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ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
H.Q.A.A.  
HELLENIC QUALITY  
ASSURANCE AGENCY  
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT of Business Administration

TEI of Serres, Greece

February, 5 2011

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## External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Business Administration of the Technical Institution of Serres consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Prof. Christina Koutra

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(President)

(Title) (Name and Surname)

The Business School, Bournemouth University, U.K

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(Institution of origin)

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(Title) (Name and Surname)

Cambridge University, UK

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3. Prof. Athanasios Kourouklis

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University of West of Scotland, UK

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(Title) (Name and Surname)

Ex Manager Air Liquide, Greece

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(Institution of origin)

5. \_\_\_\_\_

(Title) (Name and Surname)

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(Institution of origin)

**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.

The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.

## **Introduction**

### I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC), consisting of four members, was invited by HQAA to review the ‘Department of Business Administration’ of the Technological Educational Institution (TEI) of Serres in Greece. The evaluation meetings and the site visit took place between January 31<sup>st</sup> and February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The Committee followed the schedule drawn by the HQAA in collaboration with the associated Department of the TEI Serres. A number of meetings took place on campus during the site visit from January 31<sup>st</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup>. The meetings were attended by all full-time faculty members as well as a representative group of **part-time** staff. Additionally the Committee met with the President and the Vice-President for academic affairs as well as with undergraduate and post-graduate students, alumni, and staff members of administration and support services (administration staff, the Erasmus coordinator, the IT support technicians and library staff). All the meetings with academic part-time staff members, alumni, student’s administrative staff and IT technicians were held without the presence of the full-time faculty members.

These meetings were focused on issues related to curriculum, teaching and learning, research, student support services and strategic planning. Additionally the Committee visited the teaching and recreational facilities, the library and other areas of the campus. All staff was accommodating, open and willing to assist and provide all relevant information requested. Thereupon the Committee would like to commend on the staff’s cooperation and professional attitude. The basis of this evaluation was the Internal Evaluation Report of 2007-08 and a more recent update submitted in December 2010. Additionally, information was obtained from a number of documents provided by the Department in support of the original report.

## II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The Committee is fully satisfied with the documentation received in advance, as well as the documentation received upon further request. All the documentation provided was thoroughly prepared, comprehensive and easy to follow. The documentation contained enough information to form the basis of the external review.

The internal evaluation was thorough, balanced, fair and well documented. The Committee's own evaluation confirms that it provided an accurate overview of the department. It should be noted that as the members of the Committee are not familiar with the legal framework adopted by the Higher Education Institutions in Greece some of the comments and recommendations could be in conflict with some of the regulations.

### **A. Curriculum**

*To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.*

#### **APPROACH**

The 'Department of Business Administration', consisting of ten permanent members of staff, it currently offers two programmes:

1. BA in Business Administration; and
2. Masters of Business Administration (MBA)

#### **BA in Business Administration**

Based on the programme documentation the aims of this programme are:

- To provide the student with knowledge of the current business environment, as well as the organisational and functional structure of the firm;
- To equip the student with the necessary analytical, managerial and conceptual skills required in the management of an organisation;
- To develop the student's learning and professional skills so that can contribute to the development of the socio-economic environment;

The course has been structured based on these aims and within the constraints of the general curriculum requirements as set by the Greek



Ministry of Education. Additionally, the course development was influenced by contemporary identified market needs, as well as a benchmark set by equivalent courses in Europe and the United States. The course offers 44 modules in all disciplines; out of which the student is required to complete 39 modules along with a work placement and a dissertation based on a theoretical or practical topic.

The theoretical foundations are provided through a core curriculum offered through out the four year programme. The application of theory to practice is facilitated through coursework that embeds the use of labs and workshops and of information and communication technologies. There is a capstone seminar required for students in their 8<sup>th</sup> semester in preparation for writing an undergraduate thesis. There is also a work placement undertaken in the last semester. From a sample of student work provided, it was observed that the majority of the dissertations were based on theoretical topics or extended literature reviews, while the minority was more empirical.

