WP4

CASE STUDY

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Case Study

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DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANISATION

The Catholic University in Ružomberok (CU) is a public university located in Ružomberok, Slovakia. At present, our university has four faculties: The Faculty of Education, The Faculty of Arts and Letters, The Faculty of Health, and The Faculty of Theology. Founded in 2000, the university is known for its emphasis on Christian values and offers a variety of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. It aims to provide high-quality education while fostering moral and ethical development based on Catholic teachings. CU is a medium-sized institution in Slovakia with a diverse student body. The university is both teaching and research-oriented, with a balanced emphasis on providing quality education and contributing to academic research. The university does not only have students from the nearby region, it also attracts students from broader areas, including international students (7,2 % in 2023/2024), reflecting its growing international profile. The university has been developing its international relations, particularly with other Catholic and Central European universities, which adds to its reputation on a broader scale. CU offers a range of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs across various humanities disciplines including education, theology, arts, and health. The university aims to integrate Catholic values with academic excellence, fostering both intellectual and moral development among its students. The exchange of knowledge is necessary for any university.

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Considering this, CU consists of academics and students from different spheres, able to work on its progress. Catholic identity is formed by the work of Catholic intellectuals and the leadership of the university has paid attention to maintaining this ideal since the beginning of CU. CU honours academic freedom, which is the basis for the open dialogue necessary for creative scientific research. CU supports the integral growth of critical thinking and the development of body, soul, and spirit. These attributes characterize educated, intelligent and independent individuals. CU tries to lead students to recognize and appreciate the work of the human spirit. The mission of the university also concentrates on supporting solidarity and in the interest of the common good. Faculty of Education: Number of Departments: 15 (Department of Biology and Ecology, Department of Foreign Languages, Department of Chemistry, Department of Geography, Department of Music, Department of Informatic, Department of Mathematic, Department of Catechetics and Practical Theology, Department of Arts, Department of Pre-school and Elementary Pedagogy, Department of Physical Education and Sport, Department of Social Work, Department of Management, Department of Psychology and Pedagogy, Department of Special Pedagogy).

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Number of Students (2023/24): 1572 students (118 International students, 7,5 %) The Faculty of Education is the founding faculty of the Catholic University in Ruzomberok (CU), it is its largest faculty. It prepares future teachers, educators, social workers, foreign language specialists, artists and managers etc. Higher education at FE CU is based on the European credit transfer system, which ensures compatibility with leading educational institutions, and thus allows student mobility between universities throughout the European Union. The Faculty of Education is situated in Liptov, a unique region in the north of Slovakia, which is characteristic of the picturesque diversity of scenery in the small area – the contrast between high peaks and green meadows. Liptov is Slovak tourist destination number one in the winter as well as in the summer, and it is a „green“ arena full of outstanding natural beauties, adrenaline rush, waterparks, fun, lively folklore and tradition, but also history, culture and unique cuisine. Liptov is meant to be unique because in the small area, we can explore from the beauty of the underground caves, through hot thermal springs in four waterparks to great skiing or hiking experiences in the mountains. The collegiate life is at the same time, considerably cheaper than in other towns in Slovakia.

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MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSESSMENT

The university, through its faculties, is a dynamic development system, and its growth has reached a stage where it is necessary to create and implement an internal self-assessment system. As a university, we are in a continuous process of quality evaluation, but this has primarily been from an external perspective through the accreditation process, periodic evaluations of research, development, artistic, and other creative activities (VER), performance contracts with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic, among others. The university has established both structurally and content-wise an internal quality system, and so have each of its faculties. However, the faculty has still lacked an internal standardized self-assessment system, which is why the Faculty of Education, through its departments, decided to engage in international development projects aimed at creating such a tool. The KNOWLO® system provides a comprehensive approach to organizational evaluation, similar to other excellence models, but with a simplier and more user-friendly methodology.

