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

Redrawing the HEI Map of Greece

Outline of a Methodological Approach

I. Introduction

This text is a concise presentation of the basic axes upon which the restructuring of the network of Greek HEIs will be done. It focuses more on creating the preconditions for taking a step forwards rather than lengthy analyses on higher education in the country, for which there is, in any case, already a plethora of studies and articles, many of which were taken into account.

II. The claim

The development of the network of HEIs throughout the country is riddled with excesses and inconsistencies as regards the country's needs: excesses in the geographical distribution and spread of academic units, in comparison with similar primarily European countries, inconsistencies as regards the discipline in relation to society's needs and employment prospects (specialised fields, a plethora of identical or similar subjects, etc.). The result of all this is that many academic units are trapped in mediocrity. This finding, in combination with the multiple challenges of an internationalised and rapidly changing world, to which the country is called upon to respond, demands a dynamic intervention through a drastic reassessment of the arrangement of the network of Greek HEIs as a first step to upgrading higher education in Greece.

III. Goal

The sought after restructuring of the HEIs sees the resolution of the aforementioned problems through, primarily, mergers and the transferring of academic units on the level of country and/or institution. It is worth noting that restructuring concerns all the HEIs: universities and TEIs, large and small, old and new. The success of the attempt to reconfigure the current structure will depend solely on the degree to which the following demands are satisfied. They must be systematically monitored by the state so that the appropriate interventions for restructuring can take place in good time.

1. Serving national development goals
2. Responding to society's demands for the best education for a broad social strata.

3. Cultivation of scientific and technical fields or interdisciplinary fields, which are deemed necessary for the country's economic growth
4. Creation of strong scientific units with international reputations
5. Strengthening contacts and collaborations between teaching staff in different educational programmes
6. Creation of more functional organisational structures
7. Best use of the current human resources and current education and research infrastructures
8. Achieve goals through a better cost/benefit relationship through best use and economising of resources
9. Improve libraries and information services
10. Improve the quality of administrative services

Suitable interventions for achieving the redrawing of the HEI map, which have been used internationally, can, for example, be absorption, merger, transfer, etc. on the level of both academic units and institution and they could, as mentioned, be usefully applied to all HEIs without exception. In order to determine the most suitable interventions in each case particular attention should be given to the role of each institution.

With the opportunity offered by this ambitious effort, two complimentary but completely related issues (chap. V) are proposed, which we believe will strengthen the quality of higher education even further – a demand that is now a precondition for the survival and also for the economic development of the Nation. Greece has the potentials and it must set targets, so as to highlight the important role of education in the wider region.

IV. Criteria

The four following criteria cover the demands of Law 4076/201 and define a framework for developing a new map of HEIs, which can support the related decisions.

C1. Physical size and structure of HEIs

- Minimum "critical mass" of student population.
- Minimum number of schools.
- Minimum number of autonomous academic units.
- Minimum number of Academic Units per School.
- Minimum number of teaching and research staff.

In the modern era, with its increasing demands for an interdisciplinary approach in education and research, it is considered essential that there be a minimum "critical mass" of student population for the necessary interactions, etc. At the same time, it is



*essential for every HEI that it can secure a scientific breadth through a minimum number of academic units or Schools. On the level of academic units, those with a weak profile (e.g. they have a small number of **teaching and research staff**) should, firstly, be converted into a Programme of Studies and integrated into the Schools. The latter must, correspondingly, be comprised of a minimum number of Departments. Institutions that do not cover this criterion are examined in relation to the other criteria so that any further actions can be decided upon.*

C2. Spatial distribution

- Resolution of unjustified **diaspora/academic isolation** of academic units or HEIs.

