



ΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

Α.ΔΙ.Π.

ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ
ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ
ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

H.Q.A.

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT ...MBA Programme.....

UNIVERSITY /TEI.....Hellenic Open University.

14 September 2013



TABLE OF CONTENTS

The External Evaluation Committee

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- Brief account of documents examined, of the Site Visit, meetings and facilities visited.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

- Comments on the quality and completeness of the documentation provided and on the overall acceptance of and participation in the Quality Assurance procedures by the Department .

A. Curriculum

APPROACH

- Goals and objectives of the Curriculum, structure and content, intended learning outcomes.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Rationality, functionality, effectiveness of the Curriculum.

RESULTS

- Maximizing success and dealing with potential inhibiting factors.

IMPROVEMENT

- Planned improvements.

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

- Pedagogic policy and methodology, means and resources.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Quality and evaluation of teaching procedures, teaching materials and resources, mobility.

RESULTS

- Efficacy of teaching, understanding of positive or negative results.

IMPROVEMENT

- Proposed methods for improvement.

C. Research

APPROACH

- Research policy and main objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Research promotion and assessment, quality of support and infrastructure.

RESULTS

- Research projects and collaborations, scientific publications and applied results.

IMPROVEMENT

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH

- Quality and effectiveness of services provided by the Department.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).

RESULTS

- Adequateness and functionality of administrative and other services.

IMPROVEMENTS

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations***E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors***

- Short-, medium- and long-term goals and plans of action proposed by the Department.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- The development and present situation of the Department, good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process, recommendations for improvement.

External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the MBA Programme of the University/Technical Institution of Hellenic Open University consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. **Prof. James Fleck**, Professor of innovation Dynamics, The Open University Business School, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom (**Coordinator**)
2. **Dr. Christos Tsinopoulos**, Senior Lecturer in Operations & Project Management & Chair of MA Management and MA & MSc Marketing Board of Examiners, Durham University Business School, United Kingdom
3. **Dr. Cleopatra Veloutsou**, Senior Lecturer in Marketing Adam Smith Business School University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom
4. **Dr. Evangelos Dedoussis**, Associate Professor of Management , American University in Dubai, Dubai
5. **Dr. Maria Michailides**, Associate Professor of Human Resources Management, School of Business, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus

N.B. The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- On Monday the 9th September, 2013, the EEC First visited the HQAA’s offices in Athens for a short introduction and orientation about the institution and the evaluation process. This was conducted by Professor Spiros Amourgis, who was the ex-President of the HQAA and the ex-Vice President of the HOU.
- Following this briefing, the EEC met personnel and students on the MBA Programme at the HOU’s Athens Offices, on the Monday and Tuesday, 9th and 10th September 2013. These meetings covered detailed aspects of the MBA Programme. The president of HOU offered a brief welcome, saying he hoped the Committee would help the MBA achieve continuous improvement.
- On the Wednesday 11th September, the EEC travelled to the HOU’s premises in Patras for meetings with the HOU’s Central Internal Assessment and Training Unit (IATU), The Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), and technical support. A brief tour of the facilities was carried out, including the impressive mainframe computer and a new laboratory for human computer interaction. Future plans for extension of the facilities and the relocation of the library to an integrated HOU Headquarters were indicated.
The EEC also visited and met with Library personnel in the separate library facilities in downtown Patras.
- From Thursday, the EEC met in the Hotel base to consider their findings and draft the report.

The schedule below was followed and the indicated personnel attended:

1 Brief Welcome:	
Dr. Haralambos Coccossis , Professor, University of Thessaly, President of the HOU	
2 Meetings to discuss the structure and overview of the MBA Programme.	
Athanassios Mihiotis , Associate Professor in Management of People and Organizations, HOU	Director of the MBA Programme
George Agiomirgianakis , Professor in Economic Analysis and Policy, HOU, Member of the School of Social Sciences	ex-Dean of the School of Social Sciences
Stelios Katranidis , Professor, University of Macedonia	MBA50 Module Coordinator
Panagiotis Artikis , Ass. Professor, University of the Piraeus	MBA51 Module Coordinator
John Halikias , Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business	MBA60 Module Coordinator
3. Meeting to discuss the tutor’s role and module level issues	
A. Konstantellou, Ass. Professor University of the Aegean N.-S. Koutsoukis, Ass. Professor, University of Peloponese Theotokas, Assoc. Professor, University of the Aegean	Module MBA61 Tutors
I. Demetriou, Professor, University of Athens E. Thalassinos, Professor, University of the Piraeus	Module MBA60 Tutors
G. Artikis, Emeritus Professor, University of the Piraeus M. Bekiaris, Ass. Professor, University of the Aegean	Module MBA51 Tutors
P. Liargovas, Professor, University of Peloponese T. Palyvos, Professor, University of Macedonia D. Christopoulos, Assoc. Professor, Panteion University	Module MBA50 Tutors

