

UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES BELGIUM

1. INTRODUCTION

This study will begin with an overview of how education is structured and organised under the Belgian constitution. It will then give a brief description of the legal framework in which the universities conduct their mission, in order to show the context for assessment at French Community level.

It will go on to describe the system used to organise and manage the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), whereby each part of the university is involved in discussions and decisions at every level; subsequently it will look in greater detail for several types of decisions at the assessment and quality control procedure which ULB has used for a number of years now.

Details will be given of an assessment procedure recently developed as part of specific training activities, and the case study will conclude with an analysis of the comprehensive plan now being drawn up -- the objectives and consistency plan.

2. EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

2.1. Constitutional framework

A unitary state until a few years ago, Belgium is now a federal state comprising three Communities and three Regions, its powers shared between federal, regional and community parliaments and governments depending on the policy area.

The Belgian Constitution establishes the freedom of education and prohibits any measure running counter to that principle. This means that institutions are free to open at will and subject to no restrictions whatsoever. It is therefore possible in Belgium to open schools that have no links with the state authorities. The country accordingly has a whole range of education networks, run by both public and private bodies.

When it comes to language and education, Belgium is divided into three communities, namely the French Community (French-speaking), the Flemish Community (Dutch-speaking) and the German Community (German-speaking).

The legal provisions relating to the education system were formerly the same throughout the country, but now differ in each of the Communities, though the constitutional provisions still apply.

In each of the Communities, the political responsibility for organising education lies with the Ministry for Education and Research.

2.2. How education is organised

2.2.1. General structure

In Belgium's French Community, education is divided into four levels:

- pre-school education for children aged 3 to 6;
- primary education for children aged 6 to 12, lasting six years;
- secondary education for children aged 12 to 18, which may be technical/vocational *or* general, in which case it will be conventional (two 3-year cycles) or “reformed” (three 2-year cycles);
- higher education for students over the age of 18 who have completed their primary education and completed their secondary education, *i.e.* 12 years of schooling.

2.2.2. Structure of higher education

University education

This is divided into three cycles. The overall structure is as shown on figure 1 ¹:

Non-university higher education

- short post-secondary courses last 2-3 years. They lead to a variety of qualifications (*e.g.* *assistant*, *gradu *, nurse, primary teacher, lower secondary teacher);
- long post-secondary courses comprise two cycles, the first leading to a “candidate” diploma (2 years) and the second to qualification as a graduate, architect or engineer (2 years or more).

These non-university courses fall into 7 distinct subject areas: agriculture, art, economics, social studies, paramedical, education, technical.

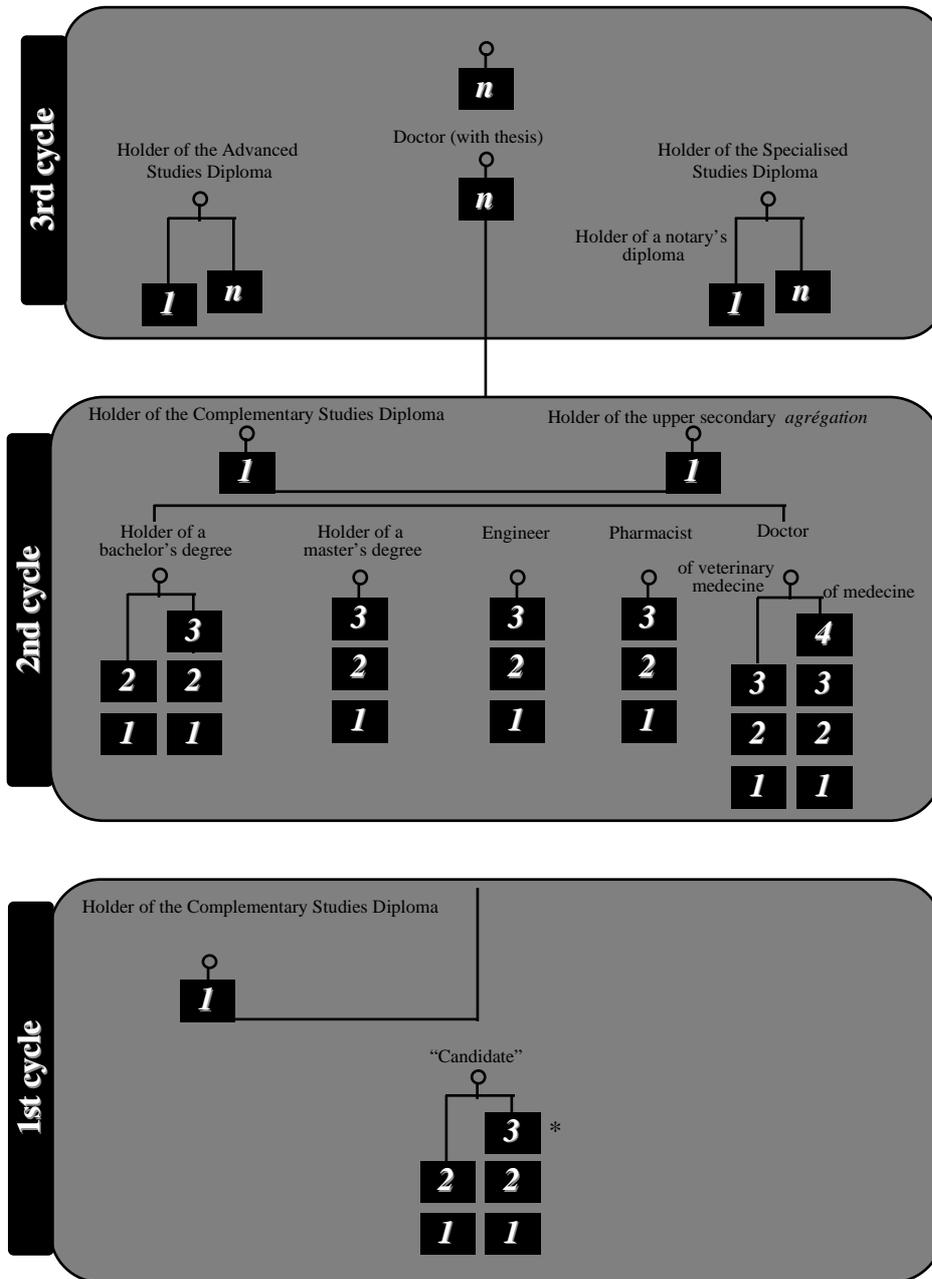
They are taught in 114 establishments currently being regrouped into 36 *Hautes  coles*.

2.2.3. University education

Under the principle of freedom of education enshrined in the Constitution, Belgium's French Community has some universities which it runs directly and other “free” institutions which it subsidises. There are nine of the latter, either full-fledged universities delivering all types of academic qualifications or other institutions authorised by law to deliver a limited number of qualifications. Belgium's university institutions are not all on the same footing.

- community-run universities: University of Li ge (13 000 students);

Figure 1. Organisation of university studies



n = one or more year of study

1 = one year of study

* "Candidate" in theology, medicine or veterinary science

- free universities: Université Catholique de Louvain (19 800 students), Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) (17 000 students); community-run university institutions:

University of Mons-Hainaut (2 550 students); Gembloux Agricultural Institute (930 students);

- free university institutions: Notre Dame de la Paix University Faculties, Namur (4 550 students); Catholic University Faculties, Mons (1 523 students); Saint Louis University Faculties, Brussels (1 190 students); Mons Polytechnic Faculty (965 students).

The universities and other similar institutions run by the French Community owe their existence to an Act establishing their status and the conditions under which they operate.

The free universities have legal personality by virtue of an act of parliament.

The free university institutions are established as non-profit making associations (*asbl*). While they do not as yet have legal personality, the legislation on the award of academic qualifications and on the requirements to qualify for subsidy sets out in great detail the courses they are authorised to offer, thereby implicitly acknowledging their existence.

Facts and figures on education in Belgium's French Community (1995)

Size of the Community	15 000 km ²
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Population	4 200 000
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Enrolment

Primary	470 000
Secondary	360 000
University	61 000
Post-secondary, non-university, long	15 000
Post-secondary, non-university, short	47 000

Total	953 000
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Educational expenditure (BF millions)

Primary	40 820
Secondary	81 000
University	19 000
Post-secondary, non-university	10 500

Total	151 320
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Belgium as a whole

Educational expenditure: percentage of total public spending	9.5
Educational expenditure: percentage of GDP	5.38

Liège, Louvain and Brussels are full-fledged universities, with all the traditional faculties (philosophy and arts, law, science, medicine, applied sciences) plus a varying number of other faculties and schools (social sciences, politics, economics, psychology, educational science, etc.).

The University of Mons-Hainaut is a full-fledged university but confined to specific fields of study and in some cases only to “candidate” level (1st cycle).

The other institutions are not full-fledged universities.

3. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION -- THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. General

While there is freedom of education, to receive subsidies and recognition any post-secondary institution must still meet specific criteria set out in the legislation.

The prevailing legislation is dense and detailed, ruling out any departure from the norm; by the same token, however, it hampers education in adapting to new developments and the realities of the current economic climate.

In practice, the main two pieces of legislation governing university education are the 1971 Act and the Decree of 5 September 1994. While other provisions relating to subsidies for the social sectors of universities, the construction of buildings and the funding of specific areas of research are important, they are of no relevance to this particular study.

3.2. The act of 27 July 1971 on the financing and supervision of university institutions

As its title indicates, the 1971 Act lays down the mechanisms for funding and supervising university institutions.

3.2.1. Funding

Government goals

- To finance, on the basis of shared, objective standards, the operating expenditure of all university institutions whatever the organising authority.
- To use objective criteria that reflect the genuine needs specific to each institution in terms of education and research.
- To cover full-fledged universities and single faculties.
- To ensure that equity in terms of subsidisation is matched by equity in terms of accountability. Accountability is the legitimate guarantee that the substantial resources made available by the State to all university institutions will be used efficiently and rationally and in a manner that is non-competitive, except in learning.

- To provide a block grant for each university institution, which may then decide, freely and according to its own goals and policies, exactly how the funds will be allocated.

Allocating funds and subsidies

As the purpose of the legislation is to set objective criteria for the funding of university institutions, funding standards are written into the Act and the relevant orders.

Calculating subsidies

With the exception of subsidies for research, university institutions are subsidised on the basis of enrolment.

Enrolment is broken down as follows:

- by course group in the full-fledged universities:
 - Group A: Human Sciences (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles).
 - Group B: Science (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles), and the 1st cycle of Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Applied Science, Agricultural and Veterinary Science.
 - Group C: 2nd and 3rd cycles of Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Applied Science and Veterinary Science.
 - Group D: 2nd and 3rd cycles of Agricultural Science.
- by course sub-group in the other university institutions: for instance, in the Human Sciences:
 - Law.
 - Philosophy and Arts, Psychology and Educational Science.
 - Social Sciences, Politics, Economics, Business Studies, Applied Economics.

For each student on its rolls, the institution will be granted a flat-rate subsidy, provided that the student meets a number of conditions. The student must:

- be a national of Belgium, Luxembourg or a developing country, or have parents resident in Belgium;
- be qualified to enter university education;
- pay a registration fee of BF 25 000 (BF 3 000 for those awarded grants).

Foreign students who do not meet the subsidisation criteria may be accepted on condition that they pay, in addition to the registration fee, an amount equal to 50 per cent of the annual flat-rate subsidy per student on the relevant course.

