

Teaching_and_Learning_at_LBU

When asked about the predominance of programmes in the 'C' category? in one of the faculties, some academic staff acknowledged that this was probably a true reflection of their status but pointed out that the criteria used by ARACIS was largely based on research outputs in the subject specialisations. In this sense this external scrutiny did not offer any great insight into the approach to learning and teaching. Student focus group comments in the SER, however, highlighted the view that some professors are self-centred rather than student-centred and that curriculum design is narrow and failed to reflect the interdisciplinary aspects of the subject. This was confirmed in meetings with students. Nevertheless there was evidence of external, company involvement with curriculum development although it was not clear to the team whether this might result in some programmes being developed that were too closely allied to the needs of a particular company with concomitant risks to the academic integrity of the programmes.

There was a general view expressed both at the level of senior managers and amongst academic staff that the low level of motivation of teaching staff is a serious problem. There were few, if any, promotion possibilities although there was some feeling that the Ministry of Education might change its policy in this area during 2013. Equally no new blood was entering the system with a government moratorium on new appointments. It was noted that staff mobility is generally poor in Romania and that the culture did not encourage movement of staff around the country. One professor expressed the view that it might require some form of legislation to change this. The team also noted that there is a pattern of former LBU students becoming professors and a real lack of external appointments to the teaching staff. In some areas of the university this was compensated for by academic staff studying abroad, either for a PhD or a post-doctoral qualification, and academic staff exchanges. Overall, there was a real concern expressed at a senior level that the quality of learning and teaching and the associated quality assurance systems could not be improved without appropriate resources and greater motivation amongst all staff.

In this context the team recommends that it was important for good practice in teaching and learning to be shared and as much support as possible provided for teaching staff. It was clear that there is potential for sharing good practice across faculties; indeed some professors were keen to see a wider debate on didactic methods. The point was also made by one professor that the current arrangements did not provide for the training of academic staff to be educators and that there would be real benefit from an approach that allowed for the development of educational skills. The team learnt that the university did provide some workshops for teaching staff, for example, on motivating students but there did not appear to be formal staff development plans for staff either at the faculty or the university level. The team recommends that this gap in staff development plans should be addressed and that a particular focus could be on the development of a deeper understanding of some aspects of the Bologna Process such as the embedding of student-centred learning in the curriculum and the clear articulation of learning outcomes. It was notable that both these features were felt to be lacking in discussions that the team had with students from across the university. The team did note, however, that there was a determination at senior levels of the university to provide for the better preparation of staff for teaching and that a new department dedicated to enhancing teaching skills had just been established. There was also recognition that assessment instruments such as examinations needed to demonstrate that the appropriate learning outcomes were being tested.

It was confirmed that an institutional learning and teaching strategy was being developed. The team recommends that this should be progressed with some urgency as it would allow the university to respond to some of the factors raised in the paragraphs immediately above. Such a strategy could also include ways, for example, of promoting technology-aided learning; responding to student concerns over large class sizes; the length of the teaching day; bias in marking; the approach to tackling plagiarism; out-dated library stock; and the disruption of lectures and seminars by some students. It might also consider ways in which the curriculum could be developed to improve graduate transferrable skills, including teamwork, and provide a focus for improving the opportunities for, and the experience of, internships. Some of the most strongly expressed opinions from students in meetings and in comments in the SER related to lack of internships, poor organisation of these opportunities and a sense that they were not allocated on a fair basis. This led the team to conclude that other graduate attributes could also be highlighted, for example, language skills and information literacy, the latter an area that the library might be able to take forward with faculties.

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The team was pleased to hear that, as a key support to such developments, the university was moving ahead with new arrangements for academic support for students. A new personal tutorial system would ensure that, at undergraduate level, all students were linked to an academic member of staff for the duration of their studies. This contact would also be sustained following graduation. The team found that there was general support for this initiative amongst both students and staff. One student commented that students wanted someone to care about them and their studies.

The team was interested to hear that staff in some faculties were visiting high schools and providing additional tutoring to pupils thinking of entering university ? particularly in disciplines that required core knowledge in the sciences. While it was early days this work appeared to be having an impact.