Econ Lit –I210

CURRENT EMPHASES OF THE ADMISSION AND TRAINING OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA

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Introduction

The analysis of the educational market development in this country in recent years allows us to identify processes, which stimulate higher education institutions (HEI) to rethink their competitive positions and encourage them to demonstrate a higher degree of flexibility and adaptability to the new market realities, this time from the positions of active business-oriented entities. It is no accident that the adopted Strategy for the development of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020 and the action plan adopted under the same strategy¹ pays particular attention to several principal trends of substantial impact on the educational market over the last years, such as:

- unfavourable demographic trends since the beginning of the 1990s, (exhibiting an annual decrease in the number of young people finishing secondary education in the Republic of Bulgaria after 2008. This trend has remained steady until 1998, followed by some negative effects (arising from the increase in the percentage of students who drop out or do not wish to finish their secondary education and are, therefore, no part of the educational market in which the HEIs in this country are directly interested);

- progressive and stable growth in the number of secondary-school graduates, who opt for educational institutions abroad (between 8% and 12% of those finishing secondary education). The reasons why a certain percentage of the secondary-school graduates wish to graduate HEIs abroad must not be solely attributed to the quality of the educational product of Universities in Bulgaria. We can outline the following factors which have exerted a negative influence: the poorly developed business environment; the low remuneration of higher education specialists (especially at the start of their career); the excessively high concentration of business and public administration in the capital along

¹ https://mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=4332 (last accessed 19.05.2015).
with poorly developed regions with insufficient potential to ensure the living conditions, etc., sought by young specialists.

- popularization of higher education, which finds expression in easier access to higher education institutions in Bulgaria, which, however, poses the question about the consistency of training quality. The last few years have also witnessed an absurd situation, in which the number of secondary-school graduates is smaller than the number of the announced places for admission by state order at the Universities. The reasons for this are, on the one hand, the demographic crisis and increase in international migrants, mainly young people, and on the other - the absence of a clearly defined state policy with reference to subsidizing Universities. The funds allocated to education as an overall annual amount (BGN 450 mln) are probably enough, but the disproportions of its allotment (by means of the set base allowance per student) have forced a number of HEIs to seek opportunities for greater admission, thus maximizing the amount of the total subsidy.

The above trends are accompanied by a transformation in the educational model as a whole and in particular - transformation of the roles and expectations of the participants in the process of training - lecturers, students, administration. The successful change, or just the opposite - the inability to adapt the roles of the participants in the educational process, exerts a powerful influence on the expected and the achieved results of graduates in the form of a relevant combination of knowledge, skills and competencies, necessary for a good realization on the labour market.

The outlined trends make each University face the dilemma of administering the processes in a way that will allow to simultaneously pursue the following goals:

- guarantee a sufficient number of newly-admitted students;
- halt devaluation of the educational product quality;
- support placement of graduates, which has a direct projection on the image of the educational institution, etc.

The University of Economics - Varna (UE-Varna) is no exception to the other HEIs in its efforts to find adequate positioning on the educational market. That is why the aim of this article is to discuss certain ongoing issues, connected with the processes of admission and training of students at UE-Varna, and on the basis of analysis to define and set forth guidelines and specific measures for their improvement, as well as pose questions, to be addressed by the governing bodies of the University in the coming years. The analysis aims at evaluating the execution of the mandate programme of UE – Varna for the period 2011 – 2015, as well as taking into consideration the fundamental goals, activities and measures, stipulated in the adopted Strategy for the development of higher education in Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014 – 2020 and action plan associated with it.
The admission and training of students are key processes in every HEI, but they cannot be fully realized without the presence of other basic conditions, which are to be communicated in the proper way to all parties interested in the activity of the University: educational documentation harmonized with that of leading European universities; stimulating educational environment; modern library and access to electronic databases; digitization of the book-stock; rich cultural and sports calendar, etc.

In line with the specified goals, and the formulated basic conditions for realization of the key processes in HEI, the article is structured in several provisionally differentiated parts: measures taken for the modernization of the educational activity of the University; admission of students, training of students (including degree of student performance and information support of the training process).

