



# How to Achieve Quality Higher Education in Macedonia

## Screening of the Reforms in the Higher Education Sector in Republic of Macedonia

Analytica

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**List of Abbreviations:**

European Credit Transfer System – ECTS

European Union – EU

Gross Domestic Product - GDP

Higher Education – HE

Higher Educational Institution – HEI

Information Technology - IT

South-Eastern European University - SEEU

## Introduction

The Higher Education (HE) system is created to enhance the production and dissemination of knowledge, and nowadays above all, to get a hold on the new consumer good - information. Hence, latest transformations made the role of education in the overall development of societies explicitly applicable, changing the goal of knowledge from search for the truth to search for ways of augmenting power, becoming increasingly adjusted to national requirements.

Contesting globalization, no country is excluded from the politico-economic trends currently transforming higher educational institutions. On the European continent this trend is unequivocally defined by aiming to establish a common European Higher Education Area, development depicted by the Bologna process and most recently by the Lisbon objectives<sup>1</sup>. Republic of Macedonia as a candidate EU country is adjunct to this international agenda, additionally having national interests in implementing such objectives in context of fitting the European socio-cultural milieu.

Being a post-socialist country, categorized as underdeveloped and undergoing what is perceived to be a never-ending transition, Macedonia has been confronting circumstances different from those facing the core four EU countries for which and from which the Bologna agenda was designed initially<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly interpreted, the Lisbon Declaration is achieving a broader outreach such as aiming towards market-economy educational system and democratic governance model of university organization. Hence, the process is introducing reforms not constitutently a part of the Bologna process but essential for creating conditions necessary for the implementation of the European agenda.

Following the development logic, the Bologna process in Macedonia should be aimed at pushing structural reforms in the educational system relevant to the indigenous needs of the emerging economy, and at the same time, struggling against budgetary limitations, resistant governmental structures and know-how deficiency. All this in order to adapt to the country's cultural, economical and social needs and sustainable development patterns, integrally supporting national reformation processes in general.

**Considering the reform of the educational system to be of significant importance for the EU approximation process, Analytica has initiated this research in order to generate information on, and analyses of the effect of government policies on the development of HE sector, monitor the formulation and implementation of these policies and identify the gap between policy (governmental and institutional) and practice. The final goal is to argument number of recommendations for improvement and further sustainable development of the HE system in the country.**

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<sup>1</sup> For more official information on EU education and training policies: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et\\_2010\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html), (accessed October 6, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The Bologna Accord is based on the conclusions of Sorbonne Declaration signed in Paris 1998 by the education Ministers of UK, Germany, France and Italy.

Considering the Macedonian experience of open-ended transition character and non-consistent reformation process, first remark on policy design and implementation results underlines the existence of contingency-dependent practice frameworks, continually initiating problems requiring immediate institutional respond, not presupposing and resetting the standards according to which these replies are regulated. However, this study tends to avoid social politicization prescription. Instead is focusing on facts about the general state of the educational system, significance of those facts defining the major themes and developments, in order to determine if essential changes have taken place, assess their impact and show in which ways can the reformation process be fostered and improved. Therefore, the main emphasis of the analyses is put on:

- How is the strategy for national development of the HE system been set in relation to the current capacity potential of the sector?
- How and by what means has the national policy framework regarding HE changed reflecting on the EU regulative?
- What is the impact of this policy's implementation on different segments including governance, financing, administrative practices, curricula reforms etc.?

## Methodology

There is a general opinion among actors included in the HE process about the insufficient interest on data collection and research on the performance of this sector, which contributes a great deal to the problems in policy development and implementation. Provided information in this report are mainly derived from the legislation, national regulations, institutional regulations, official documents and other recognized sources concerned with, but not always in particular on HE.

Although there is a little hard data in this field of study, no national reports and only scarce domestic reform agendas, the State Statistical Office<sup>3</sup> is maintaining a continuous program of periodic data collection that facilitates trend analyses. The statistical data used in this report are discussed with domestic experts in order to relate the quantitative information to the different perspectives of HE actor's experience.

As there were no survey data available in regards to this specific research problem and screening agenda seemed too broad for performance of in-depth survey by Analytica's team, an ethnographic approach in supplying interviews was applied to increase the validity of the study. During the research process a number of stakeholders involved in HE sector were interviewed including ones on managerial positions, academics and students. Most of the conclusions synthesized from the quality research are therefore consensus based, but one must take into account that perceptions mainly rely on personal experience and may cause some bias.