4. Meeting to explore the web sites and electronic infrastructure	
Dr. I. Tsoulfas, Portal Officer of the MBA	Module MBA61 Tutor
5 Meeting to explore the students' perspective	
Mrs. M. Topaloglou Mr. D. Koulopoulos	MBA Students
Mrs. A. Dikopoulou	MBA Graduate
6 Meeting to explore the HOU's central Quality and data support	
M. Xenos , Associate Professor, HOU, Director of the Internal Evaluation Unit of the HOU C. Katsanos N. Karousos	Staff Members of the Internal Evaluation Unit (IATU), HOU
I. Ntokas	Staff Member of the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP), HOU
7 Tour of the physical facilities	
N. Kostaras G. Bousios	Staff members of the Premises and Building Projects Department, HOU
8 Meeting to explore library services	
E. Verikiou P. Abazoglou N. Alexopoulou I. Kostopoulou M. Mperdesi I. Seferli	Staff members of the Library, HOU

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

The Hellenic Open University provided several documents and reports which included information about all aspects of their operations. The reports and data were able to provide firm evidence for everything that was presented to the EEC during the visits. These reports included the following:

- The agenda, provided by the HQAA, which was continuously adapted during the visit.
- The “blue books” which provided the introductory information for the modules.
- Examples of tutor material from all modules but particularly from MBA61.
- The more recent study guides for all modules.
- Learning aims for the MBA, and learning outcomes for the modules.
- Information material on the aims and supporting activities of MEAE.
- List of performance indicators which were provided during the visit to Patras. There was widespread evidence of their use throughout the visit.
- Reports on student assessment and progression.
- Examples of student evaluations including analysis of tutor performance.
- All presentation material during the three days of the visit.
- Attendance data, with summary information on MBA completions since its first year.
- Examples of students’ assessed coursework, both assignment-based and exam-based.
- Examples of students’ work during the tutor meetings; e.g. PowerPoint presentations.
- Examples of dissertations from different performance bands.

- Examples of minutes of the group working meetings (later called Tutor Meetings).
- Examples of minutes of Board of Studies.
- Dissertation handbook.
- MBA handbook.
- Examples of study schedules.
- Reports on the EADTU process.

Many of these were in Greek making it difficult for the non-Greek speaking members of the team to comment. Finally it should be noted that during the EEC's visit, HOU staff were able to promptly produce the information that was requested.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

A wealth of well-presented, useful, and detailed data relating to the MBA Programme and the specific modules was made available to the EEC. However, this data was not adequately contextualized and there was no narrative explaining the objectives of the various reports or the process of the internal evaluation. In particular, no predefined plan was presented for the development of the MBA Programme and it was not initially clear how the data linked with the objectives of each module and the strategic goals and the objectives of the Programme. Further, in the data provided before the visit, there was no clear description of the teaching and learning model.

Moreover, although much data existed, the members of the panel found it difficult to access it. Some key materials were not provided to the members of the panel in advance of the visit, although they were readily made available during or after the meetings with HOU staff. Also many of the reports provided were offered in Greek. Given that the programme is delivered in English and that the assessors are not all speaking Greek, this was found to be rather inconvenient.

Nevertheless, there was an excellent response to the EEC's requests for data during the visit, and it was clear that all members of the HOU were very willing to share information and did not try to hide issues. The EEC gained the strong impression that the HOU and the MBA Programme personnel were rather inexperienced in conducting these forms of meetings for evaluation processes, especially in terms of the preparation for the event and the scheduling of the various meetings.

A clear initial statement before the EEC visit, of the vision, mission and objectives of the MBA Programme and the internal review process itself would have helped in structuring a more comprehensive and useful internal evaluation report. In particular, the comprehensive data results should have been linked with the overall objectives of the MBA Programme and the modules within the programme.