1. Measures taken to modernize the educational activity of the University

The last mandate period (2011-2015) of UE-Varna is aimed at creating the conditions for sustainable development of the University. A major priority in the area of educational activity, which underpins the sustainable development of the HEI, is to improve the quality of training in its various forms and encourage the development of student potential. Indeed, the quality of training is a category, which is difficult to measure whereas the obtained result would always be looked upon with reservations from the point of view of objective truth. In terms of the UE-Varna mandate programme which was approved and implemented during the period 2011 – 2015, the quality of training is seen as reaching a reasonable balance between the trainees’ knowledge, skills and competences and provision of a stimulating environment for the development of students.

In the area of educational activity during the period 2011-2015 the efforts of the Academic Board of UE-Varna have been focused on the following more important areas:

First. Adoption of adequate internal rules and regulations which will help improve the management of the training process. The motives which necessitate these changes are as follows: the need for a better market orientation of the University through removal of restrictions of procedural nature; elimination of restrictions in the form of a penalty year upon failure to sit for state examinations; allowing students who study for their second degree course to sit for their state examinations in the first and the second degree programs within a single examination period; training of students in the educational and qualification degree (EQD) master in an individual study plan; providing training for Master degree students in two degree subject programmes under different forms, etc.
Second. Updating the educational documentation in conformity with good European practices and the state requirements for the different EQDs, aiming to achieve a balance between the knowledge, skills and competencies of the students. For years the University has been committed to the practice of providing a full review and update of educational documentation in the various EQDs at the beginning of each mandate program. The idea is that the changes that have occurred in the educational area and the labour market also find adequate reflection in the training process.

Third. Development and enrichment of educational content with new achievements of knowledge and contemporary business practices, aiming to build professional and key competences of students and increase their competitiveness and aptitude for effective professional realization. Every year the titulars of academic disciplines are expected to update part of the thematic units in their syllabi. In this way the syllabi of disciplines featuring dynamic content can be brought up to date with as much as 70%-80% within a single mandate period.

Fourth. Perfecting the organization, the technological and the material support of the educational process by using a greater scope of contemporary audio-visual, information, communication and multimedia products, modernization of the information system and provision of high-speed Internet².

Fifth. Putting the credit transfer system to good use at optimal student workload, offering a wider choice of elective subjects and educational forms as well as mobility, based on partnership with the academic community in this country and abroad.

Sixth. Stimulating the process of acquiring skills, enhancing self-study practices for students and their involvement in team work, through research and using forms and mechanisms to encourage research activities and ensuring a more active feedback in the process of training.

Seventh. Adapting the on-line admission platform to the trends on the educational market (through changes in the normative documents regulating admission; computerization of part of the processes; introduction of electronic entrance examination, etc.).

Eighth. Creating conditions and prerequisites for better adaptation of first year students (changes in the schedule of the education process; since 2014 the newly-admitted students are familiarized with the structures in the University and the main landmarks of the city of Varna; implementing a policy towards a smaller number of examinations in the first semester, etc.

Ninth. Extending the practical training through appropriate methods, forms and means on the basis of innovative partnerships with the business and the public administration\(^3\), through hourly involvement of Bachelor degree students in the structures and the activities of the University, as well as through their active participation in student placement projects.

Tenth. Provision of incentives for noteworthy students, who have taken top positions at national and international forums (conferences, Olympiads, competitions, sports events, etc.).

Eleventh. Improving the foreign language training of students.

Twelfth. Creating partnerships with foreign universities, leading to joint degrees to attract students.

Thirteenth. Expanding the range of the distance learning forms of study (DLFS), through offering new programmes in the various EQDs, including more intensive use of electronic forms for regular (full-time) studies and extra-mural (part-time) forms of study.

Fourteenth. Diversification of the programme structure in EQD bachelor and master. The development of the above structure should not be based entirely on increasing the number of courses/programmes. The University has adopted the rule that programmes, which failed to generate demand within two consecutive years, are not to be offered in the next campaign.

The indicated measures for modernization of the educational process have been recognized as successful and contributing to the sustainable development of UE-Varna. They cannot and should not be viewed in isolation in so far as they are mutually supporting and complementing each other. The dynamism in the development of the educational market (not only in this country) requires systematic tracking of the changes and adopting new measures to help the university in its process of adaptation, including the transformation of practices and processes.

