



INTERNAL INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR ADMINISTRATIVE FACILITATION AT EPISKOP KONSTANTIN PRES LAVSKI UNIVERSITY OF SHUMEN¹

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Abstract: *The article describes the policy at Shumen University regarding the collecting and analysis of information about the issues pertaining to the continuous application of the System for Ensuring the Quality of Education. The subject of the analysis is the participation of the interested parties in the development of the System. The various methods for collecting information depending on its purpose are discussed.*

Key words: *System for Monitoring, Assessment, Facilitation and Management of the Quality of Education; Shumen University Information System*

Shumen University is a school of higher education which offers a wide range of programs within 21 professional areas and 7 fields of higher education, in all degrees of education, as well as within the system of continuing education. The effective management of its complex structure including 5 faculties with different profiling, a College and a Department for Information, Qualification and Continuing Education necessitates the collecting, organization, analysis, releasing and storage of a large volume of information of various nature.

The academic management puts considerable effort into the proper selection of the objects of monitoring, the sources and methodology for collecting information, the aspects of its analysis, the levels of releasing it, the ways it is stored, the control on the activities related to the management of information. The collecting of various types of information databases is not an end in itself but a means for making effective and adequate executive decisions.

The available information databases are connected to different elements of the System for Monitoring, Assessment, Facilitation and Management of the Quality of Education and the Academic Staff (Quality Control System): the status of the university documentation and procedures for its updating; the profile of the

¹ The present study is conducted with the financial help of Project № RD-08-91/31.01.2019, The "Scientific studies" Fund, Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen.

students and their collective, group and personal interests; the professional self-realization of the university graduates as an indicator of the adequacy of education programs etc.

In accordance with the requirements of the established Quality Control System for achieving more efficient management in all its activities and an internal quality facilitation, the management body of Shumen University and its main and auxiliary structural units continuously collect and analyze information of various kinds, as follows:

Within the domain of education:

- Pertaining to the development of the student admission campaign, the level of fulfillment of the planned admission quota for students and the interest towards the programs at the university;
- Pertaining to the organization and the improvement of the effectiveness of the process of education, as well as the improvement of the education programs (for bachelor`s and master`s degrees and continuing education);
- Regarding the practical training of the students and their professional self-realization;
- Regarding the availability of material and technical resources and the development of computer support of the education process, the communicative facilitation and connectivity, the development of information resources including those of the University library etc.
- Pertaining to the levels of satisfaction of the students with the process of education and of the employers regarding the quality of work of the apprentices, trainees and university graduates at their places of work;
- Concerning the opinions and recommendations from the students and the employers regarding the education programs, the contents of the curricula and courses, the practical student training;
- Regarding the activities related to the incoming and outgoing student mobilities for studying and training; the completed procedures for recognizing and accepting foreign graduation diplomas and periods of exchange at universities abroad etc.;
- Regarding the availability of teaching staff for upholding the education process, the annual work-load of the teaching staff etc.;

Within the sphere of the communal and living issues of student life: allocation of grants, providing aid to those in difficult and disadvantaged situations as well as to persons with disabilities, accommodation and communal feeding.

Within the sphere of research activities and staff career development:

- Artistic and research activities of the academic staff - publications and citations in peer-reviewed editions and especially in SCOPUS and Web of

Science, as well as issues related to the publishing of research in internationally renowned databases;

- Project activity - managing the internal university project terms, the timely preparation of documents and the progress of work on national and international program projects;

- Doctoral training - timely updates to the university Standard for the Training of Doctoral Students; monitoring of the upholding of the Standard; the Doctoral Training Center activities for organizing group forms of training; timely attestation, confirmation and doctoral defense; issues related to doctoral training etc.;

- Staff career development - announced and successfully completed procedures for the recruitment of academic staff etc.;

- Participation of doctoral students in research and publishing, artistic and competitive sporting activities and events.

International cooperation and international education programs:

- Realization of the Erasmus/Erasmus Plus program and other international education programs and BA/MA student-, doctoral-, and staff mobilities - incoming and outgoing;

- Duty travel abroad of academic staff in terms of type, geographic range, main structural units;

- Activities for the realization and optimization of international relations, contracts and agreements for international cooperation etc.

- *Accreditation and post-accreditation monitoring and control:*

- Timely development of programs of measures and fulfillment of recommendations by the Accreditation Committee and the standing committees of the National Assessment and Accreditation Agency from the institutional and program accreditations and the post-accreditation monitoring and control procedures;

- Preparation and realization of program accreditations of professional fields and doctoral programs;

- Preparation and realization of post-accreditation monitoring and control.