A. Curriculum

APPROACH

During the visit, a clear statement was provided of the aims and learning outcomes both for the MBA Programme as a whole and at the module levels. This commendable listing made good use of Bloom's taxonomy, although it was not clear to what extent a full understanding of the use of learning outcomes was shared across all staff in the Programme. In particular, the mapping of Learning Outcomes onto the programme content, assignments and examinations appeared to be achieved largely through the judgment of the tutors. Currently it is an implicit process where tutors design the learning process and reflect the learning outcomes into the learning process and assessment. There was no *explicit* mapping of objectives onto the various components of the programme and there was a lack of familiarity about international practice and standards with respect to measuring the degree to which objectives have been met (for example the AACSB's Assurance of Learning process which is an international standard for leading business schools).

The overall structure, aims and objectives of the Programme were initially determined when the programme was set up and Government approval was gained. The EEC understands that insights were drawn from experience and examples elsewhere, notably from a Master's in Finance at the City University, London, UK. Professor George Agiomirgianakis, the ex-Dean at the HOU and ex-President of the EEFS (European Economics and Finance Society) had previously worked at City University and saw the opportunities such a Programme would offer in Greece.

Once the overall aim and structure had been set, detailed objectives and topics within the modules are regularly considered and refined through the Academic Bodies supporting the MBA Programme; namely, the Module Sessions involving module coordinators and module tutors; the Module Plenary Sessions, involving in addition the Programme Director, and finally the Board of Studies. These all meet three times a year and extensive discussion and consultation takes place as is evidenced in the minutes for these meetings. This structure also enables the views of students to be taken into account, and ensures that the objectives are effective in framing the learning.

The topics presented are consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and it is clear that issues arising as a result of the worldwide and Greek financial crisis are reflected in teaching and case study material. The MBA dissertations in particular enable wider issues to be explored by the students.

At another level, the Social Mission of the HOU to enable students who might otherwise be unable to study is an important aspect, and enables working adults to improve their career effectiveness and opportunity through the MBA programme.

The EEC noted that the Management module (MBA61) in particular was very well developed and received by student. The popularity of dissertations in this area supported this (65% inspired by MBA 61). It appears that innovation happens in this module more than in others, such as the pilot with external industrial lectures. Further, as was learned from discussions with the students, it provides individuals with great opportunities to develop themselves. However, the breadth of modules could be expanded in line with international standards, perhaps through the provision of electives.

The curriculum was set when the initial structure was approved and the "blue books" (the Module Teaching Material texts) were commissioned. Since then tutors have regularly adjusted the curriculum to reflect changes in research and teaching, although major curriculum changes are constrained by government regulation. Minor curriculum changes

are coordinated through internal procedures which are negotiated by the academic bodies noted above. An example was discussed of a module when changes were considered but not implemented after due deliberation, due to student work load implications, and another where a new topic was introduced. There was, however, no direct student involvement in these decision processes through student representation on the Board of Studies, as would be standard international practice.

The dissertation is sufficiently open to explore more contemporary issues, and this affords an important channel for ensuring that the curriculum remains topical.

While minor modifications can be accommodated through the procedures in place, longer term government approval processes limits the application of such procedures. The Programme appears therefore to be strongly constrained by the regulatory barriers.

IMPLEMENTATION

The structure is clear and effectively communicated to all relevant stakeholders. The curriculum is clear and rational, albeit focused more on economics and finance.

The skill levels of the tutors have been exceptional and this is maintained by means of a robust selection process. The recent changes in the renewal of the tutor contract should facilitate a greater element of continuity in the programmes.

While the Module Teaching Material texts, the “Blue books,” are seriously dated and in need for revision, The courses are kept up to date by the continual development and revision of Study Guides to an appropriate selection of “readers,” international standard Textbooks.

Although the MBA Programme has ambitions to develop its electronic delivery platform to provide access to e-books and online journal, these ambitions are limited by resource constraints, exacerbated by the Greek financial crisis.

However, from an international perspective and in comparison to other international offerings, the EEC considered that this appeared more like a solid MSc on finance and economics, than a conventional MBA.

