively and the support of established procedures. Crucially, for the effective renewal of an evaluative culture, reflective practice must be developed and modeled across the whole organization; owned actively by the staff, students and external stakeholders not only in one department like Teacher Training but also in every other department, Faculty and section. Teachers cannot grow a reflective approach in isolation. Neither can they teach and support their students effectively using the new curriculum focus on learning outcomes which include skills, attitudes and application as well as knowledge and understanding without modeling such skills and attitudes themselves. All stakeholders are involved. A whole institution approach is also consistent with the European-wide Bologna declaration and SEEU has benefited from placing these guidelines at the centre of its function and practice. This has helped to create an institution which has equality, language diversity, high quality and evaluative practice as part of its central mission.

Strategic approaches

Thus, South East European University has committed itself to a total quality culture with evaluation and self-improvement at its heart. This is firstly a matter of strategic direction from the Rectorate. Senior managers are developing an evaluative leadership and management style. They have specifically considered advice from the University's external Quality Champion, whose twice annual visits form key points in the annual review cycle. This quality champion elicits information from all levels of staff both formally and informally, meets with specific university bodies and the Student Union, and reports on the quality of academic, administrative and support systems. The report is published and used to identify improvements, and to initiate developments at Faculty, Departmental and University level. Just recently, the university has formalized its forward planning process with the introduction of Action Plans for all Faculties and Departments. These have been produced by Deans and Heads of Department, validated by the relevant Senior Manager, and are being monitored for successful implementation. Crucially, staff teams were asked to contribute to their production and implementation and they have proved useful in highlighting key achievements, areas for improvement and development and action planning. The plans have been evidence based, and focused on what can be achieved realistically within the academic year. The Department for Pedagogical and Methodological Training is currently implementing its own plan and the university Quality Assurance and Management Commission has itself presented an overall planning document to the Board. This has proved beneficial in focusing the university's priorities for the year. In October, 2007, SEEU was also successfully validated under the international ISO 9000 standards which have been an effective mechanism for strengthening our evaluative procedures, particularly in administrative areas. One requirement is a procedure for effective review and change management. Thus, developments have been actively led by senior management, evaluation has been embedded in an annual review and planning cycle, and the processes devised have sought to involve all levels of staff, for use across both academic and administrative faculties and departments to create an institution-wide culture of self-improvement.

Performance management processes have also been used in order to shift the ethos of the university, keeping in mind the fact that 'there is a risk of bureaucratic overregulation', *Eurydice (2006, p. 4)*. Practice is still primarily shaped and influenced by the requirements of the Higher Education Law and the statutes of the university which mirror this legal framework. However, developments within and beyond the legal framework are moving the university forward. An example of this is the creation and review of Job Descriptions for academic staff. The University used external facilitators in order to carry out on the ground job reviews of key positions, analyzed what they and staff themselves said about their work, and produced Job Descriptions which formalized job roles, ranking, workload and career progression. For teaching staff, they include specifics regarding effective teaching, skill in communication with and support for students and the commitment to individual and institutional review and development. This work is currently being completed for all levels of work, both academic and administrative and will be vital in providing structured evaluative management. The university is also currently re-vamping its appraisal forms and process in order to create a more active, evaluative process. Furthermore, it recently reviewed and changed its bonus scheme which until recently has been given on a 'flat' basis. This revised process encouraged more staff involvement against specified criteria. The review from this has been mixed, and further work may need to be done but it is seen as another step towards better staff motivation and quality

management. The value of the consultative nature of developing such quality processes and the growing confidence in review, evaluation and development is central to their being accepted and used positively.

Professional development and training has grown in importance. There has always been support and encouragement for staff to complete academic qualifications; and a focus on offering seminars, conferences, workshops and external and/or international courses in order to support high quality curriculum development, review and accreditation. However, in March 2005, the University established the Instructional Support Center (ISC) under the umbrella of the USAID-financed Higher Education Linkage Project between Indiana University (IU) and SEEU. The main goal for setting up the ISC was to create an opportunity for additional professional development of teachers working at SEEU by providing training sessions in three specific areas: English language, current teaching methodology and the incorporation of technology in teaching, IT skills (MS Excel, MS Power Point, MS Access, etc) and the usage of ANGEL software. ANGEL is an online course management software (CMT) introducing an online environment for learning and teaching. The goal was for SEEU instructors to be able to: post an online syllabus, create and edit a course calendar, upload files for student use or download student assignments from previously created drop boxes, develop online quizzes and surveys, communicate with students through ANGEL, create lessons by combining lesson elements into a logical order, track student progress, create an on-line grade book, create discussion forums, and set a time limit for assignment submission. Though ANGEL is still a fairly new tool at SEEU, the statistics indicate great success in terms of number of users over a relatively short period of time (71.63% of full-time teachers and 35.04% of part-time teachers). *Zlatkovska, E.* (2007). This was perceived by teachers as a useful tool for data sharing but also as mechanism for changing the approach to learning and communication with students. For the Department of Pedagogical and Methodological Training, the ISC has organized video-links with experts from Indiana University on current issues in teacher training. These and other training initiatives are linked closely to the observation process described below.

