

## **Report on the Activities of the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA) for the years 2006-2007**

### **Introduction**

Implementing the Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999 for the creation of a Unified European Higher Education Area, which Greece also signed, in August 2005 the Parliament of the Hellenes voted the Law on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Law 3374/2005, Government Gazette, 2 August 2005, issue 189), the main aim of which is the continuous evaluation of the teaching, research and all other work of the higher education institutions, with the purpose of ensuring and improving quality in education and research, the studies and other services that are they provide as part of their mission.

The procedures foreseen for the systematic and documented Internal and subsequently External evaluation of higher education in Greece, according to generally accepted criteria, benchmarks and standards that are applied in all the member states of the EU and widely internationally, is expected to strengthen the autonomy of the academic units and institutions, to reinforce their sense of responsibility, respond to society's demand for accountability and will more generally contribute to the cultivation and improvement of a "climate of quality" among the country's academic communities.

Following the opinion of the parliamentary Educational Affairs Committee (11 January 2006), Emeritus Professor SPYROS AMOURGIS (*Government Gazette* 10 February 2006) was appointed president of the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA), as foreseen by Law 3374/2005, taking took up his duties on 1 March 2006.

This was followed (1 September 2006) by the appointment and formation into a body, according to article 11 of law 3374/2005, of the 12 members of the Authority.

The term of service of the faculty members and research staff was determined by public lot (article 11 §3) on 12 October 2006 as follows:

#### I. Faculty Members with a four-year term

AIKATRINI DOUKA-KAMPITOGLOU, professor of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, for the scholarly field of "Human Sciences"

VASILIS ZANNIS, professor of the University of Crete, for the scholarly field of "Health Sciences"

SOCRATES KATSIKA, professor of the University of the Aegean (today the University of Piraeus), for the scholarly field of "Natural Sciences and Information"

#### II. Faculty Members with a two-year term

VASILIS PAPAZOGLOU, professor of the National Technical University of Athens, for the scholarly field of "Engineering and Geotechnical Sciences"

PANOS TSAKOGLU, professor of the Athens University of Economics and Business, for the scholarly field of "Economic Sciences and Business Administration"

LOUKAS TSOUKALIS, professor of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, for the scholarly field of "Law, Politics and Social Sciences"

#### III. Research staff members with a four-year term

IOANNIS TOKIS, professor of the TEI of Epirus, for the branch of "Technological Building Sciences"

PANTELIS YPSILANTIS, professor of the TEI of Larissa, for the branch of "Administration and Economy"

#### IV. Research staff members with a two-year term

IOANNIS VLACHOS, professor of the TEI of Crete, for the branch "Technological Geotechnical Sciences and Food"

KLEOMENIS OIKONOMOU, professor of the TEI of Athens, for the branch "Health and Welfare Professions"

The term of the other two members will also be for four years, as specified by Law 3374/2005, article 11, para. f and g respectively.

LOUIZA LOUKOPOULOU, Director of Research at the National Hellenic Research Foundation

AMEDEO ODONI, professor of MIT, as the representative of the Union of Hellenic Chambers (UHC)

It should be noted that the student representative, as foreseen by Law 3374/2005 (article 11, para. 2d), was not accepted by the EFEE student organisation and so the position of student representative was not filled, as no candidate had come forward from the ESEE student organisation either, despite the written invitations of the Minister of Education to both bodies.

## **I. THE FIRST DIFFICULTIES**

During the first twelve of months of its operation, the HQA faced serious difficulties as measures were not taken to create the necessary preconditions for its operation before the appointment and creation of the Authority. As a result, the in this period the Authority faced serious difficulties.

### **1. HEADQUARTERS OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY**

- Because space was not immediately made available to house the headquarters of the HQA, it was obliged to utilise the hospitality of the University of the Aegean, whose Rector made available to the President the use of his personal office and - on occasion - the meeting room in the building on 30 Voulgaroktonou Street in Athens.
- The University of the Aegean also temporarily made available a secretary and it also undertook to cover the Authority's operational and consumables expenses. In addition, another university temporarily uploaded the website to make communication with the HQA possible, while other academic institutions covered some of its operational needs.
- The British Council covered the expenses for the organisation of two meetings with the President of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) as speaker, the goal of which was to inform the Rectors and Presidents of the TEIs on the European Union procedures for quality assurance in higher education.
- The Ministry of Education offered the HQA temporary accommodation only on 1 September 2007, on the 5th and 6th floors of the dilapidated office building at 56 Syngrou Avenue, as well as basic furnishings and electronic equipment.
- Since then the HQA has made persistent representations for the securing of suitable space, analogous to its operational needs and the integrity of its members and, above all, the foreign partners and experts who will undertake the external evaluations of the higher education institutions, as it is estimated that 500-600 experts will be hosted annually in the Authority's offices.