RESULTS

The MBA Programme’s Aims and Learning Outcomes appear to be effectively achieved, although this is on an intuitive and judgement basis, and so deficiencies might not be easily apparent. An explicit and systematic mapping and measuring of learning outcomes at both the programme and module level would help provide further confirmation to reinforce the judgement. This would also adhere to international practice and allow the identification of areas of improvement of the curriculum.

With the excellent data collection and analysis capability of the HOU, this should be fairly easily implemented.

IMPROVEMENT

The department is run by confident individuals who are able to identify and implement improvements.

The extensive data collection and analysis capability of the HOU provides a powerful instrument for identifying effectiveness and deficiencies and therefore indicating where action needs to be taken.

There is a robust system for yearly refinements and updating of readers, although Government restrictions inhibit improvements at the overall MBA Programme and Module title levels.

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

The methodology of teaching was originally based on the model developed by the Open University UK, according to Professor Amourgis, the ex-Vice President of the HOU. The OU UK model has the primary learning centred on a set of carefully developed and tested teaching texts, with tutors playing a strictly supporting role—or, as Professor Amourgis put it, “advisory educational personnel.” While this was perhaps the original intention, since the start of the MBA in 2005, the model has very clearly shifted to one in which the learning is instead centred on the excellence of the tutors, who provide five four-hour teaching sessions per module with extensive email and office hours support in addition. The original course teaching material texts (“blue books”) now require extensive updating and act only as a general overview of the areas considered. The key learning is achieved through the tutors’ efforts and their study guides to external international standard textbooks, “readers,” which are selected and reviewed on an annual basis. Thus essentially the quality is dictated/determined by the tutors. And in this regard, on account of thorough and strong selection criteria, the tutors are indeed excellent and are maintained as such by the rigorous annual review and reselection process, which means that tutors may be changed if their performance is not up to standard. Further, the comprehensive data collection and analysis capability provides extensive measures of quality, notably focussing on student and coordinator evaluation, and feedback performance.

In line with the change in the basic teaching model and the current development of the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment, the MBA Programme might consider removing the blue books and replacing them with extended study guides. Furthermore, the e-books initiatives should be explored further.

Teaching methods are traditional, but there have been several interesting and encouraging initiatives including guest lectures from industry representatives.

The teaching staff and the processes for managing them have been excellent. The tutor/student ratio of 1:30 is such that good individual relationships can be developed, as attested by the tutors who commented that their HOU experience compared very favourably with their conventional Greek university experience, where they can rarely develop such good relationships.

The data on student evaluations is evidence of the above observations. There is a good level of satisfaction and high levels of teaching evaluations for the tutors, but a rather low level accorded to the teaching materials (2.55 on a Likert scale of 1 – 5). In particular, the feedback has been thorough and prompt and action has been taken when this is not the case. This was actively measured through the data collection and analysis process and there was widespread evidence of this across the documents received and the individuals interviewed by the EEC.

However, most evaluation appeared to take place at the end of the module study period, and there was little evidence of teaching monitoring during the delivery of the module, with the exception of the speed of feedback. Moderation of the feedback happens at the end of the module, and this could result in shortfalls not being rectified during the course.

Through the Dissertation Module, there have been several tutor-student collaborations that have led to publication, which is very commendable. However, despite such instances, and on considering several dissertation examples, the EEC noted that there needs to be greater effort in the teaching of a wider range of business research methods for use during the dissertation stage. The discussion and presentation of methodology in the dissertations

examined did not appear as strong in comparison with international standards.

The technology used in Patras was impressive and up to date. The EEC was shown evidence of the use of Moodle and examples of use of online learning technology. However, this could be expanded across other modes of e-learning. There is also active research on online teaching and distance learning methodology as was also shown during the EEC's visit to Patras.

The examination system was robust. The use of coursework assignments was interesting and enabled the consideration of important and contemporary issues thereby ensuring the currency of the learning processes. They were clearly a major driver of student learning, as evident from the minutes of the Tutor Meetings. This could be expanded further. However, team work, though a stated aim of the MBA Programme and an activity that is a key feature of MBA programmes elsewhere, as well as being demanded by industry and commerce, was relatively little emphasised. There could be some additional use of online technology to encourage teamwork.

The examination questions and assignments are not systematically mapped on the learning objectives, but depend on the implicit judgement of the faculty setting the assignments and examinations. This is not to say that they do not align with learning outcomes, but international practice is now to make explicit use of systematic mapping and measuring to prove effectiveness and identify areas requiring rectification.