Important to note in this direction is that leaders and managers expressed more positive feelings about the governance and management of their institutions than academics and students. Level of criticism was as well extremely expressed among managerial structures in the public education sector, while the private institutions were more PR positioned moderating criticism. The initial selection of indicators was a subject of consultations as well as a result of a desk research on international surveys with special focus on most recent policy analyses performed by the European Commission. As the research is nationally oriented number of additional interest matter has arisen from the questions and interests of the HE actors interviewed as well as from observations on everyday practice of university life.

Embedded in the subject-matter, the tendency of such multidisciplinary approach is meant to provide more flexibility to the specific socio-political context in order to offer balanced bottom-up as well as authority positioned outlook, providing in that way a general picture along with a more detailed view on certain specific aspects which will demonstrate viable proof about the validity of recommendations to policy makers. Although the report is an outcome of collective effort, all those who contributed to the producing process stay anonymous due to the offered discretion on part of the research fellow conducting the research. The charts, graphs and tables are produced specifically for this report. English versions of reports, document and data bases are used when available and gathered as such.

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<sup>3</sup> General information available on-line: [http://www.stat.gov.mk/english/glavna\\_eng.asp](http://www.stat.gov.mk/english/glavna_eng.asp) (accessed, October 14, 2008).

## General Information

The first University in Macedonia established after the World War II, constituted out of three faculties all located in Skopje - the capital of the country. Being one of the state instruments the University activities during socialist time enjoyed a great deal of authority and received a considerable amount of state finances incorporating their activity in the overall socio-political environment. The number of faculties significantly increased in the following decade and a second university was established in Bitola.

After the initial outburst of HE institutions in 1950-60s the situation enfacd stagnation fixing the existing organizational and curricula constellation which will characterize the extended period to follow. Statistic figures and lack of development strategy shows that such inertness reflects on enrollment and performance results as well as lost of interest on the side of the relevant actors well accommodated into the system. Data generated after country's independence point to unremarkable changes in this particular sector at the same time reveling some inconsistencies.

<i>Study year</i>	<i>Number of faculties</i>	<i>Number of students (gross)</i>	<i>Number of lecturers</i>	<i>Number of enrolled students in I year of study</i>	<i>Number of graduated students</i>	<i>Number of MA graduates</i>	<i>Number of PhD graduates</i>
<i>1989/90</i>	25	27759	1367	.....	2884	95	46
<i>1990/91</i>	25	24846	1032	8877	2500	104	91
<i>1991/92</i>	26	25440	1108	9288	2464	92	80
<i>1992/93</i>	25	24719	1085	8745	2325	67	38
<i>1993/94</i>	26	25657	1122	8810	2179	67	49
<i>1994/95</i>	27	26959	1122	9495	2150	66	28
<i>1995/96</i>	30	28073	1192	9029	2527	43	51
<i>1996/97</i>	30	29868	1341	9187	2597	77	56
<i>1997/98</i>	30	32048	1350	10628	2564	76	54
<i>1998/99</i>	28	35141	1335	11692	3288	106	34
<i>'99/2000</i>	29	35995	1443	12346	3338	74	46
<i>2000/01</i>	29	39406	1437	13268	3180	156	68
<i>2001/02</i>	29	43587	1501	13711	.....	96	51
<i>2002/03</i>	29	44731	1487	14180	3294	61	59
<i>2003/04</i>	29	45677	1540	13364	4178	110	67
<i>2004/05</i>	38	48252	2893	13590	4725	189	92
<i>2005/06</i>	36	47092	2826	12921	5132	203	85
<i>2006/07</i>	43	55673	2695	15527	5771	272	82
<i>2007/08</i>	.....	64 254	3506	18583	.....	.....	.....