2. The admission of students to UE-Varna

The ambition to respond proactively to the unfavourable trends which are being observed on the educational market (the demographic crisis, the active redirection of

\(^3\) In the various programmes of EQD bachelor and EQD master part of the classes are given by representatives of the business. They also actively participate in state examination boards. Since the beginning of May 2015, already there functions an innovative partnership network for continued interaction "University - business" (developed under the Operational Programme Human Resources Development). The project is realized with the help of a great number of representatives of the business, among which Varna Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which shows their positive attitude to UE-Varna.
young people abroad, etc.) has directed the efforts of the Academic Board of UE-Varna towards improving students admission in all three EQDs (professional bachelor, bachelor and master)\(^4\). This has made necessary certain measures to be taken (which are subjected to analysis and are, if need be, further adapted), the more important of which are:

- annual update of the regulations on admission in the various EQDs, as well as of the accompanying internal normative documents;
- introduction of standardized criteria to be applied to various programmes (i.e. uniform grade rating for application; falling off of the requirement for proof of the level of proficiency in a foreign language for certain programmes; possibility to apply with the score from the state matriculation exam - SME and many other);
- extending the agenda by offering more programmes taught in a foreign language in EQD bachelor and EQD master;
- introduction of an electronic admission test with on-line submission of documents for EQD bachelor, which optimizes the admission process for new students;
- UE-Varna has drafted and adopted new rules for recognition of acquired educational degrees and completed periods of training in foreign higher education institutions, which will make the European Credit Transfer System more efficient;
- establishing active relations with a broad range of secondary schools through joint activities (contests, Olympiads), career counselling and so on, as well as providing incentives (financial ones; incentives connected with eased admission requirements; possibility for early enrolment) for University candidates;
- maintaining and developing contacts with intermediaries on the educational market (Centre for University Candidates Preparation and Information - CCPI and The National Association for Admission of Students - NAAS), with the help of which the University is represented in 28 towns across the country.

The above measures which aim to improve admission, are already yielding results. However when we compare the dynamics of data on the projected and the actually achieved admission - by year - for the various EQD, it seems that there are a number of issues to consider such as: an increase (or a decrease, respectively) in the

\(^4\) At the time of writing the demographic pressure is particularly clearly manifested when applying in EQD professional bachelor and in EQD bachelor. Nevertheless the number of University candidates - by year - indicates preservation of the interest in the vocational higher education in tourism (the College of Tourism), where there are on average 2 candidates applying for one place.
ordered planned admission; a decrease in the absolute number of University candidates in EQD professional bachelor and EQD bachelor along with a parallel retention (and even an increase from the point of view of the absolute number of admitted students) of the interest in EQD master in the final year, etc.

Reports show that planned quotas of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) for admission of students in EQD bachelor to UE-Varna have increased from 2570 in 2011 to 2720 in 2014. The approved planned admission of students in EQD bachelor to the University by year, for the period under analysis has doubled in comparison with that of the previous mandate program, as a consequence of the European trend for popularization of higher education. On the other hand, this administrative measure (in so far as it is the result of the policy pursued by the MES in connection with the realization of the Europe 2020 Strategy, may be said to have depleted its potential due to the strong demographic crisis and as far back as 2013, the planned admission was already achieved with some difficulties. From 2010 till 2014, due to the influence of demographic processes, the number of University candidates decreased (the decrease is by 60 percent). Certainly the demographic factor influences directly the number of candidates to the HEI, but here we should not ignore some other factors of a negative projection on admission: the shrinking of the labour market, which demotivates part of the young people to study and work in Bulgaria; the liberalization of the educational market in the EU; the objectively existing attitudes towards the respective HEI according to its territorial location; "the existence of a tertiary labour market or informal economy, which attracts many young people and creates non-standard work culture and motivation for realization, based on deviations from the legal norms and social standards"; the internal migration of the population, the dynamics and structure of birth rates by region, etc.

