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HELLENIC REPUBLIC
H . Q . A .
HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

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1. EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE (EEC)

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation (EEC) of the University/Technological Education Institution named: **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh)** comprised the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry kept by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 and the Law 4009/2011:

Professor Adamantios Arampatzis (Chairman)
Humboldt-University Berlin, Germany

Professor Anastasia Karakasidou
Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA

Professor John Floros
Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, USA

Professor Christos Clairis
Sorbonne, Université Paris Descartes, Paris, France

Professor Basilis Gidas
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The External Evaluation Procedure

The site visit at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki commenced on Monday, 30 November, 2015 and concluded on Wednesday, 2 December, 2015. Upon arrival at the hotel, the Committee members were welcomed with a “package” that included the updated Self Evaluation Report of the University (as of November 2015), the presentations prepared by the various committees and departments, and other useful information about the people and the upcoming agenda. Additionally, the Committee was provided with a USB flash drive containing the abovementioned material, as well as its three (3) Annexes, and reports of the Institution’s Council, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Philosophy.

Due to students’ protests against the evaluation, the University modified the program and chose meeting places that would not be disrupted by protesting students. Because of this threat, the EEC did not have a chance to take a closer look at some University buildings, including the classrooms, the student cafeteria, the gym and the dormitories.

On Monday, the Committee met first with the chair and vice-chair of HQA, Professors Nikoletta Paisidou and Ioannis Gerothanasis, and then with the Rector of the University, Professor Pericles Mitkas, the five vice-rectors, chief administrative staff, IT personnel and the self-evaluation team (MOΔIII). The above-mentioned meetings were held at the Research Dissemination Center (KEDEA). The Committee was then given a Campus Tour, and had a chance to drive by the Student Center, the University’s Gym, the dormitories, the central Library and other buildings/facilities located on the university’s main campus. The EEC was also driven to see the facilities of the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and National Environment, the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, the Faculty of Fine Arts, and the Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Education (KEDEK), all located outside the main campus, in the city’s suburb of Thessaloniki.

On the second day of the visit (Tuesday, 1 December, 2015), the Committee was split into two groups and met with the deans, department heads, professors, coordinators of the internal self-evaluation (OMEA) and students of the following faculties: Agriculture and Forestry & National Environment; Engineering, Health Sciences, and Philosophy. At the end of the day the Committee met with thirteen (13) Postgraduate Students, PhD candidates and post-doctoral students of various Schools of the University.

On Wednesday, 2 December, 2015, the EEC met with the University’s Council, alumni, local and regional government authorities including the mayor of Thessaloniki, and the vice Secretary of the Region of Central Macedonia, as well as leaders of the various industrial, professional and merchant associations based in the Thessaloniki region. Later in the afternoon of the same day, the EEC gave an initial oral report to the rector, vice-rectors and members of the MOΔIII about its initial findings and recommendations.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Although the time allotted for our visit was very short for such a large and comprehensive

institution, and the agenda was at times very short, our visit was extremely well organized. The university should be commended for putting forth such a tremendous effort to share as much information as possible, show us a variety of places, and schedule meetings with so many groups. The university complied with all of our requests in good time.

2.2 The Self-Evaluation Procedure

The EEC felt that all the sources and documentation provided by the local institution were appropriate and useful. At the same time, the local liaison, was extremely helpful throughout the whole procedure. She provided any information we needed, in addition to the sources and documentation previously provided.

The institution provided the EEC with evidence that was complete and easily accessible. The Committee expresses its gratitude for the extensive and easily accessible information, tables, figures and other materials we needed to write this report.

The EEC found that the University's Self-Evaluation was conducted in a professional manner and that the Institution met its own criteria.

The Committee was also pleased to see that the self-evaluation attempted successfully to provide a complete overview of the function of the University. They used a sophisticated method to collect and analyse the data. Although a small number of faculty members did not comply with the internal evaluation requirements and did not provide the information requested, the EEC found the database complete enough to provide an overview of the elements and difficulties faced by the university.

The main goal of the self-evaluation procedure was to create 'a culture of quality' for both faculty and students of the University. Although this is a new concept in Greek society, particularly for the Institutions of Higher Education in Greece, the EEC was impressed with the University's accomplishments and believes that this 'culture of quality' is making important strides within the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH).

The EEC found the self-evaluation to be comprehensive and highly interactive.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3. PROFILE OF THE INSTITUTION UNDER EVALUATION

3.1 Institutional Governance, Leadership & Strategy

3.1.1 Vision, mission and goals of the Institution

The basic mission of the Institution is to continue to deliver high quality education and state-of-the-art research, and become competitive at the national and international levels. The main goal of the Administration is to transform the Aristotle University of

Thessaloniki into the best Institution for education and research within Greece and the Balkan region, and into a competitive center of learning and research in Europe and the world at-large.

The vision and priorities of the University are leading toward excellence, and will help improve the university's ranking to a possible position among the top 150 institutions in the world by 2020.

The University is implementing a number of processes to attain its educational and research goals. For example, the University is updating educational programs/curricula and modernizing research capabilities, thereby equipping its students with the necessary academic and technical knowledge that today's job market demands.

The Institution has established a timetable to monitor the progress towards their target goals of educational and research excellence. They have established specific mechanisms to follow and monitor student performance in their course work, as well as in their research requirements, especially for graduate students.