***Table 1: General Variables in High Education Sector in Macedonia<sup>4</sup>***

The above figures show that immediately after Macedonia gained its independence (1991) there were no significant changes to the HE system having almost fixed number of faculties until 2004 when as a result of the inter-ethnic conflict (2001) changes in the legislative were introduced to liberalize the sector, creating possibilities for establishment of private High Education Institutions (HEIs) and university language of study other than the official national language. Although created under pressure of the International community,

<sup>4</sup> The data used are extracted from the official Yearbooks and Annual Reports of the State statistical Office and organized according to the needs of this research.

the establishment of the South-Eastern European University (SEEU) in Tetovo was to open new opportunities for extensive involvement of the Albanian ethnic community in the educational process, thus through this liberalization vitalizing the sector for further reforms and initiatives for establishment of other private HEIs.

As a result, and even more with the kick of signing the Bologna Declaration in 2003 and adopting the latest legislative in 2008, significant dynamics can be noted in the last 4-5 years (see table 1). The number of faculties almost doubled not including the other HEIs such as scientific institutes and specialized education facilities licensed for educational activities on tertiary level. Considering the limited infrastructure and facility resources, these institutions still enroll very small percentage of the student population. Latest data from 2008 show that 17.9 % of students were enrolled in the private sector paired by 81% in the public sector (0.4% were enrolled in the religious faculties). Therefore, the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education level<sup>5</sup> in Macedonia of 24.4% is a lower optimum compared to the EU countries figures varying from 20% to 70%<sup>6</sup> and has a potential for further improvement<sup>7</sup>.

Further analyses show that although the gross enrollment is rising (stressing here the role of the private HEIs) the number of graduates still remains very low. If this is considered to be one of the HE performance parameters, the situation is worrisome. In 2008, only 29% of undergraduates graduated according to the study terms. Having in mind that one of the main criticisms targeted towards the private HEIs is the low ratio of failed exams; one must put the reasons for such a low graduation rate to questioning, directly relating it to the quality assessment, which will be a subject of discussion in the following chapters of this study. Even more, the number of granted MA and PhD qualifications is significantly low in comparison to the European standards and the private HE institutions being relatively new lag behind in establishing these higher-level studies.

The relevant stakeholders should create a long term strategy for increasing the enrollment ratio which will rely on the existing capacities and development trends. It is essential to include the potential of both public and private sector with an objective of accommodating students so to achieve best graduation performance, additionally creating opportunities for further educational advancement.

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<sup>5</sup> Gross enrolment ratio at tertiary level is the sum of all tertiary level students enrolled at the start of the school year, expressed as a percentage of the mid-year population in the 5 year age group after the official secondary school leaving age.

<sup>6</sup> For comparison, from the countries in the region Slovenia has a highest rating of 60.5% gross enrollment, Romania which is among the new EU member states has 27.3% enrollment rate and Croatia as an EU candidate country has 28.3% enrollment rate.

<sup>7</sup> *Education Statistics-Tertiary enrollment (most recently) by country*, [http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/edu\\_ter\\_enr-education-tertiary-enrollment](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/edu_ter_enr-education-tertiary-enrollment), sources used from United Nations Human Development Program and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (accessed October 27, 2008).

## Funding

Last reports estimate average public expenditure on HE of 1.14% of the GDP in the 27 EU member states with numbers varying vastly across countries, exciding 2% of the national GDPs only in the Scandinavian region.<sup>8</sup> In Macedonia the GDP expenditure on HE has risen from 2101 million denars in 2003 to 3567 million denars in 2005. However, the spending is far below the sums per student projected by the European Commission aimed to make the European education system competitive to the US educational system.

Almost doubling the national budget sum in the period 2005-2008, the financial means distributed to the HE sector in Macedonia have increased accordingly but they are still maintaining low percentage in the overall budget. The HE share in the total education sector expenditure is moving insignificantly. An improvement, though, is noticeable in the distribution of means having 90.55% of the budget money in 2005 spent on salaries comparable to 61.99% salary expenditure in 2008 as indicated in the graph below.

	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>% of HE in the national budget</i>	1.47	1.34	1.82	1.57
<i>% of HE in the national budget for education</i>	12.16	11.45	12.59	13.99
<i>% of salaries in the national budget for HE</i>	90.55	87.26	74.02	61.99

***Table 2: Financial Variables in the Higher Education Sector in Macedonia<sup>9</sup>***

According to the ongoing activities, changes are moving towards redirecting investments into the official government projects such as establishment of dispersed faculties and of “The National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility”. Another input was a small but significant increase of the student scholarships and credits that have not corresponded to the general socio-economic development during the past decade, for the first time available for all students including those enrolled in private educational institutions.