From a global perspective, the above-mentioned trend appears to be unfavourable as it shows the serious negative impact of demographic processes. However, we are confident that UE-Varna is prepared to meet this pressure without much confusion. On the one hand we believe that the number of students in EQD bachelor will remain in the range 1600-1700 on an annual basis (i.e. the admitted number of bachelor's degree students on an annual basis until 2011). On the other hand in 2008, great strides were made towards optimization of said activity with the adoption of the regulations of the structural parameters of educational documentation. To a great extent,


6 On 22 Feb 2008 the AC of UE-Varna adopted a Project for Improving Educational Documentation. With the decision of the AC of 25 Nov 2011 (Record No 170) there was updated the Sub-system "Improving and updating educational content".
the educational documentation of UE-Varna (from the point of view of the number of curricular hours and number of places for subjects in the curriculum) follows the established benchmark practices of West European Universities, where the three-year course of studies is realized with 15-20 subjects and 1500-1800 curricular hours. From that standpoint, the optimization of the number of places on the curriculum can be further considered, with a slight decrease in the number of subjects and curricular workload from 2310 to 2200 curricular hours.

With regard to the admission of students in EQD bachelor, a new approach was adopted, namely to target a segment of prospects who are employed or have jobs. To this aim, the admission in PTFS is transformed into DLFS, which is expected to have a positive effect in view of the amount of the state subsidy per student.\(^7\)

The analysis of the data on the structure of University candidates by form of application shows a lasting predilection for SME as a way of application. The percentage of UE-Varna candidates by SME for the past 4 years has risen by 30 percentage points and has reached 84.5% of all applicants.

The data on the individual stages of ranking, confirmation and enrolment allows us to identify the programmes and the forms of study, which are most favoured by University candidates, as well as those programmes in which there is little or no interest.\(^8\) The percentage of the enrolled students immediately after the first positioning for the academic year 2014/2015 is highest in the following programmes and forms of study: *Industrial Business and Entrepreneurship* - DLFS, *Business Information Systems*, *International Business* (taught in English), *Business Economics*, *Public Administration*, *Management and Marketing*.\(^9\) The analysis of this data, as well as received information on applicants choices, allows to make managerial decisions such as whether to open additional groups in the desired programmes or close groups in programmes where admission quotas were not filled in, taking into consideration the approved planned number of students by professional field.

As far as the organization of admission is concerned, it is important to attract more students who can help with the advertising campaign and other admission relevant activities in the various EQD. This practice largely contributes to improving the complex service and effectively communicate information to candidates.

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7. The subsidy per student in DLFS is equal to the subsidy for FTFS and three times as great as that in PTFS. In 2015 there have been offered a total of 8 programmes in DLFS in EQD bachelor.
8. The programmes with the most and least marked demand are described in detail in the report of the mandate programme of the University for the period 2011-2015.
9. Correctness calls for the provision that the lower planned admission in certain programmes automatically improves the rating of a given programme in terms of the indicator in question.
The policy for flexible admission pursued by the Academic Board has led to the testing of new opportunities through the initiation of a January admission in the Master’s degree (EQD) in 2015. The idea of this admission policy is that within a 6 month period, students admitted from other fields of higher education in a preceding bachelor or master’s degree, and graduates of EQD professional bachelor should be able to pass an intensive course of training so that they can meet the requirements of subjects in the core curriculum of professional field Economics. Yet, in spite of the limited timeframe to advertise such an option, a group was successfully formed and is currently undergoing training.

One peculiarity of flexible admission in EQD master is the introduction of a regulatory mechanism applied to programmes, which during the June admission failed to gather a preliminarily fixed minimum number of University candidates. For such programmes no formation of study groups is allowed, which leads to redistribution of candidates according to their next wish. This also helps the formation of more uniform groups with a subsequent financial projection on the budget of the University, thus providing opportunities for higher quality of training and better motivation for students and lecturers.

The analysis of admission in EQD master by form of study exhibits a lasting downward trend in the number of applicants in PTFS. In this connection, a decision was taken, effective from 2015/2016 for equal periods of training in the full-time, part-time and distance learning forms of study.

One of the strategic decisions made, aiming to sustain interest in the Master’s Degree EQD relates to the number of state order students. Since 2011, their number has increased several times - from 150 to 880 in 2014. For 2015, the requested state quota/order is to fully meet the demand for Master's degree programmes at the University. The rationale behind this decision is that by giving up part of the paid training (which is a priori uncertain and there may be expected a decrease in the interest of potential candidates) to ensure in a higher degree - the formation of homogeneous groups and thence - the realization of more secure cash flows and financial benefits for the University. As a result of this policy, the year 2014 witnessed the best admission campaign, (in terms of absolute number of students) in the Master degree programs (EQD master) for the past 4 years (a total of 1549 students as compared with 1188 students in 2011).