It should be noted that student should be encouraged to engage in studies of more practical nature and where possible to include some primary research.

Additionally student should be expected to use literature that requires properly cited material utilising a standard referencing system, for example the 'Harvard Reference System' in order to verify any form of plagiarism.

Based on the information received about employment of graduates and as far as the Committee was able to establish, the curriculum does meet its goals. From testimonials by alumni interviewed by the Committee, nearly all of the graduates are successfully employed; mostly in the private sector. This is additionally highlighted in the internal evaluation report where some information is given regarding graduate destination statistics. Furthermore, the opinion of graduates interviewed suggests that the Greek employment market appreciates the knowledge and values the skills they have acquired in this programme.

Currently the curriculum is under review with a view to develop three thematic streams in:

1. Economics and Financial Economics;
2. Management and Marketing; and
3. Information Technology and Operational Research;

Although the current structure of the programme has been successful in meeting the overall objectives and is comparable to similar programmes offered in Europe and the US; as it is currently under review, a number of recommendations are proposed by the committee for the consideration of the programme team:

- To consolidate a number of current modules and create a coherent core element for all streams, and satisfy the needs of the thematic specialisations. However, some consideration should be given to the fact that currently the thematic streams do not have a critical mass of associated permanent academic staff to allow for efficient operations of the three different streams, although the academic requirements can be satisfied with the engagement of part time staff.
- To consider the inclusion of a number of topics namely including:
  1. Strategic Management
  2. Leadership and Change Management
  3. Personal and Interpersonal Skills
  4. Entrepreneurship
  5. Risk Management
- To consider offering the module Research Methods at a later semester as it could be more beneficial in the development of the necessary skills. The content should include both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods

Overall the Committee believes that the current curriculum meets the international standards for Economic and Business programmes as it is evident not only from our own experience but from the fact that graduates are able to successfully compete in the employment market or progress their studies in a number of Greek and other European Institutions (Calabria University, Italy, Gdiff University, UK, TEI Kavala/Creenwich etc.)

### **Masters in Business Administration (MBA)**

According to the programme documentation the overall aim of the postgraduate programme revolves around the following objectives:

- The development of knowledge and research in related subject areas with an emphasis on the topics of *Management Information Systems* and *Cost Accounting and Auditing*;
- The development of necessary managerial skills to equip students for

employment and positive contribution in private and public organisations;

- The preparation of graduates with adequate knowledge and skills to engage in the economic development of Greece and be able to cope with the continuously changing business environment;
- The development of capable specialised managerial staff with knowledge of the current business issues and adequate analytical and conceptual skills for effective decision making and innovation;

The course is structured around a core element of six modules and another eight modules that offer choice of specialisation. The current structure of the programme is comparable to other similar programmes. However as the programme is in the first semester of operation, with the first cohort of student intake, it is anticipated that a more fruitful review should be carried out at a later stage.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the chronic shortage of funding, resources and personnel, the Department has successfully implemented the curriculum aims. The curriculum compares quite favorably with universally accepted standards for university-level education in this particular area of study. The structure of the curriculum is rational and clearly articulated.

Additionally, the Committee observed that the Department has instituted a policy of prerequisites for a very limited number of courses. This is a sound policy that enables students to eventually acquire the necessary skills cumulatively and consequentially and should be encouraged as the current course review aims to develop thematic streams.

The major issue clearly visible during our visit is that the Department lacks the necessary resources to fully implement the curriculum, as most of the teaching is undertaken by part time staff (10 permanent versus 34 temporary academic staff). The Department's full-time faculty is clearly well trained and qualified to pursue the aims of the curriculum. As far as we were able to assess, the temporary staff is also well trained to engage fully with the delivery of the programme. However, there are many bureaucratic obstacles and practical constraints that result from the implementation of the legal framework, that do not allow the Department to make full use of the temporary members of staff.

