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*HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITIES: ITS  
ROLE IN LEADING AND IMPLEMENTING CHANGE*

**Case Study: University of Žilina**

**University of Žilina: Perspectives on Human Resource Policies**

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## **University of Žilina Perspectives on the Human Resource Policies**

### **Brief History**

The University of Zilina is a modern university providing a full range of technological, economic, management, and a limited range of humanistic and natural science education at under-graduate, graduate and post-graduate levels. During its existence the University has become a reputable institution within the university educational system of Slovak Republic.

The origin of today's University of Zilina goes back to 1st October 1953. It was established under the name of College of Railways in Prague. In 1959 the institution changed its name to the University of Transport and moved to Zilina. As a result of the increasing role of communications, the academic institutions amended its name to the University of Transport and Communications. Since 1989 the University has experienced various organizational, transformational and restructuring changes. These became the deciding factors that enabled to lead this higher education institution towards a modern institution, featuring a character of a full university, named the University of Zilina since November 1996.

The University of Zilina originally housed 3 faculties only. As a result of both a natural development and efforts to make the study more universal, new faculties were established after 1989. All of these were created on the basis, inclusive human resources, of own institutes, departments and faculties already in existence.

After the restructuring, the following independent faculties were established or re-established:

Faculty of Operation and Economics of Transport (1953), Faculty of Civil Engineering (1990), Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (1953 - 1992), Faculty of Electrical Engineering (1953 - 1992), Faculty of Management Science and Informatics (1996), former Faculty of Management Science (1990), Faculty of Special Engineering (1998) transformed from the former Military Faculty (1952), Faculty of Science (1998),

### **EUA institutional evaluation and the consequences**

Recognizing the importance of achieving an international credibility and promoting its identity, the University of Žilina applied for the EUA "Institutional Evaluation". The first evaluation took place in May 2002. Since that time the University experienced important stages of development.

The EUA "Follow Up Evaluation" process and verification of the reality of visions of the University of Žilina in May 2006 provided a qualified identification of University problems and gave support for the University management to focus on the solution of key problems.

The University of Žilina aims to provide university education in accordance with the present requirements, given European standards, and, at the same time, to participate in the development of science and education.

The University of Žilina aims to be significantly involved in the contemporary system of universities not only in the national but also in the international environment, above all, within the European educational area and European research area.

The outcomes of the evaluation have motivated a further process of enhancing the quality of all sub-processes at the University, self-evaluation procedures and established a need for independent evaluations of results and for these results to be compared with objectives of other higher education institutions. In addition, the evaluation process has brought about an improvement in the communication skills of the University staff which is very important for the international academic recognition as well as for international co-operation among institutions.

The University of Zilina is one of the universities with a rather longer tradition in Slovakia. This fact brought about a lot of experiences with more or less difficult changes in its history determined by requirements which were coming from outside like social and political changes after 1968, 1989, and 1993 and these resulted from the continual development of the University within specific time.

The study programmes are restructured in accordance with the concept of a 3-stage system of higher education (in accordance with the "Bologna process"), i.e. B.Sc. degree programmes, followed by M.Sc. degree programmes and Ph.D. degree programmes. Arrangements and preparatory activities leading up to the full implementation of the Bologna process at the University culminated in 2005. In the academic year 2005/2006 for the first time in the history all the newly admitted students were enrolled to B.Sc. study programmes taken as the first study degree in a new 3-stage system of higher education in accordance with the Bologna process. The University faculties were granted by the Accreditation Commission (based on the requests submitted) the rights to offer a sufficient number of study programmes.

The old (unstructured) educational system based on the fields of study is currently provided only for already enrolled students and will run till the end of the academic year 2008/2009 (including). The faculties will have to exert more effort to manage the transition period due to the co-existence of both educational systems.

### **Management activities**

The system of university management proceeds according to the respective legislation, internal regulations of the University of Zilina and its organizational structure. Heads and directors of organizational units of the University of Zilina are responsible for their decisions to the University of Zilina bodies as the Academic senate, the Scientific board, Rector's collegium and Rector's advisory board.