Annual surveys on students perceptions (in EQD bachelor) to further their education in EQD master at UE-Varna, however, exhibit a downward trend. Nonetheless, on average, about 78% of the applicants for EQD master have graduated UE-Varna, which is attributed to graduates choice of preceding years to be trained in their first or second master's degree programme at UE-Varna. It is true however that the potential
of DLFS is inadequately utilized, and that many opportunities to attract work graduates from other HEIs have been virtually lost.

As a result of the conducted analysis of the admission of students, we can point out some areas, in which the University should concentrate more effort:

First. Development of partner relations with secondary schools (holding competitions, organizing discussions, etc.). Students from partner schools are to be invited to visit events from the cultural calendar and participate in sports activities held at UE-Varna. The emphasis should be placed on the 10th and the 11th grade forms, because students from these grades still lack guidance and orientation towards HEI and there is a fat chance to provide them with necessary motivation to become students, in comparison with the 12th class (who are supposed to have already made their minds). It is necessary to survey the attitudes of students regarding their choice of a higher school and of a particular programme.\textsuperscript{10}

Second. In rating University candidates, especially those who graduated vocational high schools (in economics, tourism, construction, etc.) the grade of the SME in vocational training should be taken into consideration if students apply for the same programme.

Third. Building partnerships between UE-Varna and foreign universities which lead to joint degrees can be seen as an opportunity to draw/attract students.

Fourth. Involvement of the social networks, the Career Centre, the Information Centre and the Students' Council should be more actively sought in mounting the advertising campaign. In this relation, the new innovative on-line platform establishing the link "university - business", can prove extremely useful if supported by the right staff and appropriate maintenance. The preparation and distribution of the promotional materials for the AS must be carried out until December of the current year for the following academic year.

Fifth. Creation of a platform for online submission of documents for EQD master, including submission of documents in other towns using CCPI and NAAS services or through University representatives / mobile groups.

Sixth. Orienting students to take up master's degree programmes must be done in the context of all activities of the primary academic units ever since their third year as bachelor students. Departmental representatives should also take part in commissions being in charge of admission into EQD master, and give candidates advice and information about the contents of Master degree programmes on offer. It is also ad-

\textsuperscript{10} In 2014 and 2015 such a survey was conducted among a wide range of schools in the whole of Bulgaria, and the results will serve as a basis for taking management decisions in connection with the SA.
visable that the primary units appoint contact persons, from whom Master degree candidates will be able to get more detailed information (in addition to what has officially been published by the Master's Degree Studies Centre).

**Seventh.** Engaging the resource of the Career Centre to offer career advisory services to undergraduate *bachelor* degree students and help them in choosing a programme in EQD *master*.

**Eighth.** Orientation towards integrated inter-departmental and inter-University master degree programmes and development of programme structure aiming to offer hands-on experience and knowledge in different practical areas. Surveys among Bachelor degree students show clearly that they prefer to continue their studies in EQD *master* by taking up a Master Degree program different from the one completed in their *bachelor* degree, as they wish to increase their competencies.

**Ninth.** Communicate in a more efficient way the incentives and activities approved by UE-Varna (i.e. early admission for school students who meet certain criteria; exemption of semester fee upon providing proof of a preliminarily set level of achieved results). Therefore, the set of measures and actions adopted by the Academic Council with the purpose to improve communication between UE-Varna and other target audiences, should be applied in a broader sense.

### 3. Training at Varna University of Economics

University training is a multi-layer process insofar as the HEI performs various functions: reproduction of the social system; preparation of highly-qualified workforce; development and formation of culture; guaranteeing the right to education as a principal human right.\(^{11}\) The social role of Universities is expressed in that they should be transformed into "... centres for training, improvement and preservation of culture".\(^{12}\) In that sense the training of students is to be regarded in terms of factors such as: educational outcomes; created conditions facilitating the process of training; students involvement in various forms of scientific research; guaranteed access to culture in its various aspects. Further down, the emphasis is placed upon the first two factors.

All efforts of the academic staff have been focused upon creating conditions for better quality of education. During the period under study, the University was engaged in the following more important activities towards achieving this goal:

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\(^{11}\) For further details see: Gurova, V. *Obrazovanieto po sveta (problemi i perspektivi)* (Education around the world (issues and prospects)). S., 1994.

