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ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

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

External Evaluation of Higher Education Academic Units

**Guidelines for the Members
of External Evaluation Committees**

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European Union
European Social Fund



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

Co- financed by Greece and the European Union



programme for development
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

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Foreword

In modern educational systems, *quality assurance* signifies the effort aiming at the continuous enhancement of the work of academic units. It requires the implementation of a uniform system (including **annual reports** and an **Internal Evaluation Report**), which will allow academic units to continuously assess and improve their performance.

As a central part of this system, **external evaluation** should be viewed as a regular, objective and independent assessment carried out periodically by experienced external auditors. The purpose of this external assessment is to define whether the diverse actions of a given academic unit and the ensuing results are consistent with its predefined plan. Also, whether this plan is appropriate for the accomplishment of the unit's objectives; finally, whether the plan is effectively implemented, thus ensuring the accomplishment of the academic unit's goals and the improvement of its quality.

The external evaluation is based on the Department's **Internal Evaluation Report**. The latter is compiled by the academic unit in accordance with the methodological guidelines published by the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA) for use by all academic units.

The first stage of the quality assurance process is concluded when the **Internal Evaluation Report** is completed and submitted by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of the Department to the HQA together with the Department's *Guidebook of Studies*. Eventually, the HQA distributes these documents to the members of the external evaluation committee, thus initiating the second and final evaluation stage, that of the **External Evaluation**.

For each and any given field of the academic unit's activities which the internal evaluation has monitored - **Curriculum, Teaching, Research, all other Services** - the external evaluation examines by means of general questions **four dimensions - approach, implementation, results, improvement** -, as outlined in the following general diagram :

Curriculum

- Approach
- Implementation
- Results
- Improvements

Teaching

- Approach
- Implementation
- Results
- Improvements

Research

- Approach
- Implementation
- Results
- Improvements

All other services

- Approach
- Implementation
- Results
- Improvements

The EEC's External Evaluation Report is further expected to comment on:

Potential inhibiting factors (at the institutional level and that of the academic unit)

Perspectives for improvement (mission, policies, medium- and long-term strategies, improvement processes).

Finally, it should also include:

Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC concerning

- the strategic administration of the Department and its ability to change/improve;
 - quality assurance.

A detailed analysis of the above diagram can be found in the “***TEMPLATE for the External Evaluation Report***”, that has been prepared by the HQA for use by the External Evaluation Committees.

The following guidelines are addressed to the members of External Evaluation Committees (EEC), who undertake the task of evaluating academic units. It is strongly recommended to read and use them together with the guidelines published for academic units by HQA or other European Quality Assurance Agencies.

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

The external evaluation process of a given Department begins with the appointment by HQA of a specific External Evaluation Committee (EEC) which consists of five (5) independent experts drawn from HQA Registry of relevant expert auditors. One of these auditors (and his replacement) may be selected from the same Registry by the audited unit. The Chair of the EEC is nominated by HQA.

As a first step, the HQA informs the members of the EEC about the national educational system and the evaluation procedures.

The HQA coordinates the whole process and ensures the impartiality of all members of the external evaluation committees, precluding as best as possible cases of conflict of interests. To this aim, prospective members of EECs are asked to accept and sign the attached **Code of Conduct** and to declare that they do not belong nor have (or have had during the last five years) any teaching, research, financial or other close relation with the evaluated academic unit.

The Chair and members of the EEC and HQA sign an agreement in which the terms of remuneration for EEC members are fixed.

The Role of the Committee

The External Evaluation Committee is expected:

- to verify the objectivity of information appearing in the Department's *Internal Evaluation Report*, checking, where necessary, the original data collected for evaluation purposes ;
- to assess and evaluate the results of the work done by the academic unit and to compare it with current, internationally accepted best practices;
- to advise and suggest specific alternative practices and improvements.

Responsibilities of the Members of EEC

The members of EECs read and comment on the *Internal Evaluation Report*; they participate in the committee's meetings and in the Site Visit, and they discuss their findings; they contribute to the formulation of the *Report* under the guidance of the Committee Coordinator and share collectively the overall responsibility for the *External Evaluation Report*.

Responsibilities of the Coordinator of the EEC

The Coordinator of the EEC:

- assigns responsibilities to the committee members according to their specialty or/and expertise; he ensures their participation in the drafting of the Report and their *consensus* before submitting it to the HQA.
- organises and coordinates discussions;
- inspires and cultivates a collaborative spirit
- ensures spare time at the end of each day for private meetings of the Committee;
- is responsible for presenting orally a brief summary of the Committee's conclusions to the Chair of the Department at the end of the visit;

- supervises the formulation of the *Draft External Evaluation Report*;
- serves as a contact with the HQA secretariat on behalf of the EEC members;
- forwards the Draft Report to the academic unit through the HQA and responds to eventual comments on the Report formulated by the academic unit, after consulting with the other EEC members.