The university's management prepares and decides about principal questions and main activities, development, financing and budget, education and research, labour-management relations, etc.). The faculties are autonomous in their research, training, admission of students, and study programmes and in selecting the academic and administrative staff. The faculties' proposals and decisions are also liable to negotiation or approval in the academic senates of the respective faculties.

### **Strategic university management is based on:**

- Long- term education and research plans and strategic intentions of the University of Zilina and its faculties;
- Regular annual evaluation of long-term education and research plans and strategic intention of the University of Zilina and its faculties;
- Existence and further development of information systems for science, research, education and entrepreneurial activities;
- Ability to find pragmatic solution for improvement the level of educational and research activities;
- Ability of the academic and administrative management and staff to work successfully under frequently varying conditions;
- Openness of teaching process and research process the to international programs and contacts;
- Good potential in human resources /administrative-operational infrastructure - potential contribution to the development of the Institution's research policy and the development of strategic management of research activities;

- Good educated and experienced administrative staff for research management of international project as well as for project financed from national level and project based on university – industry collaboration.

The new Act on Higher Education No. 131, in the Slovak Republic was adopted in February 2002. Its implementation has had a considerable effect on the operation of the University and its faculties and brought several major changes.

While keeping the Human Resources administration centrally organised more management responsibility for staff is being decentralised into the faculties and departments, giving the development perspective a more effective dimension. The responsiveness of the academic and administrative staff depend on many factors such as a previous professional career, access to more information through professional contacts, international experience, or position within the academic community.

The management structure like at other Slovak universities remained after the approval of the new act on higher education nearly the same.

The University executive body is the **Rectorate**. Rectorate is an expression traditionally used for academic and administrative top managements at Slovakian universities.

The **rector** is the legal representative of the University and also the chairman of the University Scientific board, Rector's supervisory board and Rector's collegium. The rector manages directly the Rector's office, legal and control department, vice-rectors, bursar and indirectly the deans of faculties.

The **bursar** manages financial matters of the University. The departments controlled by the bursar are: the Bursar's office, Human resources department, Economics department, Operational department, and Investment department.

The **vice-rectors** supervise the Department of education and student's affairs, the Department of science and research, the Department for development and the Department of international cooperation and public relations. In each department the head of the department organizes its administrative activities.

Implementation of the new Act on higher education incorporates changes in work organisation, management structure and started transformation of many processes performed at the University. New conditions brought a new role as a "service provider" with more attention paid to – students, industry, state administration and other stake holders, etc. The faculties lost their legal identity and submitted it to the University; however, some of the powers were re-delegated from the Rector's Office back to the Dean's Office (e.g. the human resources development and human resources management, to admit students, to make contracts to a certain finance level, to sign agreements, etc.) in order to ensure the required level of flexibility, independence and management effectiveness of individual organisation units of the University.

The quality of provided "services" is correlated to the quality of employees. Human Resources development has become a key feature of the institutional strategy in accordance with recommendation of *Human Resource Policies in Universities, The second EUA workshop, 27-28 February 2004, Dublin, Ireland*. This is positive for the strategy of the organization as a whole.

When implementing the new Act on higher education, a new way of appointing function positions of Professors and Associate Professors have been introduced based on new rules for a time-limited execution of these positions.

The next major topic (connected to human resources development) the managements of the University and faculties pay utmost attention to is the issue of quality assessment. The focus is both on the quality of a teaching process and on activities of the University management. The implementation of the new system of complex evaluations introduced in 2003 and regulated by the "Methodical directive No. 1/2003 for evaluation of complex job performance of employees at the ŽU" (of 16<sup>th</sup> June 2003) signed by the rector and effective from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2003 opened the way for complex evaluations with yearly periodicity. All those working at the university for the period longer than 3 months have to go through the complex evaluation process.

This instrument has turned out to be a good tool of more effective management of the staff giving a chance to formulate short- and middle-time tasks and to evaluate effectively their realisation. At present a set of 5 different evaluation forms is used in the process of yearly evaluation of employees, i.e. the following 5 different groups are evaluated:

Manager;

University Teacher;

Researcher;

Officer, administrative worker, technical worker;

Employees performing activities with dominating manual work.