Functions of the Internal Quality Control System:

- Fulfillment of the priority fields from the Working Program on Quality;
- Application of the Student Assessment and Evaluation System (Point-Grading and Rating System) and the expanding of its functionality;

- Application of the Credit Transfer System;

- Upholding of the academic and education standards;

- Surveying the opinion of newly-enrolled students; the students` opinion on the process of teaching particular disciplines; the opinion of graduating students and university graduates on the entire course of education;

- Surveying the opinion of employers on the new and updated BA and MA programs;

- Surveying the requirements of employers and branch organizations regarding the parameters of the training within the education and qualification degrees.

Along with the aforementioned branches, information is collected regarding the activities of the Faculties and the University centers and structural units (University Library, Center for Career Development, University Publishing House, Department of Finance and Accounting etc.)

Depending on the purposes of the information different methods of collecting are employed, namely:

- Surveys - they are the most popular way of collecting information from the applying students, enrolled students, staff and employers;

- Collecting opinions, references and reviews from employers, representatives of branch organizations and interested parties, organizing meetings;

- Meetings between the class tutors, faculty and department chairs with students;

- Planned and thematic audits, organized by the University Quality Control Committee;

- Internal faculty reviews by the academic management;

- Reports from the departments, faculties, university centers and other auxiliary structural units;

- Control visits on the spot in the respective structural units by different academic management bodies;

- For the preparation of information for external institutions etc.

Information is collected in a planned manner as well as in cases of special necessity. The main participants in the process of collecting and analyzing the information are the staff members of different university structural units and at different levels - at faculty level and at university level. Directly engaged in the collecting and analyzing of various sorts of information are also the student management bodies.

The character of information and the methods for its collecting show that external interested parties participate in this process in different ways, namely in the face of representatives of business, various organizations and institutions, which ensures the continuous cooperation with them and connectedness to practice and implementation.

The information is analyzed and presented to different bodies for reviewing and making executive decisions - namely, to those of the Academic Council, the

Rectoral Council, the Faculty and Department Councils, the General Assembly of the University, the General Assemblies of the Faculties.

In addition to serving institutional needs, information is provided externally for the annual editions of the rating system, statistical purposes etc.

The information is published in paper-based form, at the university website and on the web pages of the faculties, centers and departments depending on its purpose.

The University Quality Control Committee collects data regarding the activities of the main and auxiliary structural units by means of planned general and thematic audits.

All audits include BA/MA students and/or doctoral students. These undergo training and orientation regarding their participation in the audit and are equal members of the auditing teams: taking part in the reviewing of documents, the meetings with the academic staff, the discussions within the team, the reporting of the findings etc. A positive practice is the fact that the members of the auditing team are not members of the audited faculty, which provides the opportunity for comparing the established educational and managerial practices within the different structural units and is a sort of exchange of experience. The auditing of the auxiliary structural units allows for the detailed observation of the work of the various administrative offices and specialists.

The University Quality Control Committee and auditing committees also include representatives of the trade unions.

After the processing of the data received in the course of the audit, the findings, analysis and recommendations are presented to the respective faculty and department management bodies for taking corrective actions.

Part of the information collected at the university has to do with the level of availability of resources for the education process in terms of material and technical base, staff, information and financial resources.

Providing the necessary material, technical, information and financial resources is an important part of the University Development Strategy. The primary tasks in achieving the main goal of the Strategy include an up-to-date education and research infrastructure; highly-qualified academic staff; the application of modern methods and technologies in the education and research activities.

Strictly monitored are: the observation of the requirement of the Higher Education Act for employing staff with academic rank under basic legal terms of employment to lead at least 70 percent of the lecture courses within the curriculum; the availability of properly approved documentation pertaining to the process of education - job descriptions, curricula and syllabuses for all programs and disciplines. The observation of these requirements is a compulsory element of each annual institutional audit whose objects are all main structural units with the professional areas and BA and MA programs they offer.

Information is constantly gathered regarding the available resources for education activities and their financing. The information is provided by the responsible structural units - the Finance and Accounting Department, the Department of Education Administration, the Chief Specialist of the Department for Academic Staff Research and Development, the Department of Human Resources, the Center for Career Development, as well as the main structural units. This information serves as a basis for making decisions regarding the renovation of the resources and facilities in all their aspects. The information is taken into consideration by different management bodies.

The effectiveness of the methods applied within the System of Quality Control is evaluated on the basis of the specific results from its functioning in the university activities, regarding the correspondence between the achieved results and the set strategic goals and tasks.

Information is gathered and analyzed in terms of the interest towards the education programs provided at Shumen University as well as about the profile of the student body. Such information is acquired via the “Enrolment Campaign” module of the Internal Information System for Administrative Facilitation of the Shumen University. The interest towards the programs is analyzed during the analysis of reported results from the current Enrolment campaign and during the planning of the next campaigns, as well as cyclically during the entire period of realizing enrolment activities.