The University has well defined procedures to monitor the quality of student learning, both in coursework and research, and the EEC believes that the University is well positioned to attain its goals.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.2 Organizational Development Strategy

The cooperation and coordination of the various components of the administrative structure (Rector and vice-Rectors, the Council of the University, as well as the Deans of Colleges and the Heads of Departments) are very strong, efficient, effective, and fairly impressive, given the size of the University. In addition to employing excellent human resources, the university has developed an impressive electronic facilitation system of governance.

The University established 44 committees to assist the administration in the development of strategic plans. Examples of such committees are: Finance Committee, Committee on Gender and Equality, Committee for Postgraduate (Master) Studies, and Committee for International Post-Graduate Studies.

The University has designed a strategy to attain specific goals during 2016-2020. These goals include: (a) completion of planned changes at the level of Faculties, Departments and other Divisions; and (b) efficient use of current university space and buildings, and the construction of new facilities, if the current national economic situation permits.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.3 Academic Development Strategy

AUTH is the biggest academic institution in Greece and South Eastern Europe with 11 Faculties and 41 Departments. Despite the large size, the administration addressed effectively a number of issues related to individual departments. All departments have recently undergone both internal and external evaluations. These evaluations and other initiatives by the Faculties/Departments, play a crucial role in the Administration's response to departmental needs and requirements. A second issue under consideration is related to the big size of some faculties such as the Faculty of Health Sciences (Medical School) and the Faculty of Engineering (Πολυτεχνείο). The relevant Faculties have indicated the wish of making themselves separate entities under the broader umbrella of AUTH. Other Faculties such as the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry & National Environment may also wish to follow a similar path forward. The University should carefully examine the pros and cons of such a move before making a decision. The EEC believes that the on-going discussion is helpful and provides the University with a chance to decide a path forward as a more autonomous place of academic excellence.

The main goals in the educational planning of the university are: modernization, excellence and competitiveness of the graduate (Master and Doctoral) programs. To this end, a number of actions include: updating departmental programs, development and integration of laboratories, emphasis on multidisciplinary educational programs, collaboration with universities and institutions within and outside the country, creation of graduate (Master) program in foreign languages, accommodation of foreign students, etc.

The university has also established a Life Long Learning (Δια Βίου Μάθησις), offering an opportunity to non-traditional students to enrol in university classes. Although the Ministry of Education has not approved this program yet, the University has a complete curriculum ready and hopes for the program's fruition.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.4 Research Strategy

The University has high calibre research activities across a broad spectrum of disciplines represented in the University. There are strong collaborations across departments as well as interdisciplinary and international collaborations. They have some excellent laboratory facilities and an effort is being made to reorganize some of the research facilities so that

multiple research groups can use them. Recently the University created a new research centre (KEΔEK) to host a number of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research groups. The EEC concurs with the importance of this center and encourages the Administration and the researchers to use it as a model for future areas of research. KEΔEK should also become the focal point for interactions and collaborations with various industries within and outside the country. The EEC feels that the Research Centre could (and should) set the foundation for aligning graduate programs (Master and Doctoral programs) with industrial and societal needs, or create new “professional” graduate programs, which would train or retrain personnel of industrial partners. Such a three-tier (KEΔEK, Industry, Academic programs) effort will assist the university financially (e.g. industry can provide the funds for the training-retraining of their personnel or establish student fellowships), will be useful to the university’s graduates to gain employment, and will contribute positively to the educational and research goals of the university.

The University has created a Research Committee to organize, facilitate and emphasize research within and across the university. In addition to coordinating research, the committee has established “fellowships of excellence” for Ph.D. candidates, as well as “fellowships of excellence” for university researchers. The Research Committee makes valiant efforts to attract international researchers, and provides economic support for fundamental research both in sciences and humanities. The Research Committee assists the faculty with the preparation of proposals, and exploits the patents and innovations submitted by university researchers. The EEC feels that the Research Committee should identify high caliber research activities across the university (such as for example Biomaterials and Regenerative Medicine) and combine them into larger research centers or units from both natural sciences and the humanities.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.5 Financial Strategy

The financial resources of the university come from the government, and most of the educational, service, and research activities are supported by government sources. Due to the national economic situation, the funds provided by the State have been reduced dramatically in the last 5-6 years (from €43.5 to €13.8 million). This reduction has already impacted the basic academic and educational functions of the university in a very negative way. The EEC believes that the Greek government must reverse this trend, because any further reduction in funding would be disastrous for the University’s academic, research and educational mission.

Within this fiscally severely constraint situation, the university has made and continues to make great efforts to secure financial support through research and service to the private sector and to local, national, and international organizations. Currently, the university makes efforts to exploit the value of their real estate. The EEC encourages the university to increase private fundraising and improve the financial benefits of their endowments. In addition, the administration should exploit the expertise of the city and local county administration in financial matters, work closely with them and the University Council to efficiently and effectively use the estate income, and similarly, all other financial

resources.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):

	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

The main factor impeding the university's Financial Strategy is the State's dramatic reduction of funds (more than a factor of three the past 5-6 years)

3.1.6 Building and Grounds Infrastructure Strategy

AUTH is an especially large university with its main campus located at the center of the city of Thessaloniki, and a number of additional facilities positioned outside the city. However, in the judgment of EEC, the university buildings are not sufficient for the size of the university. The current infrastructure and existing buildings are inadequate for the educational (e.g. classrooms), research and administrative needs of the university, and far below those of their peer institutions in Europe. The Greek government should address: the significant maintenance needs of current buildings, the desperate need for new educational and research infrastructure (classrooms, laboratories, etc.), and the needs for integrating and expanding the library system. The university, one of the oldest in the country, has some historic buildings, whose maintenance and preservation is especially important.