Calculating the flat-rate subsidy per student

The subsidy is based on:

- the **teacher-student ratio**, or the number of students per teacher (expressed in full-time equivalents). The ratio -- not a constraint but a target which should not be exceeded -- is:
 - 1:14 for Course Group A;
 - 1:9 for Course Group B;
 - 1:6 for Course Groups C and D;
- average cost:
 - of teaching staff, based on two members of the academic staff (from the category *professeur and chargé de cours*) for three members of the scientific staff (from the category *chef de travaux and assistant*): the figure is calculated every year on the basis of pay trends for the previous year in the relevant categories;
 - administrative and technical staff, on the same basis;
- trends in other operating costs.

Theoretically this is based on the retail price index. In practice, however, the government reserves the right to determine what the acceptable percentage rise will be.

The average cost of courses in each group can vary in a ratio of one (in Group A) to three (in Groups C and D).

The average costs are fed into a matrix of the university's income broken down by course group.

Initially the matrix was as follows:

	COURSE GROUP			
	A	B	C	D
Teaching staff	58.3	47.6	42.2	56.8
Administrative/technical staff	9.0	18.3	23.3	19.8
Operating costs	32.7	34.1	34.5	23.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In practice, however, the matrix has evolved over time bringing operating costs down to 20 per cent.

Calculating the institution's subsidy

This is obtained by multiplying the flat-rate subsidy per student by the number of students eligible for subsidy on each type of course.

3.2.2. Supervision

Individual institutions are supervised by a government commissioner and a delegate from the Ministry for the Budget, while responsibility for the overall supervision of post-secondary institutions lies with the Department of Education and the *Cour des Comptes* (Audit Office).

SUPERVISORY AGENTS

A) Government Commissioner

Status

Appointed by the Community government in each “free” or state-run university institution. A single commissioner may supervise more than one institution. The post is incompatible with any other post in a university institution. The holder must have a university degree and at least 5 years’ practical experience. Remuneration is on a par with that of a university *professeur ordinaire*.

Duties

a) General

The commissioner ensures that the Governing Board, the permanent bureau and any other bodies with a mandate from the Board do not take any decisions that may contravene the law and the orders and rules relating to it *or* put the finances of the institution at risk.

The commissioner may lodge an appeal with the Minister for Education against any decision which he deems contrary to the law and the orders relating to it. The appeal must be justified, and the commissioner has five full days to act following *reception* of the copy of the decision. The decision is suspended pending appeal.

b) Specific

Prior to any commitment of funds, the commissioner must authorise the purchase of any goods and services in excess of BF 500 000.

B) Delegate from the Ministry for the Budget

Similar provisions to those applying to the commissioner.

C) Minister for Education

The Minister represents the organising authority for state institutions and the supervisory authority for free university institutions.

The Minister receives the appeal lodged by the government commissioner. Where appropriate, he has 30 days to confirm the appeal by notifying the institution that its decision contravenes the law or the

orders and rules relating to it. He gives the institution 30 days to make a new decision that is neither illegal nor unauthorised, or to withdraw its decision.

If at the end of that period the institution has failed to comply, the Minister:

- quashes the decision if the institution is in the state sector;
- suspends all operating subsidies in the case of a free institution. The latter may lodge an appeal with the civil courts against the Minister's decision, which will be provisionally suspended.

D) *Cour des Comptes* (Audit Office)

An emanation of the legislative authorities, the *Cour des Comptes* keeps the Parliaments informed of any non-compliance with budgetary legislation, and exercises permanent supervision over the government's financial management. Where subsidies for university institutions are concerned, it checks the reality, regularity and legality of financial operations.

However, audits may in no way relate to the timeliness of such operations. The university's accounts, approved by the Minister, are forwarded to the *Cour des Comptes* for audit and approval.

The *Cour des Comptes* may also audit the accounts *in situ*.

3.3. Decree of 5 September 1994 on the reform of university education and awards

This decree, which considerably updates earlier legislation in this field:

- divides areas of academic study into three areas:
 - human and social sciences:
 - religious sciences;
 - philosophy;
 - history;
 - language and literature;
 - law;
 - criminology;
 - psychology;
 - educational science;
 - economics;
 - politics;
 - social sciences;
 - science:
 - science;
 - applied science;

- agricultural science and biological engineering;
- health sciences:
 - medical science;
 - dental science;
 - veterinary science;
 - public health;
 - pharmaceutical science;
 - physical education;
 - physiotherapy;
- divides university studies into three cycles:
 - 1st and 2nd cycles covering basic education;
 - 3rd cycle, covering either advanced studies (specialised training or training in research) or studies leading to a thesis for the doctorate or the agrégation;
- confers on each institution the authority to organise university studies and award diplomas;
- sets entrance requirements for university courses;
- specifies the duration of university courses.

The purpose of this decree, known as the Organisation and Management Plan for University Institutions, can be summarised as follows:

- to define a single set of rules governing all university courses and awards for all public and private institutions of higher education in the French Community;
- to give institutions of higher education responsibility for defining and organising all university courses within the general framework set out by the decree;
- to enable university institutions to develop courses more in line with advances in scientific knowledge and allow them greater freedom to define course content;
- to provide a clear and coherent definition of the powers granted to university institutions, *i.e.* the scope for each institution to organise its courses;
- to determine the qualifications giving access to each cycle of university studies and the conditions governing transfers from one cycle to another or from a non-university institution to a university institution;
- to enhance inter-university co-operation and dialogue.

4. ASSESSMENT AT FRENCH COMMUNITY LEVEL

In principle the above legislation guarantees the transparent use of resources allocated to education and sets structural standards to ensure that courses are occupationally adequate. The legislation is also intended to guarantee that courses are equivalent across institutions.

It does not, however, set out indicators relating to quantity, quality or performance.

The only indicator of this type is a sentence slipped into the provisions regarding teacher status in 1995: “The Rector shall publish at least once every five years a report on the teaching, research and service activities of every member of the teaching staff”.

While the regulatory process does guarantee a certain level of quality, it does not provide for actual quality assessment of higher education (university or non-university) in Belgium’s French Community. Yet for many years now some universities have been conducting such assessments, in particular via their research councils and teaching councils.

Assessment naturally raises numerous concerns, particularly about external assessments (by outside bodies), but also about internal assessments. The reasons are usually as follows:

- the fear of seeing external assessment lead to performance tables;
- the fear of seeing assessments fall into the hands of politicians, particularly in the French Community where education is run by a variety of “organising authorities”, *i.e.* state, free confessional and free non-confessional;
- the lack of generally accepted criteria and assessment tools;
- the threat to an institution's managerial autonomy and the academic freedom of its teaching staff;
- the fear of seeing assessment become a new tool for allocating available funds, either among or within institutions.

Most of the current approaches to educational quality assessment, in particular the European Commission's SOCRATES (European Pilot Projects for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education), also frighten a large proportion of academics, who believe it is impossible to assess teaching properly without taking into account the research component which determines the quality of university education.

Those who run university institutions in Belgium’s French Community know full well, however, that one fact must be faced, whether we like it or not: higher education institutions that want to stay competitive will have to undergo quality assessment sooner or later.

To raise awareness among academics, a group of experts from CREF (the Council of University Rectors in the French Community) published a report at the end of 1995 on quality assessment in universities. Summarising the challenges of internal and external assessment, the report concluded with the following recommendations:

“Faculties, departments and other university bodies responsible for teaching and/or research are invited to become more involved in the process now known as “quality assessment”, in any of its forms:

- *quality of teaching (including student appraisal);*
- *quality of research;*
- *quality of the teaching/research interface;*
- *quality of other services to society;*
- *quality of administration.*

Where training is concerned, the definition of general objectives for each diploma course (the skill profile expected of graduates) and specific objectives for the main components of each programme (teaching methods, practical training, dissertations) will enhance programme coherence (content and teaching/assessment methods), suggest areas that would benefit from collaboration, dialogue and restructuring, and ensure good relations with students, employers, other institutions and government authorities, while at the same time guaranteeing the principle of academic freedom.

Voluntary assessment means self-assessment and internal regulation. The institutions that are first to adopt this kind of approach will avoid the pitfalls and possible adverse side-effects caused by over-hasty external assessments of the French Community’s institutions.”

Preparatory work by this expert group highlights:

- the need for a guide to assessment criteria;
- the need to integrate aspects of research that are specific to universities, and their impact on education;
- the need to take into account “student value-added”;
- the need for universities to set their own assessment criteria.

In its opinion dated 7 June 1996 on quality assessment in higher education, commissioned by the Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research, the French Community’s Education and Research Council (which acts in an advisory capacity only, and includes representatives from the organising authorities, trade unions and students) sets out the following principles as a basis for assessment.

4.1. The objective of quality assessment

Assessment should essentially be aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and programmes of study. It should evaluate the value added to students, with a view to feeding the findings back into the system to improve performance. So it is the institution that is being assessed, and in particular whether its goals are consistent with the situation on the ground. Assessment is also aimed at making the institution more accountable by helping it to improve its management of the human and financial resources placed at its disposal.

Assessment cannot therefore affect the amount of subsidies an institution receives from the government, unless that institution has still not taken on board the views of the experts after several assessments.

The assessment report may not serve as a basis for performance or “league” tables of institutions that have been assessed.

4.2. How to meet that objective

- **Self-assessment** is the most worthwhile and relevant part of the assessment process. It should be conducted by those best placed to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the institution in question; it should also enable outside experts to identify key areas on which they should focus. The self-assessment group should include all the actors in the institution (management, teaching staff, clerical staff, students, administrators, etc.).
- In terms of content and procedures, assessment must be characterised by **transparency**; this means that everyone must have full knowledge of the criteria used and there must be channels of communication between the assessors and those being assessed. Self-assessment and external assessment should also be practised on the basis of open **dialogue**. The institution should be able to discuss the report with the assessors and ensure that any differences of opinion are included in it. It is therefore essential to ensure as much co-operation as possible between the institution and the assessors.
- Any quality assessment of teaching should always be placed in **the context of the institution’s mandate** and the resources at its disposal to fulfil its mission. Self-assessment will always be based on “quality indicators”.
- External assessment is conducted by **experts**. It is vital for these outside experts to be peers **acknowledged** as impartial specialists and able to conduct a peer review with the joint competence required by their mandate.
- In line with objectives, the **full draft report** should be submitted to the **institution concerned**, whereas a summary may suffice for wider dissemination. This is because a widely published integral version of the final report may turn self-assessment into self-defence.
- For the *Hautes Écoles*, assessment will be twofold, beginning with a **breakdown by category** -- distinguishing between short and long courses -- and moving on to a full institutional assessment of the *Haute École* when the structure has settled into place.

It should be noted that student representatives abstained from approving the above report, on the following grounds:

“FEF² is abstaining on the subject of quality assessment in higher education.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of this report, the Federation cannot give its approval; it holds the view that, before the issue of assessment is addressed, specific goals need to be drawn up for higher education.

Furthermore, FEF would have preferred to see government subsidies for institutions far more closely tied to quality assessment, and working both ways: more funds for institutions with good assessments and financial penalties for those with a series of poor assessments.

The FEF also believes that assessment reports should be made widely available to the public.”

5. UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES (ULB)

5.1. Historical and salient features

This brief overview of how the university was founded and subsequently developed is particularly relevant, in that it sheds light on the philosophy behind not only education, research and culture at ULB but also its organisation and decision-making structures, all of them highly specific to the institution. **The fact that representatives from every section of the academic community are involved at every level of decision-making says a great deal about ULB's approach to “quality” and the critical element built into the system.**

All of Belgium’s universities, in their modern form, date back to the 19th century. In 1816 King William founded three State universities in Gent, Liège and Louvain. In the wake of the 1830 revolution, the Government slowly began drawing up a Higher Education Act (finally passed in 1835). In the meantime no progress was being made in the three universities, and in 1834 the Belgian episcopate decided to found a Catholic university in Malines (subsequently transferred to Louvain in 1835, when the State decided to close its own university there). This would have given the Church a de facto monopoly in Belgium’s higher education. So Théodore Verhaegen, a lawyer and politician, launched the idea in liberal and masonic circles of establishing a free (or non-denominational) university in Brussels. Within a few months the project took form and on 20 November 1834 the Free University of Brussels (or, as it was called at the time, the Free University of Belgium) opened its doors.

In his speech at the opening of the university, its registrar Auguste Baron declared:

“We vow to inspire in our students, whatever their discipline, brotherly love without distinction of class, creed, or country; we vow to teach them how to devote their thoughts, work and talents to happiness and the improvement of their fellow citizens and mankind.”

The early years were very hard. The university was funded solely from subscriptions and minor subsidies from the City of Brussels and the Province of Brabant. The new institution also came under strong attack for the democratic and rationalist doctrine taught by several of its academics, and enrolment suffered. The government authorities found several ways of undermining the university, one being to prevent it from participating fully in the national examination panels which enjoyed the privilege of conferring academic awards.

But Verhaegen and his masonic friends refused to be discouraged and their perseverance overcame every obstacle. In 1859 the university proudly celebrated its first quarter-century.

It was during these difficult times that the university, founded to protect the freedom of education, liberty of thought and human dignity, summarised its own driving force as the notion of *Free Enquiry*. This is an attitude of mind, a way of thinking, a method of working; it encourages researchers to reject dogmatic preconceptions of any kind and teaches them to accept nothing that

they have not personally verified; it is a set of freely agreed moral standards, a state of permanent meditation on the ethics of one's destiny. Free Enquiry implies respect for human beings and, as a corollary to this, the utmost tolerance. Each member of the university's teaching staff adheres freely to this principle but the students are not forced into any commitments.

The two world wars were harsh on the university, but fostered an even stronger determination to expand ULB by tailoring it to the substantial changes that were to affect Belgium and the rest of the world over the next twenty-five years, culminating in the crisis of 1968. The outcome was a series of far-reaching reforms.

The main reform came to fruition after wide-ranging consultations with the academic community and was established in the new statutes adopted by the Governing Board on 10 July 1970. This gave ULB one of the most liberal and democratic constitutions of any university.

Article 1 of the university statutes confirms and proclaims that the principle of its teaching is Free Enquiry. Whatever the area of study, this philosophy is based on independence of judgement and the rejection of untested arguments.

ULB, given the nature of its commitment, "*welcomes as students in their own right those who do not share its ideals...*". However, students who make a conscious decision to attend this university have a duty to familiarise themselves with its principles. The community into which we welcome all students without exception implies mutual comprehension and tolerance. But the tolerance ULB recommends does not impose absolute respect for the opinions of others. "*How can people respect what they deem to be wrong, what they condemn, what they wish to destroy?*"

Article 3 explains that the university's mission is:

- to ensure the development, transmission and application of knowledge through research and teaching that are free of all political and ideological constraints;
- to provide, through such research, a critical teaching for those who will contribute to knowledge in the interests of the community;
- to provide quality medical care combined with teaching and academic research.

Article 2 is of capital importance to organisation and the decision-making process in the university

It stipulates that:

"The university is organised on the basis of internal democracy, independence and autonomy.

Internal democracy is a guarantee that fundamental freedoms are exercised within the university and that the constituent bodies of the academic community participate, with voting rights, in the management of the university and the supervision of its management."³

Article 2 establishes parity between the academic staff and the three other categories of staff⁴ in decision-making bodies, although one special commission in each faculty is responsible for drawing up proposals for appointments, promotions and contract renewal for teaching staff.⁵

In practice, the Governing Board comprises 17 elected members from the academic staff, including the rector, the vice-rector and the former rector who are elected separately, and the seven faculty deans; then there are 17 elected members from the three other categories of staff (five from the scientific staff, seven students and five members from the administrative, technical and management staff). These 34 members then elect a further four from among representative figures in social, political and economic life who have proven their attachment to the university; another member is elected by former students.

The university bureau has seven members, namely the chairman of the council who is also chairman of the bureau, the rector, two members of the academic staff, one member of the scientific staff who is not on the academic staff, one student and one member of the administrative, technical and management staff. They must all be members of the Governing Board. The vice-chairman of the Governing Board and the faculty deans attend deliberations and have a consultative voice.

Under Article 6 of the statutes, the Board may delegate as required to facilitate its mission. One example is the creation of standing advisory commissions. It appoints their members who must be drawn from the Governing Board, board deputies, experts and elected delegates from the university community.

The Governing Board establishes six standing commissions:

- the research council;
- the teaching commission;
- the administrative commission;
- the student affairs commission;
- the finance commission;
- the planning and investment commission.

In 1834 ULB had four faculties, 34 lecturers and 96 students. Today it boasts seven faculties and a large number of institutes, schools and research centres, over 2 800 teaching and scientific staff and over 17 000 students, some 5 800 of them from other countries.

5.2. Some facts and figures on ULB (for the year 1995)

5.2.1. Size (excluding hospital staff)

-- full time students: 17 500

-- teaching staff	FTE ⁶	Number
teaching staff	406.33	1 137
tenured scientific staff	225.92	265
non-tenured scientific staff	<u>307.46</u>	<u>716</u>
Total	940.71	2 118

-- scientific/research staff in FTE: 726 (including contract staff)

-- administrative staff in FTE: 1 051 + 261 contract research staff

The total staff numbers around 4 200.

5.2.2. Annual operating budget (excluding hospital)

BF 7.5 billion, or Ecu 193 million.

5.2.3. Research budget

BF 3.6 billion, or Ecu 89 million.

5.2.4. Faculties

The university as a whole comprises the seven faculties traditionally found in the education system, plus other schools and institutes.

FACULTIES	Number of students	Percentage
Philosophy and arts	3 206	18.7
Law	1 976	11.5
Social sciences, politics and economics	2 467	14.4
Psychology and education sciences	1 180	6.9
Science	1 918	11.2
Medicine	2 474	14.4
Applied Science	1 104	6.4

SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTES	Number of students	Percentage
Public Health	259	1.5
Physical Education and Physiotherapy	431	2.5
Pharmacy	457	2.7
Institute of Labour	288	1.7
European Studies	189	1.1
Modern Languages and Phonetics	--	
Environmental Management and Land-use Planning	154	0.9
Solvay Business School	992	5.8
Institute of Statistics	68	0.4

5.2.5. Specific profile of ULB

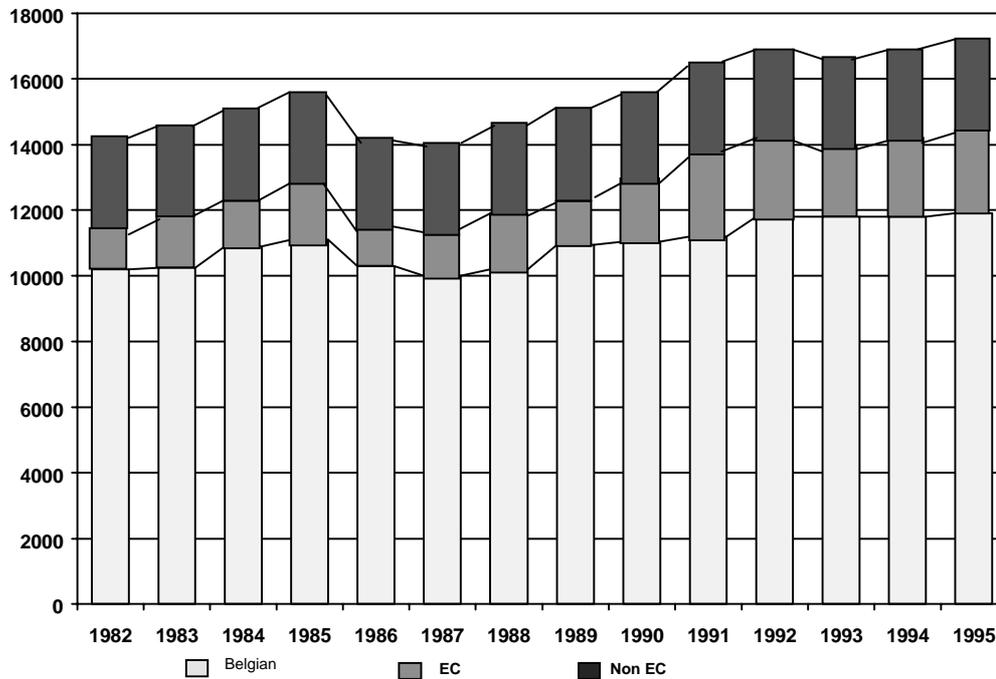
- Free non-confessional university, *i.e.* subsidised (and supervised), but not run, by the government. Education and research are based on democratic ideals and the principle of Free Enquiry, or the rejection of untested arguments.

- Run by a Governing Board which appoints and dismisses staff, draws up programme content and the list of awards, and takes sole responsibility for decisions affecting budget policy and institutional development plans.
- One-third of its students are non-Belgian, from 100 different countries; 6 per cent of staff come from abroad.
- A university hospital with 900 beds and a vast network of training hospitals for medical students, in Brussels and the French Community, as well as a cancer care and research institute (Institut Bordet).
- Three main and several other campuses, two science parks and two business and technology centres.
- A large proportion of teaching time spent on seminars and practical work.
- Numerous post-university training courses.



STUDENT NUMBERS

On 1 February of each academic year



6. REGULAR WORK ON QUALITY

Quality management and assessment, and the implications for decision-making, can be addressed in a plan covering the whole university or single faculties, departments or courses; they can also be addressed on a regular basis with specific goals that must be constantly monitored and reworked, at the risk of becoming routine after a while.

Below are five examples of this kind of initiative conducted at ULB, in some cases for more than two decades and in others just for a few years, using methods that are constantly evolving.

The first part, however, is that ULB has standing bodies addressing quality, as well as temporary commissions to take this work further in areas of strategic importance to the university's development.

The *planning bureau* is a standing administrative body. It is in fact a planning tool suggesting long-term policy. Independent of the administration, it is attached to the rector's office. It plays a technical role in that it draws up Governing Board decisions and commission proposals.

The planning bureau's mandate is twofold, in that it conducts forward-looking studies and analyses budget issues. It draws up studies on new policy directions for the university or on internal reviews, needs analysis and medium-term projects and plans.

The planning bureau reports directly to the rector. Studies are undertaken on the initiative of the academic authorities, the Governing Board or the bureau itself. They are submitted to critical analysis and remain objective in both preparation and conclusions.

The *strategy council* is a standing policymaking body set up in 1992. It brings together the university authorities and some forty leading figures from civil society and artistic, social, economic and political circles, together with representatives of the former students' union. It is not a decision-making body but provides advice on strategic choices and feedback from the outside world on the university's initiatives.