Teaching Observation – the pilot

The quality of teaching and learning in all Faculties at the university is evaluated against student achievements and a yearly student evaluation and these indicators are taken into consideration for the purposes of staff performance management, in particular with regard to contractual issues. Some informal observation of learning and teaching took place, in particular for staff new to teaching or where issues had been identified. These tended to focus on negative aspects. The university wished to move to a more positive, developmental approach for all teaching staff, in line with recommendations for 'future teachers' in initial teacher training in Macedonia, which was to promote the development of 'their skills to share the fundamental knowledge with their students within the framework of their understanding and abilities.' *Delceva Dizdarvevic, J., Adamceska Damovska, S. (2007, p. 343).* Thus, the aims and outcomes of how the university is developing an evaluative culture for the education of teachers both in its Teacher Education department and across the institution is clearly reflected in the creation, implementation and first review of its procedure for the Observation of Learning and Teaching which was established during the academic year 2006-7. In line with the Bologna quality assurance guidelines which require that 'institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so' *European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education,*

(2005); the University's Quality Champion recommendations, *Bource, M. (2007)* and its own internal plans and Implementation Report, the university decided to focus on the enhancement of the quality of the students' learning experience in lectures and practical workshops. This included the delivery of teaching on teacher training programs.

Academic and Administrative leaders were very clear that the rationale was:

- to support the University's strategic aim of continuous improvement and development of learning and teaching
- to provide evidence of quality assurance at Faculty and University level
- to ensure that the students' learning experience is of the highest quality across each Faculty
- to acknowledge excellent practice and facilitate the sharing of good practice across each Faculty and the University
- to support continuous, individual staff development
- to inform other relevant processes, specifically, the annual self-evaluation process and the allocation of staff bonuses
- to ensure that learning and teaching is inclusive and addresses the University's commitment to equality of opportunity

This was a scheme which was to be supportive, positive, in line with the university's mission, led and promoted by senior managers and implemented objectively in order to train and develop the whole range of teaching staff, from assistants to professors, both full and part time, in every learning setting and across all Faculties and Centers. It aimed to make a difference to the quality of learning and teaching and not merely be a management tool. This again mirrored the approach recommended for teacher training in Macedonia where the way that evaluation results were used was seen as 'crucial for the 'acceptance of quality control within a system' and to avoid the danger that 'evaluation reports may also be produced only 'for the sake of producing them', in order to respond to an administrative demand without having any real implications for the providers. They may not be given back to those whose work was evaluated. In this context, the way in which these results are expressed also seems quite important.' *Eurydice (2006, p. 69).*

The findings of the research paper, 'Teaching Observations: A Meeting of Minds?' *Hatzipanagos, S., Lygo-Baker, S. (2006)* proved useful, specifically detailing the advantages and disadvantages of peer observation schemes and their impact on staff thinking and performance. This useful journal paper outlines current research literature, details the perceived positive and negative outcomes, compares the observers' views with the views of the observees and draws conclusions about the most positive aspects of such schemes - the formative and developmental aspects with trust being the most important underpinning factor. The paper also offers different models of implementation and concludes that 'observations within an educational developer observation framework (that is, with external, objective observation) do provide a time to consider knowledge and deepen understanding'. 'All recognized the importance of constructive and supportive feedback. The formative nature of such feedback determined the attributes of the relationship between observer and observee being non-intimidating and supportive and will potentially contribute to development and improvement.' *Hatzipanagos, S., Lygo-Baker, S. (2006) p. 103* The positive points identified were relayed to observers and observees during training and briefing meetings, and contributed towards the formulation of the scheme at SEEU. This use of research within a

research based institution has supported the development of critical thinking and aided acceptance of the observation process.