The existence of computer and information networks is fundamental in the education and research mission of today's academic institutions. AUTH has excellent expertise and knowhow in information technology (IT). In fact, it has produced and implemented a number of powerful software programs (e.g. ResCom, Moebius, MOΔIII internal evaluation program) that have been used effectively by the university and could be of interest to other institutions within and outside the country. AUTH has actually installed and maintains the Rescom software platform to almost half of the Institutions of Higher Education (AEI/TEI) in the country. However, the maintenance and modernization of the computer and IT systems are costly, and in the view of the EEC, the Greek government should address the financial support needed for modernizing and maintaining such networks.

The EEC realized that there are buildings (outside the main campus) that for technical and bureaucratic reasons beyond the control of the university are not properly heated during the winter – thereby making the attendance of students in a number of classrooms very difficult. These building are not connected to the gas network and need to be heated by oil. However the university is required to purchase oil only through a tender for all public buildings in Central Macedonia – a procedure that is often completed after the winter is over. EEC strongly suggest that the law which restricts the university for purchasing oil on its own when it is needed should be changed or at least the procedure for launching the tenders should be timely executed.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

The buildings and grounds infrastructure is primarily impeded by the economic negligence provided by the State and/or by bureaucratic procedures beyond the control of the university.

3.1.7 Environmental Strategy

The EEC believes that the University has well defined policies to seriously address environmental issues, as well as to address issues related to health within the campus. Indeed, the university has established an Environmental Office which works closely with relevant bodies of the Institution and systematically undertakes actions towards addressing environmental issues. The university's environmental strategies are supported by various agencies such as the Environmental Council and the Committee for Integrated Environmental and Aesthetic Management. However due to dramatic lack of financial resources, there are a number of problems related primarily to the hygienic needs of students, faculty, and personnel that need to be addressed. The students complain about the lack of properly maintained hygienic facilities, such as bathrooms and garbage collection.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.8 Social Strategy

The university has excellent relationships with the city and regional political authorities, and contributes ideally to the cultural outlook of the city, the region, and the country. Representatives of several industry associations (the Τεχνικά και Βιομηχανικά Επιμελητήρια) were enthusiastic about the role AUTH plays in their mission. The university provides them with up-to-date, timely, and accurate information, thereby contributing to the economic, social and cultural development of the local region and the entire Northern Greece. The university has developed clear channels of communication and collaborations with industry in Northern Greece, as well as in Europe, a point explicitly emphasized by the industrial representatives that visited with the EEC.

There exists an energetic Alumni Association of AUTH that works nicely with the University, and is involved in maximizing collaborations. The EEC feels that in the near future, the Alumni Association should play an increasingly important role in University activities.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.9 Internationalization Strategy

AUTH has a long and active history in international activities, and has taken concrete steps towards expanding and advancing its strategy for educational and research purposes. Concrete evidence for its international orientation is: (a) participation in international networks; (b) an extensive ERASMUS program that involves both student and faculty mobility, since faculty members also teach in foreign universities; (c) undergraduate programs in foreign languages (English and French); (d) two French and six English interdisciplinary programs held in various European universities, and the university encourages the various centers of excellence to accommodate these programs; (e) cooperation and collaboration with multiple international industrial partners in state-of-the-art research; and (f) offering foreign language classes (e.g. English, French, German) to Greek and international students.

The University has created committees to coordinate and support these activities (e.g. Committee for International Graduate Studies, Committee of International Relations, Committee of European Educational Programs). The University is currently planning the creation of a new program for graduate and post-graduate studies for both Greek and international students. One of the purposes of this program is to encourage students from foreign countries to study in AUTH. The courses in this program will be given in English. The EEC strongly supports this initiative and we hope the Ministry of Education will support it.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.10 Student Welfare Strategy

The University places great emphasis on the quality of services provided for the welfare and support of students. As an example, it takes care of the dormitories, and provides food for students, while medical insurance and electronic services are also covered by the university. However dormitories are very limited for the student population size of the university; the last dormitory was built more than 30 years ago – a problem due primarily to the negligence of proper State planning for student housing. EEC also identified deficits in the management and functionality of the dormitories – a problem that impacts the student living conditions and requires immediate attention. Although the university makes concrete efforts to streamline the management and operation of the dormitories, part of the problem seems to be due to the fact that the personnel of Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation (which has jurisdiction over the student housing

management) has been reduced to critical levels – a problem beyond the control of the university.

Needless to say, the University makes sincere efforts to promote academic excellence among its students. To this end, it offers awards and recognition to both undergraduate and post-graduate students, in an attempt to enhance the collegiality and collaborative spirit within the student body.

The University also offers resources for sports and cultural activities. The structure, opportunities and availability of the sport facilities and activities are well designed, facilitating the exercise and training of students. For example the existing University Summer Camp in Chalkidiki is a unique asset of student life. The collaborations with social and cultural local organisations are productive, and mostly based on initiatives by the members of the University community. The quality, originality and significance of the University initiatives are improving, but additional emphasis should be placed on establishing external collaborations and interactions outside Greece. The large number of alumni can help build such collaborative relationships with surrounding communities and the society at large. Furthermore, alumni that hold positions in prominent social, cultural, and political places can become catalysts for collaborative relationships.