Recently projected budget for 2009 has predicted a significant increase of 4.98% investments in the educational sector. The priorities however are put on reforms in primary and secondary education with unclear investment plan for tertiary education.<sup>10</sup> Having in mind the latest developments such as establishment of private HEIs and Bologna reform process, the HEI funding issue is becoming more complex, increasing the importance of strategic investment planning due to changes in financing modes.

<sup>8</sup> *Higher Education Governance in Europe: Policies, structures, funding and academic staff*, Eurydice, European Commission, 2008, available at: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/pdf/0\\_integral/091EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/pdf/0_integral/091EN.pdf), (accessed November 12, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Internal information gathered from the Financial sector for HE in the Ministry of Education and Science

<sup>10</sup> 2009 Budget Proposal for Republic of Macedonia, available at: <http://www.finance.gov.mk/>, (accessed Nov 26, 2008).



Currently in Macedonia individual faculties have separate legal status and present their budgets to the government, after whose approval appropriations are made directly to the faculties. The Ministry is primarily funding the institutions with lump-sum budgets whose allocation is a decision of the institutional management, often financially redirecting the resources. Additional sums are being granted for small number of scientific projects on competitive basis. Private HEIs do not receive public financial support having their main financial income from tuition fees as well as small financial support from the private sector.

Public educational sector according to the newly adopted law is also eligible for additional private funding and establishment of tuition and administrative fees. Such autonomy has allowed the faculties to have various amount of their income collected from students, some time reaching more than 50% of the institutional budget. This has introduced diversity in student expenditures including changes during the study year which have consequently increased the student costs. On the other hand, collecting private funds through fundraising practices is still unusual for the public faculties since they lack managerial and entrepreneurship skills.

Such emergence of a quasi-market in the HE sector where the market competition is often addressed as unfair is leading to unexpected outcomes with the government institutions having no control over the critical inputs and the overall 'process of production'. Facing market competition and not changing the traditional mode of state finance regulation has made collecting money from students more important for the HEIs than providing quality learning experience and reforming the educational process. High tuition fees in a low living standard country paid for low quality education does not stimulate the increase in student enrollment and fosters social exclusion.

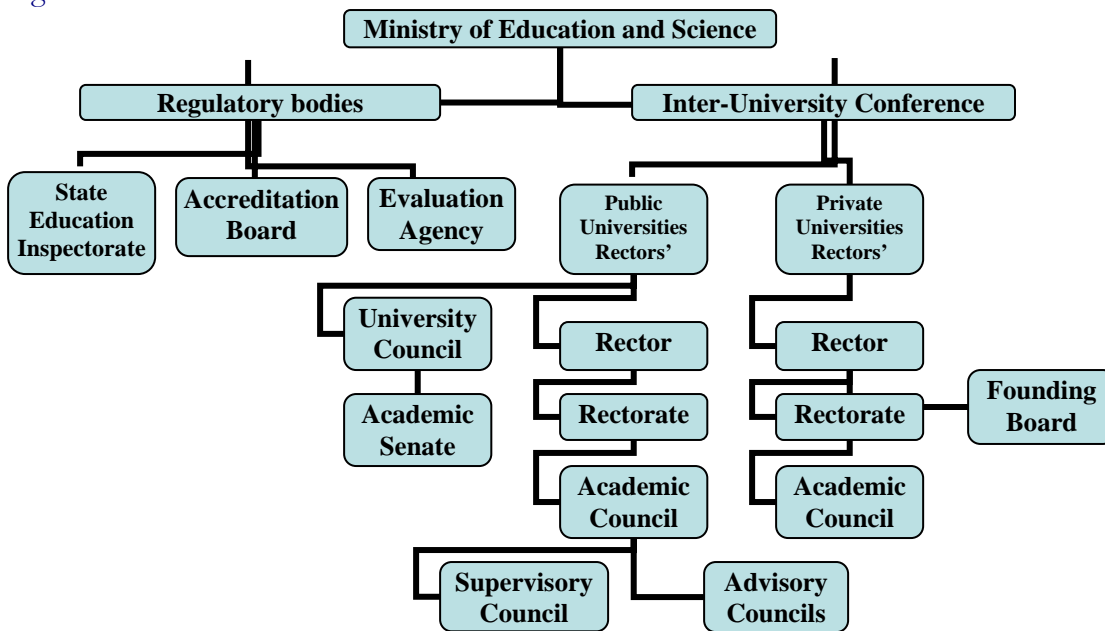
The above analyses arguments the essential importance to establish direct links between performance results and funding such as annual reports, internal and external audit based on clear performance indicators that will produce publicly available information. Current practice shows unreliable financial reports missing quality parameters and visible consequences on further funding provisions. Indicators should provide accountable mechanisms for quality assurance and encourage development of sustainable long-term strategic plans for the institutions that will suggest viable use of public funds. Furthermore, the relevant institutions should consider measures for fostering interest in diversification of funding of public HEIs.