The University of Žilina has a detailed long time plan of development of its human resources activities. The document focuses, first of all, on the basic trends of development and consequent tasks so that the University could fulfil its mission as efficiently as possible in compliance with the trends of development in Slovakia and the EU. The University will be directed towards those areas of social life, which are influenced with the worldwide trend, i.e. the trend of development towards the humanistic information society driven by knowledge economy.

### **Selection and appointment of professors, academic staff and other employees**

Human resources of the University of Žilina are managed according to Act on Higher Education at the rectorate, faculty and department levels. The department of human resources at the rectorate is responsible, according to the valid acts, for methodical and methodological legal frames, which are adapted by the faculties in compliance with their own conditions. The basic part of human resources activities lies within each faculty.

The mission of each faculty, in the field of human resources, is to create qualified teams of academic and administrative staff and employees within particular departments. The emphasis is put on profound expert knowledge and moral qualities required for educational, pedagogical and research tasks.

There are several factors having impact on actual numbers and categorisation structure of employees at the University of Žilina. At least two of them are worth to be of mentioned – relatively high average age of employees with consequence of retirement process and positive achievement of recruiting new young employees with PhD degree

The Statute of University of Žilina deals with issues of academic employees, i.e. it determines conditions for associate professor and professor appointments, defines the process of recruitment procedures (professor, associate professor, senior and junior assistant professors) and conditions for allocation of academic positions.

The rules of scientific boards of each faculty approved by the University scientific board define conditions required for the opening of procedures to achieve the degree of an associate professor and a professor. Traditionally, these procedures are called habilitation for an associate professor and inauguration for a full professor.

**Habilitation** -a procedure taken by candidates in order to qualify themselves as “associate professors”; it usually consists of submitting a habilitation thesis which is to be approved by the scientific board of a particular faculty. The candidate should also meet the given scientometric criteria.

**Inauguration**-a procedure taken by candidates in order to qualify themselves as “full university professors”; it consists of submitting an inauguration thesis which is to be approved both by the scientific board of a particular faculty and by the scientific board of the university. The candidate should also meet the given scientometric criteria.

The rector issues the degree and diploma of an associate professor. The degree and diploma of a full professor is issued by the president of the Slovak Republic on proposal of the minister of education of the Slovak Republic.

Nowadays, the structure of the university teaching staff (roughly 690 academic employees) is the following: 13% professors, 20% associate professors, 67% senior and junior assistant professors and lecturers. Researcher personal inclusive PhD students in internal form of study account for 410 persons while administrative staff is present with 172 employees. The University of Žilina employs also nearly 510 workers in different services (dormitories, cafeteria, etc.). The human resources at University of Žilina present with 1534 employees an important factor in the city of Žilina.

#### **Position of Employees of Žilina University as stated in Article 24 of the Statute of University of Žilina**

- Employees of ŽU are in labour and legislative relationship with ŽU,
- Contracts on employment, changes and end of contracts in compliance with the law on labour is carried out by a particular faculty acting on behalf of ŽU, if an employee works for the faculty, ŽU in all other cases.
- Teachers, research and managerial workers (according to Article 12 of the statute of ŽU) and heads of the rectorate’s departments according to the internal regulations of ŽU are employed on the basis of an interview announced in compliance with the specified conditions.
- Conditions and procedures leading to the award of scientific and pedagogical degrees of associate professor, professor or visiting professor are specified by law and generally obligatory regulations.

#### **For the future**

One of the main important activities for improvement of the human resources management at the University of Zilina is the preparation of the new methodology for the evaluation of scientific and teaching results. That is very strongly influenced by “Accreditation Commission” which is the advisory board of the Slovak government. We anticipate that the accreditation rules will more contribute to the higher quality of Slovak universities from the point of view of research. Evaluation methodologies of teaching, research and development evaluation at the University of Zilina was and will remain the main activity of the rectorate departments.

Competence of human resources at university in relation to qualification potential and age is favourable. The human resource policy of the University of Žilina is aimed mainly at raising the qualification structure as well as at lifelong education.

The human resource competence is maintained on the basis of the adopted concept of the development of the University of Žilina in the area of the human resource management