### **2. SUPPORT STAFF**

As a result of the insurmountable and time-consuming bureaucratic dysfunctionalities, only in December 2007, i.e. one and a half years after its legal foundation, was the very rudimentary staffing of the Authority possible, with three members of the administrative-academic staff (private contracts of open duration) through secondments from the Ministry of Education.

### 3. SALARIES

The salaries of the members of the Authority as well as the president were paid nine months after their appointment. This means that during this first crucial period for its formation as an operational whole, the members of the authority selflessly offered their services. It should be noted that because the HQA does not have any financial staff, the salaries of its members will be paid informally from the competent section of the Ministry of the Aegean.

### 4. BUDGET

Besides the salaries of the Members and a small amount for its basic operational expenses, the Ministry of Education had not foreseen a budget for the preparation and implementation of the evaluations. For this reason, the President of the Authority submitted in August 2006 a tender document for funding from the OP Education within 3rd Community Support Framework. The use, however, of the approved funds ran into insurmountable administrative limitations, primarily because of the lack of a Special Account.

## II. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE FIRST YEAR

The negative impact upon the work of the new independent authority as it took its first steps would have been unavoidable if they had not been balanced by the particular zeal of its thirteen members. Despite the aforementioned difficulties, the work of the HQA in its first year of operation focused on the following actions.

### 1. INFORMATION

A primary role of the authority from its foundation is the widest possible provision of **information** to the Higher Education Institutions of the purpose and goals of the Quality Assurance procedure. This action was done:

A. *With the organisation of meetings between the President and Members of the Authority with the administrations of the academic units and members of European Quality Assurance agencies.*

This included attendance at the workshop on 3 October 2006, at which spoke the President of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Mr Peter Williams, followed by the General Secretary of the European University Association (EUA).

B. *With information visits to Universities and HEIs*

The president and Members of the Authority sought contacts and had information meetings and an exchange of ideas with the administrations (\*) of higher education institutions in Greece or just with the administrations of the interested academic units, as follows:

- Athens School of Fine Arts\*

- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki\*
- Democritus University of Thrace
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
- National Technical University of Athens\*
- Ionian University\*
- Athens University of Economics and Business
- University of Thessaly
- University of Western Macedonia
- University of Macedonia\*
- University of Crete\*
- University of Patras
- University of Piraeus\*
- University of Peloponnese
- University of Crete\*
- Polytechnic School of the Democritus University of Thrace
- Harokopio University \*
- TEI of Athens\*
- TEI of Western Macedonia
- TEI of Epirus
- TEI of Thessaloniki\*
- TEI of Kavala
- TEI of Kalamata
- TEI of Crete\*
- TEI of Lamia
- TEI of Larissa
- TEI of Messolonghi
- TEI of Piraeus
- TEI of Chalkida

C. By sending letters and information leaflets to all the Higher Education Institutions (universities and TEIs)

For the most complete provision of information to the administrations, the correspondence was first addressed to, from October 2006 the Rectors of the HEIs and the presidents of the TEIs is, and later to the competent Vice Rector or Vice President of academic affairs, then finally to all the Presidents of the 490 academic units of all the higher education foundations.

**2. PREPARATION FOR THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION**

In order to implement the internal evaluations, which is a precondition for external evaluation, the HQA made the necessary moves in order to support the

academic units and the higher education institutions in their progression, in keeping with best practices and the standards applied in the unified European education area and which are recognised by the international quality assurance agencies. For this reason, from January 2007 it proceeded with the preparation and publication of a series of guidelines, so as to facilitate the academic units in the preparation of their internal evaluation reports. These texts were put forward for public dialogue and finalised after comments, observations and questions had been made, primarily on the part of the interested institutions. The following information leaflets have already been distributed, copies of which are attached:

**A. Information leaflet**

This leaflet seeks to inform about the new institution and make it easily understood. It contains a brief analysis of the legal framework that governs the procedures for quality assurance in HEIs and the role of the HQA, as these are defined in Law 3374/2005 as well as by the guidelines of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

**B. Analysis of quality assurance criteria for academic units**

This leaflet provides a systematic analysis of the quality assurance criteria defined by Law 3374/2005, with the purpose of helping the academic units collect the necessary data in order to respond to the demands of the internal evaluation procedure, once they have, of course, adapted them to the specifics of their own discipline.