The scheme was developed in a similar thorough and consultative manner, to meet the current situation, needs and aspirations of the university and its stakeholders. Schemes and approaches from other Higher Educational institutions and from other sectors were considered. There was initial discussion amongst the Rectorate and Faculty Deans and Pro-Deans about whether to use 'peer' or colleague observers, observation by senior Faculty members, or by members from other Faculties, or external observers. There was debate how to report and standardize observer judgments and whether to use a grading system or provide feedback through the use of specific language. There was further discussion about the link to performance management, to contracts of employment, the university's bonus scheme, the right balance of teaching, research and administration in Job Descriptions. There was, very importantly, a lively debate about what would work at the university and whether staff would accept, respect and use the observation process positively. There were very specific concerns:

- Would the scheme be objective and free from personal, political and other influences?
- Would it be accepted, especially by established professors who saw their qualifications and experience as synonymous with teaching skill and felt that such a scheme was not appropriate for them?
- Would staff view observation only from a negative point of view, and as unwarranted criticism which might impact on their job security or reputation?
- Would observers have senior management backing and would they have the skills to carry out the observations with accuracy and sensitivity?
- Would it just be a paper exercise, to be used by 'management' as a measuring tool but without impact on actual teaching?
- Would it be logistically feasibly, given the number of staff involved, and would observers receive 'remission' to make the scheme workable within their existing responsibilities?
- Would reports be linked to training opportunities?
- Would the scheme be appropriate to the established ways of working within a post-communistic country?

The initiation of a pilot scheme had, if nothing else, generated a significant level of institutional reflection even without a written scheme in place, and all these points were noted in a review report and considered in the production of the draft Procedure and Forms which were circulated to the Rectorate, Faculty Deans and Pro-Deans and the university's staff development unit, the Instructional Support Centre, for consideration and refinement in May 2007 in Albanian, Macedonian and English. The scheme provided for annual, supported observation, an optional unannounced observation; all observations co-observed; pre- and post-observation meetings, a written report supported by guidance about what language to use; a training analysis; an opportunity for observee input; and sections detailing how to deal with possible issues, observer conduct and appeals. It was agreed by all stakeholders in early June 2007 (Appendix 1).

In addition, and seen as crucial by both observers and observees, staff were provided with notes on the criteria for excellence which observers might expect to see. These were developed in grid and note form, with reference to a number of published good practice lists.

They were to be used during the pre-observation meeting to support the discussion of the lesson plan, for observers to refer to during the observation and when writing the feedback report, and again for shared use in the feedback discussion.

Templates recommended for standard use were:

- Teaching Observation – the Characteristics of Excellence (note and grid form)
- Teaching Observation Confirmation Request (an invitation form for staff)
- Lesson Plan Form (for observed lesson only)
- Teaching Observation Feedback Form
- Co-observation and Support Feedback Form
- Use of Language in Providing Teaching Observation Feedback (guidance notes which support thoughtful, accurate and standardised feedback)

The draft Procedure and Forms were circulated to all teaching staff, via Faculty managers and email, and briefing and consultation meetings were offered to each of the five faculties, with a focus on full time staff. Comments were again noted and considered.

In early June, 2007, Faculty observers and co-observers, including members of the Rectorate, received training. In all, eighteen members of staff were trained in the scheme's context and purpose, the research base, the procedure and forms and how to produce effective feedback reports. The training sessions employed active learning techniques and evaluative opportunities to model good practice.

The pilot project then begun in earnest. Within a two week period at the end of May and the beginning of June, 2007, eleven observations took place. The draft SEEU procedure and paperwork were used and every observation was co-observed. The co-observer commented on both the lecturer's performance and on the objectivity of the process. The observees included professors, assistants and one international member of staff, and included both new and experienced teachers. Feedback was given to the observee within the proscribed five day time limit, recognizing good practice and identifying areas for development and/or training. Observees were invited to participate actively in the feedback and to note their comments on the Feedback Form. Copies of each report were provided to the observee, observer, the Faculty and to the Rectorate for overall quality assurance. Copies were also seen by the Instructional Support Centre, and formed a basis for identifying professional development needs. This resulted in the circulation of a Needs Analysis Training Menu and in the development of training sessions in 2007-8.