## RESULTS

The Committee is satisfied that the Department has been able to implement its predefined goals and objectives, despite the limited resources. Shortcomings in specific areas are largely the result of insufficient allocation of resources and the result of large number of students the Department is obliged to serve in its incoming cohort.

## IMPROVEMENT

Following discussions with the academic staff, the need to upgrade the core curriculum was acknowledged to reflect comparable programmes abroad. Specifically, the Committee recommends:

- a number of topics, as listed above, to be incorporated as new modules to the core curriculum;
- a more formal process should be adopted for programme review and development and that incorporates the currently adopted yearly module review practice;
- Adoption of continuous assessment practices to encourage attendance and class participation;
- Adoption of essay writing as a form of assessment (apart from exams) in order to engage students more actively in reviewing literature and become skilled at writing at an academic level;
- Establish a new policy for temporary staff engagement, to avoid discontinuity in the development and review of modules;
- Adoption of a policy for second (within the department). and external marking (different institution) of a representative sample of exam scripts to increase and ensure fairness in marking; as well as an exam marking guide which explicitly stipulates the marking criteria;

## **B. Teaching**

### APPROACH:

The Department uses a combination of instruction methods based on lectures, labs and workshop and seminars. The Department's pedagogic

policy is to combine theoretically focused lecture-based courses with applied labs and workshops and encourages the use of multimedia technologies. Additionally, the department has implemented the use of a virtual classroom platform that the students use to access course material and to communicate with academic staff.

From information provided in the internal evaluation report the current staff to student ratio is 205.6:1. However, this ratio is calculated by considering only the permanent staff and the total number of registered student but not necessarily “active”, and is only representative for administrative duties. A better picture for staff to student ratio, related to the implementation of the current programmes, can be derived by including in the calculation the temporary staff fulltime equivalent.

According to national legislation, students are required to attend 80% of lab sessions while attendance of lectures is not mandatory. Also, the Committee believes that attendance should be mandatory for lectures too. That should help to decrease a likely high rate of drop outs, but it will also help students to complete their studies at the expected four years time, as currently the average study time is well above the expected four years.

As far as the Committee was able to determine and based on the comments made by the students themselves, instructors overwhelmingly are responsive to student queries. They are accessible by email and in person and often spend considerable time advising students.

The Committee also notes that the teaching approach followed, allows students to enroll but not attend lectures. The most popular assessment method used in the Department, as well as in all Greek Higher Education Institutions, is examination-based. A new assessment policy that requires the use of other assessment methods , such as in-class test, group based course work, presentations, essay writing etc. should be formally introduced in order to diversify the teaching/assessment system and allow a far more accurate and fair evaluation of students’ abilities.

A number of academic staff has attempted to introduce alternative or additional assessment methods in order to achieve such an objective. However, all such efforts work on a voluntary basis and only to the extent that the students themselves chose to exercise these options. In such cases, students receive adequate feedback and assistance. This is a commendable practice that should be encouraged and adopted on a wider basis.

The teaching facilities include a number of well equipped lecture theaters and seminar rooms, ICT labs and copying and printing facilities, as well as access to a wireless network. The Library services offer access to on-line academic databases, and to a good selection of books and academic journals in Greek and other languages.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

Student feedback indicates that the quality of module delivery is very good. The students considered the teaching material to be of good quality and the choice of textbooks helpful. However, there is a weak link between research and teaching, thus staff is encouraged to include their own research and other contemporary research practices in the teaching material. The department currently participates in student and staff exchange programmes such as Socrates, Leonardo and Erasmus with a pretty good flow of students in both directions. Nevertheless, staff has not taken full advantage of this opportunity with no outgoing and a limited incoming activity.

The Committee's general impression is that the students' evaluation of the teaching and the course content shows positive results. Students remarked that they value highly the assistance and guidance offered by the faculty members.