- applying the updated educational documentation for attaining compliance with the good European practices and the state requirements;
- activating the functioning of the Distance Learning Centre (expanding the DLFS in EQD master and its introduction in EQD bachelor);
- implementing a policy towards better adaptation of students. To this aim, the Regulations of UE-Varna and the timetable of education process have been updated.
- improving the foreign language skills and competences of students – to this aim, course programs were updated and in their first semester, students study a foreign language as a compulsory subject. From the second to the seventh semester students have the option to study a foreign language as an elective subject, with a workload of 0/30;
- improving the organization and running of the education process using the facility for online selection of the elective and the facultative subjects;
- fine-tuning the evaluation system to measure knowledge and skills of students with an emphasis on developing autonomy and self-study, and teamwork and ensuring a more active feedback in the process of training;
- updating the internal rules and regulations in order to optimize the processes of managing the education process;
- improving the organization, the technological and material support of the education process by means of: broadening the use of state-of-the-art audio-visual aids, information, communication and multimedia products, modernization of the information system and provision of high-speed Internet connection; introducing the e-learning platform Moodle.
- promoting an innovative for Bulgaria form of simulation training in two degrees in EQD master under the project "Business modelling of curricula and syllabi in professional field 3.8 Economics of UE-Varna".
- providing encouragements for outstanding students (upon top achievements in the area of academics, research, culture and sport).

Irrespective of measures undertaken and achieved outcomes in the process of training, the analysis of the data allows us to make the following more important conclusions about UE-Varna for the period 2011-2015:

**First.** The average grades of students in EQD bachelor in the FTFS show a steady decline throughout the indicated period. The negative changes with the PTFS are significantly less pronounced.

**Second.** In contrast to the Bachelor degree programs, students in the Master degree programs perform well, in spite of the slight drop in average grades, which is most pronounced in the FTFS. There are observed normal levels in the number of
failures to sit for examinations and the received poor grades. The number of dropout students remains steady on an annual basis, and so is the number of students who moved to other higher education institutions at their own will.

**Third.** Students at the College of Tourism, Varna show a very good performance. Traditionally, the highest are the grades of students in the PTFS. A positive fact is the high percentage of subjects with a vocational and practical orientation (75% of the subjects in the curriculum).

**Fourth.** A positive effect on students’ performance can be achieved through discussions and seminars in which they actively participate. A similar seminar connected with the quality of training was organized at the University in March 2014. This practice is to be continued more actively, in order to seek the point of intersection between expectations and perceptions of the education process among students and lecturers.

**Fifth.** Traditionally, the lowest grades in all programmes are reported for students who are in their first year of studies, whereas the highest grades are found with the fourth-year students. The analysis of the number of suspended and delisted Bachelor degree students - by year - shows a falling trend for first-year students, i.e. part of the first-year students either do not succeed in adapting to the educational environment, or are not motivated to do so. To aid students adaptation during the transition from secondary school to University training, certain corrections were made to the educational documentation, as a result of which, the number of subjects in the first semester was reduced to 3, and in subsequent semesters - to 4 items. Despite the decreased number of examinations in the first semester, no significant improvement in the grades of first-year students was reported. The main reasons for these unsatisfying results can be sought in the following areas:

- reasons ensuing from the trainees - difficult adaptation of first-year students to the training process at the University; insufficient basic preparation of newly-admitted students; lack of motivation to acquire additional knowledge; inconsistent preparation during the semester; poor or insufficient use of extracurricular workload, etc.;
- reasons ensuing from the trainers – insufficient andragogical preparation; omissions with regard to the methodological coordination of the size of the educational content with the number of classes in the respective subject; non-optimal ratio between the knowledge and acquired skills that are required of students; insufficient interrelatedness between the theoretical level of the subject-matter being taught and the basic knowledge and skills which the student must develop for successful realization; omissions in the criteria and the methods of assessment, in the complexity and number of exam questions; asymmetry with respect to the requirements of the different lecturers in the
same subjects; non-conformity with the requirements for on-going continual assessment during the semester; presentation and interpretation of educational content inconsistent with the level of the students, on the part of some lecturers; the posing of either too high, or too low requirements on the part of assistant professors during seminars; deviations on the part of lecturers from the stated office hours; insufficient competence of part of the assistant professors, who do not have any (or have insufficient) practical experience and methodological qualification; formal attitude towards the education process on the part of some lecturers, which demotivates students; non-compliance on the part of lecturers with the regulation for obtaining feedback on the results of the conducted examinations; low degree of provision of textbooks and training aids in certain subjects; formation of on-going control during contact hours with the students of DLFS, which alienates the latter from this form of study, etc.