At the end of the pilot, both observers and observees were asked to evaluate the procedure and a report was published in three languages. Comments included:

- An endorsement of the procedure so that its use for 2007-8, with some minor adjustments, could be confirmed;
- Confirmation that the forms were easy to use and supported useful, evaluative feedback;
- Full acknowledgement that the pilot process was operated objectively;
- A very high level of satisfaction with observer training, with useful evaluative comments;

- 9 out of 11 observees made comments on their Feedback Forms indicating a willingness to participate in the feedback process. Most observee comments endorsed the useful of the process and what individuals had learned, but some staff used the opportunity to put their point of view or disagree.
- Positive and useful evaluation responses by observers and observees. Specifically, they stated that the paperwork and criteria for excellence supported the observer and one-co-observer felt that the pilot process had helped with identifying and dealing with potential problems. The observees stated that they felt the process had been supportive and helpful in acknowledging their good practice, boosting confidence, and in identifying areas for development. One or two pointed out that they had felt nervous and that they would almost have preferred not to know that anyone was coming. All observers and observees felt that the pre-observation, observation and post-observation elements were all useful, but the observees said that the post-observation feedback was the most valuable part. Observers also stated that they had gained valuable insights during the process. Observers felt that continued central support was needed in order to operate the process effectively next year. Mechanisms for sharing good practice and identifying staff training needs should be developed in Faculties and across the University. Further consideration also needs to be given to use of languages in the pre-observation and post-observation process to ensure that detailed feedback is received which is accurate and mutually understood.
- Useful critical comment resulted in adaptions to the scheme for 2007-8 which also raised awareness of possible future issues, for example, with the standardisation of judgements and the workload of observers.

Operation in 2007-8

In the four months since the start of the 2007-8 academic year the observation procedure has operated fully for both full and part time academic staff (293 in total, 149 full time and 144 part time teaching staff). The university has sought to implement the scheme positively, with careful attention to detail and staff and Faculty requirements. Thus, all staff were re-notified in September about the process and each Faculty was again offered the opportunity to discuss the process with lead people and staff teams. The names of all Faculty observers were confirmed with the Rectorate and a small number of new observers were trained using the same materials and active follow-up. To ensure that staff knew the scheme was fair and equal, a schedule was drawn up and circulated which identified an observation date for each member of staff in the first semester and provided notification to those staff who would be observed in the second semester. Careful consideration was given to the co-observation schedule to ensure that the 'external' observers worked equally between faculties, faculty observers and levels of observed staff. Individual issues concerning sensitivity to rank and expertise were resolved with the aim of maximizing the usefulness of the process.

In all, 100 feedback records were received from mid-October until the end of December 2007, including Professors, Assistants, two Deans out of five and one Pro-Rector (34% of staff total). These were spread across every Faculty, including 26 from the Department of Pedagogical and Methodological Training. Each person was given the opportunity to talk about their lesson plan in advance of the lesson, with the criteria for excellence, and to discuss their syllabus, roster and other records and therefore to feel well supported and prepared. A small number of observations were delayed or postponed because staff were not prepared or because of sickness or the unavailability of observers. Feedback meetings

(sometimes with the main observer and sometimes accompanied by the co-observer) took place in most cases. Written reports, using carefully advised language, were provided to observees and 31 lecturers took the opportunity to add their own comments, about the process and with regard to their feedback. Copies of these reports were given to the observee, observer, a copy lodged in a quality folder in each Faculty and copies logged centrally for quality assurance and monitoring purposes. There has been 1 re-observation because the first one was less than satisfactory and this have resulted in improved observed performance. Other re-observations are planned from the first semester. There have been 3 disputed observation reports which were followed up with central support. Summary information concerning the observations has been logged including the number of observations carried out by each observer(Table I). A first semester review has been produced which provides a teaching observation profile (Chart I) An observee questionnaire was also circulated and the responses analyzed.

Table I – Completion of Observations by Observers from October to December 2007

Name of Observer	No. of observations (from Quality Assurance and Management Office records to 14.01.08)
Observer A	8
Observer B	6
Observer C	10
Observer D	1
Observer E	1
Observer F	4
Observer G	5
Observer H	10
Observer I	7
Observer J	4
Observer K	2
Observer L	3
Observer M	6
Observer N	7
Observer O	10
Observer P	5
Observer Q	6
Observer R	3
Observer S	2 (plus 18 co-obs)
Total	**100**