Last, but not least, there is an impressive and seemingly effective infrastructure that supports and encourages students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):

	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2 Strategy for Study Programmes

3.2.1 Programmes of Undergraduate Studies (first cycle)

Regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the University's undergraduate programmes, the EEC agrees in principle with most of the points presented and discussed in the Self Evaluation. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is a large and comprehensive university, with a wide range of academic departments and programs, ranging from fine arts, to humanities, natural sciences, engineering, agriculture, law and medicine. However, the formal absence of a School of Social Sciences is noted.

Based on conversations the EEC had with faculty and students, it is evident that teaching is a priority for the faculty, and they spend considerable time in designing and delivering their courses and curricula.

The EEC also believes that the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki students receive high quality education and upon graduation they are well equipped to enter the job market in the country and abroad, especially in other European countries.

It is worth noting that only a small percentage of students graduate within the designated time period. However, this is not necessarily the responsibility of the University alone. There are several political, social and personal reasons that influence students and cause delays in their graduation. The EEC suggests that the main reason for this endemic problem characterizing all Greek Universities is governmental rules that allow students to delay the completion of their studies. The EEC feels strongly that such regulations should

change, and this change will be welcomed by most of the administrators and faculty we met at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Students have faculty support and relatively good and well-equipped facilities, as well as academic books, libraries, computers, and basic electronic support. Most faculty members appear eager and ready to mentor undergraduate students, and to forge amicable relations with them.

Regarding the weaknesses of the University, the Committee would like to point out that a number of facilities appear to be in desperate need of repair and improvement. The students should receive their education in a clean and well-maintained environment. The Committee understands that the University has limited funds and power to proceed with such improvements, and they entirely depend on the Ministry of Education for such initiatives.

At the same time, the University is obliged to accept a number of students dictated by the government, that cannot be accommodated in the existing facilities, neither can their expenses be covered by the already drastically reduced University budget.

Many degree programs (Προγράμματα Σπουδών) have somewhat strict course requirements. Such programs adequately train students in their fields, but -- due to a Ministry of Education rules -- they do not provide students with the flexibility to take courses in other departments and schools that may contribute to a better training and a well-rounded education. To overcome this restriction, several departments allow students to attend courses in other departments as elective courses. EEC believes that interdisciplinary education is crucial in today's academic world and strongly suggests that the restrictive rules imposed by the State be changed. In the meantime, EEC recommends that the university should extend the mechanism of elective cross-departments courses to all departments and disciplines and even find other mechanisms which would allow students to benefit from an interdisciplinary education.

Despite government laws and regulations, we hope that the University will find ways to help students complete their studies within a reasonable number of years.

The Committee believes that there are a couple of serious issues that need to be addressed regarding student obligations and reading material. First, class and lecture attendance by students is not obligatory, and thus an endemic problem of student absenteeism is created. EEC believes that the faculty should encourage students to attend lectures and problem sessions, perhaps by making class contribution part of the grading. Second, though some instructors recommend reading sources (such as scientific articles or additional books) beyond rigid textbooks, this does not seem to be the practice of all the instructors. EEC suggests that the departments should encourage all the instructors (especially those of "advanced" courses) to do the same thing – the wider choice of reading material would encourage students to create independent critical thinking, rather than memorizing and reproducing texts for their examinations.

The Central Administration recognizes and makes concerted efforts to address the above-mentioned weaknesses and improve the overall situation.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2.2 Programmes of Postgraduate Studies (second cycle)

The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki offers a large number of post-graduate programs (Master's program) across the disciplinary spectrum. All programs appear to have concrete study plans and they cover an impressive range of fields and topics. The University includes in its strategic planning the development of new graduate programs taught in English that could attract foreign students. The EEC supports such future plans, which are in line with current trends in the international academic community.

Though AUTH's post-graduate programs do an excellent job, EEC believes that the existence of a Graduate School that administers and manages (e.g. coordinates curricula, accepts applications, and assures the quality of post-graduate education) all graduate programs is crucial for a successful post-graduate education and research. Unfortunately, the Minister of Education has been ambivalent towards the idea of establishing a Graduate School in Greek universities. In view of the lack of an umbrella Graduate School, the university has recently established a Committee for Graduate Studies charged with the responsibility of assessing the feasibility studies of all new proposals and provide recommendations to ΜΟΔΙΠ – the unit that is currently responsible for the coordination and quality assessment of the university's graduate programs.

A weakness of the graduate programs is the absence of a coordinated mechanism to bring programs and students together and build interdepartmental ties. In addition, graduate programs appear to be under-staffed and in need of additional faculty to satisfactorily complete their educational mission. The committee also recommends the establishment of organized seminars for graduate students, where they can meet each other, present their research, get feedback and create a community of young scholars/researchers.

The duration of graduate programs varies, ranging from two to four semesters. It appears that each program designs its own curriculum and program requirements independently, although formal University guidelines exist. It is not specified in the material provided whether independent research and thesis writing is required for all graduate programs. The EEC would recommend making this a requirement for all programs.

The EEC believes that the central administration of the institution deals effectively with the recommendations by external experts through the mediating and effective role of ΜΟΔΙΠ, with quality being the basic guiding principle.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2.3 Programmes of Doctoral Studies (third cycle)

The EEC believes that the absence of a formal graduate school makes the coordination and access of general information about individual doctoral programs difficult. It appears that the Ph.D. programs and their requirements vary from department to department. EEC recommend a setting of some uniform rules across the university on how students are accepted to doctoral programs. Such rules will help the University broaden its horizons and create equal opportunities for all Greek and international students.