## Organizational Structure and Governance

The governance structure of an institution shows how stakeholders communicate with each other, who is accountable to whom, how they are held accountable and for what, and what form of accountability and information sharing are practiced between the governmental bodies, with external and internal stakeholders, and the public.<sup>11</sup> Bologna process in this regard deals with changing the role of the state *vis-à-vis* HEIs adjusting it to the current socio-economic reality.

HEIs governance tradition in Macedonia is characterized by high autonomy on the part of faculties managed on collegiate-style basis, which along the years of stagnation resulted in organizational structure of weak associations lacking authority and initiative. Current legislation adopted in 2008 introduces opportunities in direction of professionalizing of the management structures, introducing external stakeholders which is provoking significant doubt on the part of the academic public about allocating power procedures. The result is maintenance of the existing governance structure along with introduction of additional governing units according to Bologna directives whose outcomes can not yet be measured.

The following chart depicts delineation of the institutional level governance bodies in reference to their responsibilities and their respective duties according to the legal regulations.



**Graph 1: Organizational Structure of the Higher Education Sector in Macedonia<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>11</sup> *Higher Education Governance in Europe: Policies, structures, funding and academic staff*, Eurydice, European Commission, 2008, 25. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/pdf/0\\_integral/091EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/pdf/0_integral/091EN.pdf) (accessed December 2, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> The Chart is designed according to the *Law on High Education* and data gathered from the HEIs official web-sites.

At the top of the chain is the Ministry of Education and Science, responsible for regulating HE policies, framing national strategic priorities and institutional development. The regulatory bodies are independent and consist of the executive heads of HEIs as well as representatives of other stakeholders (local governance, trade unions, students, etc.) some including directors appointed by the Minister. These bodies are setting quality standards and conducting evaluation, elaborating and implementing policies and standards for improving the quality of HE, at the same time, following the European and international trends in context of their recommendations.

The Inter-University conference outlines the strategic goals of HEIs, coordinates the work of the various Universities including exchange of information and is meant to increase inter-institutional mobility opportunities. Entitled of coordination of the different sectors' interests - public and private are the two Rectors' conferences respectively. They are constituted of the University rectors and members of the rectorates (the executive bodies in the institution). The rector as an executive head is elected by the institution's academic body and the middle management (rectorate) is recommended by the same body but appointed by the rector. By reshuffling authorities and responsibilities between the various levels within higher education, many powers at this point are attributed to the top management of institutions, with the middle management having more informal influence than exact power and leaving to the academics responsibility only for development of study programs and quality assurance.

Looking at the above excessive chart structure, and taking in consideration the statutes of the described governmental units which overlap duties and lack concrete performance criteria creating in that way an opportunity for distancing from accountability, the complexity and ambiguity of the system becomes more obvious. Therefore, for an objective insight of the governance situation within the HEIs, subjective internal relations among actors must be considered. Having various segregations between academics, non-existing recruitment policy and unclear process by which individuals are sorted into status hierarchies, in circumstances where no one gets discharged - most common form of survival is internalizing. In this sense, initiating change in HE organization and governance practices will be as much a conceptual as a technical matter. On one hand, many argue that recent changes in legislative will lead to political misuse of HEIs by appointing managerial structures with political affiliations. On the other hand, there are those who believe that even if the HE governmental bodies get (informally) appointed by the minister it will lead to better management and improvement in efficiency.