Chart I – Teaching Observation Profile October – December 2007

SEEU T.O. Feedback Results for winter semester, Academic Year 2007-08
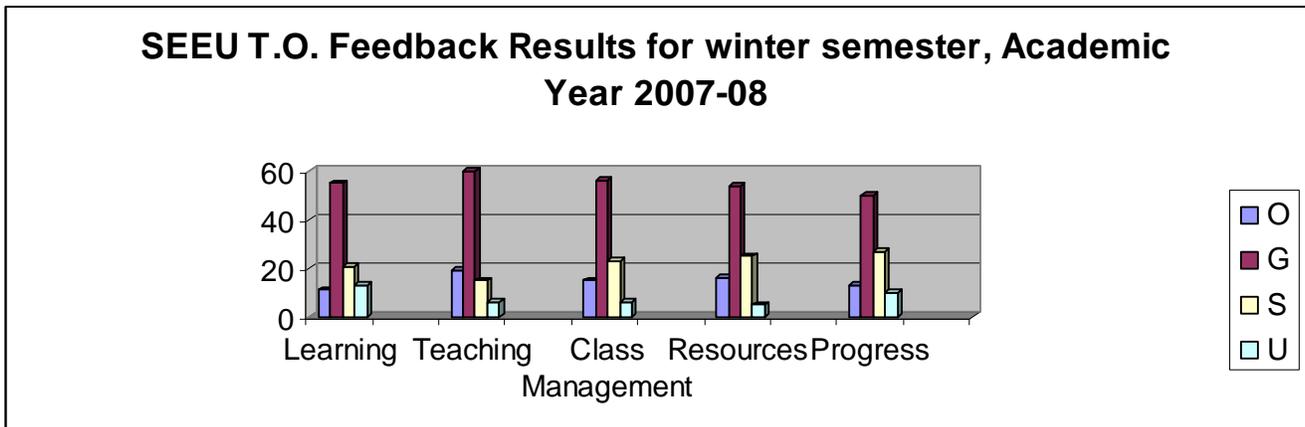
Each Faculty was presented with a breakdown of their own observation profile. Below is the example from the Pedagogical and Methodological Training Faculty (Chart II).

Chart II - Example Faculty Observation Profile

Faculty of Pedagogical and Methodological Training
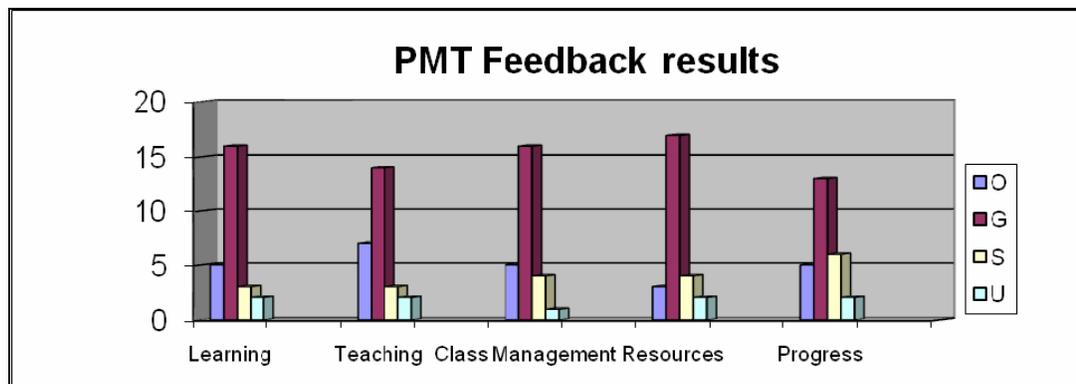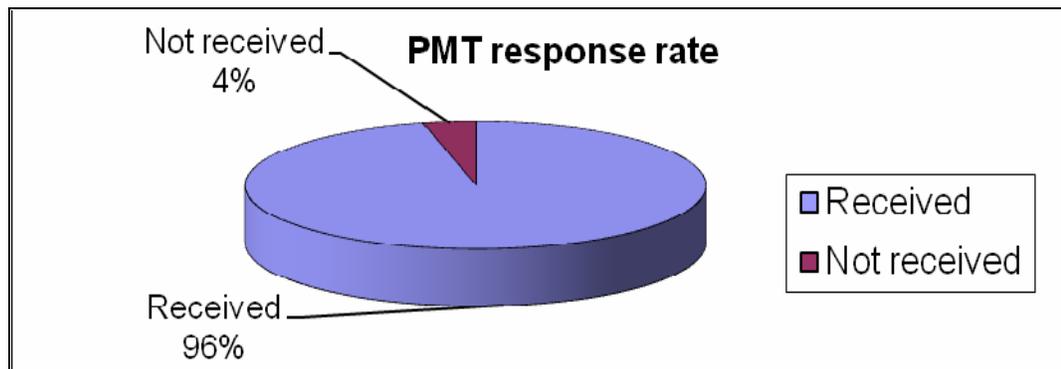
The review has indicated the following**:**