#### RESULTS

From the data provided, in the internal evaluation report, it appears that there is a high failure rate in modules within the first few semesters. This is probably the result of poor attendance levels in a populous of students that have achieved a low grade at entry level. The failure rates diminish at the later semesters and the completion rates are average.

Based on these observations it is difficult to justify their use in establishing the efficacy of teaching as these statistics is the result of the idiosyncrasy of the Greek Education system. A better and fairer evaluation should be based on employment statistics which suggest a rather positive result as almost 70% of graduates are fully employed. This view is shared by the undergraduates and graduates students of the department, as well as by the new first cohort of postgraduate students.

#### IMPROVEMENT

Staff in the Department has always adopted a continuous improvement

culture and tries to engage as much as possible with students, by operating an open door policy, offering help and advice. Additionally the Department has adopted a policy of engaging the students in a number of wider activities, such as the formation and operation of study groups facilitated by specially designed and allocated areas, within the campus. This is in an effort to facilitate a change of culture and contribute to a more positive student experience.

In order to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning experience of the students, currently the department offers support to temporary staff with the provision of a teaching guide and detailed course outlines. In the opinion of the committee the department could take the initiative to organise formal induction sessions for new staff and personal development activities for all staff.

Furthermore, the pastoral and tutoring support practices offered to the post-graduate students should be adopted for the undergraduate students with particular emphasis in the first few semesters in order to encourage and therefore ultimately improve, participation in all learning and teaching activities.

### **C. Research**

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and postgraduate level, if necessary.*

#### **APPROACH**

According to the information provided in the internal evaluation report and from discussions with the permanent academic staff it is evident that currently the department follows an ad hoc policy driven by the research interest and activities of the individual due to lack of resources. The Department's intention is to streamline the research efforts under the auspices of the three thematic streams.

Although this is not a bad policy the Committee feels that due to lack of a critical mass of academics in each thematic stream and other resources implementation of this policy may be an element of a longer term strategy. In the medium term it will be useful to embark on a plan that focuses on the strengths of the permanent staff and take full advantage of any funding opportunities both national and international.

To facilitate the development of a stronger research culture and allow for growth the department could focus more on applied research that is in line with the overall direction of the institution, initiate and establish procedures

to assess research output, based on international ranking systems such as ABS, and try to participate in international activities. Although currently the research activity is at its infancy with some output, the staff is commendable on their motivation and interest to improve the research activity in the department.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

The Department currently promotes research by entering into various research programs, with national and European funding as described in the internal evaluation report. There is no institutional funding for research and this reflects the lack of research infrastructure.

In terms of scholarly publications and using the internal evaluation documentation, the Committee observed that the faculty members had an output of books and edited volumes, articles in scholarly journals and chapters in edited volumes. In addition, they have paper presentations in national and international conferences. This output is not ranked, according to standards employed by other Universities internationally, and a true as well as meaningful comparison is difficult.

#### RESULTS

The overall effectiveness of the current research activity has been evaluated by the department as overall unsatisfactory. The Committee accepts this view but believes that there is potential for improvement and growth in the research activity. This necessitates the development of a focused research strategy, where traditional research activities, can be fully utilised. Within the current situation activities such as PhD programmes and Research Fellowships can not be properly supported and are not encouraged until a research culture and environment is established.

#### IMPROVEMENT

The Department aims to increase the participation in funded research activities supported by national and EU funding bodies. The Committee believes the department could focus more on applied research that is in line with the overall direction of the institution, initiate and establish procedures to assess research output, based on international ranking systems such as ABS, and try to participate in international activities.



It should be noted that in view of the budgetary cuts, the Department should consider the engagement of temporary staff in the research activities to create a critical mass and promote the development of a research environment.

#### ***D. All Other Services***

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under and postgraduate level, if necessary.*

#### **APPROACH**

The Department is currently supported by dedicated administrative and technical teams. The Department has made an effort to improve and simplify administrative processes, and a number of them have been automated. Another initiative was the establishment of groups study areas that are currently near completion and will be operational in the near future.