The *council for international relations*, a standing body with members from every sector of the university, acts in an advisory capacity and can initiate proposals on an international strategy for the university, based on an overview of the institution's objectives and its resources.

Its work includes:

- drawing up proposals for the Governing Board on options for the policy areas, countries and institutions of greatest interest to the university;
- gathering and analysing documents on projects for international co-operation, forwarding to the Governing Board the summaries it considers the most important.

Temporary commissions are also set up when a specific situation needs to be strategically assessed. Recent examples include:

- a commission on the regional expansion of the university beyond its usual catchment area (around Brussels), and more particularly into Wallonia;
- a commission to look into specific problems relating to ULB's European dimension, in particular in terms of teaching and student mobility.

6.1. Teaching staff: recruitment and tenure

6.1.1. General

A university's decisions on issues such as teaching-staff recruitment and tenure have a major impact on the quality of teaching and research. The criteria it applies will be scientific, pedagogical or strategic, or a combination of all three. Any attempt at codification here is extremely delicate and ULB, in its drive for quality, has opted for a process which is based on a series of opinions but leaves a great deal of autonomy, at each stage, to those involved in making the proposals or decisions.

A range of cases may arise:

- initial recruitment of a member of the scientific staff (*assistant*). Contracts are fixed-term (two years);
- contract renewal for a member of the scientific staff, also fixed-term. In principle two renewals are allowed, each for two years;
- recruitment or renewal of a *chargé d'exercice*;
- recruitment of tenured scientific staff (invariably from among the scientific staff or researchers with equivalent experience);
- promotion of a tenured member of the scientific staff to a higher grade than the recruitment grade;
- recruitment of teaching staff and tenure (with or without probation). In this case recruitment may be internal (from among the tenured scientific staff) or external.

Apart from the *chargés d'exercices*, who are confined to teaching duties, all these appointments encompass teaching and research duties.

Quality-related procedures at ULB are relatively similar for all the decisions listed above, although some stages are only implemented for certain types of appointment.

6.1.2. Recruitment and renewal of contract for scientific staff (non tenured)

For every new post a vacancy notice is issued specifying the teaching duties involved (subject, specialisation) and the type of research conducted in the department concerned. Applications are examined by a special faculty commission, and its members must include the head of department or the person in charge of the relevant courses.

The commission draws up a report relating *mainly* to the academic qualities of each candidate and putting forward the names of one or more candidates to the faculty council. The council's choice is then put to the Governing Board for decision.

For contract renewal following an initial or second contract (*i.e.* not a newly created post), the candidate's application must include:

- A report by the candidate on the scientific, teaching and logistical work carried out under the contract coming up for renewal, and on intended research during the following contract. The candidate forwards the report to the dean of the faculty, with a copy to his head(s) of department.
- The opinion of the pedagogic commission as to the candidate's teaching ability.
- A proposal by the head(s) of department to renew or not to renew a contract; any proposal must give grounds for the decision and include the scientific opinion required under Article 28(3) of the university statutes.

The decision to renew (or not to renew) a contract is submitted to the Governing Board by the faculty council, which bases its decision on the opinion of the head of department and the pedagogic commission. The latter takes student views of the candidate's teaching ability into consideration.

The recruitment and renewal procedure for *chargés d'exercices* is similar, except that such staff usually teach for only 25 per cent of the full number of hours and do no research, so their application will make no mention of such duties. However, renewal is based on an examination of whether the appointment/renewal is in line with supervisory requirements: teaching ability is still important, but the strategic-needs factor tends to outweigh the scientific criterion.

6.1.3. Tenure and promotion for scientific staff

The granting of tenure to scientific staff is subject to a yearly, inter-faculty competitive examination (with the number of places set in advance), open to members of the scientific staff with fixed-term contracts and to researchers:

- with a contract not due to expire before 31 March of the academic year in which the competition is held, or (for researchers) with a contract in the second month of the academic year of the competition;
- with a doctorate (with thesis) or proof of scientific research deemed comparable to a doctoral thesis;
- with four years' scientific seniority.

Each faculty examines applications submitted by candidates from its own scientific staff. The following are considered:

- a report by the candidate on the scientific, teaching and logistical work carried out, stating qualifications for the confirmation and promotion in question and giving details of intended research;
- the opinion of the scientific faculty commission;
- the opinion of the pedagogic commission regarding the candidate's teaching ability;
- a duly justified opinion of the head(s) of department regarding the application.

If the faculty council feels that the applicant should not be offered tenure, it sets up a *Commission de plus ample informé* (or commission for further investigation) comprising five members (three from the teaching staff and two from the scientific staff) who were not on the scientific faculty commission.

The opinions of the faculty council and the commission for further investigation, together with a list ranking the candidates, are submitted to the Governing Board which, prior to any decision, submits the applications to *two central assessment commissions*, the first judging candidates solely from the scientific angle, regardless of faculty, while the second looks at the strategic issues behind proposals for submission to the Governing Board.

Why and how these commissions operate

- Inter-faculty commission for scientific assessment

The commission, whose members are drawn from both the teaching and the scientific staff (ten teaching staff, including the faculty deans, and four scientific staff), examines applications on the basis of candidates' scientific files, before drawing up:

- a list of the candidates who in its view merit tenure immediately or at all events exceptional renewal for one year where necessary, and the candidates' ranking;
- a list of candidates to be given an exceptional 1-year renewal.

No mention is made of candidates who are not on either list.

Two student representatives may comment on the candidate's teaching ability while the applications are still under consideration, but do not take part in the vote.

- Extended commission of rectors

The commission of rectors studies the reports presented by the commission for scientific assessment. Decisions will be based on both the candidates' academic merits as recognised by the commission and the institution's strategic needs as analysed by the teaching commission, the council for research and the conclusions of the review of the weaknesses, strengths and future of the teaching and research units.

This commission does not vote but endeavours to reach decisions by consensus. Whatever the nature of the consensus, the rector draws up a report for the Governing Board.

One important point is that this commission comprises the Rector and former Rectors still on the staff, who consult two representatives of the commission for scientific assessment, two members of the scientific staff, two members of the administrative and management staff and two students.

The promotion procedure for tenured scientific staff is the same as for appointments, except that there is no competitive examination and the number of posts is not set in advance.

6.1.4. Appointment of teaching staff

The selection of a candidate for a teaching post with a view to granting tenure is based on a report by the scientific commission, composed of members of the faculty's teaching staff and, where appropriate, leading figures chosen for their specialist knowledge. Proposals by the scientific commission may take faculty policy into account.

The opinions of the scientific commission are forwarded to a special (faculty) commission comprising all the tenured teaching and scientific staff in the faculty, together with a representative of the untenured members of the scientific staff and a student representative.

If the opinions of the scientific commission and the special commission diverge in the first round of voting, a further opinion is requested from the same scientific commission or a reconstituted one.

The proposals of the scientific commission and the special commission are forwarded to the Governing Board, which selects a candidate.

6.2. Student appraisals of teaching performance

6.2.1. Definitions

At the close of every university year, students appraise the performance of all the teaching staff -- from professors to *assistants* and *chargés d'exercices* -- involved in their courses.

Their appraisal does not relate to the value of the course in the broader context of their education, nor to course content or relevance. It relates solely to the teaching ability of the staff concerned, as perceived by the students. It therefore focuses mainly on didactic or relational aspects.

Is the subject presented clearly, do the students understand? In the minds of the students called upon to appraise performance, it is obviously hard to make a clear distinction between interest in the subject, which may vary from one individual to the next, and teaching ability. On the other hand it is clear that a "casual" attitude (being absent, late or unresponsive) on the part of a teacher will feature prominently in the student appraisal.

The idea of asking students to evaluate teaching performance was first introduced at ULB some twenty years ago. At first the faculties were left entirely free to gather and use the information as they wished. This was because allowances had to be made for perceptions that varied widely from one faculty to another, and teaching staff had to be convinced that this was not necessarily a coercive process but more crucially a means of practising self-assessment. Over time the process has evolved and is now based on a set of overarching principles.

6.2.2. General principles

First principle:

Students evaluate the performance of the teaching and the scientific staff (with or without tenure).

Second principle:

These appraisals are conducted on a regular basis. Faculties that have already been conducting them annually are asked not to diminish their frequency. Whenever an appraisal is negative, the exercise is to be repeated annually.

Student comments are given on a voluntary basis, but extremes of opinion -- whether positive or negative -- must always be justified. In the rules governing such appraisals, faculties must give details of the quorum required for the appraisal to be validated.

Third principle:

The procedure to be followed when an appraisal is negative should be clearly specified in the relevant rules.

When the appraisal is negative, the exercise will be repeated each year until the problem has been settled. A negative appraisal immediately sets in train a procedure devised by the faculty.

When three successive appraisals are negative:

- the case is forwarded to the rector, who will decide on the steps to be taken;
- the issue is raised in the special commission or the faculty commission, as appropriate. (If it is the special commission⁷, the faculty commission will be informed.)

6.2.3. Procedure

Teaching commissions have been set up in each faculty. Members include an equal number of teachers and students.

The task of the commissions is to organise the procedure used to obtain, process and analyse student appraisals of teaching performance. They are also responsible for disseminating and processing the findings. At the request of the faculty council or their own initiative, they may propose amendments to the procedure or changes to the questionnaires.

Students are generally asked to evaluate teaching performance on the following basis:

- very good;
- good;
- poor;
- very poor.

In order to be validated, very positive or negative appraisals should always be duly justified. Student appraisals are not compulsory, and they remain anonymous. Steps are taken to avoid dishonesty.

The commission chairmen ensure that the raw findings are forwarded to the persons concerned, priority going to new members of staff and those who received a negative appraisal the previous year.

The commissions analyse the findings and draw up a report.

The commissions then display the overall percentage of positive and negative appraisals for the academic staff and for the scientific staff on university notice-boards.

6.2.4. *Interpreting the findings*

The results of the appraisals are given separately for each course.

Teaching ability appraisals are validated when they meet minimum participation requirements. These may vary from one faculty to another, but the following usually holds:

- if the number of possible respondents exceeds 50, the appraisals received must account for at least one-third of that total;
- if the number of possible respondents ranges from 20 to 50, the appraisals received must account for at least 40 per cent of that total;
- if the number of possible respondents is under 20, the appraisals received must account for at least half of that total.

However, if the number of possible respondents is very high (at least 250 students) and at least 25 per cent of the theoretical total give a similar appraisal, the case will receive special attention by the pedagogic commissions.

Each member of staff subject to appraisal will receive a full report, including all comments, for each course taught.

The positive or negative nature of the report is based on a duly justified decision by the pedagogic commission.

This report is placed in the staff member's file.

The commission chairmen draw up an overall summary which is forwarded to the dean of the faculty.

6.2.5. *Quality enhancement and the implications for management*

Having followed the process through, we need to focus on what happens when the appraisal is negative.

Any member of the teaching staff who receives a negative performance appraisal is strongly encouraged to meet students to discuss the grounds for the decision and to look for possible solutions.

If this is the first negative appraisal received, the member of staff is invited to discuss the problem with the chairman of the pedagogic commission and one of its student members to look at the problems and envisage ways of remedying the situation.