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Given that both the university and the faculty are large and complex structures, we decided to implement the KNOWLO® framework through the faculty's core structures, specifically the departments. To date, the KNOWLO® framework self-assessment questionnaire has been completed by the Department of Social Work, the Department of Catechetics and Practical Theology, representatives from the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, the Department of Informatics, the Department of Ecology and Biology, and the Department of Management. However, the Department of Social Work has fully adopted and implemented the KNOWLO® system into its organizational structure.

We have also begun implementing the KNOWLO® framework within the International Relations Department at the rectorate, and currently, the department is undergoing reorganization.

The advantage of the KNOWLO® framework is that it guides us to take a comprehensive look at the faculties as well as individual departments through their activities, processes, and stakeholders. This is something we don't always examine in such depth or, in some cases, don't address at all.

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REQUIREMENTS FOR PERFORMING THE ASSESSMENT

The self-assessment process at the Faculty of Education was implemented through the voluntary interest of individual faculty members and the involvement of verified faculty departments, which had previously participated in international projects. The faculty leadership was regularly informed about the processes taking place within the faculty in the context of the implementation of the KNOWLO® framework assessment at the individual departments. We hold regular workshops for faculty staff, where we train them in the processes, but more importantly, we explain the benefits of implementing the KNOWLO® framework into the quality systems of individual departments.

We believe that the voluntary adoption and adaptation of the KNOWLO® framework by the departments is a more natural way of activating self-assessment processes than if it were imposed as a tool for internal quality self-assessment by management. An added value of the KNOWLO® framework self-assessment questionnaire are the discussions that arise among staff when completing the organizational questionnaire, as they collaboratively analyze the different categories. Often, quality-related topics that had not previously been discussed or addressed at the department level are brought to light.

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SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Faculty of Education at the Catholic University in Ružomberok undertook a structured self-assessment process utilizing the knowlo.eu® platform. This initiative aimed to evaluate the quality of its educational programs and enhance overall institutional effectiveness. The self-assessment journey began with a preparatory week where all participants engaged in individual self-assessments. This initial phase was crucial, as it allowed participants to familiarize themselves with the assessment criteria and understand the underlying rationale. By reflecting on their own practices, faculty members could identify personal strengths and areas for improvement.

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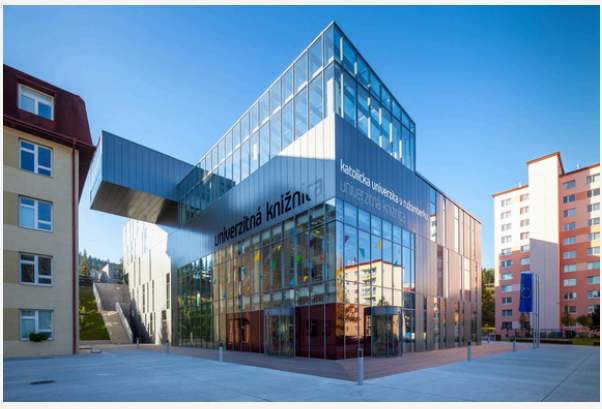
Subsequently, a faculty self-assessment was conducted over several weeks through weekly meetings that lasted one to two hours. During this time, each criterion was evaluated based on the specific time requirements for their assessment. The internal assessors' team was composed of seven individuals with varied responsibilities at the faculty. The evaluators have previously participated in courses where they became familiar with the knowlo platform. This diversity enriched discussions, bringing multiple viewpoints that enhanced the objectivity of the self-assessment process. By incorporating different perspectives, the faculty aimed to create a more comprehensive evaluation of its programs. In conclusion, the self-assessment process at the Faculty of Education not only aimed to meet educational objectives but also fostered a culture of continuous improvement and reflective practice among faculty members, ultimately enhancing the quality of education provided to students.



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RESULTS AND THEIR CLASSIFICATION

We aimed to maintain objectivity while evaluating ourselves against outstanding organizations (especially institutions of higher education) globally. Typically, those competing for Excellence Awards achieve an average score of around 75% across all framework criteria. This benchmark guided our self-assessment process. The self-assessment results for The Faculty of Education CU indicate an overall average score of 56%. This evaluation was conducted using the KNOWLO Self-assessment framework, focusing on various organizational criteria. The strongest areas are Clients (76 %) and Sustainability and product orientation (66 %). On the other side Learning, communication, and cooperation (33 %) and Organisational self-awareness, strategy, and development (33 %) were identified as the weakest criterions, suggesting a need for enhanced performance measurement and comparative analysis.