Additionally, the EEC recommends the promotion and establishment of doctoral student seminars, where students are given a chance to discuss their research and exchange ideas with other students and faculty. We recommend the university takes steps to increase the visibility of PhD students and help them overcome the sense of ‘loneliness’ a few of them expressed during our discussions. Involving PhD students in teaching assisting jobs might also be a good idea to overcome the above mentioned problems and provide them with valuable teaching experience.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4. INTERNAL SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

4.1 Quality Assurance (QA) Policy and Strategy

The Committee feels that not enough time has been provided for us to fully grasp the intricacies, rules and regulations about the evaluation programmes and degrees awarded. We did our best in addressing most, but not all, of the points. We believe, however, that MOΔΠΠ has established and effectively implementing an excellent quality control mechanism.

The institution’s policy and goals regarding QA and improvement are well functioning. The MOΔΠΠ appears to be doing its job properly, urging everybody to participate and practice this new ‘culture of quality.’ Each department has identified a group of its own faculty (OMEA) that oversees the process and its implementation within the department. Since most of this process is performed electronically, students, faculty and staff are protected from biased interventions and discrimination. A detailed implementation guide has been put together, and it contains an analysis of the QA system’s operating procedures. The students, with whom the EEC spoke, were enthusiastic about the professor/course evaluation process. Although they find the questionnaire a bit difficult to navigate through, they were excited about the opportunity to offer valuable evaluations and suggestions about teaching and pedagogical techniques used in the classroom. However, only a small number of students fill out the questionnaire and the university needs to find innovative ways to urge a wider participation (e.g. no grades will be posted until the questionnaire is filled). At the same time, all professors should be obliged to have their courses evaluated.

MOΔΠΠ’s analysis of the outcomes is publicized and is easily accessible on the web sites of the university. Individual professors we spoke with maintain that they learn a great deal from the evaluations and they enjoy involving students in designing their courses.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.2 Design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of the study programmes and degrees awarded

The achievement of learning outcomes is also monitored and there is a published Guide regarding the organization of programmes of study. The ECTS system appears to be taken into consideration and implemented properly. A periodic evaluation of the programmes according to set procedures and criteria is also at work, and aims at safeguarding their consistency and regular updating. They have collected a huge amount of data relating to teaching and research quality, and they created impressive computer programs to accommodate and analyse the data. Such software packages have the potential to be useful to other national and international universities.

The learning outcomes of the University have been clearly formulated and published. MOΔΠΙ has taken all the necessary measures (providing guidelines, establishing control procedures, etc) in order to ensure that the courses conducted and the degrees awarded are not only properly described and published, but also compliant to the necessary criteria.

Students are involved in the design of teaching with their contribution in: (a) the departmental committees responsible for teaching quality; (b) the decision-making meetings in the Department, Dean's Office and Senate; and, (c) the OMEA of every department.

OMEA, departmental committees responsible for teaching quality, and MOΔΠΙ, monitored and evaluated the learning outcomes. However, although the university motivates the students to participate in the evaluation of teaching quality, student participation is quite low.

The ECTS system is obligatory in the University and it is implemented in the curriculum (Diploma supplement level). OMEA, MOΔΠΙ and departmental committees are responsible for teaching quality, and for monitoring the application of the ECTS system.

All graduate and postgraduate programs of the University follow a continuous evaluation procedure from internal (MOΔΠΙ), as well for external experts. Some Departments (Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Chemistry) have been evaluated also from European Committees.

Several mechanisms have been established within the University for the internationalization of educational programs. The European program ERASMUS is a well-defined and well-practiced mechanism that helps student and faculty mobility, and is widely applied in the majority of departments.

Additionally, common masters and doctoral programs with foreign universities contribute to internationalization of educational programs.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.3 Teaching and learning - Assessment by students

The design of degree programs takes into consideration possibilities for multiple and coherent paths of teaching. In some schools, students are offered the opportunity to attend courses in different departments. The School of Philosophy, for example, includes in its strategic planning the creation of a major-minor for their students.

The University offers support and contributes actively to student learning and quality of life. The University has published lists of advisors for teaching opportunities, academic representatives to help students with their studies, and coordinators for the ECTS-rules and ERASMUS-program.

The students seem to be well informed about the evaluation strategy and its implementation in each department. The information is posted in each department's homepage, and it is also orally communicated. Furthermore, students are informed about the outcome of the evaluation. The University's academic staff is required to explain in written form their grading. The evaluation procedure of the graduate (Diploma), Master and Doctoral theses is open and transparent to all university members and students and it is conducted by committees. The EEC feels that the implementation of a program called "Συνήγορος του Φοιτητή" used from 2006 – 2012 was a very nice idea, and addressed any possible complaints by students.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.4 Admission of students, progression and recognition of studies

The criteria regarding admission in the post-graduate and doctoral studies vary for each Department, but they are adequately explained and published for the benefit of applying students. Every Department uses a transparent algorithm for the rating of the applicants, including recommendations from more than one evaluators and interviews with committees.

All departments have committees that follow well-defined procedures for transferring credits from study in institutions elsewhere in Greece and abroad. The contribution of the established ECTS-system is considerable. The recognition of graduate and post-graduate degrees awarded by AUTH is automatic, whereas those from international institutions fall under the responsibility of ΔΟΑΤΑΡ.

All Departments adapted the ECTS-System and provide detailed information in their

Diploma Supplements.