When two consecutive appraisals have been negative, the same procedure is set in train, this time with the faculty dean. The latter will have already gathered the supplementary information deemed necessary (*e.g.* the opinion of the head of department and heads of section, interviews with students).

Heads of section are informed of the outcome of the discussions. Furthermore, the member of staff will receive a caution from the faculty dean.

When three consecutive appraisals are negative, the faculty dean, the former dean, the chairman of the pedagogic commission and the student delegate will look at scope for improvement, including changes to teaching duties, before submitting proposals to the faculty council and then to the Governing Board. If there is no scope for improvement, the case is submitted to the rector and the faculty council is informed. The rector will decide what steps will be taken.

In many cases, it has been found that the discussions following a first or second negative appraisal have led to a lasting improvement in teaching performance as perceived by students, with staff gaining a better grasp of what is expected of them and adjusting their methods accordingly.

For tenured staff, it is obviously difficult to decide what steps to take, but criticism may be detrimental to their future career.

For non-tenured staff, there have been numerous cases in which staff with a series of negative appraisals have not applied for their contracts to be renewed -- these were actually part-time contracts on the scientific staff -- or have quite simply resigned.

For scientific staff applying for tenure, and for teaching staff seeking tenure (who are generally appointed on a probationary basis initially), the teaching performance appraisal is a factor in such decisions and may, in some cases, result in an application being turned down.

6.3. Skill development of administrative and technical staff

6.3.1. Background

If we count not only permanent but also temporary staff (hired for specific research contracts), the category of administrative and technical staff is nearly as large as the entire teaching and research staff of the university. They carry out the administrative and technical tasks necessary for the university's operations and provide practical assistance to researchers and teachers.

Since the regulations governing them are more rigid than those applying to teaching staff, in the past their career advancement was at times based more on length of service than on actual work performance or skills.

However, over the past two decades the university has set up a system by which applications for promotion are reviewed by staff commissions (in all, there are six commissions for different types of

staff, *i.e.* administrative, secretarial, technical, research assistants, etc.) that are composed equally of representatives of heads of services and staff representatives.

In 1991 the university also introduced a new system for “assessing” staff in this category. The purpose is to assess the quality of staff applying for promotion more effectively and, just as important, to enable staff to find out regularly where they stand with respect to the university’s expectations, to have their qualities recognised and their shortcomings pointed out and to set appropriate goals for skill development.

The project was designed on the basis of an in-depth study of assessment systems used in various state-owned and private companies, while taking into account the specific situation of the university.

Most large private companies have long had staff assessment systems. Today, a growing number of public or semi-public institutions -- city governments, universities, hospitals, public lending institutions, etc. -- are now adopting these kinds of systems, having become aware of the key role they play in any staff management policy. At government level, it is planned to extend assessment across the civil service. In some companies, moreover, employees themselves ask that this kind of system be introduced in order to make appraisal of staff less arbitrary and to ensure that merit is the main factor on which career advancement is based.

6.3.2. The goals of the reform

The reform has five major goals:

- to improve communication and dialogue between heads of services and the staff under their supervision, especially as regards job content and performance;
- to institutionalise this dialogue on an annual basis for all administrative and technical staff, whether or not they have applied for advancement or promotion, in order to open up freer channels of communication;
- to broaden the range of the criteria used by the head of service in assessing a staff member in order to make the appraisal more objective;
- to ensure that the assessment system is sufficiently uniform by using standardised forms (ones which are flexible enough, at the same time, to cover a range of different jobs);
- to broaden the university’s information base and improve the quality of information used by staff commissions.

6.3.3. The reasons for the reform

Under the former system, two reports were required for each application for advancement or promotion, one prepared by the head of service and the other by the staff member. This system had the following shortcomings:

- It often did not clearly define the exact job content.

- Since the report by the head of service was prepared in direct response to a staff member's application for advancement or promotion, more often than not it consisted of a highly positive or indeed glowing recommendation, and provided little concrete information.
- Reports differed considerably depending on their authors' writing skills, the time taken to complete them, their sense of responsibility, etc. This may have worked to the disadvantage of deserving applicants.
- The former system did nothing to encourage dialogue between the head of service and the staff member regarding job content and performance. Years often elapsed between applications for promotion, during which staff had no feedback on the quality of their work.
- The small number of items covered in the head of service's standard report increased the risk of subjective judgements based on only one or two criteria and on personal feelings rather than on the staff member's objective performance.
- A staff survey had showed that there was scepticism and dissatisfaction among administrative and technical staff regarding the extent to which performance and merit were taken into account in granting promotions.

The new system tries to correct these shortcomings without diminishing the safeguards provided under the former system, such as staff's right to consult their files, the right of reply and appeal, joint staff commissions, etc.

6.3.4. *The principles of the new system*

The new system comprises:

- two reports:
 - a report describing the staff member's duties (since employees cannot be assessed without first defining the content of their job);
 - an assessment report that replaces the current report by the head of service.
- an annual interview in which the head of service and the staff member take stock of the situation and discuss any changes in job content and the assessment of the staff member.

Both reports are to be prepared on a yearly basis and discussed at the time of the interview. The head of service must conduct the interview in person with the staff member concerned. Heads of service who supervise a large staff may delegate this interview, however, provided that they closely monitor the process.

One may have misgivings about this system because of the considerable amount of work it entails for heads of service; but this can be answered by pointing out that to spend one hour per year with a staff member is not an unreasonable burden. Moreover, the system is designed to keep the extra work involved to a minimum.

Indeed:

- although preparing the job description for the first time unquestionably involves a great deal of work, this can and should be delegated to individual staff members, who know their jobs best, and then discussed with the head of section;
- in subsequent years, the job description will only have to be updated if the job has changed significantly;
- the assessment form has a number of boxes that merely need to be ticked off and only requires specific written comments when the assessment is “needs improvement” or “excellent”.

The following provisions ensure that staff members participate in and verify the assessment process:

- both reports must be co-signed by the staff member;
- these reports must be discussed during the interview;
- it is recommended that heads of service involve staff members in preparing the description of their duties;
- the last page of the assessment form is reserved for staff members’ comments;
- staff members are in any case free to ask the personnel service to include in their file any information that they see fit.

For both heads of service and staff members, the interview should be a time when they can express themselves as freely as possible and take stock of the work done during the year, free from the pressures of their daily responsibilities.

It should be emphasised that assessment only concerns staff members’ work performance and skills, and is not aimed at evaluating their personality.

If criticisms are made and shortcomings pointed out, it should be done in a constructive spirit. If an item is marked “needs improvement”, the assessment form asks that specific goals for improvement be set for the coming year.

6.3.5. Use of results

The job description and the assessment report will replace the currently used reports by heads of service and staff members (see above) in the staff member’s file. The personnel service administers this system, checks that job descriptions and assessment reports have been completed appropriately, ensures that assessment is carried out consistently, adapts and improves the system as necessary, develops training based on the needs reflected in reports and summarises files for presentation to staff commissions.

The reports are used to provide qualitative assessments that will be referred to during discussions of files in staff commissions; the results may not be converted into any kind of numerical or point system to obtain aggregate quantitative assessments or statistics.

6.4. Selection and funding of research projects

It is widely acknowledged in all university circles that high-quality teaching must go hand in hand with high-quality research. Most universities have a long-standing research commission or council.

In Belgium, the Royal Decree of 14 June 1978 made it mandatory for each university to have a research council, but these councils' statutory role is limited mainly to the preparation of an annual report, which is in reality only an inventory of research activities, resources and sources of funding.

At ULB, however, the research has a much broader mission. It may, at its discretion, give an opinion on the impact of proposed projects on the university's research policy when the work is to be carried out with the assistance of grants or other financial resources provided:

- under agreements signed with national research funds;
- by the public authorities as part of joint research programmes or similar initiatives;
- directly or indirectly for government-initiated fundamental research or minister-initiated programmes.

For all other research contracts, including those with international bodies, the research council gives an opinion at the request of the Governing Board or the body receiving the grant and signing the contract.

The research council gives these opinions on its own initiative and makes proposals to the Governing Board regarding the allocation of operating appropriations, sums from bequests or gifts, the proceeds of scientific work or the university's own income.

In addition to the rector, the council comprises twenty members of ULB's academic staff, as well as observers from the scientific staff and the student body.

Despite the importance placed on research, very little of the work done recently on the quality assessment of universities has addressed this aspect. The reason seems to be that the mode of funding itself, which is mainly contractual (with both the public and private sectors), is thought to have enough built-in assessment mechanisms for it to be unnecessary to assess research per se.

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that universities should give greater attention to the assessment of their research activities. The fact is that the choices made may do much to determine a university's strategy regarding its international ties and standing or, conversely, its integration into its region or economic environment. What is more, competition among universities for funds for projects increasingly requires them to make choices at an early stage so that only "worthwhile projects" are promoted. This is particularly important since the policymakers who manage some budgets sometimes tend to "go along" with any project that has a semblance of being serious.

For these reasons the research council decided to develop a methodology for assessing the university's strengths and weaknesses in research.

6.4.1. The spirit of the method

To ensure a coherent research policy, it is more useful to assess subject areas rather than individuals. A subject area is generally represented by a group of individuals, whose composition obviously depends on how accurately the subject area is defined (from this standpoint, a directory of research units will be especially useful). In any event, the procedure proposed is independent of the size of the group considered, so that groups may be combined or subdivided as the need arises.

The term "assessment" implicitly contains the idea of a value judgement. For research, this judgement can only be made with the help of experts in a particular subject area. This is why the proposed procedure is primarily aimed at building up information that will give the research council an overview of research activities at ULB and will provide a basis on which experts may assess the ULB's standing (by subject area) while taking into account the historical evolution of subject areas and research carried out elsewhere. To avoid any confusion, we shall therefore call the outcome of the proposed procedure the "five-year summary report".

So that it can really be used in practice, the procedure selected is relatively simple and only requires information that is readily available, while taking into account the different criteria used to assess subject areas. As the process becomes an ongoing one, it should be enriched and perfected over time.

The process must involve the entire university community. It would be absurd to review the activities of a group without its members being involved in the process. They should therefore be able to consult the findings, to correct and supplement them if necessary. The goal is to help research teams see where they stand in the research community and to define their strategy for ensuring that their work is known outside the university. As a result, the exercise should lead to self-assessment and reappraisal that can only be beneficial. The five-year summary report will also be a tool for dialogue between the research units and the academic authorities.

6.4.2. The procedure

The five-year summary report on a research group will comprise the following elements:

- definition of the group;
- publications;
- outside co-operation;
- research and development activity;
- comments.

Definition of the group

This part will contain information on the number of individuals in the group, showing their status in the university and their age distribution.

Publications

The group's publications (in the broad sense) will be listed. For example, information will be given on the number of publications cited in the SCI and on lists prepared by faculties.⁸

Outside co-operation

It is illusory to try to quantify the extent of outside co-operation. As a result, information will only be given on official co-operation (it is impossible to take stock of informal co-operation, but it obviously has an impact that should be reflected in the findings under points 2 and 4), indicating the type of activities. It is recommended that co-operation be broken down into the following geographical areas: Belgium, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Japan, North America, South America, North Africa, the rest of Africa, Asia and Australia. Information will also be provided on the team's standing in terms of membership of scientific committees, invitations, etc.

Research and development activities

Information on the overall amounts of research contracts will be given for each Belgian region and for foreign countries.