IMPLEMENTATION

As noted above, overall the quality of teaching through the tutors was of a very high standard. The data collection and analysis system enabled effective maintenance and improvement of that quality. In particular, the various Academic Bodies supporting the MBA Programme (Module Sessions, Plenary Sessions and the Academic Board) enable tutors to share information. Moreover, minutes are kept of the Tutor Meetings to ensure communication with those students who were not present.

While the "blue books" are clearly outdated due to the constraints outlined above (an issue that was reflected in the evaluation of this material by the students) these deficiencies are mitigated though the regular updates of study guides.

Teaching is enriched and informed by the tutors' research activities and by the wide scope afforded by the dissertation exercise.

The careful preparation of students for the assignments during the Tutor Meetings, together with feedback discussions of the best and worst previous examples ensures a strong learning dynamic, and clearly succeeds in engaging the students' participation.

Mobility is possible by the virtue of the distance learning mode of learning, although the EEC did not see any information on the use of international opportunities such as Erasmus.

Tutoring staff are also employed by other universities in Greece and beyond which encourages mobility and provides a channel for the communication of best practices and the latest knowledge in the relevant topics.

However, from an international perspective in comparison to other international offerings, the EEC considered that this appeared more like a solid MSc on finance and economics, than a conventional MBA. Some suggestions are noted in this connection in the final section of this report.

As also noted above, student evaluations of the tutors were high while those of the teaching materials were not so good. Remarkably, although tutorial attendance was not obligatory,

excellent attendance rates (generally well over 60%) were routinely registered which indicates the value that students place upon the tutors' contributions.

RESULTS

The mode of teaching in this MBA is somewhat different from that of more "conventional" courses, and the distance education mode necessitates some specific conditions regarding the period of study. For instance, students are given strict rules about extending the length of study. The EEC was given clear and convincing reasons for when graduation was delayed, based on the effective collection of data. This was thoroughly analysed and records were kept and easily produced at a very competent level. Evidence of this was found throughout the visit and the reports made available to the EEC.

Tutors are all required to contact students at least 5 times during the Module period of study. This was monitored and statistics about participation and communication was produced and provided.

The HOU's rich data capability allows the quick identification of issues, such as low marks and low attendance. There is clear evidence that this data is used effectively to identify and address these issues. The minutes also indicated that relevant issues arising are discussed in the Tutor Meetings and Academic Bodies.

IMPROVEMENT

Several initiatives were presented on improving the teaching and learning experience. Examples included the use of online teaching technology, the use of e-books, and the use of industrial presentations via the web. There is clear evidence that the MBA Programme leads the way across HOU in the implementation of new technology, and it was frequently remarked that the business courses were used to pilot new initiatives.

Overall, the MBA Programme constitutes a very sound teaching operation with the admirable HOU data collection and analysis capability employed for regular review and continuous improvements.

.

C. Research

APPROACH

As a teaching programme, research is not a primary objective for the MBA Programme. However, the effective policy is to carefully select staff with good research track records, according to set criteria, so that their research experience might inform the teaching processes. Tutoring staff are selected so that there is alignment of their research to the thematic topics covered by the MBA.

Further, research is a positive value for the students' dissertations, and again careful matching of tutor research interests with proposed student dissertation topics is undertaken.

IMPLEMENTATION

As noted above, practical implementation of the implicit research policy is achieved by means of careful selection of faculty and tutors according to their research experience. This is particularly the case for the dissertation module, which comprises 20% of the MBA programme.

Some funding is available for supporting conference attendance where papers are presented by full time faculty.

RESULTS

In some cases student dissertations had given rise to joint publications between the student and the supervisor.

Overall, the wide range of dissertation titles listed, clearly reflect areas of considerable and emerging research interest and topicality.

IMPROVEMENT

The EEC understands that the MBA Programme intends to explore ways of increasing the effectiveness of the Dissertation research process.

However, the nature of the MBA as a teaching programme, and the basis of the HOU teaching/ learning model which depends on the vast majority of the work being carried out by part time staff who already have a full-time base in other, mainly Greek, universities, militates against the achievement of a long term coherent research dynamic. This is exacerbated by the constraints arising from short term albeit repeated tutor appointments and therefore improvements involve learning how to operate this model efficiently.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH

The program's administrative services have consistently been rated relatively highly by students; the figure for 2012 is 3.8 on a 5-point Likert scale.

