



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ & ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SCIENCES
NATIONAL & KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
MANAGING AUTHORITY

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Economics of the National & Kapodistrian University of Athens consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Professor Christos Ioannidis (Coordinator), University of Bath, UK
(Title) (Name and Surname) (Institution of origin)
2. Professor George Tridimas, University of Ulster, UK
(Title) (Name and Surname) (Institution of origin)
3. Professor Emiliios Galariotis, Audencia School of Management, France
(Title) (Name and Surname) (Institution of origin)
4. Professor Daniel Himarios, University of Texas – Arlington, USA
(Title) (Name and Surname) (Institution of origin)
5. Professor Nicholas Vonortas, George Washington University, USA
(Title) (Name and Surname) (Institution of origin)

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- Dates and brief account of the site visit.

24 February – 28 February 2014

- Whom did the Committee meet?

University rector, head of the University HQA, teaching faculty, secretarial – administrative staff and students

- List of Reports, documents, other data examined by the Committee.

Internal reports Volumes I – V, Staff CVs, purpose – made presentations of course degrees, dissertations, books authored by staff, texts used by students, faculty promotion material

- Groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed

All teaching staff together, non professorial staff separately; all administrative staff; and 1st and 3rd year students except for other student meetings that were disrupted by extremists

- Facilities visited by the External Evaluation Committee.

All facilities used by the department including, offices, teaching areas, labs and libraries

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

Please comment on:

- Appropriateness of sources and documentation used

The internal report is voluminous and somewhat confusing without always providing essential information

- Quality and completeness of evidence reviewed and provided

The department was informed of the decision of external evaluation in late November 2013. The report could not be produced during the period of strikes and as a result of the limited time available the quality of the report was somewhat short of what was expected. However, under the circumstances it was understandable

- To what extent have the objectives of the internal evaluation process been met by the Department?

At this stage we cannot comment on this as we are not familiar with the internal evaluation objectives. The leadership of the department and a substantial proportion of personnel welcomed and helped the evaluation report

A. Curriculum

To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.

APPROACH

- What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum? What is the plan for achieving them?
The Department has stated in its self evaluation document the aims and objectives of the course of studies for their degrees.
- How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?
The central process of the selection and sequence of modules upon which the degree structure was decided was not obvious
- Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?
The Department does state that its curriculum should prepare students to contribute to society and be able to join the labour market. The Department has been partly successful in these efforts.
- How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted?
All 6/7 “divisions” of the Department contributed to its construction and delivery. No other stakeholders were actively involved
- Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?
This is done in the context of the division but there is no institutional basis which regularizes the process

IMPLEMENTATION

- How effectively is the Department’s goal implemented by the curriculum?
Partly effective, as it provides for a pluralistic view of economic theory
- How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study?
Partly, its core in basic economic theory is comparable with similar institutions in Greece. Unlike other programmes, it puts additional emphasis on political economy in its core modules
- Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated?
The structure is articulated in a manner reflecting the composition of the divisions’ competences
- Is the curriculum coherent and functional?
Within the subject matter of the divisions the curriculum is reflective of their competences
- Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient?
Yes, as the course textbooks and class notes are distributed on time, and the time allocated is in accordance with the legal framework

- Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum?
For the demands of this curriculum the Department appears to be sufficiently staffed

RESULTS

- How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?
Given the Department's division structure and their subject matter the curriculum is reflecting their expertise at the appropriate level. The provision of services for 3 month internship is clearly aimed at improving the employability of students, one of the explicitly stated goals of the curriculum
- If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with?
N/A
- Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results?
The Department reflects, albeit in an informal basis, on the nature and effectiveness of the curriculum

IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?
The Department seems not to articulate a single collective view regarding the evolution and future direction of the curriculum as a result of its divisional structure, which fails to integrate it into a coherent point of view
- Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?
We are not aware of a single direction of change, however there are ongoing discussions amongst staff members about improving and raising the quality of the curriculum

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

Does the Department have a defined pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology?

The department operates a traditional teaching model based mainly on lectures and occasional seminars and provides reading material at a regular basis as required. The department is working actively to develop IT infrastructure and laboratories; however these are not yet adequately equipped and sufficient in size for the large number of students that they are forced to admit. This situation affects negatively the department's stated wish to equip the students with the practical experience required in core courses such as econometrics to integrate theory and practice.