Comments

Under this heading, members of the research group will be able to add any information, details and explanations they consider to be necessary, in particular as regards the group's financial resources and its members' teaching load.

It will also be useful to include the successive appropriations obtained by the group concerned.

In any case, it goes without saying that the research council asks for the advice of national and international referees whenever it deems appropriate.

6.5. Continuing and post-university training⁹

At the beginning of the 1980s post-university training was considered to be marginal to university education, or even criticised at times as a luxury. However, since then there has been a considerable development of post-university training for working people who wish to update their knowledge or master new knowledge in fields related to their previous studies or necessary for their future career.

Unlike traditional university courses, which are generally codified by legislation, post-university programmes are aimed at a clientele that can be clearly targeted and whose needs can be accurately defined (for example, to train high-level civil servants in new technologies, to familiarise them with new legislation or to develop new analytical and decision-making skills more in line with those found in the private sector than those traditionally used in the public sector).

Consequently, the goals of the training offered are clearly defined and are based on the criteria of coherence, specificity and effectiveness. The specific nature of programmes is clear and they must be

effective if they are to be successful and continue. These programmes cannot neglect the essential component of acquisition of knowledge, and courses must be more practical than theoretical.

The assessment of programmes of this type has virtually become standard practice and, without claiming that it has been standardised, we can say that it meets the following criteria:

- it assesses the general **targeting** of training, based on criteria of specificity and rigour;
- it assesses the **appropriateness** of the training in terms of stated goals and students' needs;
- it analyses the **pedagogical quality** of programmes: the programme's structure and content, and the relevance of the methods used.

Assessment is based on data obtained from student evaluations:

- student evaluations are questionnaires that allow students to make a personal assessment of courses after one year of training;
- they are completed at the end of the courses;
- the student evaluation consists of a series of closed or open questions divided into two separate parts:
 - the evaluation of a programme as a whole;
 - the evaluation of courses and methods by subject area;
- replies are anonymous.

The closed questions address for example the following points:

- the student's knowledge of the subject area before taking the course;
- the difficulty of the course;
- student's interest in the programme;
- assessment of the coherence of the content of courses;
- assessment of teaching methods;
- overall impression of the programme.

In the open questions, participants are asked to make any criticism or suggestions they may have. These spontaneous replies are then broken down into similar themes according to the intern consistency and their mutual relation. Tables summarising the positive and negative findings are then prepared.

These student evaluations may have the following results:

- changes in programmes;
- changes in the number of hours taught;
- changes in the distribution of the contents of the different modules of a complete cycle;
- staggering certain programmes over time;

- creating or eliminating certain courses;
- changing the teaching methods used.

7. GUIDANCE OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AND ITS ASSESSMENT¹⁰

7.1. Background

With the development of mass university education, attempts to redefine its objectives have given priority to preventing and remedying underachievement by first-year students and reorienting students who have chosen programmes that are unsuited to their background or do not correspond to their real aspirations.

Various causes are often mentioned to explain underachievement in the first year, the main ones being inadequate study methods, poor language skills, problems in adapting to university life and the reasons for choosing a given course of studies.

Students must cope with the same problems in the transition from secondary school to university that they faced during earlier transitions in their school careers (*i.e.* from primary to secondary and from lower to upper secondary), which are times of sudden change in schedules and the organisation of studies and in the knowledge to be mastered and study methods required.

For many students, these changes are difficult to cope with and lead them to fail or drop out. This situation is found across the 15 countries of the European Union¹¹, or at least it is as long as minimum standards are maintained.

Underachievement, marginalisation and unemployment have therefore become the focus of policy concern in most of the EU Member States; currently at least 10 per cent of young people over the age of 16 leave the school system with no qualification. Given the level of expenditure on education, that state of affairs is unacceptable.¹²

The same is true of higher education. Despite the long selection process students have undergone before they enter university, the failure rate is high, particularly for first-year students.

Completion rates range between 41 and 51 per cent, depending on groups of population.

For this reason, over the past decade the university has increasingly developed its support programmes for students who have difficulties during their first year.

The following kinds of assistance are available, although they remain optional (stress is placed on encouraging students to assume responsibility for themselves).

At the beginning of the school year:

- extra practice sessions: reviews of useful concepts introduced in secondary school; development of educational software supplementing traditional teaching methods;
- sessions to help students assess themselves: mock exams, followed by correction and remedial sessions aimed at showing any deficiencies, evaluating students' mastery of

knowledge on which they will be examined and teaching students proper study habits for learning course material and preparing for exams;

- drop-in guidance sessions staffed by student assistants (analysis of examination questions, how to organise answers to questions, course structure, etc.);
- resource rooms staffed by experienced assistants in which all current multimedia resources are available to students (books, videos, software, hypermedia);
- seminars on books, journals and other material relevant to the field of study;
- guidance on how to use the library.

After the first semester examinations, extra pedagogical support is provided for students whose did not receive passing marks:

- sessions in small groups, to analyse written tests for example;
- catch-up sessions (these are also provided in the summer to prepare for the second session of examinations);
- a remedial programme for students who failed their exams in January;
- remedial groups using computer-assisted instruction.

These programmes cost some BF 20 million per year, which is the equivalent of the salary of approximately 15 members of the scientific staff.

Given the goal of these programmes (*i.e.* to improve completion rates) and current economic constraints, it seemed necessary to carry out a twofold assessment of these programmes:

- to assess students' perception of these programmes;
- to assess these programmes' effectiveness.

7.2. Assessment of students' perception of programmes

This assessment is based mainly on the data contained in student questionnaires completed at the end of the 1994-95 academic year, after the first-semester examinations and before the year-end examinations. Replies to questionnaires were analysed in the light of the annual activity reports prepared by those in charge of guidance in each faculty.

7.2.1. *The questionnaire*

Only some of the students who attended guidance sessions filled out the questionnaire (between 30 and 60 per cent). It is difficult to gather data from all students who have actually attended these programmes (some were absent when the questionnaire was handed out, others dropped out, others are only canvassed after they have gone on to the second year, etc.).

Be this as it may, various sorts of information can be obtained from the data provided by:

- the general part of the questionnaire (replies of students who may or may not have received guidance);
- the specific part of the questionnaire (replies of students who have received guidance).

General part

Question 1: “Have you attended one or more guidance sessions organised by your faculty?”

Question 2: “Do you believe that guidance activities are necessary?”

Question 3: “In which guidance activities would you like to participate or have you already participated?”

Specific part

Question 1: “How did you learn of the guidance provided in...?”

Question 2: “In which guidance activity or activities have you participated and how frequently?”

Question 3: “How did the guidance you received in... help you?”

Question 4: “What do you think of the various guidance activities offered in...?”

Question 5: “By whom do you prefer to be taught in the guidance activities in...?”

Question 6: “Were you taught by a student assistant in the guidance activities in...?”

Question 7: “Do you think that the guidance in... is helping you or has helped you to improve your performance in this subject?”

7.2.2. Analysis of student replies

Although the number of students who reply to the evaluation questionnaire is sometimes low (it is difficult to find the perfect time to ask students to complete the questionnaire), the available data seem to be highly consistent across guidance programmes.

On the whole, it appears that the students who answer this survey were quite well informed about the existence of guidance programmes, whether or not they had actually taken part.

The activities that were considered to be highly useful or in some cases even indispensable were first of all the explanatory sessions, followed by the guidance sessions with student assistants and the mock exams (when the latter are held systematically, they are often ranked as the most useful activity). As regards explanatory sessions, it should be emphasized that most of these guidance sessions are organised to help students understand courses in depth and also grasp the basics of the subject matter better and realise how the different parts of the course fit together.

As regards study method sessions, students seem to consider these sessions introducing university study techniques to be very helpful.

Students who have been taught by student assistants appear to be “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the help they received (they think that student assistants are similarly placed to themselves, non-judgemental and very open). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that in guidance programmes staffed by one or more *assistants chargés d’exercices* and by student assistants, students prefer the former. An approach that seems of interest, in particular for some programmes (such as mathematics, statistics, etc.), is to have an *assistant chargé d’exercices*, with one or more student assistants.

Lastly, in this survey the vast majority of students (between 70 and 100 per cent) seem to think that the assistance provided by guidance programmes helped improve their performance in the subject in question.

7.2.3. The role of student assistants

Many guidance programmes are taught by student assistants, who are in fact experienced students preparing their *licence* selected by senior teaching staff. The support provided by student assistants is a useful complement to normal course work.

The student assistants who help first-year students receive prior training to introduce them to the teaching of study methods and language skills. During this training, various kinds of exercises that can be used with first-year students are suggested, discussed and developed in an interdisciplinary setting, in which work or study techniques used in teaching French composition are combined with the specific content of a given subject area.

The very concept of “student assistants” teaching in a programme organised by the university was quite innovative, and it was essential to ensure that it was effective, which justified the special emphasis it was given in the questionnaire.

7.2.4. Conclusions

Analysis of the data obtained via the questionnaire and the activity reports by the heads of guidance programmes leads to a number of conclusions on ways to improve the organisation of guidance programmes and, consequently, the success rate of first-year students:

- Information on guidance programmes should be maintained at its current level in most faculties and should be expanded in the university catalogue, the student handbook and information provided via posters and bulletin boards.
- Explanatory sessions and drop-in sessions have been organised in all guidance programmes and are appreciated by students. It appears that when mock exams, tests of knowledge or study methods are organised systematically within guidance programmes, they are highly popular with students. In the 1993-94 report, it is clear that there is a need to offer students tests of knowledge or mock exams from the very beginning of the year. When such tests are available early in the year, they allow students to catch up or do remedial work. Consequently, these activities should be encouraged.

- The training of student assistants seems to be highly satisfactory, not only from the standpoint of student assistants themselves, who find it personally enriching, but more importantly from that of students, who are taught by older students who have a methodological approach well suited to the subject. Student assistants would like this training in study methods to be supplemented by some additional hours devoted to teaching techniques and student-teacher relations.
- Thought must be given to organising guidance programmes for students who have failed the January examinations and whose level is too weak for them to benefit from guidance programmes in their present form.

7.3. Assessing the effectiveness of guidance programmes

7.3.1. Student opposition to the principle of assessment

To assess these programmes' effectiveness, it is obviously necessary to test student performance at the beginning of the year and to inform students of their test results and encourage them to attend guidance programmes if need be; it is then necessary to correlate the results of the first-semester examinations with the results of year-end examinations and compare the performance of students who participated in guidance programmes with that of students who did not.

This type of assessment was to be carried out during the 1995-1996 academic year. It did take place, but it was delayed by the fact that the student government was opposed to the very principle of this assessment.

Although the utmost care was taken to ensure that the teachers who would administer university examinations could not know how students had performed on the assessment test, this initiative aroused great suspicion and there was a major conflict between the rector and students, who dubbed it the "rector's test".¹³

In fact, students were afraid that the tests, which were indispensable to assess guidance programmes, were a first step towards a future university entrance examination or placement test.

In opposing the test, students protested that they had a "right to attend the university", that students should be free to choose their course of study and that they had a right to complete a full first year, even if it was obvious that they would fail the year-end examinations and would do better to devote the rest of the year to remedial work that might enable them to begin the first year again with some chance of success.

After any number of discussions and many changes in the project, the assessment was finally carried out, but the test, which was intended to check students' initial skills, was no longer mandatory and was administered in February rather than at the beginning of the academic year (in October) as originally planned.