What majority agrees on, is lack of professional management expertise on the part of the academic staff that favors external stakeholders taking managerial positions and bringing along outside perspectives, expertise and additional transparency. Equally important is for the manager to take in consideration the consensus-based decision making within the academic bodies leading to pro-active behavior meant to trigger more outward and performance oriented environment. Additional expertise is needed in the administrative sector as well, in order to cope with the governance becoming more complex and dynamic, involving more actors from different levels, especially in regards to networking and mobility. One possibility is that the administrative services are transferred to service centers established by collaborating institutions and working on an interuniversity level, incorporating regular updates for national databases holding information on activities,

academic programs, staff, enrolled students, cost per student, degrees awarded, events organized, libraries etc. Such services can be used by the Ministry for planning, monitoring and budgetary purposes and can serve as one of the steering tools.

Processes of professionalizing managerial structures and allocation of power must not undermine the complexity of introducing decisions taken by an external body without internal support and input by authority figures within the institution. Simplification of the overall organizational structure of the HE sector is necessary with clear distinction of responsibilities and duties of separate governance bodies. At the same time, distinct bodies responsible for distributing and monitoring of public funds management in HEIs have to be established between the HEIs and the government with performance oriented indicators in order to avoid direct political involvement over decisions in HE institutions.

### **Curricula and Quality Assurance**

The new Law on Higher Education adopted in 2008 envisages solutions for number of regulative and practical problems regarding the implementation of the Bologna Accord. Changes in the legislative incorporate curriculum reform focusing on three-cycle structures, competence-based learning and flexibility of learning paths, mobility and recognition. Through certain points it also indicates potential ways in which such reforms may shape issues like access to education, employability etc. How this regulative will help in development of the 'knowledge-based society'<sup>13</sup> depends on various interpretation on behalf of stakeholders perspectives, their power positions and their interactions. So-far experience in other sectors enduring in structural re-formation processes in Macedonia points to traditional reaction to supranational challenges in particular national context. Analyses on already measurable effects in regards to the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)<sup>14</sup> may predict some of the future outcomes.

The three-cycle degree structure is adopted by great majority of the HEIs, creating confusion and practical problems in the current transitional period. The four-year undergraduate program in most cases is synthesized in half-semester courses maintaining the same courses and lecturers as before. However, because of the HE legacy, general opinion on the new degree structure is that three years of study period does not prepare students for the labor market. As pointed in the first chapter, graduation rate in the old system was very low so expectations are to significantly increase the rate, as well as the number of students who pursue MA title, consequently contributing to specialization of the work-labor. Questions appear on adopting the new degrees in sense of competence framework by the employers and the problem of adopting the existent degrees by integrating opportunities for the old system four-year graduates to engage in further specialization.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Knowledge based society' is stated as fundamental principle of the Bologna process.

<sup>14</sup> Introduction of ECTS in public HEIs in Macedonia started in 2003 although some of the Bologna Accord principles were not regulated by law.

ECTS is designed as rather a technical tool to measure student workload and as an element to support mobility and recognition. Driven by the conventional grading practice, not many academics understand the concept of credit validation. The ministry organized workshops on ECTS as means to promote the Bologna process but lack of clarity remains about reorganization of study programs and teaching approaches. Dissemination of the information among academic circles is incredibly low and no expert consultants on the issue exist in HEIs or in the Ministry.<sup>15</sup>

The academic staff in the public sector expresses serious concern in the ECTS implementation while the private sector claims high professionalism in this matter with no need for support, although their students sometimes react opposite. What is more, criteria are not applied equally across universities and even across same study programs resulting with different credit transfer systems existing next to each other. At some faculties ECTS and the new degree structure increased the number of relatively rigid study programs instead of increasing the number of entry and exit points, mainly due to credits assigned to courses retaining the traditional teaching and grading methods unchanged. Sometimes terms of study programs are being changed during the study period without students' consent.

For students the regulations for new study programs are not clear, there are basic regulation information that are being distributed with the study program, many-times not matching the reality and mainly explaining the forms while missing the content.<sup>16</sup> Student information points are equally confused and solve problems in improvisation-style as they come. On many occasions student suffer additional bureaucracy and expenses to extent of assigning prices to credits and especially when coming to flexibility and recognition issues which are the exact purpose of the ECTS.