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FIVE MOST IMPORTANT GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Faculty of Education CU has identified several good practices through its self-assessment process. Here are five notable practices:

a) Organizational Self-awareness, Strategy, and Development: The Faculty demonstrates a strong understanding of its strategic positioning and development needs. This practice involves regular evaluations of its goals and alignment with broader educational objectives. The Faculty conducts regular informal meetings for faculty members (e.g. Gooulash and Christmas party) but also strategic planning sessions that involve faculty members, administration, and student representatives. This practice ensures that all stakeholders contribute to the development of the Faculty's mission and goals, aligning them with current educational trends.

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b) Learning, Communication, and Cooperation: Emphasizing collaborative learning environments, the Faculty fosters effective communication among staff and students. This practice enhances teamwork and knowledge sharing, contributing to a supportive educational atmosphere. The Faculty has established interdisciplinary workshops (ULCA, NELCA) and collaborative projects (KNOWLO) that encourage faculty from different departments to work together. For instance, a recent workshop focused on integrating technology into teaching methods, fostering a culture of shared learning and innovation.

c) Focus on Clients: The Faculty prioritizes the needs and feedback of its clients, which include students and community stakeholders. This client-centered approach ensures that programs and services are relevant and responsive to the demands of the educational landscape. The Faculty regularly gathers feedback from students through surveys. Based on this feedback, they have revised course offerings and implemented students support services.

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d) Sustainability and Product Orientation: There is a commitment to sustainable practices in educational offerings, ensuring that programs are not only effective but also sustainable. Once a year faculty evaluates the compliance of study programs with the needs of all stakeholders. The regular annual evaluation of the study programmes contributes to the fulfilment of their basic criteria.

e) Digital Transformation: The Faculty actively embraces digital tools and technologies to enhance learning experiences. This practice includes integrating online resources and platforms to support teaching and learning, preparing students for a digitally-driven world. The Faculty has adopted a comprehensive online learning platform (MOODLE) that provides resources such as video lectures, discussion forums, and interactive assignments. This platform not only enhances the learning experience but also prepares students for future digital environments in their professional careers.

These practices reflect the Faculty's commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in education.

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FIVE MOST IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT FROM THE SELF- ASSESSMENT

Based on the self-assessment results from the Faculty of Education, here are five important suggestions for improvement:

1. **Enhancing Results and Benchmarking:** The Faculty should develop a more robust framework for measuring outcomes and comparing performance against peer institutions. This could involve setting clear performance indicators and regularly reviewing data to identify areas needing attention, thereby fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

2. Strengthening Digital Transformation: There is a need to further integrate digital tools and resources into both teaching and administrative processes. This can include investing in training for faculty on emerging educational technologies and creating more online learning opportunities to enhance accessibility and engagement for students.

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3. Improving Client Engagement: The Faculty should implement systematic feedback mechanisms to better understand the needs and expectations of students and other stakeholders. Regular surveys, focus groups, and feedback sessions can help tailor programs and services, ensuring they remain relevant and effective.

4. Fostering Organizational Culture and Cooperation: Initiatives aimed at promoting collaboration among faculty members should be enhanced. This could involve interdisciplinary projects, team-building activities, and regular forums for sharing best practices, which can improve communication and cooperation across departments.

5. Developing Sustainability Practices: The Faculty should prioritize sustainability in its operations and curriculum development. This can include creating courses focused on environmental education, implementing green practices within the campus, and encouraging community engagement projects that promote sustainability.

These suggestions aim to address key areas identified in the self-assessment, enhancing the Faculty's overall effectiveness and alignment with best practices in education.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEASURES

At the Faculty of Education and within the Department of Social Work, we initiated the implementation of several enhancement strategies based on our recent self-assessment. To prioritize these suggestions, we employed an “Improvement Selection Matrix,” which allowed us to identify and rank seven high-priority areas for immediate action.