Additionally, the Department welcomes development of the campus's facilities and hopes that utilisation of these services by the students will influence the overall learning culture and encourage the students to participate more regularly in the teaching and learning activities. Overall the Department feels satisfied regarding the services provided to the academic community. The reactions of the various constituencies (students, faculty) are sufficiently positive to justify the confidence.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The Department is currently supported by a dedicated administrative team that employs two members of staff. Their main responsibilities evolve around document generation, data processing and other matters that relate to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with the use of ICT systems.

Additionally the Department has technical support, operating on a shift basis that is responsible for the smooth operation of labs, performs invigilation duties, offer copying and printing services and support students in the use of the labs. Their responsibility extends to budget planning of consumables.

The facilities that the department shares with other units are the library, wireless internet within the campus area, student support services, the gymnasium and a student cafeteria. Additional athletic facilities are currently outsourced to the Department by the local authorities. Recently the Institution has organised the distribution of books to take place within the

campus by outsourcing the services to a local bookshop. The distribution of books takes place in the library building every semester. In another initiative the Institution has provided specific areas for Student Union activities.

## RESULTS

The Committee believes that overall the administrative and other services are adequate. However, some students expressed the view that departmental administration services were occasionally inefficient. This is probably the result of diminished resources and the department has indicated the need of additional personnel.

## IMPROVEMENTS

The Department has made an effort to improve their services and to offer both students and staff a functional operating environment. As resources are currently scarce, an improved functionality could result from reorganisation of some processes with more formal procedures. For example the office hours allocated for student enquiries are currently set on a daily basis (from 12.00-13.30). Reorganisation of these sessions (for example 2.5 hour sessions three times a week) could result in a more efficient utilisation of the same personnel time.

Additionally, equipment utilised in the computer labs should satisfy health and safety regulations. All the computer labs visited by the Committee satisfied these requirements with the exemption of the MBA lab where the chairs were not appropriate for use in a PC station.

## **Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations**

The Department is conscious of the important role in the area. In the last few years it has made every effort to cultivate ties with the local community and has pursued a series of collaborative cultural activities with local agencies. In addition to the considerable efforts described in the internal evaluation report, the Department has formal collaboration with the local hospital, the Chamber of Commerce, and the local media.

The Department has also initiated efforts for the Library services to join a

wider network of university libraries and to improve the access to books and journals for the students. It has also instigated the policy that allows the use of numerous campus facilities to be accessible by the local population for recreational activities. The above are indicative examples of the type of ties the Department has cultivated with the local community. These efforts are highly commendable.

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

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under and postgraduate level, if necessary.*

From the Internal Evaluation Report and discussions with the department's management team, it is clear that as far as the Department is concerned, the major inhibiting factor has to do with delays that result from the Greek State in relation to the approval of the proposed regulatory framework for TEI Serres. The ambiguity of the state's legal framework introduces difficulties in the strategic planning and budgeting processes of the Institution and consequently of the Department.

Currently the Department operates within the boundaries set by the strategic plan 2008-2012. This plan proposes a number of actions:

- Review and development of the undergraduate programme: This action is currently in progress;
- Upgrading of campus facilities and student services: A number of specific actions have been completed and in the next two years efforts will concentrate on the commission of facilities for study groups and the improvement of the departmental internet site;
- Introduction of quality assurance systems, as prescribed by HQAA: The department has completed the internal and first external evaluation;
- Development of research activities: The department has completed the upgrading of ICT facilities for staff, and has appointed additional support staff. Additional resource requirements, that emerge from thematic streams, have been planned and directly depend on future allocation of funds (ESPA);
- Introduction of new postgraduate programme (MBA): This new programme was developed and was launched in the academic year of 2010-2011;
- Internationalisation activities: the Department has established a

number of International contacts and has formally engaged in collaborative activities and continues efforts to expand its activities;

- Collaboration with local community stakeholders: the Department has established a number of collaborative relationships with the local community and continues to pursue such activities;

It should be noted that long term planning activities are constrained by the Legal Framework

### ***F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC***

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under and postgraduate level, if necessary.*

The Department of Business Administration of TEI Serres, offers an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and a recently introduced Masters in Business Administration (MBA).