Prescribed facility and academic staff conditions are as well a huge problem. Recommendations on infrastructure facilities, teaching equipment, number of lecturers and their qualifications are met only in part of the private sector, while the conditions in the public HEIs are in desperate need of serious investment. Universities find themselves squeezed between the public fiscal constraints and burgeoning enrollment that demand larger faculty facilities to accommodate growing classes of students. In such environment the money from student tuition fees are being used in un-transparent ways mostly for salaries and for funding private projects.

In the public sector and to some extent in the private HEIs, conditions of employment of staff, access and admission policies are performed in a much closed manner with no explicit recruitment and hiring indicators inbreeding nepotism and corruption. Firings are extremely rare and never of senior-professors, while academics often refuse to

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<sup>15</sup> Many interviewees claimed that there are insufficient trainings for the academic staff from the managerial structures of HEIs to disseminate the skills and information achieved on various conferences, seminars and trainings in regards to the Bologna process and poor communication among the academic staff including resistance on the part of the academics to accept critique on their work.

<sup>16</sup> During the research both students and academics were much eager to share their predominantly bad experiences of ECTS explaining that “they have no-one to turn to about their problems”.

retire because of the doubtful benefits of their position<sup>17</sup>. There is lack of junior faculty due to necessary approval by the government for new employments. When a position gets approved there is a public add for already existing faculty member with usual preference in endogamy. The process of attracting and promoting excellence gets limited by such practices and competence-based learning becomes almost impossible due to unqualified lecturers.

Competence-based learning is meant to produce qualification profile in which employability is especially taken into account. However currently, no connection is made between competences and learning outcomes. Change towards competence-based curricula is mostly a matter of individual institutions and disciplines varying across different HEIs. There is evident improvement in comparison to content of making choice available and rationalizing expertise. Courses choice makes knowledge and other attributes that students will attain through successful participation in the program transparent and promotes flexible learning paths, an increase in the diversity of teaching modes as well as an increase of the number of entry and exit points. This is considered to be the most important benefit of the reformation process so far.

Furthermore, there are no solutions to the permeability issue between vocational and higher education, validation of study experience at non-university institutions and promotion of student excellence tracks. Most faculties have not adjusted to mobility schemes, there is no internal mobility and only few bilateral agreements are signed. Recently several joint-degree programs were established as positive influence on mobility promotion. Many faculties do not have sufficient resources to initiate the collaboration themselves contributing to absence of academic staff mobility. Apart of lack of interest, main reasons are deficiency in financial means, insufficient proficiency in foreign languages and ignorance in application procedures. A key factor to influence study internationalization are the international offices that are non-existent at some of the public faculties and smaller private faculties<sup>18</sup>. Positive change is the IT promotion of mobility opportunities on the official institution web-sites and possibilities of attaining bilingual documents such as the Diploma Supplement.

Some explicit measures should be undertaken in order to increase the efficiency on short-term notice as the situation is already alarming. The role of lecturers must be reconsidered to increase the interactive communication among the students and their professors. The students' workload must be formulated through objectives of the course so to transfer from grade evaluation to universalistic basis of achievement. Knowledge and information on means to improve teaching and learning must be more systematically distributed on initiative of both institutions and government including coordination among faculties with special focus on pilot projects and training activities. The indicators of quality used to judge the institution must be set clear and standardized on national level further expanding on issues such as access to institutional facilities, quality of academic staff, instructional supplies, information availability etc.

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<sup>17</sup> Salaries of the academics in the public HEIs are significantly low (500 Euro average), serving as an excuse for the professors having additional engagements which is permitted by law and often neglecting their primary educational profession at the public HEIs.

<sup>18</sup> Students report difficulties in communication with the International offices in the private HEIs as well.



## Conclusion

Advocating superficial reforms to obtain EU recognition, the Bologna process is currently driven by the government rather than by faculty members who although agree on urgent systematical reform, judge Bologna process as lowering the quality in higher education. The implementation of the Bologna process therefore, has identified some of the weaknesses in the sector that need to be addressed immediately. If one should expect a positive outcome instead of further complications, two important issues must be addressed as soon as possible, namely the absence of central policy directives and uneven overall reform.