The HOU's data collection and analysis capability, which has been frequently commented on above, is very effectively realised through the Internal Assessment and Training Unit (the IATU). The IATU provides informative data with excellent analysis, with up-to-date facilities. The HOU's central Quality Assessment Unit (the QAU) reported initiatives and projects to improve quality procedures through the MBA Programme to clearly align with HQAA guidelines.

Regarding the Library, the nature of the HOU's operation as a distance education provider means that its services are rather different from those of a traditional university though by no means less important. Library resources are used by students and faculty of the HOU as well as by members of the local community. The Library also provides access to online material. The HOU library in the framework of expanding the Interborrowing Service is trying to collaborate with other Hellenic Academic libraries in order for students of HOU to be able to access their digital content. However, this aspect could be extended much further using some additional resources. Examples of resources that would be considered as standard in other competing institutions include access to a wider range of journals, and in particular for support of an MBA, to Business Information databases. It was observed that library services are not heavily used by staff or students of the MBA Programme, which might reflect peculiarities in the Programme as well as available resources not being well-matched to requirements. The students the EEC met reported that they bought many of the recommended textbooks, "readers," for their own personal use.

The HOU has a Career Office (CO) with the aim to support students and graduates in the development of a professional career. This provides a standard range of services and is available free of charge to MBA students and graduates, although the EEC was not provided with information regarding the extent of take up of those services. One interesting feature is a "Connectivity Service" which seeks to connect students and graduates with organisations which offer job positions or programs of lifelong learning.

The appeals procedure has been transparent and well communicated to the students.

Although there was no explicit policy to simplifying procedures, there was clear evidence of attempts to do so, such as the simplification of the evaluation of tutors for reappointment, for example.

IMPLEMENTATION

The organization and infrastructure of the MBA Programme's administration seems to be simple and effective, and indeed constitutes a very lean operation. As a pertinent instance of this, the EEC was very appreciative of the support provided by the MBA Programme Coordinator, Professor Michiotis, whose enthusiasm and passion was very evident. His willingness to give the EEC speedy access to all the information requested was highly appreciated.

RESULTS

Overall, the administrative and other services are generally adequate and functional, although it was apparent that budgetary constraints, exacerbated by the current financial situation in Greece, were clearly inhibiting certain desirable developments such as the extension of provision of on-line journals and e-books.

IMPROVEMENTS

A range of improvements were underway, though the budgetary constraints already mentioned were clearly limiting what could be achieved. Examples of such improvements were associated with the integration of MBA Programme websites, exploration of the feasibility of providing a greater range of online materials, and several projects undertaken by the QAU and IATU.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The HOU's mission is to provide distance education. As such the University can cover the education needs of a wider spectrum of students than can a more "conventional" University. This was reflected by the materials, processes, and teaching staff that the EEC met during the visit. For instance, there is a constant allocation of places to individuals with special needs on the MBA Programme, and the Library in Patras has been made available for use by the local community.

The HOU offers some connections with business and other Greek institutions. By the very nature of its operating model, HOU's tutors are employed by other Greek universities, which affords a degree of collaboration and exposure to those organisations. Also, MBA Programme students are generally employed by businesses and other Greek organisations, and this immediately provides opportunities for collaboration with a wide range of institutions and suggests that the Tutor Meetings offer excellent settings for networking. Furthermore, collaboration with cultural, social and commercial organisations is effected through the Dissertation Module, as was evidenced by the range of titles of dissertations undertaken.

During the visit the members of HOU's faculty and tutors provided additional evidence of collaboration with business in the form of guest lectures. Moreover, this was a pilot initiative and it is planned to extend it in the future. Clearly it could be taken much further and possibly linked with other learning activities such as dissertations. Such initiatives could be further developed, possibly by establishing an Alumni Relations office which could make use of the diverse careers of HOU's graduates.

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

During the visit, the EEC was shown several initiatives that aimed at improving and advancing the quality and diversity of HOU's offering. However, there was no formal document which articulated the medium and long term goals as such, and the EEC saw no evidence of a formal process for developing one.

Nevertheless, a few consistent messages were communicated during the visits and discussions with Faculty. The first related to the aspiration to internationalise the MBA operations. The model and language of teaching (English) are such to provide sufficient flexibility to welcome students from outside the Greek market. Recent activities and international agreements provide strong indications that an implicit strategy of internationalising the MBA is taking shape.