Please comment on :

- Teaching methods used
Mainly traditional methods, such as lectures, seminars, tutorials and computer lab classes, as well as less traditional and innovative methods including e-classes.
- Teaching staff/ student ratio
Woefully inadequate, e.g. very low in comparison to international standards.
- Teacher/student collaboration
N/A
- Adequacy of means and resources
Please see our earlier comments regarding both the availability of human resources, IT infrastructure and the equipment of lecture theatres. We note that mainly small but continuous improvements to this category are thanks to the tireless efforts of the department's leadership. This is happening in the dearth of available funding and the risk of vandalism.
- Use of information technologies
Limited (see above). The students utilize extensively the web-driven administrative system regarding registration, course selection and examinations.
- Examination system
By and large, three hour end-of-term examination, occasionally supplemented by formative assessment. Note that the large number of students (including the significant proportion of "eternal" students) and the plethora of choices, as they are exercised, constrain the efficient implementation of the examination system and its nature.

IMPLEMENTATION

Please comment on:

- Quality of teaching procedures
There is no departmental evidence of quality control in terms of student evaluations or other sources of feedback. However we found evidence that at least one division seeks

and responds to student feedback formally.

- Quality and adequacy of teaching materials and resources.
See Above.
- Quality of course material. Is it brought up to date?
The books and lecture notes are available in a timely manner to all students, and books are updated. We wish to commend the timely translation into Greek of leading textbooks, which are taught in leading Universities abroad. The large number of students and the legal framework regarding course material distribution constrain the variety of course materials that could be made available to students at the undergraduate level, such as journal articles, monographs and web material.
- Linking of research with teaching
There is evidence that applied research brings currency to the teaching of some modules, such as for example Labor Economics and others.
- Mobility of academic staff and students
There is evidence of faculty and student mobility through exchange programmes as well as academic visiting positions. This enables international cooperation and enrichment of intercultural experiences.
- Evaluation by the students of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content and study material/resources
For the undergraduate degree, there is no evidence of departmental policy regarding feedback. We witnessed some evidence at divisional level. At the postgraduate level such policy does exist, and is consistent with international standards.

RESULTS

Please comment on:

- Efficacy of teaching.
There was no evidence at the departmental level that there was any effort to present data measuring the efficacy of teaching. To the extent that the distribution of final marks reflects the efficacy of teaching and the efforts of students, the fact that the majority of students fail to reach the classifications of “λίαν καλώς” and the scarcity of students graduating with “άριστα” gives grounds to the department engaging in a thoughtful re-examination of the efficacy of their teaching/learning and assessment processes.
- Discrepancies in the success/failure percentage between courses and how they are justified.
No departmental policy of comparison exists. However, results are discussed informally within the divisions.
- Differences between students in (a) the time to graduation, and (b) final degree grades.
We were shown statistical evidence which relates positively the results achieved and small deviations of the target time to graduation for the more recent cohorts of students. The longer the student remains registered over and above the four years of

study, the lower the degree classification.

- Whether the Department understands the reasons of such positive or negative results?

The department is fully aware of the reason behind these trends and aims to curtail the population of student exceeding the n+2 period. We wish to commend the department's leadership for its sustained and successful efforts in reducing the number of "eternal" students.

IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department propose methods and ways for improvement?

Although the department is aware of existing deficiencies, there is no coherent plan for improved procedures and their implementation. The adoption of coherent policies may be inhibited by the fragmented nature of the department because of the existence of the divisions.

- What initiatives does it take in this direction?

At this stage there is no departmental plan (see above).

C. Research

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

APPROACH

- What is the Department's policy and main objective in research?
We were unable to locate an explicit statement regarding research policy at the departmental level. However, in the department's mission statement there is reference to achieve a leading position in teaching and research in economics. The divisions presented, at the individual level, aspects of their research efforts.
- Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?
There are no written standards for assessing research. However, members of the department have expressed the opinion that the quality of research is seriously taken into account in hiring and promotions. There is a widespread awareness of the need of standards of quality within the different divisions; however, it has not been expressed in concrete manner at the departmental level.

RESULTS

- How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented?
In the absence of explicit research objectives this cannot be ascertained by the committee, but at the heuristic level at best. This is a direct consequence of the existing research culture and its implementation in the department.
- Scientific publications.
We observed a wide diversity in the nature and quality of scientific publications across the different divisions. The same diversity in output was observed across members of staff over the last five years. We were shown evidence of cumulative impact across individual divisions and members of staff. The department provided evidence of the volume of scientific output over time. There was no indication of the quality ranking of this volume of data.
- Research projects.
A significant proportion of staff members have been successful in securing research funding (2004-09, 72% of academic staff and 2009-13, 41% of academic staff). These figures place the department at the top three departments of the University of Athens. At the same time the amount of funding was drastically reduced.
- Research collaborations.
There is ample evidence of joint publications and research grants with academics from other departments at home and abroad.
- Efficacy of research work. Applied results. Patents etc.
The research effort of faculty members has been acknowledged by institutions of the public and private sectors as evidenced from the supplied CVs of all faculty members.
- Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department?

Rewards and awards.

Over time several senior members of faculty have served in important and influential policy making positions at home and abroad (for instance the Greek government, The European Central Bank, the National Bank of Greece, etc). Research presentations in international conferences by staff members have been awarded distinctions for the quality of the work presented. Several staff members' research has significant number of citations.

IMPROVEMENT

- Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary.
The department's leadership has recently adopted an active policy to encourage the quality of research of younger and talented members of staff by allocating additional research funding and supporting international collaborations. The success of this policy maybe threatened by the restrictive institutional framework by micromanaging staff duties.
- Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department.
With the introduction of formal postgraduate studies at the MSc and PhD levels, the department has invested heavily using its own resources for the purchase of databases and research scholarships to support the advancement of research activity.

D. All Other Services

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

APPROACH

- How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students).
The department has a positive attitude towards all services provided and strives to provide services of the highest calibre to all stakeholders
- Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically?
We have no evidence to judge possible simplifications. Whenever possible, the department uses electronic resources in carrying out its services
- Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?
N/A

IMPLEMENTATION

- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).
The department has established a competent and responsive administrative process to deal with its needs. It is currently staffed by seven people down from eleven until very recently.
- Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g. library, PCs and free internet access, student counseling, athletic- cultural activity etc.).
The department runs a library service housed in a refurbished University accommodation providing access to numerous hard copy and electronic resources. It provides for an excellent study environment administered by dedicated staff, whose numbers shrunk considerably from five to two. As a result shorter time periods of operation are available resulting in a massive underutilisation of an excellent and supportive resource. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of users has dropped from an estimated average of 300 (approx) daily users to about 80 (approx).

RESULTS

- Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?
The department administrative services work well despite increases in personnel shortages and increases in student numbers requiring administrative services (examination, issuance of certificates and the like). University – wide administrative services appear cumbersome and somewhat ineffective. For example, approval of acquisition of up-to-date software for undergraduate teaching purposes has been unnecessarily delayed.
- How does the Department view the particular results?
The Department could avail itself of better quality services provided by personnel appropriately trained.

IMPROVEMENTS

- Has the Department identified ways and methods to improve the services provided?
Such improvements are problematic in the light of institutional constraints. We note the quality of leadership of administrative personnel in delivering a competent service under adverse conditions
- Initiatives undertaken in this direction.
N/A

E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

Please, comment on the Department's:

- Potential inhibiting factors at State, Institutional and Departmental level, and proposals on ways to overcome them.
- Short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- Plan and actions for improvement by the Department/Academic Unit
- Long-term actions proposed by the Department.

The department is severely constrained in delivering a long-term plan that is credible in the face of current legal, regulatory and financial uncertainties. These uncertainties inhibit long – term planning and absorb the energy of the departmental leadership in managing the existing situation. The existing ambiguities of the role of the department chair are partly the result of legal opaqueness and exogenous circumstances. This is unhelpful to the development of a coherent long – term plan at the departmental level. The intellectual fragmentation of the department to divisions with no formal coordinating arrangement exacerbates the situation and amplifies the impact of the existing uncertainties. For our recommendations, whilst acknowledging the existing institutional setup, please consult the following section F.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- the development of the Department to this date and its present situation, including explicit comments on good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process and recommendations for improvement

We commend the dynamism and willingness to adopt change by several members of faculty, especially the departmental leadership and some senior members of staff. In addition, the contribution of the administrative staff cannot be overestimated in the life and operation of the department. We also commend the departmental effort to help and support students to complete their academic studies without a loss of semester despite the very difficult circumstances.

There is however a lack of consistency between stated objectives and current practices, reinforced by the rigid and cumbersome legal framework and antiquated custom and practice.

We regret that our work was interrupted twice by a small minority of extremists who insulted and intimidated us in the line of our evaluations. We wish to record that the university authorities failed to provide a safe and secure environment in which to conduct our work. The Department made genuine and effective efforts to minimize the threat to the evaluation process, by organizing alternative venues and making arrangements to visit the facilities without interruptions. We are grateful for and highly appreciative of their efforts and recognize the limits of their authority in providing security on the premises of the University"

In spite of such incidents we thank the numerous staff members and students who actively participated in the evaluation and provided us with useful and valuable information.