- Compliance with the requirements and spirit of the procedure has been good but there are a number of issues about the operation of the process which will need to be addressed by discussion and further training and support for observers. These issues are partly to do with availability and workload and may partly be accounted for by the current level of commitment within a culture that believes processes can be circumvented or completed 'on paper' without maximizing their value and usefulness.
- The teaching observation profile indicates a small number of outstanding lessons and a small number of unsatisfactory sessions which the majority of observations being satisfactory or good or a mixture. This indicates that there is a solid base of competency but that there is plenty of room for further reflection, training and development.
- With regard to lecturer comments, 41 members of staff out of 100 observed wrote something on their feedback form. 10 commented on the process, mostly positively. 18 noted how they might improve as a result of the process which demonstrated that this had contributed to active self-evaluation. 15 made self-justifying comments which implied that they did not feel that they had learned anything which would improve their teaching skills.
- Key areas for training were identified including lesson planning with specific objectives and student activities, questioning techniques, management of large size lectures to maximize concentration and participation, quality use of resources.

Questionnaires about the procedure were received from six members of staff. This low response rate may indicate a lack of interest or willingness to complete the form but it was issued at the end of the semester and further forms may still be received. Staff were asked to comment in one of three languages on the process, on the relative value of the main parts of the procedure, how it had helped their practice, whether it was supportive, training identified, would they recommend it to other colleagues and other comments. All expressed positive support for the process and 4 out of 6 indicated that it had helped with their practice, although there was a focus on improving weaknesses rather than recognizing good practice. All felt the process had been supportive and would recommend it to colleagues. Critical comments included points on the efficiency of the system, the experience and abilities of the observers and the quality of the pre- and post-observation advice.

What is also very important is the contribution the procedure has made to the quality of learning and teaching and its effectiveness in helping to shift the university's culture and ethos. Whilst it has been in operation only for a short time, the following benefits may be identified:

- the successful introduction of a formal, evaluative procedure which supports both individual, critical thinking and institutional quality assurance;
- a greater focus on what makes excellent teaching in a higher education institution which can be shared across all Faculties including teacher training;
- lively debate amongst academic staff, for example, about what is possible in a large size lecture as opposed to a small, practical group;

- useful support for the development of management skills in being able to observe, evaluate and accurately describe teaching practice, and more actively manage staff performance;
- Identification of good practice seen and increased opportunity to share and discuss teaching strategies, for example, from follow-up Faculty training workshops and summary guidance notes circulated;
- Additional evidenced follow-up where teaching was seen as unsatisfactory;
- a greater awareness of issues still to be tackled, for example, reviewing some syllabi, some student results;
- increased individual opportunity for self-reflection in a supportive, non-intimidating environment;
- feedback meetings which have acted as training sessions for staff; and the identification of other general training needs, for example, the use of questioning techniques;
- a positive response from students to the scheme, including a request for any reports to be made available to the Student Union Executive;
- Support for other processes, for example, appraisal, staff bonus scheme, the development of Job Descriptions for Academic Staff.

Conclusions - Evaluation and lessons learned

South East European University has had to face serious challenges, deal with rapid development within a transitional educational system and lead and motivate its staff to aspire to the highest quality within and beyond the current culture and educational mentality. It has made the enhancement of the quality of its provision and its staff a central part of its strategy and has recognized that using evaluative mechanisms to create a real learning community is the key to success. It believes that an evaluative approach must be integrated into the whole institution and that all procedures and stakeholders must be actively involved. The link between quality and the continued success of the institution is recognized as is the importance of the ethos of the university with its commitment to inspiring its staff and students with the motivation to learn and the desire for life long self-development.

The introduction and initial implementation of the Annual Observation of the Learning and Teaching Process has demonstrated that a carefully constructed and thoughtfully. implemented procedure can be an agent for change towards a more evaluative culture. The aim was to combine an effective tool for quality management with a system which would improve teaching practice within a positive and supportive environment. In order to do this successfully, the procedure should involve some key characteristics:

- The purpose and use of any procedure must be clear and explicitly agreed and communicated to all participants, for example, whether it is for internal or external measurement, for institutional or personal development, and how it is related to performance management processes.
- In a research-orientated institution, it is useful to consider relevant research and to analyze other procedures and systems, but then adopt a model which is tailored to institutional and staff need.
- It is imperative that evaluation must be evidence based, specific, measurable and achievable and that staff understand the criteria that they will be observed against.