The second message related to the desire to provide more services online. The use and experimentation of online platforms such as Moodle have provided evidence of the willingness to move in this direction. This is a stream of initiatives that we would strongly support as it would bring HOU's practices more in line with other competing international MBAs.

There are several constraints within which HOU operates which could potentially inhibit its growth. These include:

Greek Government regulations which restrict the introduction of new programmes and modules. As was explained in several instances, the introduction of a new module would require ministerial approval, a process that includes several risks and takes a considerable amount of time. Such restrictions limit flexibility for adapting to changing business and social needs.

Funding restrictions associated with the development of new learning paradigms. The funding model, and restrictions in the availability of funds for investing in new technologies and processes reinforces the current learning paradigm. For instance, much of the development of the new Moodle facilities was carried out by a tutor during his own time. Although such examples provide substantial evidence of the enthusiasm and commitment of the tutors, they also clearly illustrate the lack of institutional availability of funds for strategic investments.

Tutor selection and retention which potentially discourages continuity and commitment. The tutor selection process is robust and transparent. However, all tutors and most coordinators are employed on short term contracts which span only one academic cycle. Such a model could discourage commitment for the longer term development of the curriculum. Very recent changes in the recruitment process should help to alleviate this, but a more consistent organisational structure would ensure that longer term strategic initiatives are embedded into the new organisational structures and implementations.

No predefined plans for the MBA Programme's development. During the visit the EEC were introduced to several ambitions for the development of the Programme. The most prominent of these related to an agreement with a Polish University for offering an MBA with a more international cohort. Such initiatives are clearly promising and in line with other international offerings. However, such initiatives should be part of a more coherent and explicit development plan, aligned with the strategic objectives of the Programme and

those of the wider University.

Strategic identity of the curriculum. Three out of the four modules are finance or economics based. This gives the impression that the strategic positioning of the MBA Programme is more focused towards the development of students' quantitative foundation, and is in character more akin to the international standard for a Master's in Finance and Economics rather than a standard MBA. Yet, as evidenced by the popularity of the dissertation topics inspired by MBA61, the strategic identity of the MBA is in practice more oriented towards management related topics, as would be typical of an international standard MBA. As a result there is a clear need for a clarification of the strategic positioning of the Programme to align with students' perceptions and needs, especially in the international context.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

Commendations

The teaching experience that the HOU MBA Programme students are exposed to is to be complimented. More specifically:

- The tutors play an important role to the quality of the programme. Tutors are of high quality, since they have knowledge and considerable experience in higher education, many of them from different international environments. Tutors have extensive interaction and develop personal links with the students, are well prepared for the sessions with the students and the students suggest that the interaction with the tutors is the most valuable part of their experience in the MBA Programme. Tutors also seek to increase student engagement in some really difficult to engage topics by providing clear links with real problems that the students confront in their own businesses (i.e. quantitative methods). In addition the students commented that their tutors provided thorough and timely feedback that was particularly constructive.
- The students are particularly engaged. The attendance at the Tutor Meetings is high, while a lot of communication between the tutors and the student takes place. The tutors play a core role in the students' engagement with the Programme. The MBA Programme is to be complimented that the work produced for some of the dissertations in the programme led to journal publications.

Other strengths of the HOU MBA Programme include:

- The Programme Co-ordinator (Associate Professor Athanassios Mihiotis) is a full time member of the HOU and is an asset to the programme. In addition to the great job he has been doing for the most popular module of the Programme (MBA61), he also oversees the overall Programme. He is very involved, passionate, responsive, effective and open to suggestions.
- The willingness to experiment with and embrace technological developments. This was evident from the meetings with all full time and part time staff in both locations that the EEC visited, Athens and Patras.
- The excellent collection and analysis of Programme and Module related data. The data is analysed and very informative reports are produced and distributed to different audiences, from tutors, to module and programme co-ordinators.

- The transparency in the selection procedures of students.
- The plans for international collaboration with a Polish University for the MBA programme.