The Committee is favourably and enthusiastically impressed with the quality of education offered by the Department. The blend of academic and practical education allows the Department to offer an educational programme which is also vocationally relevant. Indicative of the quality offered, and its effectiveness, is the fact that the Department's graduates secure employment in their field, in a most competitive market, soon after submitting their final degree thesis; sometimes, employment is secured even prior to the completion of the degree thesis.

In the Committee's view this indicates educational effectiveness accomplished with limited resources and it is a good example of educational investment. The curriculum in the undergraduate programme is comparable to established programmes in other European and US institutions.

The postgraduate programme offered has been designed in line with similar programmes in other European and international Universities. However, since it is still in the first year of operation, its effectiveness cannot be presently assessed.

As discussed earlier in the report, it will be beneficial for the department to adopt formal practices and procedures for frequent reviews of curriculum. More specifically with regards to curriculum and teaching:

- Adoption of continuous assessment practices to encourage attendance and class participation;
- Adoption of essay writing as a form of assessment (apart from exams) in order to engage students more actively in reviewing literature and become skilled at writing at an academic level;
- Establish a new policy for temporary staff engagement, to avoid discontinuity in the development and review of modules;
- Adoption of a policy for second (within the department), and external marking (different institution) of a representative sample of exam scripts to increase and ensure fairness in marking; as well as the structure of an exam marking guide which explicitly stipulates the marking criteria;
- Adoption of a formal citation reference system i.e. Harvard reference style in order to deter plagiarism and verify authenticity of sources used;

With regards to research:

- The Department should consider the establishment of a Research Committee which will aim at establishing clear priorities for future research; allocating the required resources; and developing partnerships with other academic establishments. Introduce Personal Annual Research Plans, to guide research activity and monitor performance throughout the year;
- The EEC recommends that institutional support is provided to junior tenure-track faculty members for professional development (i.e. participation in conferences);

Other issues to be addressed:

- The Committee is concerned with the rather small number of students graduating on time, the above average number of “drop-outs”/ inactive students;

- The rather limited number of permanent faculty members (10) when compared with the non-tenured teaching staff (34) needs to be addressed;
- The department must find ways to integrate its considerable body of non-permanent, part-time faculty;
- Minor revisions to the curriculum mainly through the introduction of a few new courses and updating a few others;

Shortcomings in specific areas are largely the result of insufficient budgetary resources and a large number of new students, particularly since 2007-2008 academic year. The submission of new students has not been met with a comparable increase in the numbers of the full-time members of staff. The same applies to the administrative services, which are also inadequate. The skewed distribution of funding is a critical factor inhibiting the rational allocation of resources. Distributions of funding would best be based on variables such as student population and unit-based academic and administrative needs.

In conclusion it could be said that the Department sits on very good foundations and is performing sufficiently well. There is much opportunity and scope for development and the Committee hopes that this evaluation would spark a new round of development.

The Department has very good teaching resources and an improving programme of research activity. The curriculum follows current trends and developments and has sufficient links with the local economy. International experience and collaboration can provide a good stage for improving internal processes. The Department has the 'know-how' for undertaking this venture and it has demonstrated a good level of adaptability to local requirements. The Department also offers good levels of services and infrastructure to the student. It has the active support of the TEI and its senior management.

We wish them all the best in their endeavours

## The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. Prof. Christina Koutra	<i>Christina Koutra</i>
2. Prof. Prodromos Vlamis	<i>Prodromos Vlamis</i>
3. Prof. Athanasios Kourouklis	<i>Athanasios Kourouklis</i>
4. Mr. George Athanassiadis	<i>George Athanassiadis</i>