GENERAL COMMENTS

- I. It is desirable to undertake measures to increase the cohesiveness of the department, facilitate its management, and align its operations. In this spirit, we recommend that the historical "divisions" be abolished.
- II. It is desirable that the management and generated revenues of all postgraduate programmes be integrated in the department's resource allocation model.
- III. It is important that the department publishes and circulates a full account of all departmental activities to all members of staff in advance. More specifically, such information should include teaching hours, class size, marking load, supervisory duties, invigilation duties, and administrative duties. The time allowed for research should be stated explicitly, and the output of such research be related to the overall workload.
- IV. The department should adopt a policy of nurturing young researchers in terms of the workload model and allocation of funds.
- V. We are happy to hear that the existing locational fragmentation of the department will soon cease when it moves to its new premises.

PARTICULAR COMMENTS

I. Curriculum

- i. The stated objectives of the curriculum emphasises the acquisition of the appropriate skill set to understand the economic conditions and facilitate labour market participation. This requires a thoughtful redesign of the curriculum with emphasis on applications of economic theory and the use of data in the compulsory modules. We understand that such redesign will require the displacement of some existing core modules into the set of electives and the promotions of some elective modules to core. A good example would be the inclusion of applied econometrics as a core module for all economics students. Such redesigning will further facilitate the acceptance of graduates to the best graduate schools abroad and to private and public sector positions which will result in a constructive engagement with societal problems.
- ii. The department should set up a committee to evaluate the possible overlaps between the currently offered 118 undergraduate modules. This is warranted in view of the fact that the number of modules is heavily out of line with other comparable programmes.
- iii. Furthermore, the department should adopt a common format of presenting the modules in terms of aims and objectives and most importantly learning outcomes, the achievement of which will be systematically evaluated.

II. Teaching

- i. It is absolutely essential that the department establishes a robust procedure (paper or web-based) of module evaluation and the appropriate feedback processes to both staff and students. Such feedback process will involve the support of staff members' teaching performance if and when required, resulting in improving teaching and assessment effectiveness.
- ii. A significant improvement of the very challenging staff/student ratio and administrative support are absolutely essential to the improvement of teaching and learning efficacy.
- iii. The current practice of prolonged absences of members of staff occupying organic positions and their substitution with hourly paid academic teachers is detrimental to teaching quality and long term standing of the department.
- iv. Equally important is the reduction in the numbers of students whose tenure exceeds twelve semesters, as such cohorts of students put extreme strain on the limited resources (see also above).
- v. Regarding the MSc Economics it is desirable to look at the possible consolidation of the modules offered in the interest of both academic content and efficient resource allocation.

III. Research

- i. In the absence of a mission statement for research, the departments should develop one.
- ii. The department should monitor the quality of the research output in order to achieve a position among the leading institutions as stated in their own departmental mission statement.

- iii. The department must establish appropriate benchmarks for evaluating the quality of the research output according to international standards, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the subject areas.
- iv. The department should establish a research committee to evaluate the research output in regular intervals; this will help stem the observed loss of momentum in some instances.
- v. If possible, the department should establish an incentive scheme to reward high quality research.
- vi. In the interest of accountability all members of the department should keep up-to-date web profiles.
- vii. Develop a closer monitoring of PhD progress; a time limit for the completion of the PhD; more active participation of PhD students in the life of the department (undertaking the teaching of tutorial classes and invigilation duties).
- viii. Establish a committee to consider the funding of the PhD on a sustainable basis and in conjunction with the existing MSc economics structure.
- ix. It has been noted that following the break-up of the successful joint PhD programme with AUEB, the doctoral programme of the department has become financially vulnerable. The department must consider its long term sustainability.
- x. The current practice of prolonged absences of members of staff occupying organic positions and their substitution with hourly paid academic teachers is detrimental to the research culture and this must stop.

IV. Services

- i. It is imperative that the utilisation and opening hours of the departmental library are extended as soon as possible
- ii. It is strongly recommended that up-to-date software for teaching and research is delivered on time
- iii. It is also recommended that the current shortage of administrative personnel is filled with qualified and appropriately trained personnel

- The Department's readiness and capability to change/improve

The alignment of goals to change/improve the department is inhibited by the present structure of the department in terms of somewhat disjointed, historically formulated "divisions".

From our discussions with all stakeholders we detected the unquestionable willingness to adopt measures aimed at safeguarding the continuous improvement in quality.

- The Department's quality assurance.

The current operations of the department provide teaching and research are generally comparable to the quality encountered in similar institutions. This is attained by the concerted efforts of the leadership and the initiatives of individual members of staff both academic and administrative. The department needs to develop and implement robust and well documented processes to establish verifiable quality assurance.

The Members of the Committee

<u>Name, Surname and Affiliation</u>	<u>Signature*</u>
1. Professor Christos Ioannidis (Coordinator), University of Bath, UK	
2. Professor George Tridimas, University of Ulster, UK	
3. Professor Emiliios Galariotis, Audencia School of Management, France	
4. Professor Daniel Himarios, University of Texas – Arlington, USA	
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