As detected through the research, the further establishment of proper institutional system must have priority in quality assurance. The national centers must deal with this problem in direct cooperation with individual HEIs appointing more accountability to academics and students in the decision making processes in order to make the future reforms more comprehensive. The positive trend of increase in overall student enrollment and emergence of various private HEIs must be managed in a way to only contribute the development of the sector and not open new problems, even more, in times when the public universities find themselves in alarming position.

Considering the overall research analyses of the sector, one can draw number of recommendations that must be taken into account as soon as possible:

### **Governmental level:**

- Establishment of expert commissions on identified problematic issues such as funding, organizational management, curricula development, ECTS, quality assurance etc. According to these issues, short-term and long-term development objectives should be developed for the HE sector;
- Design general directives for HEIs based on the development objectives defined by the expert commissions;
- Establishment of Advisory boards available for the HEIs on their request;
- Functionally reducing the organizational structure by merging bodies such as University council and Academic senate as well as merging the Evaluation agency and the Accreditation board.

### **Governmental and institutional level:**

- Specification of the responsibilities and duties of the regulative bodies with priorities of producing publicly available results and ranking options;
- Establishment of a direct link between the public financial input and public HEIs output in order to prioritize the allocation of scarce resources and stimulate specific HE segments;
- Establishment of standardized quality assurance system on institutional and national level in both public and private sector to prevent variations in outcomes;
- Immediate public investment in infrastructure and facilities in the public HEIs;
- Straightening of the attractiveness of HEIs as a working place - retirement regulations, incensement in recruitment positions such as post-doc, increase in salaries, transparent employment policy in order to secure the best talent available;

- Strengthening of the capacities of HE administration, in particular student services and offices for international cooperation;
- Initiating state support in developing multilingual study programs;
- Initiating state support in developing labor-market relevant study programs;
- Initiating state support for social inclusion study programs.

**Institutional level:**

- Improving the performance of the internal evaluation processes by setting clear standards, parameters, monitoring tools and performance based career systems;
- Improvement of information and communication activities in regards to study programs, instructional regulations, requested student output, ECTS, mobility opportunities, excellence tracks, literature and research data bases, internal quality evaluation results etc.
- Issuing of Diploma Supplement and other official documents by simplified procedure bilingually or trilingual on Macedonian, Albanian and English upon request on the student and free of charge.

In chorus with the above initiatives, a long term and more general recommendations should also be taken into account:

- Conduct a research on the identification of the effects of lecturers as critical thinkers and social actors in regards to democratization of HE. This will help changing the teaching process in order to empower and help students identify problems and realistic solutions, therefore leading to the concept of knowledge-based society;
- To identify which culture and knowledge are incorporated into the curriculum of higher education, for whose benefit, in whose interests and what are the effects. This should indicate how teaching methods, curricula, language of instruction, and new as well as traditional teaching materials can be used successfully to overcome those barriers to higher education which exist to exclude minorities, women, racial, ethnic and linguistic groups and the poor;
- Identify how might the impact of technology be addressed and mediated through higher education curriculum, instructional materials and teaching methods;
- Support relevant research projects, professional associations, HE journals and other media, research centers, establishment of information systems and research databases;
- Support HEIs to directly stimulate economic development by entering into partnerships with industry on their mutual benefit.

The shortcomings in the HE sector identified through the above chapters will be subjected to further analysis in the next Analytica reports. Having on mind the national and European regulative in regards to HE sector, Analytica is to continue addressing the issues of funding, governance and quality assurance in the HE sector through research on three main topics which are of essential importance for improving the current situation in HE: ‘The implementation of ECTS’; ‘The implementation of the national legislative in regards to the HE organizational structure’; ‘Fostering of social integration principles within HE sector’.



***Education and Culture***

***Forthcoming policy publications:***

"Implementation of ECTS in Macedonia"

Contact Information

***ANALYTICA***

Dame Gruev 7/8-3  
1000 Skopje, Macedonia  
tel: + 389 2 312 1948  
web: [www.analyticamk.org](http://www.analyticamk.org)  
[info@analyticamk.org](mailto:info@analyticamk.org)

***Research Fellow on Education and Culture Program:***

Katarina Kreceva  
[kreceva@analyticamk.org](mailto:kreceva@analyticamk.org)

***Analytica*** is a non-profit independent institution dedicated to helping individuals and institutions with the aim to foster lasting improvement in the democracy and governance in Macedonia and elsewhere in the region of South Eastern Europe.

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