Information regarding the university activities for fulfilling its mission statement and strategic goals is constantly being collected, summarized and analyzed. The gathered information is systematically analyzed regularly, at different intervals.

Annual summary reports are presented to the Department and Faculty Councils and the Academic Council containing information about:

- The results from the Enrolment campaign (in November);
- The results from the realization of the projects financed by the national budget (in January);
- The results from the research and artistic activities of the academic staff, the students and the doctoral students (in February and March);
- The realization of the Working program on the observation, facilitation, assessment and management of the quality of education and the academic staff (in October);
- The results from the activities of the Center for Career Development (in March);
- The activities of the University Library (in February);
- The activities of the University Publishing House (in November);
- The activities of the consultative organs of the Academic Council.

The rectoral management body reports to the University General Assembly annually on its activities during the year. The deans also report to the Faculty General Assembly of their structural units.

The information is summarized and analyzed in the mandate reports of the rectoral and dean management before the General Assembly of the university/faculty.

All documents are available to the academic community at the internal information network of the university (Uninet). The results from the analyses are discussed at various management forums and the decisions are made public.

Information is collected based on the institutional audits and internal university reviews which encompass the entire range of indices regarding the effectiveness of the Quality Control System: the financial, organizational, expert, informational, materially-technical facilitation of the education process, the good practices, trends and issues. The university audits evaluate all main structural units, the activity of the Faculty Councils, Department Councils, the committees within them (8 audits per unit); the BA/MA programs organized by the units are audited based on the criteria stipulated in the Quality Control and Monitoring Manual. In general, during the last 5 years have been completed 35 general audits of the main structural units, 69 department audits, 34 audits of auxiliary units. Within the thematic audits have been assessed the activities of 1) 28 departments regarding the education process in 51 doctoral programs; 2) 15 science and research centers; 3) 57 BA- and 77 MA programs regarding the practical training they provide. 36 reviews of different themes have been completed by the Dean's Offices within the faculties.

The annual Project on Quality is planned based on the results from the audits with an emphasis on the monitoring of a particular sphere of the application of the Quality Control System.

The members of the Quality Control Committee participate in these projects along with representatives of the academic structures responsible for the particular sphere, students, doctoral students, practitioners. The results of the projects have been presented at 3 round tables with the participation of the the members of the Quality Control Committees at the levels of University and Faculties, the vice-rectors, the deans and vice-deans, representatives of the administration and students and are available to the academic community within the internal information network, in the "Education Quality Management" category, subcategory "Quality of Education University Projects" (<http://uninet.shu.bg/upravlenienakachestvoto/proekti/>.)

The project-related publications include two collective monographs and 19 articles.

One of the main aspects of the University Quality Control System is the monitoring of the updating of the already existing programs and the development of new ones and of documents pertaining to the process of education. The

University and Faculty Quality Control Committees monitor the approved curricula through the system of auditing and within the process of internal reviewing. The fundamental documents pertaining the methods for approving, modification and augmentation of the curriculum are generally observed. The documents pertaining to the process of education are prepared by the Departments, approved by the councils of the main structural units, undergo expert assessment by the Committee of Education and activities and Educational Policy and after being approved by the Academic Council, are approved by the Rector. The procedure for the development and updating of documentation regulates the participation of students and other interested parties in the process of approval, monitoring and updating of documentation pertaining to the education process.

The information about the number of students with active status and those who have interrupted their education is stored in the university's internal information network and is made available to the Register of Active and Suspended Students of the Ministry of Education. The main structural units and the university in general monitor the processes of development and realization of the students, as well as the percentage of suspended students and dropped-out students.

As per the University Quality Control System, the Departments are responsible for analyzing the results achieved by the students after each examination term in order to take the necessary measures regarding registered cases of problematic process of education.

The summarized information about the university shows that for the period between 2014/2015 and 2018/2019 the average number of suspended students per year is 937.6 (see Table 1), drawing attention to the decreasing number of suspensions and drop-outs during the last 2 years.

Table 1. Number of suspended and dropped-out students for the period of 2014/15 – 2018/19

Academic year	Number of suspended students
2014/15	1097
2015/16	1190
2016/17	1173
2017/18	831
2018/19	397 for 1 semester

The “Students” category of the Internal Information System can provide information regarding the development and the results of the students as well as

regarding the percentage of suspended students at any point. The students` results are monitored also via specific inquiries at the Dean`s Office twice per year in relation to applications for scholarships and the forming of groups and streams for the education of the students at the beginning of each semester. The results are also taken into consideration when considering the granting of permission for the development of a BA/MA thesis, as well as for the selection of students for international mobility programs.

