Human resources management at South East European University as a new model of higher education in the Republic of Macedonia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and introduce the concept of management and the planning of human resources at South East European University, and is an effort to reflect on the importance of human resource management in the context of the university’s strategic objectives. This paper also considers the place of SEEU within the Macedonian higher education system and the factors that led to its foundation as a new model of higher education in RM, at South East European University was established on 19.11.2001, on 09.10.2001 it was accredited by the Republican Council for Accreditation of Republic of Macedonia as a private-public institution.

Keywords: Human resources at SEEU; human resources planning; HR strategy; HR procedures; SEEU new model of HE.

1. Introduction

The South East European University (SEEU) was founded in 2001 as a non-profit university established by co-operation between OSCE, USAID, the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (or FYROM) as a contribution towards conflict prevention. There has been a gradual transition from a centrally managed project to a modern form of organisation and governance attracting favourable comment from OECD-IMHE and the EUA. In 2008, SEEU was granted by the Parliament of Macedonia the status of private-public, non-profit university, the first in region, reflecting its emphasis on working in the public interest.

The current status of private-public, not-for-profit, implies that the university, while independent of the state, operates its programmes in the public interest, is eligible for government funding based on contract, and re-invests all surpluses in educational activities or operating reserves. SEE University has succeeded in its mission of contributing high quality teaching and research to the higher education system of the Republic of Macedonia, and in improving access for under-represented groups. In European terms it has grown to the status of a medium-sized university specialising in socio-economic sciences, with a well-equipped, modern infrastructure. It has made significant contributions to the economic development of the region, and through its high rate of employability,
proved its value and educational strengths and attractiveness to students. Relying almost entirely on student tuition fees which are higher than those charged at the state universities, to some extent lower than those charged by the for-profit private institutions, means that we have to be highly responsive to the market and spend a considerable amount of time and resources on ensuring quality. SEEU has a highly developed quality management structure, with practical steps taken through staff evaluations, teaching observation, research selectivity, staff development and student involvement to ensure that we remain at the top of the quality league in the region. Despite the difficulties experienced in the period 2001-2004 in recruiting sufficient qualified staff, SEEU has been committed to an open, transparent and fair process of staff appointments in accordance with relevant laws.

2. Human Resources at South East European University

Having disposed of the unsupported criticisms coming from various quarters in the past, still academic staff recruitment, development and retention remains a key issue: SEEU is moving towards having its own cadre of staff qualified to MA and PhD level by about 2011-12 so not having to rely on part-time staff of other universities.

Changes from a four year to a three year first cycle, and adoption of second and third cycle curricula in line with the Bologna Process, has affected the University’s requirements for different groups of staff. More emphasis will be placed on recruiting staff who are able to teach in English in most fields. Using data collected from teaching observations, management and student evaluations, research activity reports and other relevant sources, and accepting a proposal of the Quality Champion, the University will gradually change its staffing profile to differentiate between first cycle teaching in local languages, teaching in second and third cycle in English, and establishing teams of research-active staff and doctoral students. This will be co-ordinated with financial planning including the future refinement of the University’s remuneration policy.

The Office of Human Resources at SEEU should be reinforced, including more staff development units and the appointment of a Pro Rector who will have strategic planning and staff appointments/recruitment as part of his/her portfolio. It is well known in the University that the success of the Strategy depends on the quality of staff.

2.1. Action Plan of HR

After approval of University Strategy, action plans will be realized within the following areas. The action plan includes:
- Description of basic model used in the University
- Implementation of the basic model
- Control of implementation
- Financial implications

Each action plan will be forwarded to University Council for approval. The Council will every year submit a report to the Steering Group of the Human Resources Strategy, which will report on performance and progress of plans and goals set forth. also included in this procedure is the deeper review of recruitment and retention of staff by the Senate and the University Board.

2.1.1. The process of Human Resources Management at SEEU

Human resource management process is a process through which the University needs paving, respectively provides ways of fulfilling University needs. Management of human resources is a process for ensuring the proper people in the right place and time. According to best practice, the process of human resource management should be based on several principles:

- Process of recruitment (recruitment procedures of administrative-academic staff)
- Process of training,
- Process management and development,
- Process of progress in the profession (staff development) and
- Process of determining the costs for human resources

2.1.1.1 Recruitment

Procedures for recruitment of administrative staff
Any department that needs a new employee should first submit a request to fill the vacancy/post to the Human Resources Office. After the request is submitted to the HRO than the procedure goes to the advertisement on the internet and newspapers, then the HRO makes the list with the selected candidates and conducts interviews and at the end the commission evaluates the candidates and makes a decision/appointment.