Areas for improvement:

The MBA should have a clearer and more explicit strategic direction. More specifically:

- The staff has to articulate the vision, mission and strategy of the MBA Programme. This requires to be clearly communicated across the Programme at all levels and drive all improvement initiatives. For instance, if part of the strategy is to internationalise the MBA activity, all material provided to students should be in English including evaluations. Given the Government constraints and associated lead times for decisions, this should be taken into account in the long term planning of development.
- The excellent data analysis should be complemented with greater narrative and explicit links with the mission and strategy. The five Tutorial Meetings should be protected and any changes away from the current arrangements in favour of a higher level of electronic engagement should be carefully piloted and matched to student preferences. Industry experts talks are an excellent means of innovation transfer and should be encouraged, but should not encroach on the effective activities carried out in the five meetings with the tutors.

The curriculum of the MBA should be carefully considered. More specifically:

- The current offering of modules is not consistent with most competitive MBAs in the International arena, since it looks more like a Finance MSc. The Programme should consider covering a wider range of management topics, such as Operations Management, Information Management, Marketing Management, Technology Management, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Behavioural Economics as well as other important contemporary management areas. This might be difficult to achieve fully immediately within the current four Module plus Dissertation structure, but strengthening the current offering in management and marketing and opening up more modules for management related modules, such as operations, is highly advisable. Longer term, it is recommended to have at least half of the curriculum focused on the “softer” topics, in order to be comparable and competitive with international MBA standards. Alternatively or additionally, it might be considered to develop two programmes: a Master’s in Finance and Economics with a moderate amount of management, and an MBA with a moderate amount of Finance and Quants.
- The offering of the MBA since the introduction of the Programme has not been revisited. The implementation of a policy for periodic reviews of the offerings as well as course material is crucial for international expansion. Adopting enhanced on-line Study Guides and e-books, rather than the current printed “blue books” could help on the course material front.
- The introduction of foundation or preliminary preparation courses might be considered for individuals who come from different backgrounds, for example for people with a weak background in quantitative methods.
- The integration of a comprehensive business research methodology should certainly be implemented, since the current offering is highly biased towards quantitative data analysis methods, rather than research methodology more broadly.
- The EEC strongly recommends the mapping and measurement of learning outcomes

against the Programme and Module content, assignments and examinations. In order to match up with international standards, the starting point for any changes or the design of new courses in the Programme should be the identification of the learning outcomes. Explicit use of Bloom's taxonomy in developing the outcomes is also strongly recommended, and should be supported by means of tutor training.

Any changes in the delivery of the modules should be carefully considered. More specifically:

- Given the adoption of Moodle, moving to a more dynamic study guide and associated learning material would be advisable. The implementation of more dynamic e-learning technologies, such as Elluminate and other electronic learning facilities should be explored.
- While the Programme should certainly seek to extend such on-line facilities, it should ensure that these, along with face to face Tutor Meetings are carefully and effectively deployed according to expressed student preferences. At present the data suggests that face to face meetings are perceived by most students to be the most important aspect of the learning experience, and it is important not to prejudice the success of the Programme by premature replacement by less effective alternatives.

Student selection, and more specifically:

- Due to regulations determined by the Foundation Act of HOU 2552/97, the entry criteria are not ensuring that the best applicants will enter the Programme. Adding more specific criteria, such as years of managerial experience and achievement in their previous studies, would be helpful in delivering an even more competent Programme and producing stronger graduates, as well as being in line with international standards.

Staffing issues:

- It would be useful to hire full time members of staff to co-ordinate each one of the modules, to ensure continuity.
- Part time tutors are currently employed in a 10 months basis. The recent move to a three year expectation of renewal (subject to satisfactory annual evaluation) with a 15% turnover is a positive development, which should ensure continuity and reduce bureaucracy.

In forward planning, the HOU should identify a budget dedicated to the MBA Programme and underwritten by increased future fee revenues, perhaps from international expansion, to cover issues such as:

- Quality Assurance and Accreditation support for the MBA Programme.
- Access to more on line management Journals and ebooks.
- The development of alumni services.
- The development of further career services dedicated to the MBA Programme.
- The development of links with industry, commerce and the public sector.

The Members of the Committee

HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY
MASTER IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Name and Surname

Signature

Prof. James Fleck

The Open University Business School, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom

Dr. Evangelos Dedoussis

American University in Dubai, Dubai

Dr. Maria Michailides

University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus

Dr. Christos Tsinopoulos

Durham University Business School, United Kingdom

Dr. Cleopatra Veloutsou

University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom