



## Development of Social Work Education in Slovenia

*Bojana Mesec*

### INTRODUCTION

It was in 1955 that the first generation of students was able to enrol in the first form of education for social work in Slovenia, with fifteen students taking part. The school, which was founded by the People's Assembly of The People's Republic of Slovenia did not have the official title of a school. It was defined as such only in 1958, under the Schools Founding Act. In 1960 legislation enabled the school to become the short-cycle College for Social Workers, with a total of 159 students (Rapoša Tajnšek, 2005).

The curriculum of the first year of education for social work included subjects that were divided into five groups, namely: the social and political order of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (four subjects); health care and social security (six subjects); psychology, pedagogy, and methods of social welfare work (five subjects); German and English languages; and preliminary military education (Rapoša Tajnšek, 2005).

In 1959 the school adopted a new curriculum that was more appropriate for that time, but it still did not include a single subject that would be called social work. The curriculum was divided into four subject groups: economic and sociological analysis (four subjects); psychological and health analysis (four subjects); substantive subjects (nine subjects); and methodological subjects (three subjects) (Rapoša Tajnšek, 2005).

The same year saw the publication of *The Methods of Social Work*, a manual written by Katja Vodopivec, which according to Gabi Čaćinovič Vogrinčič

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B. Mesec (✉)

University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

e-mail: [bojana.mesec@fsd.uni-lj.si](mailto:bojana.mesec@fsd.uni-lj.si)

(2005) brought a high level of useful expert knowledge that was then new to Slovenia. While still very valuable today, at the time the manual was prohibited for use for the study purposes (Čačinovič Vogrinčič, 2005).

Of course, social work was known to Slovenia even before the foundation of the first school in the field. Social work was practised as family help which was carried out by the so-called lay social workers. The first centres for social work emerged after World War II, which even at the time had an organisational scheme which implied that family help was divided, into different thematic sets (Mešl, 2005).

In the late 1950s, the first social workers were employed in Slovenia. This took place within the context of “personnel and social services” that pointed to the humanisation of work and an integrated consideration of employees within their organisations. Social workers’ tasks included care for the quality and security of employment. Due to these new forms of work the College for Social Workers developed a special department for social work in the economy and for the employment of social workers in “personnel and social services”. The students taking this course were distinguished by their rich work experience, and typically they had strong union and political support in their own companies and society at large (Rapoša Tajnšek, 2005).

In its first decades the school experienced many changes and modernisations of the curriculum, as well as changes of name. From the short-cycle College for Social Workers, its name was changed to the College for Social Work, which was later replaced by the University College for Social Work, and finally, in 2003 it obtained the title of Faculty of Social Work that designed programmes at all three levels of study (undergraduate, master, and doctoral). Soon afterwards, Slovenian universities along with other European universities signed the Bologna Declaration that brought long-lasting changes to the field of European higher education. Moreover, since 1975 the school has also been an associated member of the University of Ljubljana, which in 2019 celebrates the 100th anniversary of its foundation (1919–2019).

The governments of the 29 European countries which signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (*The Bologna Declaration, 1999*) were committed to creating a common European higher education area. In this way, European higher education was to achieve a more unified structure. Within the Bologna reform, the study structures needed to be designed to enable mobility in at least two directions. The first refers to vertical mobility within a given discipline, and increasingly also between two or more different institutions, which before that was unknown in Slovenia. The second direction refers to horizontal mobility, which mainly takes place between related disciplines, and is to encourage co-operation between faculties and universities. These changes were intended to enable high student mobility and were supported by the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Moreover, universities were required to broaden their missions in education to encompass all forms of life-long learning in order to achieve a highly qualified population. Within Europe the reform of study programmes has led to the gradual

development of European comparable and compatible national higher education systems (Pejovnik, 2012). This does not refer to comparability in terms of study programme contents, but primarily to the credit system. A programme evaluation system applying the same rules to the whole Europe was thus introduced for the first time. This, however, did not automatically mean that the quality of various programmes improved, as such developments would depend on the distribution of individual requirements within the credit evaluation. The Faculty of Social Work evaluated the comparability of its study programme from several aspects, with the detailed areas examined being the following:

1. Comparability of the concept, formal, and substantive structure of the study programme;
2. Comparability of the accessibility of the study programme and enrolment conditions;
3. Comparability of the duration, progression, and completion of the study programme, and the titles obtained;
4. Comparability of the types and forms of study;
5. Possibilities of including the programme in international co-operation projects (mobility) or the common; European higher education area
6. The differences between the proposed and foreign programmes with regard to specific needs and conditions of the national economy and public services;
7. Harmonisation with the EU regulations in regulated occupations.

The elements in which the accreditation application was compared with programmes from higher education institutions in other countries are defined by the Higher Education Act (1993), and the accreditation application was examined by the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (SQAA).