It is quite interesting to observe, in discussing the assessment of university activities and teachers' reluctance in this regard, that students are also extremely reluctant to become involved in a process in which their own performance is assessed; there is also surprising inconsistency between the position taken by students here, when they were directly involved, and their views on institutional assessment mentioned earlier (cf. the FEF statement at the end of section IV-6.2).

We shall now consider how the test was organised and the results processed, although the conclusions reached are fragmentary and provisional and must be examined with a great deal of circumspection.

7.2.2. The test

Approach

The stated purpose of the test is to give first-year students in the university's seven faculties and two institutes an accurate idea of where they stand regarding two skills that are indispensable to successful university studies:

- the ability to understand a text related to the student's specific studies;
- the ability to write a short text that is coherent in form and content.

Each of the tests is specific to the course of study with which the guidance programme is associated.

The teachers in charge of the courses and guidance programmes ensure that the tests are consistent with the given subject matter (internal consistency). The administrator in charge of instruction ensures that the various tests are consistent with each other (external consistency), while respecting each teacher's academic freedom.

- Experimental diagnostic test for first-year students

Objectives:

- To improve the quality of the guidance services organised by ULB for first-year students.
- To test the diagnostic tools designed to assess students' skills and behaviour with respect to university study methods.

Means of testing: comprehension questions based on texts or documents. These texts:

- may be consulted throughout the test;
- are related to the field of study chosen;
- are unrelated to course syllabi;
- are evaluated from responses to identification questions.

The comprehension questions are based directly on these documents and consists of the following kinds of questions:

- multiple choice questions;
- multiple answer questions;
- questions in which students summarise passages of texts.

- Organisation

Once the texts have been chosen for each test, the questions are drafted taking into account not only the behaviour and skills to be measured but also the method of correction, which in most faculties is carried out by student assistants.

Most of the comprehension questions are closed questions, in particular multiple choice questions: there may be some open questions, but they are limited to having students recognise and repeat points contained in the text.

Writing skills can naturally be measured only through open questions.

However, so that correctors can assess appropriately both form and content, the answer is limited to approximately ten lines.

The sample of students who are to take the test is selected by an independent administrative service, ULB's Programme Planning Office.

Each student is notified personally of the test and takes it on a voluntary basis.

Anonymity is guaranteed through a mailing system that ensures that only the Programme Planning Office can identify students.

- Assessment scale

As a way of avoiding assigning marks to tests while still providing clear and accurate information, an identical correction scale for all tests was designed and was used to record each student's results. After correction, this scale was sent to students.

The fact that results are recorded and forwarded to students in the form of a scale showing results for all questions also makes it possible to determine how students react to this assessment of their skills.

7.2.3. Processing the information

Participation in the test

Although students participate on a voluntary basis, the participation rate is high, averaging 52 per cent.

Participation in guidance

A questionnaire on student attendance at guidance programmes distributed to students during the January examinations and during the assessment test in February showed that:

- 50.6 per cent of the students polled said they had attended guidance sessions organised for the relevant courses;

- 75 per cent of these students had not attended more than five sessions, and only 1.5 per cent said they had attended more than 15 guidance sessions.

Guidance programmes are organised so that they target very specifically the course offerings of each faculty; they sometimes target a specific course (guidance for one course), but they may also cover a group of courses (one or more guidance programmes for a number of courses). There seems to be an inverse correlation between the number of students enrolled in a course (and thus potentially interested in the guidance programme) and the number of students who actually attend guidance sessions, since the courses with the most students enrolled have the lowest rates of attendance at guidance programmes.

Comments

Gathering information on voluntary attendance at guidance sessions may seem elementary. In reality, the information gathered is less reliable than desired because:

- each faculty gathered the information at different times, with different instructions;
- accuracy cannot be verified.

The range of guidance available makes it difficult to interpret students' answers to questions.

Analysis of results

- Identifying bias in the organisation of the test:

Two types of bias can be identified:

- bias linked to the methodology;
- bias linked to institutional constraints.

In the first case, it is important to define:

- the experimental approach used to measure the initial level of students' skills (pre-test) and the level attained subsequently (post-test);
- the type of test to be given: whether it should be a common test for all faculties, with the same form and content, or a specific test for each faculty.

If we wish to compare either skills or criteria of difficulty, the test must have at least one common section for all faculties.

- the method of correction: despite the use of a common scale, different methods of correction are used across faculties, which means that the results are not really comparable.

In the second case, *i.e.* bias due to institutional constraints, the following points should be mentioned:

- the difficulty of obtaining some information that would place the test results in perspective;
 - the correction of the test is too labour-intensive.
- Some comments
- a) Comprehension questions: closed questions (multiple response, multiple choice, summaries of passages of texts).

The results show that the questions of this type were designed too indiscriminately (*i.e.* we do not learn a great deal from them).

However, the questions in which students summarise passages of texts provide more information about their grasp of form and content than multiple-choice and multiple-answer questions.

A more detailed processing of students' answers also shows that some questions are too easy or too difficult, and should be eliminated in future versions.

The most significant finding for all faculties where students attending guidance sessions had signed a register is the fact that these students' results (the variation coefficient) were clustered around the mean.

This factor is unquestionably correlated with the standard deviation and guidance session attendance and shows that these sessions have a positive effect.

- b) Writing questions: open questions (only a limited number of lines may be written)

The purpose of these questions is to assess, in terms of both form and content, students' ability to write a coherent text answering a specific question based on information provided.

As regards the assessment of form, the results are on the whole highly positive: between 52 and 96 per cent of replies were considered to be entirely correct from the standpoint of form (spelling, grammar, syntax and usage).

7.2.4. Conclusions

a) Observation

Whatever one may think about the validity and reliability of the test given during the 1995-96 academic year, we are well above the minimum standards in terms of student participation and consequently of sample credibility.

The fact that so many students participated in the test is a very encouraging sign that suggests that guidance programmes should be continued.

As for the quality of the tests designed by each faculty, we should point out that:

- a common form was agreed upon. This common design made it possible to measure comparable cross-disciplinary skills;
- the entire group responsible for guidance programmes worked in a spirit of consensus, which made it possible to design and implement a particularly effective assessment scale for assessing the skills to be measured (comprehension and writing skills) and how students react.

b) Success in the test and participation in guidance programmes.

The students who took the test were classified in two groups:

- those who took part in the guidance sessions organised by faculties;
- those who did not participate in any session.

A trend can be detected: students who participated in guidance sessions seem to perform better.

c) Success in the test and success in the first session:

The results currently available provide an initial trend only, which will have to be confirmed after the September session of examinations. There seems to be a definite correlation between success in the test and success in the first session.

The students who passed their first-year examinations in June obtained the best results in the guidance test. They also gave the fewest incorrect answers. This is true for both comprehension and writing skills.

8. AN OVERALL ASSESSMENT PLAN: THE OBJECTIVES AND CONSISTENCY OF EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

8.1. The objectives and motivation of the plan

The university decided to undertake a comprehensive assessment of quality in October 1994.

Early discussions at ULB led to the conclusion that the concept of “quality” could be interpreted in many contradictory ways. As a result, it was thought preferable from an operational standpoint to place greater stress on the consistency of clearly defined objectives. Specifically, the approach initiated at ULB is aimed at ensuring the greatest possible consistency between the general objectives that each section defines and:

- its programme of courses (internal consistency);
- the perceptions of other sections, other universities or international bodies and the public targeted: students, graduates, etc. (external consistency).

Before describing the working method chosen to carry out this wide-ranging assessment in which the entire university community is involved, we should like to explain further the internal and external reasons behind it.

8.1.1. Internal reasons

Defining each section's general objectives in terms of graduates' skill profiles as accurately as possible clarifies communication with current and future students, employers, other education institutions and society at large ("skill profile" should be understood in the broadest sense, *e.g.* skills that prepare students for one or more occupations, research skills or other more general skills or behaviour learned during training).

This approach also secures greater consistency in education programmes (for example, to show how each course contributes to the section's general objective and to ensure that each specific training objective is achieved) and brings out the specific features of each course.

This clarification of objectives, both general (by section) and specific (by course), also makes it easier to define the priorities for reorganising education programmes.

Lastly, the clarification of objectives is a necessary preliminary for any self-assessment of programmes.

8.1.2. External reasons

There is an urgent need to set up systems of self-monitoring and self-regulation if our universities wish to be prepared for possible outside assessments (national and international).

The French Community decree on university education and academic degrees, establishing the equivalence of first- and second-cycle diplomas across universities in terms of skills, means that programmes have to be clarified in order to safeguard particular strengths. Similar clarification is required internationally.

Lastly, a self-assessment process may be used to ensure that the university is transparent to outside bodies: other levels of education, policy authorities, social partners, etc.

Last but not least, it goes without saying that the clarification of objectives and the search for consistency must be carried out without infringing academic freedom.

8.2. Working method

A quality policy can only be introduced in the university by reassessing the educational objectives of each faculty, section and diploma and by reviewing curricula to ensure that they are complementary. This assumes not only that we have defined the general criteria for a "sound second-cycle graduate", but also the specific criteria for specific diplomas and especially the criteria that distinguish this university from other universities or institutions of higher education.

We must then verify that the objectives are consistent with the means of achieving them (the form and content of courses and the form and content of student assessments).

Obviously, a quality system must take in research activities and management to the extent necessary for assessing the quality of education in the strict sense. For example, the interdependency of teaching and research is one of the characteristics of university education; and efficient organisation and co-operation between services (research services, the secretariats of faculties and sections and the central administration) helps save resources and improves contact with students.

Of course, the university cannot merely be considered as a factory that turns out graduates. The general model of a quality system must be adapted before it can be applied to the university.

What is more, the university's participatory mode of management implies that collegial responsibility will play a fundamental role in steering the quality system.

As a result, before the university's governing bodies can define the general objectives of the educational quality system and establish a consistent overall policy (resources allocated, pattern of monitoring, the institution's image, etc.), each section must appraise itself honestly and make a thorough analysis of its objectives. This appraisal must address the subjects taught, the content of courses, seminars, laboratory sessions, the work assigned to students and examination methods.

Initially, the faculties and institutes will summarise the work done by sections to prepare a comprehensive report to be presented to the teaching commission. Then the specific plans for each diploma will be adapted so as to bring them in line with the objectives defined.

This work must be tackled in three phases:

- information collection and detailed analysis (by each section);
- general synthesis, initially by faculties;
- synthesis by the teaching commission.

The documents resulting from this work will then provide a basis for a reorganisation of programmes (in the broad sense) and for adjusting the workload of academic and scientific staff. They will also serve as a reference for developing a genuine faculty policy for staff and equipment resources. They will thus provide guidelines for both internal and external assessment, and the university may usefully draw on them in dealings with the public authorities on funding or indeed on statutory definitions of university curricula.

8.3. Implementation

8.3.1. Phases of implementation

A. First phase: discussion within each academic programme

Each academic programme is asked to forward its general objectives stated in terms of the skill profiles expected of graduates, given its specialisation but also the specific characteristics of ULB.

All teachers are asked to describe the objectives of each of their courses and to provide some additional information. They may of course propose changes in the organisation of the courses they

teach (the distribution of courses, seminars and supervised work, changes in class schedule, etc.) or exchanges of courses.