The University developed a modern and a high quality level electronic system for the collection, monitoring, processing and evaluation of the students' progression in all levels of education and research.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.5 Quality Assurance as regards the teaching staff

The University adapted a common system for continuously improving the teaching quality of its academic staff by: (a) having clear criteria for every educational unit with an individual teaching evaluation; (b) providing possibilities for teaching mobility with national and international Universities; (c) identifying specific teaching weaknesses using the electronic evaluation procedure; and, (d) educating the University staff in new pedagogical methods and opportunities.

The University uses a number of processes to motivate the academic staff to improve and expand their scholarly activities. These processes include: the internal evaluation of staff seeking promotion/tenure, seminars for writing scientific papers and books, recognition and award for high quality research groups, assurance of the "literary properties", support for the creation of "spin-off" companies, and motivation for contracts with industry.

The EEC did not recognise a clear set of guiding rules at the university level regarding possible academic misconduct of the teaching staff. The overall regulatory framework for misconduct is defined by the Ministry of Education, but EEC suggests that the university establish its own policies (consistent with those of the Ministry) for misconduct or at least develop a mechanism for informing the relevant academic personnel about the rules and consequences of academic misconduct.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.6 Learning resources and student support

The excellent electronic support system adapted in the University allows a continuous improvement of the available services for students. Students may use electronic means to evaluate the effectiveness of infrastructure and teaching facilities, the quality of laboratories, the value of libraries, and the state of affairs of the refectory of the University.

EEC observed couple of issues with the libraries: First, the availability of international electronic journals for students and faculty has been dramatically reduced, due to the

reduction in government funding. The EEC believes that this limitation would affect dramatically the educational quality of all students, undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate. Second, although the Central Library remains open during weekdays from 8 am to 2 am (and till midnight in the weekends), the students stated that some peripheral libraries, due to reduced staff, are often closed, making access to this important support service difficult. Third, EEC strongly encourages the university to implement their new plan of reducing the number of libraries and consolidate their management, as soon as possible. This would improve service, increase effectiveness for the students, and would lead to the reduction of related expenses.

There is a comprehensive and efficient structure that allows individualized student counselling and tutoring. Committees are also in existence to provide educational and job prospect advice, as well as a center for mental health support and guidance for students with “sensitive” social conditions.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.7 Information Systems for Recording and Analysing Data and Indicators

A well-established electronic system facilitates the collection and analysis of important data, and allows statistical and quality assessment markers regarding students’ progression. There exist yearly statistical markers for student numbers, participation and success in examinations, student mobility, number of foreign students, average grades within each department, average study duration, and exchange of students with other national Universities.

The University collects, analyses and utilizes data for academic staff regarding research (e.g. publications and research impact, coordination of and participation in research projects, participation in spin-off companies, patent development), education (e.g. number of learning units, supervision of Master and Doctoral theses, teaching assessments by students) and administration (e.g. administrative activities within the University, participation to evaluation committees within and outside of the AUTH).

The University monitors and compares its scientific and educational qualities with similar institutions in Europe and around the world. For this comparison, the University uses international acceptable rankings. Further, the University uses this information to develop strategies in order to improve its ranking (e.g. increase the number of publications in scientific areas that are less represented, increase the publication number in journals with high impact factor, and increase the participation in research grants).

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.8 Dissemination of information to stakeholders

All information that influences and guarantees the quality of graduate and postgraduate programs is published in the homepage of each department in both Greek and English. The CVs of administrators and academic staff are published in the homepages as well. However, the EEC recognised that a significant number of University staff have not published their CV.

The grades of students are published in Greek and English to promote and facilitate student exchange with foreign Universities. In general, a lot of information regarding research grants, and international awards of faculty and students is regularly published, which contributes to information dissemination and improves the University's quality and reputation.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>		Tick
Worthy of merit		
Positive evaluation		X
Partially positive evaluation		
Negative evaluation		

4.9 Continuous monitoring and periodic review of the study programmes

The University tries to manage and develop procedures that support a continuous improvement of all degree programmes. MOΔIII uses an excellent electronic system to monitor and analyse key performance indicators/markers for learning quality, and contributes significantly to the continuous assessment and review of the contents of degree programmes. Internal and external evaluation outcomes (strengths and weaknesses) have been appropriately assessed at the departmental level, and adequate recommendations have been made.

The University considers various local and national organisations, companies and associations in order to develop course contents and graduate skills for each degree programme. Furthermore, for the development of degree programmes the University takes into consideration employment opportunities, international acceptance of the programme, students and alumni opinions, cutting edge research activities, students' work load, and progress rate.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>		Tick
Worthy of merit		X
Positive evaluation		
Partially positive evaluation		
Negative evaluation		

4.10 Periodic external evaluation

The external evaluation reports for every Department are published in the homepages of ΑΔIII, ΜΟΔIII and of the Faculties/Departments. A summary of strengths and weaknesses has been created and published for every Department.