Scientific and associates titles at University
In the University, teaching-scientific titles are: Docent (assistant professor), associate professor and full professor, and in the faculties, where the teaching of languages is conducted, there are two additional categories: teaching-professional lecturer and high lecturer.

Proceedings of Associates are: senior assistant, assistant and new lecturer.

In conformity with Article 123 of the Law on higher education in the Republic of Macedonia (OJ no. 35 to 14. 03. 2008), University has engaged demonstrators.

Election procedures
Based on HE Law of RM, the titles of educational collaborators, academic professionals and academic scientific are fix termed. Special section of the HR Office takes evidence and in collaboration with the Faculties’ Deans, six months before the expiry of the currents titles, they initiate the procedure for new election.

The election of collaborators (junior lectors, junior assistant, assistants and teaching- scientific titles- docent) is made by the University Senate. For the scientific teaching titles, associate and full professor, the University Senate only reviews and recommends their election to the University Board. The University Board at SEEU takes decisions for the scientific teaching titles for associate and full professors. The whole procedure in election of collaborators, academic professionals and academic scientific at SEEU is initiated, organized and realized by the Human Resources Office. In the Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Macedonia teaching without an academic title is not permitted.

Despite the difficulties experienced in the period 2001-2004 in recruiting sufficient qualified staff, SEEU has been committed to an open, transparent and fair process of staff appointments in accordance with relevant laws. Having disposed of the unsupported criticisms coming from various quarters in the past, still academic staff recruitment, development and retention remains a key issue: SEEU is moving towards having its own cadre of staff qualified to MA and PhD level by about 2011-12, in order not to rely on part-time staff from other universities.

From September 2009:

a) all new full time recruits at all levels, (except those teaching languages other than English), in addition to the provisions of the Law on Higher Education, must pass TOEFL and TWE at levels of attainment set for each position by the Rector, or have qualifications assessed by the Director of the Language Centre as equivalent.

b). election or re-election to full time academic titles of Docent (Assistant Professor) and above in all disciplines (except those teaching languages other than English) will require, in addition to the provisions of the Law on Higher Education, certification in spoken and written English to levels approved by the Rector, and must have achieved a level of research activity based on the scale approved by the Research Committee and the Executive Committee of the University Board.
At the time of adoption of this Plan we have about 60 staff enrolled for PhD. By the end of academic year 2011-2012 our aim is to complete this process and the University Board has committed adequate resources towards this goal.

(i) Staff development

Further progress is planned in staff development related to future staffing needs, not restricted to academic staff but related to the team approach to support of academic activities discussed above. The Board identified the need to concentrate available resources in this area by establishing a Staffing Committee to exercise independent supervision of management action and to receive regular progress reports.

(ii) Succession planning

Related to staff development, SEEU will during the period 2009-2012 establish a clear policy on replacement of staff as they reach retirement age, and training to fill positions such as Rector, Pro-Rectors, Deans and other office-holders.

(iii) Equal Opportunities and diversity

Although the principle of non-discrimination has been accepted by SEEU from the beginning, a new initiative to develop a formal equal opportunities policy and to implement it, not just in gender equality but also to counter disability and other forms of discrimination was launched by the Board in November 2008. The policy has now been adopted. During the period 2009-2012 it will be monitored and amended as necessary.

3. Conclusions

University plays an important role today in the Republic of Macedonia and in the region has been judged highly successful by both the local and international community. The continuous growth in the number of students, since the foundation, in regular studies as well as post-graduate studies, is evidence enough for the university’s ongoing development and growth and speaks for the constructive and important role played by the university not only in Republic of Macedonia but also in the region. Demand for the University’s graduates in the employment market shows its successful development within the Macedonian education system. Establishment of the Business Development Center has directly facilitated the training and development of qualified young managers in the region generally and in particular in Western Macedonia.

So, our conclusion is stick with the mission: naturally, if circumstances dictate a change in direction, follow the trends, but establish a clear strategic planning framework within which changes can be effected in a sensible way. This is probably the most difficult area to manage. It requires a combination of a consultative, collegial approach and strong management of human resources.

References

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