- Effective consultation, communication and review involving all participants maximizes effectiveness;
- Teaching staff should be encouraged to evaluate their teaching in a reflective way and need be willing to discuss their teaching and accept constructive advice for the process to work. This is part of a process of developing both staff and manager's skills in analysis and evaluation.
- Staff in the Pedagogical and Methodological Faculty need to 'model' the good practice and strategies they teach in theory, and be able to share the benefits of their expertise across the institution.
- Approaches to teaching must mirror the learning outcomes in the new curricula delivered to students in terms of skills, application and attitudes as well as knowledge.
- Evaluation is a skill, homed by gaining a qualification, but not necessarily sufficiently developed as part of that qualification. New skills and techniques for teaching need to be learned and should be continually developed and reviewed.

South East European University is an individual example of how an institution can progress towards renewing evaluative cultures so that what we do is of the highest quality and how we try to inspire the teachers we train, the lecturers in every faculty and the students we teach.

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Appendix 1

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Annual observation of the learning and teaching process

1. Background

One of the most significant factors in ensuring that we are continuously improving and developing what we are providing to students is the quality of our teaching. There is a great deal of good teaching and learning within the University. We need to ensure that we are sharing good practice and supporting staff in the continuous development of skills and methodology.

2. Purpose

The focus of the observation process is:

- to support the University's strategic aim of continuous improvement and development of learning and teaching
- to provide evidence of quality assurance at Faculty and University level
- to ensure that the students' learning experience is of the highest quality across each Faculty
- to acknowledge excellent practice and facilitate the sharing of good practice across each Faculty and the University
- to support continuous, individual staff development
- to inform other relevant processes, specifically, the annual self-evaluation process and the allocation of staff bonuses
- to ensure that learning and teaching is inclusive and addresses the University's commitment to equality of opportunity

3. What should be observed?

As far as possible, a range of all the activities which constitute 'teaching' should be observed. This could be lectures, small group lessons, practical classes and classes in specialist rooms. The observer and observee will agree on the most appropriate session when they confirm observation dates.

4. Frequency of Observation

- All staff will be observed once per year as part of the formal, supported process. Each Faculty may consider other ways of supporting learning and teaching, such as colleague observation, shared workshop sessions, good practice guidelines, training.
- Staff who are newly engaged to teach at the University will have two supported observations, using the University scheme and proformas.
- Observers should also carry out an additional un-announced observation for each member of staff during the academic year, in order to monitor teaching delivery, or follow-up on issues discussed during the formal, supported observation.

5. Who will do the observations?

- The Deans and the Pro-Dean for Academic Issues in each Faculty, with Deans co-ordinating the process. In order to ensure that the process is carried out effectively, each Faculty must nominate the observers annually and this will be agreed by the Pro-Rector for Academic Issues. This annual process may include alternative or other nominations for observers as appropriate.
- The Pro-Rector for Academic Issues or Rectorate nominees.
- Staff in the Instructional Support Centre with pedagogical expertise will co-observe in order to support the process and to collaborate with the Faculties in producing a coherent staff development plan and in disseminating good teaching practice.

NOTE: All staff will undergo training prior to carrying out observations or being observed

6. Support and monitoring process

Where possible, it is recommended that two people carry out each observation and

- all new observers will be supported by co-observation in the first year
- a percentage of observers will be supported by co-observation annually
- all re-observations will be supported by co-observation

7. Can a lecturer object to an observer?

It is anticipated that such situations will happen only in exceptional circumstances.

However, for the process to be effective there needs to be some trust and credibility between the observer and the observee. For this reason, if a lecturer objects to a particular observer, they should put these concerns in writing and discuss them with their Dean so that the Faculty can address the issue. If no satisfactory outcome is reached, then the matter should be referred to the Pro-Rector for Academic Issues, who may be asked to carry out the observation. A member of staff from the Instructional Support Centre or from outside the Faculty may also be asked to co-observe in such circumstances.

The choice of which class is observed rests with the observer but is subject to final agreement with the member of staff being observed.

8. How much notice will be given?

Observers will plan observation dates with staff well in advance but at least 5 working days notice of the observation must be given.

9. The length and conduct of the observation

Observations will last for between 45 to 60 minutes.