**C. Examples of data collection forms**

- Semester course
- Individual forms for the members of the teaching staff
- Student evaluation of course/teaching

These data collection forms, in the form of questionnaires, are indicative samples of forms for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, which will permit the responsible participation and individual contribution of all those involved in higher education in the Quality Assurance procedure.

**D. Guidelines for implementing the internal evaluation procedure**

This lengthy text gives analytical guidelines for the collection, analysis and use of the data that it is expected will be collected in the internal evaluation reports.

**E. Templates for the external evaluation report**

This text offers an indicative framework for the introduction of critical analysis and data synthesis in order to help the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) of the academic unit in its preparation of the Internal Evaluation Report.

**3. CREATOIN OF WEBSITE**

One of the first priorities for the HQA, in order to support the quality assurance and higher education procedure, was to create a **website**, where all the texts published by the Authority will be uploaded and answers given to questions of general interest.

#### **4. CREATION OF A REGISTER OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS**

A precondition for external evaluation – a process that follows the completion of the internal evaluation – is the creation of a **Register of External Experts**. The authority has already created an electronic database in which the names of distinguished scholars from all disciplines taught in Greece are entered. The External Expert Committees, to whom the external evaluation of the academic units has been assigned, will be drawn from this register. This process will complete the first phase of Internal Evaluation in summer 2008.

#### **5. INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOGISTICS**

The President and Members have taken the necessary steps for the creation of basic **infrastructure and logistics**.

#### **6. INTERNAL REGULATIONS**

The President and Members of the HQA have prepared the **Internal Regulations** of the Authority, as foreseen by Law 3374/2005 article 10 para. 3, which has already been submitted to the Ministry of education for approval.

#### **7. FINANCIAL ACTIONS**

The HQA completed the **Project Fiches** for the OP Education and the Authority's annual **budget** for 2008.

#### **8. ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS**

On 31 August 2007 the terms ended of three members of the authority, two university professors, Aikaterini Kampitgolou-Douka and Vasilis Zannis, and one of the TEI professors, Ioannis Tokis, due to their retirement from the institutions in which they served. The president initiated the process for the substitution of

these three members, in keeping with the provisions of law 3374/2005 (article 11 para. 3).<sup>1</sup>

### III. THE IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS

#### 1. BROADENING THE CYCLE OF EVALUATION

Already since late 2007 a significant number of academic units from all the higher education institutions in the country have declared their intention to be evaluated. The first of these are expected to submit their Internal Evaluation Reports before July 2008, with the expectation that they will then proceed with the External Evaluation procedure in the autumn of the same year.

At the same time, the HQA has proceeded with the timely creation of the Register of External Experts.

New external evaluation cycles are planned for 2009.

#### 2. COST OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Given the number of 490 academic units in the country that must, according to Law 3374/2005, be evaluated, the HQA proceeded with a first estimate of the cost of external evaluation, which comes to the sum of €25,000 once every four years. The first external evaluations are foreseen to begin in autumn 2008, with funding from the OP Education, and will continue in the winter and spring of 2009 with funding from the ESPA.

#### 3. INITIATIVES FOR REFORM OF THE LAW

The experience gained from the implementation of the first stages of the evaluation and, especially, the progress of the HQA's work and the contacts of the Members of the Authority with teaching staff and students in higher education, have made clear a need for small-scale scale but absolutely crucial **amendments** that will improve particular points of Law 3374, in order to facilitate and simplify the procedures that **unjustly** complicate and burden the progress of the procedure. The solution to many problems could be found with the creation of a Special Account of limited duration (until the end of the ESPA in 2013).

### CONCLUSIONS

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<sup>1</sup> In early 2008 the empty spaces were filled by the following three new members, with four-year terms: CHRYSOULLA SALTOSGLOU-PALIADELI, Professor of Archaeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, ACHILLEAS GRAVANIS, professor of medicine at the University of Crete, and KONSTANTINOS DIAMANTARAS, professor of TEI of Thessaloniki.

Despite the difficulties that arose with the occupations and the negative climate that prevailed throughout the academic year 2006-07, a not insignificant number of academic units (university and TEI) proceeded from the spring of 2007 to take the decision to begin the internal evaluation procedure. Since then, that number has steadily increased.

During the information meetings that members of the HQA had with the administrations and members of the teaching faculty, they ascertained that the spirit and letter of the law is not quite fully understood by all the members of the country's academic community.

It is encouraging, however, that after the visit to academic units and presentations of the goals and procedures, there was a positive reaction and acceptance of the institution in many cases. Despite the difficulties resulting from a lack of staff, the Authority's Members continue their on-site information and advisory meetings, with the goal of introducing the logic of evaluation to all the country's academic units.