The Site Visit

The Site Visit is an integral part of the external evaluation process. It is organised by the HQA in close collaboration with the EEC members and the Chair of the evaluated Department. During the Visit, the latter is responsible for coordinating meetings and administrative issues requested by the EEC. The duration of the visit depends on the number of programmes and the gravity of issues that must be looked into (2-3 days).

Purpose of the Visit

The purpose of the visit is to assess the accuracy of information and findings included in the *Internal Evaluation (self-evaluation) Report*. Furthermore, to explore issues which were identified by the members of the EEC in the text of the Internal Evaluation Report and/or during the Visit as needing further clarification and/or additional information.

Schedule of the Site Visit

The typical schedule of the first day includes:

- (a) An **introductory meeting** of the EEC members with the President and members of the HQA to discuss the evaluation process.
- (b) A **first meeting of the EEC members** to discuss and comment on the Department's *Internal Evaluation Report* and other documents received. During this preliminary phase, the Committee members discuss their first impressions from studying the Department's *Internal Evaluation Report* and the *Guidebook of Studies*, focusing on the following questions:
 - Is the *Internal Evaluation Report* detailed enough? Does it include all necessary information and data for a valid judgment to be formed? Are there unclear or vague data needing further analysis and clarification?
 - Are there any inconsistencies?
 - Note if there is information missing, to be requested during the Site Visit.

At a second level, the following matters should be looked into:

 - How effectively are the abovementioned strategic dimensions (**approach, implementation, results, improvements**) concerning the main evaluation criteria (**curriculum, teaching, research and other services**) dealt with in the *Internal Evaluation Report*?
 - Does the Department have an action plan for improvements? Is it realistic and functional?
 - Did all constituents of the Department's academic community participate in the Internal Evaluation process?
 - Which aspects, procedures or services should be most particularly examined during the Site Visit?
 - Which are the key-persons that the EEC should meet with during the Site Visit?

The first observations and comments of the EEC on the *Internal Evaluation Report* are expected to generate questions that must be looked into or answered during the Site Visit of the EEC to the academic unit.

The programme of the Visit to the academic unit must, as a minimum, include:

- (1) *A first meeting with the Head of the Institution, the Head or members of the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) and the Head of the Department.*
- (2) *A meeting with the Department's Internal Evaluation Group- (IEG - OMEA).*
- (3) *A meeting with members of the teaching staff.*
- (4) *A meeting with students and their representatives¹.*
- (5) *Examination of some dissertations at under- and post-graduate level, samples of written semester examinations, examination materials etc.*
- (6) *A briefing concerning the unit's material and technical infrastructure.*
- (7) *An oral presentation by the Chair of the EEC to the President and the IEG of the evaluated unit (Exit meeting) of a brief summary of the Committee's basic conclusions.*

During the Site Visit, the EEC should seek to meet with alumni and employers, as well as with relevant social bodies, local and regional organisations etc. (to be pre-arranged with the assistance of the Head of the Department).

The members of the EEC must find time at the end of each day for private meetings to discuss and exchange findings and ideas.

The External Evaluation Report

After the Site Visit, the EEC meets at the HQA headquarters in Athens and composes the **Draft Report** on the basis of observations and notes recorded during the Site Visit.

The *Draft* is approved and signed by all EEC members, and submitted to the HQA before the departure of the members of the EEC. It is forwarded by HQA to the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) and the Chair of the academic unit, for eventual comments on possible factual errors or misconceptions. The Department's comments are forwarded by the HQA to the Coordinator of the EEC, and dealt with in consensus by all EEC members. When finalized, the Report is, forwarded by the EEC Coordinator to the HQA, the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) and the Chair of the academic unit.

The External Evaluation Report should not exceed 20 pages. The EEC is expected to rigorously follow the structure of the proposed "**Template**", but it is encouraged to adapt the length of its comments as necessary.

In the case of Departments with one or more Graduate programmes (Master's or PhD), the EEC is expected to clearly and distinctly comment on each particular programme's curriculum, teaching methods, research, administration, material and technical infrastructure.

When writing the report, it must be kept in mind that:

¹ This meeting should be held in the absence of academic or other staff (see Annex).

- The evaluation does not include a financial audit. However, some information on the budget is important, especially in relation to the unit's ability, quality, strategic options, etc.
- Comments on the material and technical infrastructure and on financial limitations are clearly important. However, it must be kept in mind that all academic units face financial limitations; they should not be used as an excuse for suboptimal work.

Last but not least:

- The EEC's conclusions should include an analysis of the positive and negative points identified and offer recommendations for improvement of negative aspects and for further development of positive practices. The EEC is expected to formulate its assessment in a concrete and clear way, insisting on the relative standing of the Department's educational and research objectives as compared with modern universally accepted trends in the Department's scientific area.
- Vague comments and generalities are to be avoided ; positive and negative practices should be clearly defined.
- Positive and negative aspects which have been discussed in the main part of the EEC Report *must* appear in the conclusions.
- Avoid comments on matters that have not been dealt with in the main part of the EEC Report.
- Specific recommendations must be made for amending *all* negative aspects.
- The EEC is expected to specifically comment on the unit's ability to deal with new challenges, threats and opportunities.