By combining all this information within each section, it will be possible to analyse:

- the internal consistency of its academic programme (*i.e.* whether the section's skill profile is consistent with the course objectives);
- any appropriate staffing changes if the programme is reorganised;
- the appropriateness of the various programmes and options.

B. Second phase: multidisciplinary review

In addition to the definition of objectives and the verification of programme consistency carried out by subject specialists, an outside viewpoint is indispensable. Its purpose is to review proposals from a more comprehensive standpoint, on the basis of institutional goals. This review will be carried out at two successive levels:

- For each faculty or institute:
 - the standpoint of other programmes or sections;
 - in terms of faculty objectives.
- The teaching commission:
 - the standpoint of other faculties;
 - in terms of university-wide objectives.

8.3.2. Tools used in this review

Three documents have been used to ensure a relatively uniform format:

- Document A: a description of the skill profiles expected of graduates in each programme;
- Document B: a brief description of each course (to be completed by the teacher);
- Document C: a synthesis of information by programme and an analysis of overall consistency.

8.3.3. Analysing the consistency of an academic programme

Level 1: Consistency of each course

Consistency of objectives/resources/assessment.

Level 2: Consistency between similar courses within the same academic programme

A number of courses in one and the same programme may share some common objectives and/or content. In such cases, it may be useful to distinguish between the common objectives in this group of courses and the specific objectives of each course. This clarification makes it possible to suggest or develop more deliberate co-ordination between them in order to avoid overlapping or to devise a consistent course progression, etc.

Level 3: Consistency of all courses making up a programme

The following, *inter alia*, must be reviewed:

- The contribution of each course to the general objective of the programme.
- The position of the course in the overall programme of study (does it come too early or too late?), the problem of prerequisites, etc.
- How the content of the various courses is integrated into a consistent whole for students. The programme's general objective cannot necessarily be reduced to the sum of each course's specific objectives. Certain pedagogical activities (work experience) can be planned to promote this integration. Moreover, it is also interesting to review the overall coherence of the various types of work students are asked to do: independent study, group work, supervised work, etc.
- The general balance of courses in relation to the skill profile expected of future graduates (*e.g.* detecting aspects of this profile that are not adequately covered by existing courses).
- The priorities to be set for the future (if the academic programmes are being reorganised) in order to ensure if need be greater consistency between the expected profile and the objectives of each course.

Level 4: Consistency of all programmes offered at ULB

The following, *inter alia*, must be reviewed:

- whether the purposes of university education are clear;
- whether the specific characteristics of ULB are clear;
- whether the specific characteristics of each programme are clear;
- whether the way each programme defines its general objectives (the skill profiles of its graduates) is in line with outside perceptions.

8.3.4. Document A: description of the skill profile of each programme

What is the *skill profile* students are expected to possess when they complete a programme (*licence*, engineering diploma, etc.)?

Comments

The concept of “skill profile” should be understood in a broad sense (for example, skills preparing students for one or more occupations, research skills, other more general skills or behaviour learned during the programme).

The goal is to describe the skill profile students are really expected to have at the end of the programme rather than giving an idealised description or merely listing skills it is hoped they will have mastered. Nevertheless, as it is obviously impossible to foresee all situations that future graduates may face and for which they have supposedly been trained, it may be appropriate to divide this profile into two parts:

- at the end of the programme, the graduate in ... should be able to ... (list skills or behaviour that should really have been mastered);
- on addition, the graduate should be able to... (list desired skills or behaviour).

The profile describes the main skills students are expected to have mastered at the end of the programme, at a relatively general level, without going into the details of the primary or secondary objectives of each course.

The same question for third-cycle or doctoral studies.

First-cycle studies (*candidature*):

- What is the SKILL PROFILE students are expected to have at the end of the first cycle (same comments as for question 1)?
- What are the PREREQUISITES -- subjects taken, skills acquired, etc. -- expected or desired for admission to the first cycle? (These should be described in terms that can be easily understood by future students).
- To which programmes at the level of the second cycle (*licence*) does this first-cycle programme lead and under what conditions?

8.3.5. Document B: Description of each programme

Preliminary comment: Each teacher is asked to complete this document in collaboration with the relevant assistants (scientific and pedagogical support staff).

General information

- Title of course, name of teacher and assistants (scientific and pedagogical support staff).
- Number of hours (courses and laboratory/practical work).
- Must students have completed one or more courses as a prerequisite to enrolling in this course? If so, which courses?

Course objectives

Comments

By convention, a course *objective* provides two basic types of information:

- a description of skills (knowledge or know-how) or behaviour (life-skills) that students are really expected to have mastered (and that can be verified) at the end of this course;
- a description of the content (subject matter) covered by these skills.

Consequently, an objective is defined with reference to students (*i.e.* at the end of the course, the student will be able to...) and not with reference to the teacher (*i.e.* in this course, I use this type of approach to teach this type of content, etc.).

If appropriate, distinguish between the objectives of the course and laboratory/practical work.

Pedagogical Methods Used (*i.e.* theoretical presentation, practical demonstration, textual analysis, case studies, group work, use of specific technological resources, etc.).

Evaluation Methods (*i.e.* number of tests, oral or written, type of questions asked, etc.).

How is this course *related* to the other courses in the same programme (vertical and horizontal co-ordination) and/or different programmes at the same level of studies (horizontal co-ordination).

Also describe how your fields of research are related to this course.

What changes if any would you like to make in the organisation of your teaching duties (different class schedule, exchanging courses, etc.).

8.3.6. Document C: *Synthesis of information across programmes and analysis of overall consistency*

1. CONSISTENCY between the OBJECTIVES of each course and the SKILL PROFILE graduates are expected to have in the programme.

A. Analysis of the situation

Based on document A and all documents B filled out by the various teachers, the staff of each programme analyses any problems that might arise and makes proposals to improve consistency between the skill profile and the course objectives.

Typical examples of problems:

- Courses in which the objective seems to be unrelated to the general objectives of the programme.
- Important aspects of the skill profile are not covered (or inadequately covered) by existing courses.
- Aspects of the skill profile are covered too extensively by certain courses (redundant courses, etc.).

B. Proposals to make the skill profiles/course objectives more consistent.

2. LEVEL OF INTEGRATION of the various courses within the programme.

A. Analysis of the situation (same principle as for question 1)

Typical examples of problems:

- Courses scheduled too soon or too late in the programme (problem of prerequisites).
- Insufficient co-ordination of courses within the same programme (horizontal or vertical co-ordination) and/or different programmes at the same level (horizontal co-ordination).
- Difficulties encountered by students in integrating what they have learned in the various courses, as observed during work experience, laboratory/practical work, etc.

B. Proposals designed to promote the integration of the various courses within the programme.

8.4. Implementation and initial impact of the plan

During 1995 and the beginning of 1996, the plan was implemented in the various faculties of the university and the results are currently being brought together at the central level for analysis, but the fact that few guidelines regarding form were imposed has meant that reports do not have a uniform format, which makes the final analysis difficult.

However, the faculties now have valid information on the skill profiles students are expected to possess at the end of their studies, and by comparing this information with the content of the courses offered they have already made certain reforms or begun to carry out further surveys before

undertaking these reforms. Far more courses have been revamped than in previous years. Moreover, a number of programmes have been thoroughly reorganised, while complete reforms of curricula were formerly quite rare.

It is too early at this stage, when some faculty reports are not yet available, to draw up a list of the measures implemented or under way.

Nevertheless, it appears that the greatest number of changes are probably in the total number of hours of courses and laboratory/practical work and the possible elimination of some courses and laboratory/practical work; a complete revision of programmes is less frequent.

On the whole, emphasis is also being placed on the issue of communicating the real objectives of courses more clearly to students.

Lastly, the need to create new synergies, both within the university and with other universities, has often been mentioned.

DOCUMENTATION

European Commission -- SOCRATES

- Initiatives of quality assurance and assessment of higher education in Europe (1995).
- European pilot projects for evaluating quality in higher education:
 - Guidelines for participating Institutions (November 1994).
 - European Report (1996).
 - Belgian National Report: C. Kaufmann, P. Dupont, A. Philippart (10 July 1995).
 - Information note on the results (1996).

Conseil des Recteurs de la Communauté Française de Belgique (Council of Rectors of the French Community of Belgium)

- Rapport: Reconnaissance académique et professionnelle (October 1995).

OECD-IMHE

- Report on: Quality Management, Quality Assessment and the Decision-Making Process (March 1996).
- Institutional Responses to Quality Assessment.
- Uppsala University, Sweden (November, 1995).
- Monash University, Australia (November, 1995).
- Aalborg University, Denmark (November, 1995).
- General report: John Brennan (November, 1995).

Université Libre de Bruxelles

- Statutes and regulations.
- Internal documents of Commissions and the Board of Governors.

Legislative texts

NOTES

1. From a publication by the Council of French-Speaking Rectors.
2. *Fédération des étudiants francophones de l'enseignement supérieur (universitaire et non universitaire)*, or Federation of French-speaking Students in Higher (university and non-university) Education.
3. This structure, based on participation at every level, does not prevent the university from having the usual bodies provided for under Belgian social legislation (works committee, health and safety committee and trade union delegation). "Employer" delegations to these bodies also include elected representatives from each body in the institution.
4. Namely the scientific staff; the students; and the administrative, technical and management staff.
5.
 - a) *the teaching staff* includes the following categories: *professeur ordinaire, professeur ordinaire C, professeur extraordinaire, professeur, professeur associé, chargé de cours, chargé de cours associé*. Categories of supply staff (known as *suppléant* or *maître de conférence*), together with the *chargé d'enseignement* and *maître d'enseignement*, are also part of the teaching staff, as are retired members of the teaching staff authorised to undertake some teaching, research and service to the community. FNRS research fellows, approved by the university, are classed as members of the teaching staff.
 - b) categories of *scientific staff* include *agrégé de faculté, conservateur agrégé* (head curators), *bibliothécaire en chef* (head librarian), *chef de travaux, conservateur* (curator), *répétiteur, premier assistant, bibliothécaire* (librarian), *assistant, attaché, assistant-chargé d'exercice, lecteur* (reader) and *interne de cliniques* (intern). It also includes volunteer assistants; researchers paid by outside foundations or institutions and approved by the university are classed as members of the scientific staff, with the exception of those classed as members of the teaching staff.
 - c) the *academic staff* comprises all members of the teaching staff plus tenured members of the scientific staff with a *doctorate/agrégation*.
6. Full-time equivalent.
7. The role and powers of the special commission are addressed in Section VI.
8. Indices based on the SCI have already been used in other studies, but only for the exact and natural sciences as a rule. Enormous preparatory work is required. In other subject areas, the use of the SCI (or the SSCI) can lead to results that are totally disproportionate, especially because of the over-representation of journals from the English-speaking world.
9. The assessment process described in this section is basically the one used at INEMAP (European Institute for Public Management), Solvay Business School, the Faculty of Social, Political and Economic Sciences.

10. This section of this paper relies heavily on the summary reports prepared in 1995 and 1996 by Mrs. F. Gilot de Vries and Mr. Renard.
11. European Commission: *Figures on Education 95*; Luxembourg 1996.
12. Eurydice: “Measures to Combat Failure at School: A Challenge for the Construction of Europe”, Brussels 1993.
13. Measures under consideration at that time in the Ministry of Education, denying funding to students who failed any interim exam, in all probability considerably aggravated the student unrest.