Following this, we developed a detailed “Improvement Plan,” outlining each of the selected suggestions as individual projects, complete with specific deadlines, resource requirements, assigned responsibilities, and other critical details. While we have already commenced some of these initiatives, full implementation will require additional time, given the complexity of some measures.

We used the knowledge gained from the KNOWLO framework in the first major joint activity, in the creation of the Regional Analysis of NEETs in the Žilina Region. It involved 15 people from the Department with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and small groups of cooperation.

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THE IMPACT OF THE RESULTS OF THE FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT

(THE ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS)

The staff and doctoral students of the Department of Social Work completed self-assessments according to the KNOWLO framework.

The self-assessment process has already brought notable benefits to the Faculty of Education and the Department of Social Work. It not only strengthened collaboration within our team but also fostered a deeper understanding of our collective goals. This process helped align our efforts towards shared quality standards, allowing us to harmonize our activities. Engaging in meaningful discussions throughout the self-assessment deepened our appreciation of each team member's role, and enhanced our sense of ownership over the decisions and responsibilities we each hold.

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Upon completing the self-assessment, we conducted a thorough analysis of the reports generated by the KNOWLO® platform. This analysis highlighted both our strengths and areas where improvement is needed, providing us with a well-structured framework — an invaluable tool for our department, especially as part of a larger academic institution. Furthermore, we utilized the platform's "Good Practice Database" to benchmark our performance against other institutions (Social Work Departments in Slovakia). The database provides a wealth of ideas and practices that can be adapted to enhance our own operations.

While we are still in the process of implementing all the planned improvement projects, we have already made significant headway. For example, several long-standing challenges that had not been fully addressed were finally clarified through the structured approach of this process. This clarity has been instrumental in driving positive change within the department, contributing to its ongoing development.

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THE CLIENT BENEFITS

IMPACT ON STUDENTS AT THIS STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION

At this stage of implementing our improvements, students are already benefiting from a more clearly defined organizational structure, which enhances both the efficiency and the quality of our collaboration with them. Each member of our academic and administrative team understands their role more clearly, resulting in a unified approach to our educational activities that students can tangibly experience in their interactions with us.

As we continue to implement the planned improvement projects, these benefits will become even more evident, particularly as many of these initiatives are directly focused on strengthening our student relationships and enhancing the support and guidance we provide throughout their studies. This structured approach will ensure an even more student-centered learning environment that fosters greater collaboration and academic success.

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THE CLIENT BENEFITS

IMPACT ON TEACHERS AT THIS STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION

At this stage of implementing our improvements, teachers are experiencing clearer communication and a more structured organizational environment, which supports more efficient collaboration. With well-defined roles and responsibilities, the teaching staff can focus more on their core academic duties, such as curriculum development, student mentoring, and research activities, without the ambiguity that might previously have existed.

This improved clarity allows for a unified approach to teaching and a consistent application of academic standards across the department. As we continue to roll out our improvement projects, teachers will further benefit from enhanced resources, better administrative support, and a more collaborative work environment, ultimately allowing them to engage more deeply with students and improve the overall quality of education.

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FUTURE PLANS

From our perspective, we consider the centralized dissemination and implementation of the KNOWLO® framework to be counterproductive, as it is difficult to properly implement and communicate its impact within such a large organization as a university. Therefore, we believe it is more advantageous to implement the KNOWLO® framework through smaller management units of the faculty, such as departments. Therefore, in the coming period, we will focus on conducting workshops to present the benefits and system of the KNOWLO® framework to all departments that express interest, even beyond the Faculty of Education.

We will also organize workshops specifically for representatives of the management of individual faculties and the university, to ensure the comprehensive implementation of the KNOWLO® framework across the entire university in the final phase. Currently, an internationalization audit is taking place at CU, which provides an opportunity for broader implementation of the KNOWLO® framework into the university's system. During workshops and evaluation visits, we will introduce the KNOWLO® framework not only to CU staff but also to external international evaluators.

In 2025, we plan to repeat the assessments using the KNOWLO® framework at both the faculty level and the department level.

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