All recommendations have been or will be implemented in order to increase the strengths and reduce/eliminate the weaknesses found. To improve the quality of teaching for all accredited degree programmes, the specific comments and suggestions of the external evaluation committees are required. OMEA and MOΔΠ are responsible for the systematic monitoring and control of such suggested changes.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):

	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

5. OPERATION OF THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTITUTION

5.1 Central Administration Services of the Institution

The EEC feels that the Administration has addressed all of the following activities:

- Special Account for Research Funds (SARF)
- Financial services
- Supplies department
- Technical services
- IT services
- Student support services
- Employment and Career Centre (ECC)
- Public/ International relations department
- Foreign language services
- Social and cultural activities
- Halls of residence and refectory services
- Institution's library

However EEC observed some difficulties and delays with the smooth implementation of these activities. First and foremost, the difficulties stem from the red-tape rules, constraints, and staff reduction imposed by the Ministry of Education. But also, inefficient managerial and bureaucratic rules in the past within the university contribute to the problem. The current Administration has undertaken a number of initiatives to tackle the bureaucracy and to deal with the staff decrease. These actions include the implementation of electronic services (whenever possible) and the simplification of internal processes. EEC encourages the university to vigorously continue these efforts.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):</i>	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	X
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

5.2 Operation of the Central Administration of the Institution – Conclusions and recommendations

Underline specific positive points:

- Excellent outreach of the Administration with the City and external partners
- Attention of the Administration towards student services is excellent, despite negative conditions imposed by lack of funds
- Emphasis on teaching and research is of international calibre
- Excellent IT services developed within the University
- Excellent relation of the Administration with the Council, faculty (teaching and research staff), students, and supporting staff.
- The administration initiated or plans to initiate new educational and research directions, including directions with an international outlook.
- Creation of the “Research Committee” has facilitated the application of research grants from national, European, and other international sources

Underline specific negative points:

- Lack of systematic coordination of student seminars, scientific interactions among students, and between students and faculty or other researchers.
- Limited cross links, collaboration and interactions among centers of excellence, industrial partners, and graduate studies

6. FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) found the general operation of the University to be excellent, despite its large size and the difficult socio-economic conditions under which it operates. The newly elected rector and his administrative team work well together and they are committed to bringing a fresh air to university life. Historically, the University of Thessaloniki grew from a small school of Philosophy/Philology, to become The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, now the largest university in Greece and the Southern Balkans. It includes most of the fields of academic studies, and despite the lack of funds to sustain itself, it makes heroic efforts to continue offering high quality education to Greek and international students. The EEC appreciates that the institution does not want to compromise academic excellence in research and teaching, and tries to modify its existing strategies, while searching for new and innovative ways to sustain its excellence.

The University exhibits certain commendable positive characteristics. To begin with, it offers excellent electronic support for students, faculty and staff. It should continue improving and investing in IT, in order to make sure it remains “connected” with the new global world.

The University also has excellent relations with its social context: the city of Thessaloniki and Northern Greece. Local, municipal and prefecture authorities, the Alumni Association, as well as local business and industry organizations work closely with the University. They offer practical training and jobs to university's students and post-graduates, and include the academic community in everyday activities of the city. The integral role the university plays in the life of the city can be historically traced to its original establishment, and the way it has shaped the spirit of the city. Needless to say, the relation should be maintained and further cultivated. We also urge the local authorities to help the University in these difficult financial times by providing needed services and tax relief.

The EEC found that the recent establishment of an Alumni Association is a great step towards increasing the visibility of the institution, solidifying its identity, and providing a network of support for the students and graduates. The Alumni Association can play a leading role in the near future, and the Committee urges the University to invest in this association, by providing space and administrative support.

Among the positive characteristics of the institution were the excellent relations developed between students and their professors/mentors. Most of the students the EEC spoke with, maintained that their professors were accessible and eager to help and mentor them. They all believed that, despite the harsh financial conditions, professors make every effort to teach them and guide them through their studies. This student-centred culture should be maintained and further cultivated. At the same time, professors help students reach out to the new global world and they should continue their efforts to 'internationalize' the students and keep up with new global trends and intellectual developments. Exchange programs with European and other universities across the globe may help in this process.

The Aristotle University from its inception to present time has a reputation of providing excellent education to its students in their respective fields of study. As the world changes, however, education changes as well, and the EEC would like to see the University make efforts to provide a more 'holistic' education. For example, creating minor fields of studies, along with less rigid study programs, and more flexibility in choosing courses, would help students become well-rounded and more broadly educated as compared to just being trained in a specific field. Promoting independent critical thinking and not testing the students with only one final exam, will partially address the problem. Engaging undergraduate students in research is also recommended, since it will provide them with unique experiences that will shape their future. It will also encourage teamwork and collaboration among students. Engaging post-graduate and doctoral students in teaching/tutoring/mentoring of undergraduates can also be an innovative change that can help partially with the current shortages in faculty numbers.

The University has a good leadership team, with excellent management capabilities, as well as with good and coherent relations with the Council. The latter appears to have done a good job with the institution's budget, and the EEC recommends that the Council continues its role as an overseer of the institution's affairs. At the same time the EEC strongly believes that the Ministry of Education should alter its rules of leadership continuity and stability, as well as its process of selecting the leadership of the academic institutions. A single four year term for the rector of a university is typically short for an effective and inclusive governance of an academic institution – especially of an institution of the size of AUTH. Strategic planning is seriously impaired or even becomes meaningless unless there is stable governing body to effectively implement such a planning.

The University has initiated the strategic planning process, which should be continued and completed. All departments and colleges should complete their own strategic plans in order for the University's plans to materialize. The EEC encourages the institution to use venues such as retreats for creating a comprehensive vision and pathways to change.

The University's administrative staff is a body of highly qualified, motivated people that navigate through the changing ministerial laws and support the faculty and students of the university in a heroic way. The EEC firmly believes that any further reduction in their numbers will be disastrous for the normal functioning of the institution. Administrative staff cannot tolerate any further reductions, without seriously compromising all operations of the university.