The last conclusion which has a bearing on unsatisfactory student and staff performance needs particular attention. A long-forgotten tradition of the University is, to send newly appointed assistant professors to Universities in Western Europe for a short-term specialization (1 to 3 months with a preliminary coordination of the programme of stay and training with the host country). After the process of preparation of the young specialists, they earn the right to give independent classes to students. A similar practice is in place in a number of Universities around the world - the newly-recruited assistant professors attend a course in "Teaching and learning at the HEI" and after its successful completion and having demonstrated sufficient knowledge, skills and competences to participate in the education process, the former acquire the right to access the student lecture halls. A frequently observed mistake among young lecturers is that they are often eager to apply various pedagogical approaches without realizing that pedagogy is directly aimed at the training of school students, rather than University students. In fact, the approaches that ought to be applied in training adults (including those who have already turned 18) are in the sphere of the so-called "andragogy". The latter takes into account the fact that, traditionally, the familiar roles of lecturers and students have greatly changed over the last 20 years. The modern roles of lecturers turn them into: just one of the alternative sources of knowledge; people who motivate and provoke the activity of students; advisors and consultants in professional issues of individuals and institutions outside the University; people concerned about the adequate learning of students; citizens of the present-day Information Society.13

The wrongful orientation towards the pedagogical approach of active lecturer and passively reproducing trainee is often combined with subject orientation of training, with which in the curriculum there are included a certain number of subjects with an accent on the acquisition of terminological apparatus, a sequence of steps, a system of approaches and strategies, etc. Problem-oriented training often remains in the background (regrettably, this holds true in some cases also for training in EQD master). The making of such mistakes, together with the not-particularly-high motivation of a large part of the young people to study, can explain the unsatisfying interest in conventionally taught lectures and conducted seminars.

The modern approach to training requires that students be challenged, encouraged and involved in the study process; they should be provided with the opportunity to make decisions; the lecturer is to demonstrate flexibility and training is be organized by presenting the educational content from the point of view of the needs of trainees; there is respect for the dignity of every student and their experience is used by way of examples in order to visualize the material being presented.

The realization of the modern approach to training is not possible without adequate information support of the educational process. The level of adequacy of the information support for the educational process can be sought in two directions: ensuring the normal flow of the education process at UE-Varna through providing it with computer equipment; the development and operation of information systems.

The area "Ensuring the normal flow of the education process at UE-Varna on the basis of computer equipment" is connected with the process of upgrading the existing equipment and development of computer network. The following results have been reported during the period under study:

- in 2014 the E-learning Centre was put into operation, which includes 3 computer rooms, 3 rooms for holding electronic examinations, a server room with communication equipment and administration rooms;
- a new network structure was built, the communications in which are carried out with the help of controllable commutators Cisco and cable routes with a total length of 6 km, fully compliant with the CAT 6 cable standard and a speed of 1000 Mb;
- the local computer network was further extended by the addition of around 3 km of new cable routes. And a process of staggered replacement of the old communication switches was initiated;
- three new high-speed optical routes were built, connecting the main server room with 3 other key distribution commutators;
- Internet speed has been improved and is currently at 70 MB, etc.
The area "Development and operation of information systems" has a key role in securing the educational process. During the reporting period in the main information system "Student", a great number of modifications and improvements have been introduced, the most important of which being the substitution of the former album number with a faculty number and the introduction of a new identifier: student identification number - SIN. This helped overcome the partial inconsistency between the identifier of students in the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and in the University. Another important novelty in the system is a new module for managing files and the graduation of master degree students in two different programmes.

The students’ admission campaign in 2013 was conducted with a new web-based information system. After 2015 all entrance examinations are organized in the form of electronic tests. The programme for students admission has been reworked to integrate the data incoming from the conducted electronic examinations. At the end of 2014 there started a process of building a new information system of the University, which in pessimistic terms will be completed by April 2016.