Before the adoption of the reform, each university or even faculty had their own evaluation and study recognition system. The programmes were almost impossible to compare, or their comparability was very difficult to establish. The European area required a higher degree of cohesion, as under the existing circumstances it was almost impossible to achieve any student or teacher mobility. Today a quick look at the progress in that direction reveals that mobility is virtually the only aspect of the entire higher education system in Europe that was realised according to the plan. Speaking of social work, between the 2008/2009 and 2014/2015 academic years (Majer, 2008–2015) 130 students of social work went to study abroad, while 196 foreign students came to study to Slovenia at the Faculty of Social Work. Since the Faculty of Social Work is a relatively small faculty, the growth in the number of Erasmus exchanges from the years prior to 2008 and until today can primarily be attributed to the comparability of social work studies across Europe, greater transparency, and better organisation of the Erasmus

programme. Moreover, the Faculty of Social Work introduced a new staff position of coordinator of the Erasmus exchanges, with this person managing all student exchanges at the faculty, in terms of both contents and technical issues. Students as well as professors now visit other faculties with which it has bilateral agreements, with the list of such faculties growing longer every year (Mesec, 2015a).

However, the reform process that the faculty started over ten years ago has only just begun. The first generation of students, who tried out the entire cycle as well as successfully evaluated both the programmes and the effects of the study, left us with invaluable data. Their analyses should be the basis of the re-accreditations of the programmes needed for the reforms to start showing their first positive effects.

### THE BEGINNING OF THE REFORM AT THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

In 2004 Slovenia obtained the legislative grounds (Higher Education Act, 2004) needed to introduce new study programmes complying with the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999. Soon afterwards discussions first arose about what the declaration was actually about and what it would bring for the future of the higher education in Slovenia. We wondered whether this was the choice of individual faculties or a mandatory task for the whole higher education system. We listened to debates in the media and heard those both in favour of and against the changes (Mesec, 2015a).

It was only in 2006 that the first steps related to this reform were made at the Faculty of Social Work. At the time changes had been carried out in almost all other faculties and academies that were members of the University of Ljubljana. In contrast, we were still deciding which system was more acceptable for social work: 3+2 or 4+1 years of study. With the first possibility, students would acquire their diploma after three years of study, which they would then be able to continue with two years of master's study, while the second possibility would be more comparable to the past form of the study of social work, concluding with a diploma after four years of study, and enabling a continuation for a further year of master's study. Even today it is not clear which option is better, each having advantages as well as downsides. Our decision led social work to become a four-year first-cycle study and one-year second-cycle study. According to Andreja Kocijančič (2009), the former rector of the University of Ljubljana, the division of the university programmes according to the formula 3+2 or 4+1, may seem simple, but it is almost impossible to carry out in terms of contents. In her opinion, Slovenian universities were not able to carry out the substantive reform of their study programmes, because the EU guidelines were inadequately interpreted with regard to the country's specific higher education system.

However, the substantive renewal of its study programme was not a problem for the Faculty of Social Work: it was an opportunity to develop new

contents that would be more intertwined with practical work. This was our framework and the basis for the design of the new curriculum. In the years that followed the self-evaluation of the quality of the study showed that in this period the faculty had made great progress in terms of the contents of the education for social work.

In the time just before the programme renewal, there were some graduate theses that researched the issues of renewing the study programmes and social workers' employability. Statistical data provided by these theses (Čalopa & Vedenik, 2007) revealed that around 20% of graduates found employment immediately after completing their studies at the Faculty of Social Work, with slightly over one half of them finding employment in the first year after leaving, and 20% in the second year.

In designing new programmes the wishes of the faculty's students who actively participated in groups that planned the changes were also taken into account. Based on the survey conducted by Čalopa and Vedenik (2007), most of them were interested in working with young people and with older people, follow various fields of work in education, health care, mental health care, addictions, and work with the family. Interestingly, almost none of them was interested in working in crisis centres, private companies, the police, or military.

The Bologna Declaration and new way of financing of higher education have strengthened the faculty and staff's wish to have the opportunity, after almost fifteen years, to renew study programmes that in many ways were deficient and outdated. Primarily we wanted to make up for the deficits in practical work and enable our students to immediately test out their knowledge in practice, and vice versa, enable them to continuously reflect on their experiences through theory, and thus build their knowledge through experience. This approach enables the faculty to be well-connected with practice, while at the same time promoting theoretical knowledge about social work. With the greater selectivity and flexibility of the study programmes, future graduates should be able to deepen their knowledge in accordance with their interests or broaden their horizons beyond the standard knowledge of social work, thus creating their own profiles of skills and knowledge. The renewal of programmes and changes in the system of social security also entailed the development of new profiles, primarily those bordering different disciplines (i.e. placed between social and health care, social work, and pedagogy), which is why at the time we planned to establish several joint programmes with other European faculties. Based on co-operation with the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana, we thus successfully carried out the post-graduate master's programme Sociology—Social Work in the Community, while the planned joint master's programme Supervision, to be done in co-operation with the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, remained unrealised. Completely new challenges were presented by student and teacher mobility to other countries of the European Union, and, increasing from year to year, an even bigger challenge was the mobility of our graduates who at the time,

though with some reservation, looked to the possibility of finding employment outside Slovenia (Mesec, 2015a).

Throughout its history, the Faculty of Social Work has invested considerable effort to address the question of employability of its graduates, and in recent years started to follow the related statistics, which show that its graduates are employed in all areas of society.

However, according to the statistics the vast majority of the graduates in social work find employment in the area of social protection (Statopis, 2018). Moreover, recent data show that compared to all other areas of employment of social workers, their employment in the area of social protection has been on the increase. Social workers are the most represented professional profile at the centres for social work, they are employed in social care institutions, and in non-governmental voluntary organisations in the area of social protection, while outside that field, most social workers are employed in education and health care, as well as in public administration and justice, in private companies, the military, the police, and elsewhere. However, social work graduates do not only work in the job positions of social workers, but also in different areas that require knowledge and skills with regard to working with people (Mesec, 2018).

Undoubtedly, the actual demand for social workers is much greater both in the area of social protection and in many other fields (health care, education, employment, labour, etc.) than can be inferred from the existing job notifications. In Slovenia, there are approximately four social workers per 10,000 inhabitants, which—considering the need in social care—is not enough even today, while the expected demographic and social changes that are coming lead us to anticipate an increased need for social workers in the areas, including work with the family, ranging from providing help for parents and children to dealing with domestic violence, work with older people, in particular in the provision of long-term care, help for dying people and their relatives, work with children and youths in schools and in their spare time, work with the disabled, solving problems and distress in the contexts of mental health, addiction, stress reduction and abuse at work, work with migrants, and so on. Besides the specialised courses, as noted previously in this text, new and partly interdisciplinary profiles are expected to be developed as a result of new demands for experts, such as in the organisation and co-ordination of long-term care, individual planning, local co-ordination and prevention, harm reduction and addiction, and other areas (Mesec, 2018).

Data from a 2007 research study (Čalopa & Vedenik, 2007) also give a more detailed explanation of the employability problems in social work. Namely, the respondents' reports show that legislation covering the area of social protection enables professionals from other fields to obtain employment in the field of social work, although these individuals are not adequately qualified for this work and are taking up job positions designed for graduates of the Faculty of Social Work. In its Article 69, the Social Assistance Act lays down that recognised professionals in this field are graduates of short-cycle

college or university college courses that educate for social work, although jobs in this field can also be performed by those who completed short-cycle college or university college courses in psychology or biopsychology, pedagogy and its special disciplines, public administration, law, sociology, health sciences, in particular work therapy, and theology (Social Assistance Act, 1992).

For all these reasons, the Faculty of Social Work embarked on the reform of its undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes very eagerly, seriously, and in an integrated manner. First we focused on better understanding of the basic ideas of the Bologna process and on planning the coherent vision of the programmes. Then, we continued our work in the individual departments which were invigorated by the reform process and started to work more intensely on the establishment of the competences that social work graduates needed to gain through their studies.

The establishment of a special workgroup for the renewal of the curriculum that followed led the renewal process through several phases to the final proposals for the lists of competences, the curriculum, and the first syllabuses. We acquired the means to carry out the ESS VS—06 project of pilot renewal of the practical work for 3rd and 4th years of study, and tested some pedagogical innovations (2005/2006/2007). In parallel we developed postgraduate programmes for the 2nd and 3rd cycle in accordance with the Bologna guidelines.

At the beginning of 2007, the Faculty of Social Work organised a working meeting with various social partners (representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the Social Chamber of Slovenia, the Association of Social Institutions of Slovenia, the Association of Occupational Activity Centres, the Slovenian Association of Social Work Centres, the Trade Union of Health and Social Services, the Association of Social Workers of Slovenia, the University of Ljubljana, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the students of the Faculty of Social Workers, and other groups) and established two additional working groups (the first for the analysis of the labour market and employability, competences, and profiles; and the second for the practice of social work, internship, and practical competences).

The suggestions of these two additional working bodies, composed of the representatives of the faculty's social partners, were then included into the proposed curriculum, after the latter was approved by the whole collective of the Faculty of Social Work, as well as by the Social Chamber of Slovenia. The work was continued at the related departments, within working groups and in the study affairs committee. This long and complex process required the participation of all the faculty's staff and associates and resulted in the development of all the required documents, namely: the list of general and subject-specific competences, the curriculum and syllabuses. The process had an important effect: all teachers and other employees at the Faculty were familiar with the reform and took his or her share of responsibility for its realisation.

## SUBSTANTIVE REFORM OF EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL WORK IN SLOVENIA

In the process of renewing the undergraduate social work programme, special attention was paid to practical training. At the end of the 2006/2007 academic year, the Centre for Practical Study was established at the faculty. It is responsible for the implementation of practical education in accordance with the existing curriculum. In parallel the Centre prepared the conditions for the introduction of the renewed system of practical education. Our ambitions were high, and with our approach to practical work we wanted to come closer to the practical training programmes that exist at those higher education institutions of social work which have for years, in Europe and across the world, presented a model of excellence in education, and helped in the formation of competent graduates who are successful in the labour market.

After the process of designing new programmes was completed Srečo Dragoš wrote in the Quality Report (2008): “The largest quality shift was achieved in the area which we can influence the most, that is, the renewal of the study contents.” In a relatively short period education for social work experienced extensive transformation of contents, as well as system, including the following turning points:

- 1991/1992 academic year: the curriculum’s distinctive feature was that this was the last year in which the short-cycle College for Social Workers carried out its two-year professional programme;
- 1993/1994 academic year: the first university college four-year curriculum was introduced;
- 1996/1997 academic year: the university college programme was carried out under the institutional form of the four-year university College for Social Work until its transformation to the Faculty of Social Work;
- 2003/2004 academic year: the implementation of the first faculty programme after the university college became the Faculty of Social Work;
- 2009/2010 academic year: the reformed (“Bologna”) programme was introduced.

In his 2008 Quality Report Srečo Dragoš along with the Quality Commission (2008) gave a detailed description of how the study programme of social work was developing and changing in its contents, and primarily, presented its main highlights and differences between them in the mentioned years. For those years the study programmes were analysed according to two criteria, the practical and theoretical. The first criterion involved the analysis of the share of compulsory practical work that takes place outside the faculty in different social care institutions and non-governmental organisations. The specificity of social work as opposed to other academic disciplines lies in the fact that concrete knowledge and the skills needed to work with people



are equally important as the theoretical contents. As soon as practical work would cease to be an indispensable and equal part of such education, then social work would start losing its specific nature and would start becoming one of the numerous other social science profiles. This is why the share of practical work in the compulsory study programme, along with its relationship to other, more theoretical subjects, is a vital part of the identity and quality of social work. In this context, all subjects were divided into three groups, namely the group of non-social work subjects, the group of connective subjects, and the group of social work subjects:

The first, the group of non-social work subjects, includes those that provide the basic knowledge from other social sciences. Although these subjects do not contain social work-specific theoretical knowledge, they are still necessary in the programme because they provide social work with the broadness and analytical depth of the social sciences. These subjects involve contents based on various other “mother” faculties (such as psychology, sociology, education, constitutional order, and foreign language).

The group of connective subjects includes those that are closer to social work than the ones from the first group, but are still not considered specific social work subjects. The function of connective subjects is to highlight how general knowledge from other expert fields is transferred and applied to social work (such as social security, theories of deviance, management in social work, quality of work life).

The social workgroup of subjects is composed of those that cover specific theoretical knowledge from social work, with most of them reflecting the different and specific nature of education at the Faculty of Social Work. The subjects that are typical of the Faculty of Social Work and not found in any of the programmes of other faculties and schools include: the theory of help, addictions, introduction to social work, family social work, community social work, and others.

As Lea Šugman Bohinc (2008) wrote in the programme application for the faculty’s first accreditation, since the very beginning the first-cycle Bologna programme was developed with the idea of achieving a synergistic effect in horizontal and vertical dimensions of individual elements of the curriculum at undergraduate level, and with the application of the logic of vertical integration in the development of numerous one-year programmes and their subjects at the second-cycle postgraduate level. A third dimension was added to those, which through a spiral movement that encompasses both the vertical and horizontal connection between the subjects is introduced by the logic of practical contents, and the way practical education is organised in seven semestral units or four practical subjects.

The people who designed individual syllabuses were continuously encouraged to relate these syllabuses to the practical training of students—through the training of generic and specific knowledge and skills within the study practicum, and through diverse developmental and research project tasks and

tasks related to fieldwork and practical placement bases—and thereby contribute to practical testing of and giving meaning to the conceptual knowledge acquired in the class.

Through self-evaluation we succeeded in designing a programme whose main focus is placed on social work subjects and practical work, which gives the social work profession more status and standing. To illustrate this extremely important, difficult and long-term improvement it is useful to recall the very beginnings of the School for Social Work, which only included a small sample of social work subjects. According to the description of the history of the curriculum given by Pavla Rapoša Tajnšek in the book *It Was Easier for Me to Work with a Diploma* (Rapoša Tajnšek, 2005), in the first year of the existence of the School for Social Work in 1955/1956 there was not a single subject among the total of seventeen in the two-year programme that would qualify as social work, and even ten years later, in 1965, there was only one specific social work subject and only one connective subject among a total of fifteen subjects.

The recognition of practical work in the faculty programme, the increased share of specific social work subjects, and the increased share of elective contents within all three subject groups are considered to be among the most important achievements of the Faculty of Social Work within the Bologna reform. Moreover, the entire concept of the study for social work has been subjected to thorough rethinking, so that it now reflects those needs for social work knowledge that were suggested by the members of the strategic reform group who are practising professionals. The transformation of the study subjects continued for four years and encouraged many new ideas and connections that before this had been unexpressed. The entire process also largely impacted the quality of work at the faculty through redefining the relations among the staff, in the sense that we became more connected to each other.

In 2009 (Dragoš, 2009), most of the work was invested in the operation of the Centre for Practical Study. Its tasks now range from the most diverse aspects of content and organisation of practical social work to involving numerous other fields of work related to the Bologna reform. Practical work is very important for the profession of social work, which is why the faculty devotes much time and attention to this part of education.

With the reformed study programme, the faculty made a huge step forward in terms of the implementation of practical education, resulting in a much more elaborated programme of practical work, mainly due to the realisation that preparations for practical work involve more contact hours than it was possible to achieve in the old programme. The preparation for practice also involves the training of mentors from professional practice in accordance with the respective study years and modules.

The substantive renewal of the social work study programme involved the identification and compilation of a list of the competences of prospective social workers. Initially, faculty was faced with the question of what can

be considered a competence, and in identifying individual competences it followed the definition suggested by Professor Ivan Svetlik (2005), who described competences not only in terms of “what” they are, but also of “how” they can be identified.

General competences of the programme were then defined, encompassing 15 elements which have remained unchanged until today. As agreed by all those who collaborated in the design of the programme, the common grounds of all these competences are that they define the scientific and expert field of social work and therefore refer to education and research in social work, thus following the mission of our work. Further, numerous subject-specific competences in different areas of social work were then designed referring to the teaching contents of individual subjects, and these are written in the subject syllabuses. The competences then get updated and changed depending on the way each individual teacher delivers the subject contents, which is the responsibility of individual teachers as holders of the subjects.

The general competences of the programme in the first cycle of the study are the following (Šugman Bohinc, 2008):

1. Knowledge and understanding of the concepts, theories, and phenomena, as well as methods and procedures of social work (e.g. social contexts, legal norms, institutions, public policy and administration, human resources management, etc.);
2. Ability to analyse and synthesise (e.g. analysis of social phenomena and developments, synthesis of professional skills, ability to understand the relations between the problems of individuals and wider social context, the ability to identify and remove systemic obstacles);
3. The use of knowledge, procedures, and methods (e.g. the use of knowledge and procedures to strengthen user power, joint finding and co-creation of support networks, co-creation of working relationship, advocacy and the inclusion of deprived persons, etc.; the use of knowledge on the structural characteristics of marginalisation, the use of diverse resources of support and help; the use of methodological research tools; the use of modern approaches and principles, co-ordination of work tasks and the selection of methods and modes of work in compliance with the professional standards);
4. Capability of strategic thinking and acting (e.g. the ability of joint planning and evaluation, anticipation of developments, distinguishing which issues are essential and which are not, co-creation of solutions for long-term fundamental problems, advocacy attitude);
5. Critical and ethical (self)reflection of thinking and acting (e.g. commitment to professional ethics in social environment with respecting the principle of non-discrimination and multi-culturalism, the ability to reflect on one’s own participation);

6. Recognition and understanding of and response to diversity (e.g. the ability to reflect on one's own prejudices and discriminatory actions, identify any racist and discriminatory actions and social ideologies, and actively engage against them; flexibility of action in diverse social and cultural environments; identification, recording, and documenting of personal stories of users/their problems, needs, aims, resources, etc., differences among them and responses to them);
7. Recognition and understanding of human distress and crises related to social and personal circumstances (in the lives of individuals, families, groups, collectives, communities);
8. The ability to co-create the desired outcomes with taking into account the user perspective (the ability of monitoring and regulating given circumstances, such as articulating previously unreflected on conflicts, establishment of the working relationship and personal contact, joint definition of problems and desired outcomes, conversation management towards the agreed desired outcomes, negotiations);
9. Communication skills (skills of conveying a message, listening, summarising, writing, public presentations and argumentation, verbal expression, clear, active, public appearances, the use of ICT);
10. Innovation (ability to (co-)create authentic or alternative concepts, solutions, procedures—instead of leaning on regular procedures, when they do not work in given situations).
11. Ability of team, group, and project work (willingness to collaborate, respect others' opinions and fulfil the agreed role within the team and group, ability to collaborate and represent the views of the profession in an interdisciplinary environment);
12. Networking ability (e.g. making new connections in the organisation and outside it, management of formal and informal relationships, skilled use of networks in the context of the problem considered);
13. The ability of joint management and co-management (e.g. the ability to co-ordinate, organise, give advice, and manage users and professional co-workers);
14. The ability of working in international and pluralist professional environment (e.g.: the ability to understand global processes, the articulation and representation of the profession in international environment, work in international professional bodies, writing and publishing in international publications);
15. Professional attitude: the ability of professional discipline, care for one's own professional development, for the development and the reputation of profession, and the transfer of knowledge.

In the same year (2009) the faculty also started to evaluate the “Social work” study programme to be able to renew and improve it, even while it was being implemented during the studies of the first generation of students. The evaluation procedures used with the programme included:

- the reports of those who implemented the programme;
- student surveys;
- evaluation of the programme at the related departments;
- consideration of the programme in the internal evaluation group.

In 2010 (Dragoš, 2010) much work was devoted to the promotion of the study programme. While for the time being the enrolment in the full-time social science programme at other faculties was still satisfactory, there were the first signs of reduced demand for these fields, which could be seen in less students attending the study information days taking place each year before the call for enrolment. The reduced number of enrolled students was mainly recorded for part-time studies, where the positions were not quite filled even after the third call for applications, while the positions for full-time study were filled at the first call. This was attributed to the decreased interest in paying for the study, as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, as unlike in the socialist past the study was no longer free. The study programme was promoted on different occasions, also being presented in high schools, particularly those ending with a final matriculation exam.

In 2012 (Dragoš, 2012) intense work was devoted to different indicators of the quality of the study programme for social work (which was related to the re-accreditation of the University of Ljubljana, whose member is the Faculty of Social Work), and in closely co-operating with the university services the faculty was faced with many strengths and weaknesses of its own work. This co-operation resulted in the strengthened links between the faculty and the University of Ljubljana, as well as entailing the establishment of a completely new level of co-operation between the faculty's staff and its students. In terms of content, the faculty acquired much information that helped us in our work on the programme re-accreditation, immediately following the re-accreditation of the University of Ljubljana. Visits and reports of the evaluators from the University of Ljubljana as well as foreign evaluators were very positive and offered us invaluable insights into how the faculty is seen and perceived by our environment. We were positively surprised and happy about the response, which gave us new energy for further work.

In 2014/2015 the preparations were started for a re-accreditation of the programmes in all three study cycles, and again, within a year, the faculty did outstanding work at all three levels of study.

#### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE BOLOGNA REFORM OF THE PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL WORK

This chapter presents brief summaries describing the specific changes, noting which of them were good and which were less effective, and what achievements were made as seen from today's point of view, based on the strategic plans that we have committed to eight years ago, after we had managed to grasp the idea of the Bologna reform as mandatory rather than a choice.

The three-cycle study was designed, as follows:

1. cycle—a four-year study of social work giving students the title “University Graduate Social Worker”;
2. cycle—a one-year study that brings the title “Master of Social Work”, and at the Faculty of Social Work there are five master’s studies: Family Social Work, Social Work with the Elderly, Mental Health in the Community, Social Inclusion and Justice in Handicap, Ethnicity and Gender, and Social Work;
3. cycle—doctoral study of social work that brings the title Doctor of Philosophy, PhD.

For all three study cycles, the content plans of study were changed and a new credit system was introduced. However, while the study degrees have remained the same, the European reform guidelines were not adequately interpreted for the benefit of the Slovenian education system. Namely, under the Bologna reform students at Slovenian universities study for five years to achieve the same degree of education that they could previously obtain after only four years. This makes us unique in all of Europe. The goal of the Bologna reform was to make the length of study shorter and more connected with practice, so that the graduates would become employed more rapidly.

The faculty’s integrated approach to the reform resulted in an increased quality of work among the faculty staff and mainly in the increased connections among the teaching and non-teaching staff. Moreover, the links between the Faculty of Social Work and the University of Ljubljana also strengthened. After many years of effort, the faculty gained a clearer view of the work of all the University’s offices and of how the programmes should be implemented at all three levels. Feedback from the University with regard to the faculty’s programmes and the institution as a whole brought us to the decision to make the inventory of all the processes in the entire study process (pedagogical and non-pedagogical), the result of which was a comprehensive document including recommendations and measures to improve the operation and implementation of the programmes at the Faculty of Social Work.

There are some other things to be pointed out, such as, reduced quality of work for the staff of all the Faculties of the University of Ljubljana due to the increased bureaucracy that followed the reform. To put this in another way, the autonomy of the University seems to be gradually reducing due to the unharmonised requirements of the recently established Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency (SQAA) and the Ministry of Higher Education that carry out quality control in higher education. The financial crisis even widened the gap between the University on the one side, and SQAA and government services in the field of education on the other. In order to obtain a positive opinion from this agency, all higher education institutions are required to follow a set of quality assurance recommendations that sometimes fail to be linked to improving the actual quality of study programmes.

Although the reform mainly took place at the content level, the framework outlined by the credit system made it impossible for students to be offered a programme that would be effective in terms of content, because even in the first years of its implementation it turned out that the number of contact hours was reduced to such a degree that it prevented the realisation of the core content of some subjects. Theoretical subjects suffered a deficit in the number of teaching hours, because they are now required to include less lectures and hours of practicum and provide for more independent individual work. On the bright side, there are the subjects of Practical Work 1, 2, 3, and 4 that have enough hours for the students to get to know the profession and its work in real-life situations. When the first generation of the Bologna graduates finished their studies, the evaluation showed that they had acquired less knowledge, although it was of higher quality. However, it did take one study year longer in the new system to acquire the 7th degree of education in Slovenia, with five years needed compared to four under the old system.

All this also influenced graduate social workers' employability. While with the first-degree diploma the graduates of social work can now enter the labour market, they automatically enter a lower pay class of their older colleagues who completed the old two-year professional programme of social work.

This also made the Faculty of Social Work question its role both in the promotion of the profession and in raising the faculty's reputation among the public. Currently, these are very topical issues, which the Faculty of Social Work as well as the whole of the University of Ljubljana are dealing with in the 2018/2019 academic year.

The establishment of the new tutor system the Alumni Club and the work of the University Career Center are of great help to us in resolving these questions.

The basic aim of the tutor system is to provide learning support, which has been shown to be an effective mechanism to help achieve a higher student progression rate, which is one of the indicators of the quality of study at the University of Ljubljana. There was also an important shift concerning the association of Slovenian and foreign tutors, which strengthens internationalisation. Strengthening the connections between Slovenian tutors, as well as between Slovenian and foreign tutors, also creates a number of new opportunities for student collaboration (Pulko, 2018).

Founded at the Faculty of Social work in 2017, the Alumni Club has the following goals (The Rules of the Organization and Work of the Alumni Club of the Faculty of Social Work, 2016):

- establishment of connections and social ties among graduates as professional colleagues and with the Faculty of Social Work, its teachers, and staff;
- promotion of professional and scientific collaboration between the Faculty of Social Work and its graduates, and the promotion of collaboration between the environments in which they work;

- monitoring and supporting the Faculty of Social Work's development;
- encouragement and promotion of connections between the teaching, and scientific-and-research work of the Faculty of Social Work and employers;
- care for the reputation of the profession and education provided by the Faculty of Social Work;
- promotion of social work in the social environment.

The Career Center of the Faculty of Social Work offers a personal approach to all students in their transition from study to the labour market, which includes activities such as:

- workshops for acquiring competences and other employment skills;
- visits and presentations of working environments in Slovenia and other EU countries;
- networking and meetings with employers;
- conferences and meetings regarding the challenges of working abroad, of working in private businesses, and of apprenticeships;
- Skype counselling with counsellors from other countries;
- fairs, career days, and many other activities.

The University of Ljubljana with its very strong activities in the development of human resources and the transition from studying to the labour market has been, and continues to be, of great help in this regard.

The University of Ljubljana also carries out its social responsibility by transferring knowledge into practice. This is achieved through research and development as well as expert work, through employment of its graduates in other organisations, promotion of entrepreneurship, through counselling work and the inclusion of experts from practice in teaching and research work, through programmes of life-long learning, further training and education.

Organisational forms for the transfer of knowledge include competence centres, excellence centres, research and development projects for businesses and other organisations, the Career Center, the Ljubljana University Incubator, Innovations and Development Institute, and the advising the Collegium of Businessmen of the University of Ljubljana.

This is the so-called third dimension of the University, which in the future will be further strengthened, as by 2020 it will increase the number and value of the projects for the private and public sector by one-third, as well as double the number of participants in the programmes of life-long learning (Strategy of the University of Ljubljana, 2012). This will be achieved through the following:

- formation of strategic and development partnerships and joint development groups, and through carrying out development projects in collaboration with both private companies and the public sector;



- strengthening the transfer of technology and establishing the role of managers of knowledge as promoters of the transfer of basic knowledge in practice, and concrete development issues ranging from the production environment to research and development teams;
- developing the supply of programmes of life-long learning for further training and education of graduates, including the possibility of achieving additional qualifications;
- strengthening the activities of the Career Center, whose task is to direct students to study programmes of the University of Ljubljana, help graduates plan their careers and find employment, collaboration with employers, the organisation of graduate clubs, and monitoring the employability and success of the graduates in their work environments;
- better connections and mutual collaboration among the Career Center, the Ljubljana University Incubator and the transfer of knowledge office, with the emphasis on the promotion of the creation of new businesses and jobs, and increasing employment opportunities.

Before the beginning of the reform, the Faculty of Social Work had strategically set some framework goals. While not all of them were achieved mainly due to legislative constraints and administrative obstacles, many of them were realised, which is also seen from the reports that the faculty submits annually to the University of Ljubljana. The goals included the following: a further reform until 2016; consideration of the evaluation of all five years of the study; the development of the integrated master's study programme; the development of the national doctoral study programme; and restoration of the autonomy of the faculty, mainly with regard to bureaucratic obstacles.

The re-accreditation process is now behind us, and it let us acquire substantial data with intermediate evaluations of the study subjects and their implementation, which were the basis for all the changes that are considered in the re-accreditation documents.

### IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDY

In all the years of its existence (since 1955) the Faculty of Social Work has been a pillar of the development of social work and the field of social care in general in Slovenia. Its workers and associates have developed a high level of education for social work that is mainly based on the faculty's own scientific and research activities, as well as good knowledge of international trends. The faculty is a holder and initiator of numerous innovations without which it would be difficult to even imagine social work in Slovenia.

The employees at the Faculty of Social Work have developed forms and methods of work that represent the basis of modern social work in Slovenia: counselling work, group work, community social work, street social work, and family social work, to name a few. We have established the basis of voluntary work, action research, and qualitative analysis, which have not only

influenced the profession of social work, but have also had a broader meaning in Slovenian social and human sciences (Mesec, 2015b).

In 2007 the faculty made a conscious decision to explore our internal environment and try to introduce changes that in the era of general progress could help develop not only a fresh organisational culture, but would also influence the development of the study of social work according to the new, Bologna principles. A process of comprehensive strategic planning was started even before, in October 2006, which involved the participation of all employees at the Faculty of Social Work and the students (Mesec, 2007).

Research was started by exploring the existing internal environment, following the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) principle. A comprehensive document was written which in the following years provided the faculty with support to build new approaches for quality and more professional work with students (Mesec, 2015b).

The most frequently mentioned virtues of the faculty were the friendly interpersonal relationships, good group dynamics, solidarity, sense of belonging, absence of competition, good relationship with students, democratic relationships, simplicity, tolerance, and similar qualities.

The departments highlighted their unity, broad knowledge, recognisability and strong connections, and as a faculty we were proud of our conference activities, public recognition, efficient transfer of knowledge to practice, and the adaptation of the study programmes for students with impairments.

The main advantage, as expressed by the staff at the Faculty of Social Work, is its smallness, which enables them to nurture good professional communication that generates a great variety of ideas along with the awareness that social work is a practical, active science that requires continuous transformation. This is largely because in Slovenia we have no competition in this field, as well as a result of the aforementioned nurturing of tradition and values that were left to us by our forerunners.

In 2009, the faculty decided to record all its processes, with the aim of helping to recognise any risks to its operations. All its staff answered different questions related to employment, organisation, professional competences and learning, attitude to quality assurance, payments, internal communication and information, internal relationships, management, sense of belonging, knowledge of the mission, vision and goals of the institution, motivation and engagement, career development, innovation and initiative, and the satisfaction (Mesec, 2015b).

The results showed that most of the employees had a clear idea about what is expected from them in their work and about their position in the organisational scheme of the faculty. It was noted that employees' tasks were clearly defined and that the decisions of leaders were timely.

With regard to training and learning, the great majority of employees agreed that they had enough opportunities for further education, that only people with adequate education were employed at the faculty, but that many

people were not acquainted with the different kinds or contents of additional education available. These observations contributed to improvements in recent years, with the University of Ljubljana offering free education with diverse themes that are needed to raise the quality of pedagogical work (Project KUL, 2013–2014).

Teachers as well as support staff feel responsible for the quality of their work and for contributing to the best of their abilities to the joint achievement of the quality standards outlined in the Rules of Procedure of the University of Ljubljana. All departments have clearly defined goals and quality standards and agree on that the Faculty of Social Work considers the quality of work and the workload to be equally important issues.

### SUMMARY

Throughout the years the institution has existed—under its various names, as a school, college, and faculty of social work—its staff and students have taken care to collect materials about its work, which today are a precious resource for research into the history and development of the professionalisation of social work in Slovenia. The institution also keeps documents that contain syllabuses and descriptions of the teaching process in the first years of the development of the social work programme. In 2005 all employees and students of the Faculty of Social Work participated in extensive research into the history of social work in Slovenia. Through collecting data and conducting interviews with the still living representatives of the early years of education for social work in Slovenia, the faculty was able to acquire new knowledge that later in the same year was presented at the scientific conference “History of Social Activities, Social Policy and Education for Social Work”.

In 2006 the Bologna reform forced the Faculty of Social Work to give the form and content of the study of social work more in-depth thought. It also triggered long debates about what we wanted for the future of our profession, and what the profession of social work represented in the social environment. The process of creation and formation of the new study programme at all three study levels was a huge challenge and raised questions related to the existence of the study of social work and independence of this higher education institution. In the not so distant past the School for Social Work had to strive for recognition in the world of science on several occasions, and with its persistence and good results finally acquired the title of the Faculty of Social Work, and with it a university title and the possibility of providing study programmes at 2nd and 3rd levels. It aimed at keeping and upgrading all its system and status gains, which is why it was very motivated to change. The entire process of programme design took four years, mainly because all syllabuses and curricula had to be transformed. The European credit transfer system was introduced for the first time, and completely new study programme was designed, taking into account the relevant aspects of student surveys and

student opinions about past programmes, as well as employment indicators (based on these, new modules were introduced, and those that did not show a high degree of employability were abolished).

If today we ask ourselves what were the advantages of the reform for the Faculty of Social Work, it is difficult to decide whether the present situation is better or worse than was the past. Certainly, the study is more structured and of better quality, but there are many negative remarks with regard to the implementation of the Bologna system of education.

At the beginning, the reform had its supporters as well as strong opponents. Among the latter was Jože Mencinger (2008), the former rector of the University of Ljubljana, who in an interview suggested that the Bologna reform of higher education in Slovenia was yet another attempt to introduce the so-called study by stages, employment-oriented education or a similar form that in Slovenia (and the former Yugoslavia) had existed once before. As Mencinger critically pointed out, all those experiments had failed, and the introduction of the Bologna reform was not different from those past reforms in Slovenia but in that the latter had been dictated by the needs of our society, while the former was introduced due to the requirements of the labour market. At the very end, as he claimed, the Bologna reform was an attempt to produce human capital with a universally valid certificate to reduce employment risks for employers.

Faculties and other members of the University of Ljubljana have had many discussions in the years since the introduction of the reform about differences that arose during its implementation, from the first accreditation of the programmes to their re-accreditation after seven years. While “the spirit of Bologna” somehow did not draw much enthusiasm, it did, however, enable at least some faculties as university members to carefully and thoughtfully design new programmes complying with the employability data and needs that emerge in practice, and the Faculty of Social Work is among these.

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