

# In search of good governance for universities

Countries all across Europe have been searching for the best models with which to manage their universities and colleges. Appropriate models for good administration and good governance of these institutions of higher education have become regular issues of discussion at both national and European levels with assessments and recommendations being made by public officials and by professional organisations.

The administrative councils of colleges and universities are assuming more responsibility for implementing the strategies developed by their societies and assuring that results are achieved. These councils also have ambitions to boost the prestige of certain colleges and universities and to play a crucial role in choosing and evaluating the managers and leaders of the educational institutions.

By observing the principles of good administration and good governance colleges and universities directly support growth, innovation and competitiveness in the institutions of higher education and in this way influence the overall quality of a nation's educational system.

University governance is the term used to describe various models of administration and governance of both colleges and universities and involves the process of developing a system of values for colleges and universities, determining decision-making methods and influencing the allocation of resources. University governance also describes various functional systems of managerial hierarchy, including the defining of appropriate authorities and succession methods. University governance also connects colleges and universities to other important players within academia and also to the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Academic self-administration bodies are generally seen to have the following tasks: overseeing financial management of the college or university; appointing and dismissing administrative leaders; securing conditions for appropriate courses of study and certifying academic degrees; being responsible for the property of the college or university; and preparing and approving the statute of the college and any of its revisions.

## THE SLOVAK REALITY

In Slovakia, the state constitution, the Act on Universities and Degrees, and regulations of the Education Ministry define basic relations and establish the governance methods of Slovak institutions of higher education. Specific bodies that are involved in governance of Slovak colleges and

universities are the executive and legislative branches of the state, the leadership groups of public colleges and universities such as rectors, chancellors and academic senates, and various professional organisations.

Since academic rights and freedoms have regained their rightful place, there is now a fairly open discussion over the operation of Slovakia's whole system of colleges and universities including the above-mentioned principles of good administration and good governance. Once these principles are fully applied to the life of these institutions, they should contribute to a higher degree of effectiveness and rationality in the educational system.

The Slovak Constitution defines the fundamental guidelines for the operation and management of colleges and universities and articles 42 and 103 establish the right of citizens to study at colleges and universities in line with their personal abilities and possibilities of society. The constitution also stipulates the principle that non-public schools can charge for providing education and it gives the Slovak president the power to award academic credentials.

The Act on Colleges and Universities defines their overall status, establishes basic academic rights and freedoms, provides rules of operation and sets the status of academic self-administration bodies such as the academic senate, the rector, research council and disciplinary committees. The individual schools or faculties within a university have their own self-administration bodies, academic insignia and the like. The university rector approves the establishment, closure or fusion of individual faculties after agreement by the respective academic senates and the Slovak Accreditation Commission.

The government has oversight over the duties of the Slovak Accreditation Commission and allocates the finances necessary for evaluating full-time and part-time courses. The Education Ministry regulates the amount of maximum annual tuition for a given academic year for part-time courses, publishes a list of colleges and universities in Slovakia and oversees the use of state funds by public colleges and universities and the acknowledgement of awarded certificates.

The Slovak Accreditation Commission is a 21-member advisory body of the government which assesses and evaluates the operation of colleges and universities. The commission primarily decides on the eligibility of educational institutions to implement specific study courses and authorises each school to grant academic titles.

The academic community has various professional associations such as the Slovak

Rectors' Conference and the Council of Colleges and Universities of Slovakia, which has a governing board consisting of members elected by academic senates of all universities and colleges. The Council of Students of Universities and Colleges of Slovakia is a similar body. Both of these councils serve as partners to the Education Ministry.

To stabilise and then further develop Slovakia's colleges and universities, it is necessary to implement the principles of good administration and governance. The basic legal and economic tools which are being used to transform colleges and universities in Slovakia are changing their statutes, eliminating a direct connection between the budgets of non-public colleges and universities with the state budget. Taxpayers would no longer co-finance the non-public colleges and universities, political connections would be reduced and thus the indistinct 'political responsibility' for the operation and performance of these schools would end.

Once these principles of good governance and administration are applied to the system, the status and functions of the Slovak Accreditation Commission would need to be redefined as well. The administrative council and management of each higher education institution will carry the responsibility for the performance of their individual college or university. Also, academic titles of professors and associate professors should no longer be granted by the Slovak head of the state. These should be 'functional', meaning that a college or university educator serves as a professor or associate professor only for the time when he or she is actively performing in the position.

The current public character of colleges and universities which, on the one hand, generates an almost exclusive orientation towards classes and forms of study that the students demand and on the other hand, gives minimal consideration to the interests of employers, causes several institutional problems.

Adopting the principles of good administration and good governance would tune the colleges and universities more towards the requirements of the labour market and thus better meet the expectations of society.

**Miroslav Řádek is a policy analyst with the EPPP think tank**

*(The opinions expressed herein do not reflect the views of The Slovak Spectator. The analysis and opinion pieces published in the guide are intended to provide a wider scope of views and opinions and inspire further debate.) ■*