Progress made in the training of students at UE-Varna and results achieved in terms of provided information support for the educational process can be further enhanced by specific measures and recommendations in the following aspects:

First. Improving the educational content, the curricula and syllabi, the methodology and the tools of teaching and assessment, in order to ensure a greater practical orientation (by drawing more business professionals and public administration in the training).

Second. Placing an emphasis on the interactive approach (more active inclusion of students in discussions and role-playing games) and problem-oriented training.

Third. Developing the practice of organizing master classes.

Fourth. More active use of the electronic platform Moodle for communication with students in all forms of study.

Fifth. Appointing a coordinator for each programme, whose job is to help students with any administrative or other questions, related to the training process.

Sixth. First-year students are to become the object of a separate policy so that they can adapt faster to the academic environment and methods of training. To this aim meetings can be arranged with first-year students to help them get familiar with the university facilities or address some of their concerns.

Seventh. Improving individual work with second, third and fourth-year students with a view to meet their demand for training and project a better image of course programmes, the Faculty and the University.

Eighth. Developing a standard for training of newly-appointed assistant professors at the University and adopting well-established practices of University training
with the purpose to improve their communicative abilities, shape their academic culture, and raise the level of communication and inspire positive attitudes towards students.

**Ninth.** The primary units are to follow through the development of the education process, in order to identify arising difficulties and contradictions in the bud and to take adequate measures for their prevention or timely elimination.

**Tenth.** Initiating a discussion on the balance between the acquired knowledge and skills on the part of the students and seek opportunities for perfecting the system for assessing the knowledge, skills and competences of students in the individual EQDs.

**Eleventh.** Working ever more actively on the creation and development of partnerships with the business and the public administration, which can provide the opportunity to conduct practical traineeships and to motivate students in the presence of a clearer relation "University - business".

**Twelfth.** Observing more strictly the requirements of the University's internal normative acts in connection with the envisaged control of the education process on the part of the Heads of Departments and the Deans.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of the state and the issues of the educational activity at UE-Varna leads to the conclusion that in this principal and strategic area of the University's activity there have been achieved positive results. At the same time the current process of integration into the European education area demands an even greater effort in the following fields:

**First.** Continuing the process of harmonization of the educational documentation of all EQDs in conformity with the changes in the European education area. In that sense, it is important to adapt the structural parameters of the educational documentation of the University to the average parameters of Universities in Western Europe.

**Second.** Improving the University's system of assessment and maintaining the quality of training and of academic staff.

**Third.** Application of the new system of year-round admission of students along with investing more energy and time into the development of partnerships with secondary schools and representatives of the business and the public administration.

**Fourth.** Ensure conditions to activate the marketing function of the University. To this aim, measures adopted by the Academic Board for more effective communication with the target audiences of the University should be given a broader scope.
Fifth. Intensive work on the development and implementation of a new information system of the University.

Sixth. Raising the quality and improving the content and structure of programmes (major subjects) in the various EQDs, including more active involvement of the primary units with instituting programmes taught in a foreign language and the introduction of various forms of e-learning (including training in the full-time form of study). Widening the scope of DLFO.

Seventh. Effective application of the credit transfer system, providing stimuli for student and teaching staff mobility and optimization of the education process.

Eighth. Broadening the degree of electivity of subjects and introducing the practice of eligibility of lecturers.

Ninth. Careful and critical selection of newly-recruited assistant professors and organization of training in order to guarantee adequate behaviour (in view of the new conditions) in the process of training.

The above areas of future work are to create conditions for maintaining the quality of training and "relevance (congruence of social and economic needs) of university education". 14

CURRENT EMPHASSES OF THE ADMISSION AND TRAINING OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA

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Abstract

In the article there are discussed current emphases connected with the processes of admission and training of students at the University of Economics - Varna, and - based on analysis - there are specified guidelines and specific measures for their improvement. There are posed certain questions to which there are to be sought answers by the governing bodies of the University in the following years. The analysis is conducted in view of assessing the execution of the Term of office programme of UE – Varna for the period 2011 - 2015, as well as reporting on the main goals, activities and measures, set out in the adopted Strategy for the development of higher education in Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014 – 2020 and the linked with it action plan.

Keywords: modernization of the educational activity; admission of students; training of students.