With prior agreement, either the observer or observee should explain to the students what is happening so that they understand and are comfortable with the process. During the observation, the observer should place themselves so that they can see what is going on but should not interfere in any way with the lesson, except on exceptional grounds where health and safety is threatened.

Where appropriate and practicable (for example, during practical lessons or where there is group work or project activity) the observer may look at students' work. At the end of the lesson, they may discuss the lesson with students.

10. Will there be an opportunity to discuss the observation beforehand?

It is essential that the observer meets with the observee before the observation to:

- discuss criteria to be used
- discuss the session plan for the observed lesson
- review documentation, for example, syllabus, student roster, records, bibliographies
- discuss any issues relating to the session/group/learner evaluation/students needing support
- clarify any organisational issues
- establish a time for feedback to be given

11. How will feedback be given?

The feedback meeting will take place as soon as possible and within 5 working days of the observation, and will take the form of a written Feedback Report and a dialogue between the observer and the observee. This should be conducted within a confidential and mutually respectful environment with the aim of recognising good practice and developing individual teaching skills. The details of this feedback remain confidential between the observer and observee. The report and dialogue will cover areas of strength, areas of development/action points, and staff development needs. The observee may add their own comments concerning the observation and then the Feedback Report will be signed by both observer and observee to confirm that the process has been completed and accepted.

What happens if there is no agreement on the feedback?

This should happen only on very rare occasions, but where there remains a difference of view or interpretation between the observer and the observee, then the observer's comments are final but the observee may attach his/her comments to the record of the observation. If the observer and co-observer fail to agree on the feedback even after discussion, this should be referred to the Pro-Rector for Academic issues for resolution prior to feedback to the observee.

12. Follow up action and support

It is important that if the aims of improving the quality of students' learning experience, of sharing good practice and of supporting staff to facilitate learning are to be achieved, that comprehensive and accessible support is put into place, such as:

▪ an ongoing programme of professional development on Learning and Teaching, provided both by the Faculty and the Instructional Support Centre. All staff should be offered access to relevant professional development opportunities but if training is identified as essential on the Teaching Observation Feedback Report Form, then attendance and follow-up will be mandatory.

▪ support provided by the Dean's Office or a colleague

▪ where training needs have been identified and are common to several staff, specific group training

▪ good practice reports, workshops and team meetings

13. Where does the record of observation go?

The record of observation and any action points will be held by the Dean in a confidential Quality Assurance Folder in each Faculty. The observer and observee will retain a copy and a copy will be sent to the Pro-Rector for Academic Studies for quality assurance purposes. These will be checked centrally by the ISC for training issues. With co-observations, the Instructional Support Centre or other co-observers will retain copies of notes made and may forward these to the Dean of the relevant Faculty and to the Pro-Rector for Academic issues in confidence.

14. What happens if the session observed is inadequate?

The observer and the observee will discuss the significant areas where there is need for development and an action plan/time scale will be drawn up, including support to be provided. Staff will be supported by:

▪ The Dean's office and/or other relevant subject specialists
▪ the Instructional Support Centre

A re-observation will be carried out by the Dean or Pro-Rector for Academic Issues or a Rectorate nominee, co-observed by the Instructional Support Centre. The timing of this observation will reflect the nature of support identified. However, this would normally be within 8 weeks. The procedures for the second observation will be the same as those used for the first observation with the following difference:-

▪ The written feedback/action points produced following the first observation will be discussed during the pre-observation meeting.

In those instances where teaching performance remains inadequate following a second observation, then the issue will be referred to the Pro-Rector for Academic Issue for a decision about further support or action. As a last resort, the Pro-Rector for Academic issues may refer the matter to the Rector for contract review. This will only happen in exceptional circumstances and after a support process has been exhausted.

15. Relevant Documentation

The following guidance and forms should be used as part of the process:

- Teaching Observation – the Characteristics of Excellence (note and grid form)
- Teaching Observation Confirmation Request
- Lesson Plan Form (for observed lesson only)
- Teaching Observation Feedback Form
- Co-observation and Support Feedback Form
- Use of Language in Providing Teaching Observation Feedback (guidance notes)

16. Comment and Review

This procedure will be overseen by the Pro-Rector for Academic Issues, in liaison with the Deans of Faculty and the Instructional Support Centre. Staff will be consulted and trained on its implementation and review.

It will be reviewed annually so that it remains active and effective. Staff should make constructive comments (confidential if preferred) via their Faculty Dean or the Rector for Academic Issues for consideration