Faculty, students, leaders and administrators we spoke with, they were all eager to see changes and improvements in the institution. With few exceptions, they all maintained that the evaluation process is necessary. Producing, reproducing and maintaining a "culture of quality" is beginning to take hold, and the EEC finds the role of MOΔΠΠ to be constructive. The Institution should continue these efforts.

The research operations of the university are sizeable and impressive, both in the physical sciences and the humanities. They also include a few excellent examples of world-class research and recognition. Although the University has been traditionally defined as a teaching institution, the EEC found that research is an integral part of faculty life and should be more vocalized and clearly stated. It has now an impressive central office that supports faculty research and it is imperative that this operation continues to exist. Research programs provide overhead funds for the University, as well as relief funds in cases of emergency.

The EEC found that a number of the institution's weaknesses are externally caused, and thus, it has limited ways to improve them. We feel obliged, however, to make recommendations in the hope that solutions to endemic and long-standing problems may be found. To begin with, the University faces a dramatic increase in the number of incoming students. We understand that this can be attributed to the country's financial crisis, but the Ministry should make every effort to respect the University's "carrying capacity." More students demand more faculty, administrators and facilities, which are not provided.

The University's operating funds have been dramatically reduced from 44 million euros in 2009, to 17 million euros in 2014. The Ministry should at least guarantee the minimum operational expenses of the institution every year. It is not pleasant to hear students complain that the classrooms are not properly heated, the bathrooms are not properly cleaned, the campus is not safe after dark, and that the administration tries hard to allocate funds to buy heating oil. The University tries to find innovative ways to navigate through the uncontrollable randomness of the above-mentioned changes, and should continue these efforts. EEC believes that it is important (especially given the country's economic crisis) that the University's real estate properties be explored and made more profitable. Unfortunately the Administration's efforts in this direction are impeded by legal factors beyond the university's control. EEC strongly recommends the necessary legal changes that would give more flexibility to the Administration's actions. At the same time, the institution can collaborate with local authorities and see what services they can provide to take care of some of the operational burdens.

Simultaneously, the institution is facing a dramatic decrease in faculty numbers due to retirements and a hiring freeze. This is a paralyzing practice for the University, and the EEC strongly recommends that it should come to an end. If this continues, the quality of education and research in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki will be irreversibly damaged.

The EEC found that some university rules are too complicated and rigid and they are in desperate need for simplification. Unfortunately much of these problems are due to the rigid rules imposed on the university by the Ministry of Education. As we mentioned in Subsection 5.1, the current Administration has undertaken a number of initiatives to tackle the bureaucracy and to deal with the staff decrease. These actions include the implementation of electronic services (whenever possible) and the simplification of

internal processes. The perennially changing laws and regulations of the Ministry of Education complicate matters tremendously and the EEC recommends that serious and honest effort should be made at the Ministry level to save the University from bureaucratic delays and arbitrary decision-making from above. The University needs a stable legal framework to operate constructively and to be recognized as an entity (Οργανισμός) with its own by-laws. The institution has the right leadership and the right structure to operate, but the Ministry of Education must simplify and clarify the rules, and provide more decision-making freedom to university leadership.

There are also a number of ‘internal’ weaknesses that the EEC would like to bring to the attention of the institution. For example, given the impressive number of post-graduate and doctoral programs in all disciplines, the University has no formal school of post-graduate and doctoral studies. Although a committee is in existence, the EEC recommends that the law should allow the establishment of an official graduate school that will provide administrative oversight and support for students, faculty, and researchers. At the same time, it can provide an inter-disciplinary intellectual environment for exchange of ideas and support among graduate students.

The EEC also recommends that the university make concerted efforts to clearly define and increase the visibility of the institution’s centers of excellence in research. This should include recognizing and promoting the already existing centers of excellence, while creating new ones through strategic planning, prioritization, and reflection on new international trends in academic institutions. A fundamental component of the academic profile of the faculty is research, and the EEC would like to see a ‘research culture’ becoming more vocal and recognized within the institution.

The University has a relatively large number of laboratories. The ECC feels that there should be a smaller number of modern laboratories providing better quality service and working more efficiently and in a more cost-effective manner. This could be attained by combining present laboratories into larger, more efficient and modern units. Thematic clarity is necessary, as well as ‘reaching out’ to other European laboratories for collaboration and exchange of knowledge. The small individual libraries also need to be consolidated in the main building. This will reduce the number of separate facilities and result in better management of the staff, while providing better access to students and faculty.

Student life and representation needs some improvement. On one hand, faculty members do their best to provide students with an excellent education, and the administration makes sure they have access to the university’s Cafeteria for three free meals per day. On the other hand, EEC did not find a coherent student body for representing the students at large. The students we spoke with voiced their dissatisfaction with the present conditions, since a vocal minority is allowed to set the tone of campus activism. The university’s Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 includes the creation of an office for the Coordination of Cultural and Athletic Activities. EEC encourages the university to set as one of their priorities the creation of such an office. This will strengthen the university’s educational vision.

Under the present negative financial conditions, and the constantly changing legal framework, the University has achieved a great deal and the EEC gives it a positive evaluation. It should continue building on current strengths and contribute to the economic development of the city and the betterment of Greek society.

6.1 Final decision of the EEC

Please decide in respect to the overall Institutional evaluation:

	Tick
Worthy of merit	X
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

The Members of the Committee**ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF
THESSALONIKI**

Name and Surname

Signature

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