The “Curricula”, “Teaching Staff” and “Teaching Load Distribution” modules serve to collect and organize information regarding the individual work load of each member of the teaching staff, as well as regarding the facilitation of the courses within the BA and MA programs and specialities; regarding the status of the courses, groups and streams in which the process of education takes place.

The main systematically applied instrument for studying the opinion and the satisfaction of the BA/MA students and doctoral students with the quality of education as a means of feedback is the use of surveys.

Surveys are made regularly among students of all years and the results are discussed at department and faculty meetings. Their purpose is to summarize the students` opinion regarding the curriculum, the class schedules, the work of the teaching staff and the administrative services provided.

The university has an established system for surveying the students with developed survey cards for :1) newly admitted students; 2) doctoral students; 3) surveying the opinion of students regarding the education process for a particular subject; 4) surveying the opinion of graduating students; 5) tracking the professional realization of university graduates. The schedule for surveying students as well as for the discussing the results from the surveys by the Department Council and the Faculty Council are part of the Working Program for the Monitoring, Assessment, Maintaining and Management of the Quality of Education and Academic Staff. The results from the survey are digitally processed with the “Survey” software. They are summarized by speciality, faculty and for the university in general. The summarized results are presented to the academic management for further analysis and executive decision-making. The results are available to the academic community on the Internal Information Network (Uninet), in the separate section “Surveys”.

Within a 4-year period surveys have been made of the opinion of 2185 newly-admitted students; 4214 graduating students and 3378 graduates; 4191 students have taken part in the assessment of academic subjects; 174 doctoral students have expressed their opinion regarding the problems encountered in the process of education in doctoral programs. 2984 other student participants in the “Student Practices” project and 1877 in the “Student Practices - Phase 1” Project have given their opinion on the programs they participated in. Information regarding the levels of satisfaction is also provided by the class tutors, who have

direct observations on the process and development of education in their assigned student groups.

The results from the surveys have been discussed at 66 department Council meetings, 28 Faculty Council meetings as well as at a round table entitled “The Professional Realization of Shumen University Graduates - Monitoring, Trends, Problems”. They have been taken into consideration in the preparation and development of new academic courses, the updating of the subject content, determining the forms of independent student work and extra-curricular activities etc.

The opinion of the users is taken into consideration at different levels - department, faculty, university - and is reported by means of the following main forms of feedback: direct communication with supervisors of student practices - resource teachers, managers of institutions and structures within the fields and areas for which Shumen University prepares specialists, who participate in discussing the requirements for the preparation and training of the students in the professional areas; meetings with representatives of the employers in the process of discussing future contracts and agreements, during procedures of program accreditation, the discussing of education documents and the efficiency of opening new education programs etc., surveying.

The surveys are organized by the University Quality Control Committee and the Center for Education Quality Control in cooperation with the Center for Career Development and the main structural units, as well as the administrating departments. The surveying is done on the basis of an established model for a survey card for employers.

The results from the survey are also made available to the academic community on the Internal Information Network (Uninet - <http://uninet.shu.bg>).

Employers also express their opinion on the education and training of the students, the necessary changes to them and the forms of cooperation between education and practice. This is done at meetings with expert groups on accreditation (245 employers), via the coordination of documents, in discussing changes to curricula and syllabuses, by presenting reviews and statements, participating in committees for the development of self-evaluation reports etc. (over 160 participations). In their role as mentors and teacher-tutors, representatives of employers`organizations have shared 1877 statements on the participation of students in the “Student Practices - Phase 1” Project and in the apprenticeship practices.

The Center for Career Development has a Register of the Companies and Organizations where students and doctoral students from Shumen University have their apprenticeships and practices or find professional realization. Currently, this register includes 793 companies and organizations with an added number of 45 during the period of monitoring.

All of the above gives reason to draw the conclusion that Shumen University collects and analyzes the necessary information pertaining to the realization of the Quality Policy and the functioning of the University System for Monitoring, Assessment, Facilitation and Management of the Quality of Education and the Academic Staff. This process includes the participation of students, doctoral students, academic and administrative staff, external interested parties. In internal audits the auditing parties, according to the requirements of the System for Quality Control and Monitoring, include representatives of the students, the employers and trade unions and their opinion is taken into consideration in working on the improvement of the activities and quality.

The university gathers and analyzes information about the education resources, the effectiveness of the methods applied by the System for Quality Control, the realized procedures related to the monitoring, updating and approval of the university documentation, the level of satisfaction of the students with the quality of the education process and their level of success. The analyzed information is used in the making of executive decisions at all levels for enhancing the quality of the theoretical and practical education for the purposes of a more successful professional realization of the students.

References:

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