*A decentralised distribution of HEIs in relation to the country's demographic distribution, so that young people can have easier access to the institutions in the regions where they live. Correspondingly, institutions must limit the diaspora of their academic units, so that C1 can be achieved, not just for each HEI but for each campus (e.g. at least one School). The goal is to manage the dysfunctions that arise from the **excessive diaspora and isolation** of certain academic units. The student population must, correspondingly, not violate the "carrying capacity" of the institution's campus town, unless its attractiveness, as revealed by the significant non-local percentage of students who choose it as their first preference, requires a corresponding amendment of the population indices.*

C3. Subject area

- Resolution of **excessive number** (identical or similar) of **academic units and programmes of study**.

*The goal here is to limit the large number of academic units that cover identical or similar fields of undergraduate studies to the extent that they do not serve the national development goals, as these arise from the **National Strategic Plan for Higher Education** and international trends for broad fields of education on the basis of the ISCED1997 standard. Inter alia, academic units that best satisfy the remaining criteria will be preferred. Mergers of academic units with similar subjects are also possible.*

- Monitoring and resolution of the **excessive specialisation** of scholarly subjects, including the introduction of shorter programmes (one-year, two-years or three-years duration) throughout the whole breadth of higher education (see below V a).
- Rationalisation of the **academic standards** of some individual academic units (convert undergraduate to postgraduate level and TEI to university, and vice versa).

The prospects of the current age demand interdisciplinary approaches to the complex problems of our times, rather than an excessive specialisation in scholarly disciplines – especially for undergraduate studies. If such cases are identified, the academic units may be merged, converted to postgraduate programmes, etc. with pre-agreed procedures in each case. For the reasons mentioned above, mergers of academic units will be attempted first within the context of the individual institutions, with the additional benefit of economies of scale. The guide to this criterion shall be the National Strategic Plan for Higher Education mentioned above.

C4. Quality/viability of academic units

Inspection for the past five years and for all academic units without exception, on the basis of the following quantitative and qualitative indices:¹

C4.1 Ratio of students to teaching staff

C4.2 Graduates each year

C4.3 Entrance grade and attractiveness (% 1st preference)

C4.4 Cost per student

C4.5 Available facilities

C4.6 Research activities and international recognition

C4.7 Graduates can find jobs

C4.8 Postgraduate studies and doctorates awarded

C4.9 Student evaluation of the academic unit

C4.10 Contribution to the development of the region and acceptance by the local community

An important role in determining the output of the academic unit as regards criteria C4.1-10 will be played by the contents of its external (or its internal) evaluation and the resulting dynamic for improvements.

V. Complimentary interventions

¹ Similar analyses with sub-criteria/indices may be done for the other criteria, so as to create a **register of action choices** (chap. IV), according to the scores that will be defined for each of these indices.



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The anticipated output of this Plan (see chap. III) should be reinforced with the adoption of the following proposed bold but necessary changes.

(a) Stimulation of post-high school tertiary education with the introduction of distinct educational paths

The graduates of post-high school education must be the backbone of the country's growth efforts. Today, this section of education is functioning subpar. The state must redefine, in collaboration with the HEIs, the framework for the duration of studies and titles in tertiary education. Indicatively, some academic units in universities, but primarily however in TEIs, which have a weak academic profile, could be converted into three-year or two-year programmes. This will thus increase the diversity of educational paths and corresponding titles (and professional rights) so that all those who wish to continue with their studies after high school can find the right level and duration of education. Also, academic units (mainly in TEIs) that find themselves geographically cut off, if the preconditions also exist, should be converted into higher education professional "schools" under the aegis of the corresponding HEI. It should be noted that in Law 4009/11 (article 5 § 31) mention is made of programmes of study of a "short cycle" in HEIs.

During this effort, the need to conform the National Qualifications Framework with the corresponding European one should be borne in mind.

(b) Management of the student population

A major problem with programmes of study in HEIs is the overpopulation of students, as highlighted in many evaluation reports. It is proposed that academic units determine the number of entrants and the minimum entry grade, which in every case must be greater than 10/20. At the same time, the academic units must make efforts to reduce their "stagnant" student population. This will significantly improve the quality of the programmes, for the benefit of students and society in general.

Athens, 30 November 2012