Typical Visit Schedule

Sunday:

Arrival in Athens. First Meeting of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) members at the hotel in the evening.

Monday:

9:30 - 11:00 Orientation and briefing of the EEC at the HQA offices.

12:00 *(in the case of Departments located outside Athens)*
Check out of the hotel and travel to the location of the institution.

At the destination, meeting with the Chair of the hosting Academic Unit and colleagues, who will lead the Committee to their hotel.*

Brief meeting with the Chair of the Unit and the Rector and the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs (who is also the Chair of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit), followed by a brief meeting with the Internal Evaluation Committee of the Unit.

Brief meeting in the evening of the EEC members at the hotel, in order to discuss details and prepare for the meetings of the following two days.

OR

12:00 *(in the case of Departments located in Athens)*
Visit with the Chair of the hosting Academic Unit, followed by a meeting with the Chair and the Internal Evaluation Committee of the Unit.*

16:00 - 16:30 Meeting with the Rector and Vice Rector of Academic Affairs (who is also the Chair of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit).

17:00 - 19:00 Brief meeting of the EEC members at the hotel, to discuss the details and prepare for the meetings of the following two days.

Tuesday: Detailed schedule to be finalized by the hosting Department.

9:00 - 16:30 Interviews with:

- Faculty members
- Students
- Members of the administrative staff

Visit of various facilities used by the Department

17:00 - 19:00 Meeting between the EEC members at the hotel, in order to discuss the findings of the day and draft comments and notes

Wednesday:

9:00 - 14:00 Additional interviews, meetings and visits of departmental facilities (library, computer labs, dormitories, athletic etc.), as necessary.

Brief exit meeting with the Chair of the Department and the Chair of the institution's Quality assurance Unit (MODIP).

Afternoon:

Return to Athens.

Meeting of the EEC members at the hotel to draft comments and notes on Wednesday's events.

A longer stay, until Thursday morning, may be necessary if more than one programs of study are reviewed.

Thursday:

9:00 - 18:00 Working on the final Draft of the Report in Athens, at facilities provided by the HQA.

Friday:

9:00 - 18:00 Continued working in Athens on the final Draft of the Report.

Saturday:

9:00 - 14:00 Finalization, signing and submission of the Draft Report to HQA. Departure of EEC members from Athens.

Please note:

- * The final Schedule of the EEC Site Visit and details of the meetings with constituents of the hosting Department, from Monday afternoon to Wednesday or Thursday morning, will be finalized by the Chair of the hosting Department and the HQA before the visit.

Lunch and coffee breaks will be scheduled by the EEC members as appropriate.

ANNEX : Meeting with the students

The participating student group should include both representatives of the student union and some randomly selected students.

In order to draw wide-ranging and, as much as possible, objective data, the Committee should focus on some of the following questions:

1. Curricular experience: Describe a week in the HEI. How many hours of lectures, team work, and seminars do you have? How many hours of study in a week? What is the ratio of teaching and study hours? What would be the best balance, in your opinion? Do you want more teaching or more time for study?

Is the course literature available at the library? If not, how do you manage to study? Do teaching hours help you to read and understand the course literature? If not, do lectures complement or do they repeat the course literature? Where do you study (at home, in reading rooms, at the institution library, at the unit library)?

In between courses, are you assigned problems to solve in groups? Do teachers select groups of students to solve specific problems, to look into specific questions and to write group reports during the course?

2. Examination process: What forms of examination do you have? How many examinations do you have during a semester? Are you required to write papers? If yes, are these papers taken into account in the final grading or are they part of the examination? Are there any group examinations? If yes, how are they carried out? If students fail in an examination, can they discuss the result with the teacher?

3. Counseling: Do students have the possibility to discuss their progress with some of their teachers?

4. Evaluation of teaching: Are courses evaluated on a regular basis? What happens after the relevant questionnaires have been filled? How are they used and by whom? Do you discuss with your teachers the issues that have emerged? Do you discuss with your teachers the content of a course at the beginning or at the end of the course? Would you like to suggest to the department actions or initiatives that would improve the educational process?

5. Student participation: Do student representatives or representatives of student unions participate in formal discussions of curricula or courses at the various departmental or institutional meetings? If not, how can this situation change?

Does the Department ask for the students' opinion? How? Are you satisfied by the way students participate in the academic unit?

6. Student satisfaction from:

- the quality assurance procedures in the academic unit (and why?);
- possibilities and opportunities provided for mobility (and why?);
- Student Welfare services (and why?);

- the existing departmental infrastructure (and why?);
- the library services (and why?);
- the quality and comprehensiveness of the curriculum and the possibilities and opportunities provided for practical training (and why?);
- students' relationships with the Department's teaching and administrative staff (and why?);
- students' social life within the academic unit (and why?).

7. General

Why did they choose to study the specific discipline?

Why did they choose to study at the specific academic unit?

If they had the chance, would they make the same choice today?