



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY

ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

## **EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**

DEPARTMENT History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology

UNIVERSITY of Thessaly

Version 2.0

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### **External Evaluation Committee**

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Prof. Gilles Touchais,  
Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne (President),
2. Prof. Frank Siegmund,  
Seminar fuer Ur- und Fruehgeschichte University of Basel, Switzerland
3. Prof. Zacarias Moutoukias  
Université Paris-Diderot, Paris VII, France
4. Prof. Paolo Odorico, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris , France,
5. Assoc. Prof. George Kazamias, University of Cyprus, 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.

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 Committee visited the Department between Monday 13 December and Wednesday 15 December 2010. The original schedule was amended to take account of the general strike action (on 15 December) and the predicted closure of the University buildings; however, all parts of the site visit were completed and all groups interviewed. On 13 December there was a very heated discussion between a group of students (all but one belonging to other Departments) intent on disrupting the process and the members of the committee, two Vice Rectors and select members of staff of the Department. Despite some very heated moments (including a very minor scuffle) the process went ahead, with the cooperation of all groups required by the assessment rules. Overall, the visit was very well organised and the Department very welcoming.

- Whom did the Committee meet ?

The committee met with two of the three Vice-Rectors, the Head of the Department, the Directors of the Sections; the members of staff belonging to the Sections (in one case a contract lecturer [L. 407] was also present); Secretarial, Technical and Administrative Staff and Contract Staff employed by the Laboratories; and two groups of students, one composed entirely of undergraduate students of Archaeology and another of post-graduate students (MA and PhD), of all disciplines. Among the members of Staff were the colleagues who drafted the Internal Assessment Report.

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

Beyond the material provided by ADIP (HQAA), we were also given *in situ* the following additional material: a) an updated (March 2010) version of the Department General Information Handbook (117 pages, hard copy and CD version) b) a more extensive presentation (28 pages and hard copy of a Powerpoint presentation) by the Social Anthropology section c) the Intermediate Report of the Internal Evaluation Unit of the University of Thessaly (Jan. 2010). We had also the possibility to review samples of BA, MA and PhD theses put at our disposition, in the Laboratories Libraries and the University Library.

- Groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed

This is covered above.

When the meeting with Undergraduate students began, more than 14 students were present. Some of them left after a long discussion around the desirability and merits of assessment. In the course of the discussion they gave the Committee a one page document headed «Αξιολόγηση» (Assessment). A hard copy of this document as well as all additional documents mentioned in the report, has been handed to ADIP (HQAA).

As regards students, the Committee met the following: 12 Undergraduate Students (10 female, 2 male), 16 MA Postgraduate Students (14 female, 2 male), 2 PhD

candidates (1 female, 1 male). According to the statistical information given, this distribution seems representative of the overall composition of the student population of the Department.

- Facilities visited by the External Evaluation Committee.

The Committee visited the Department Laboratories, Staff Offices and the University Library. Strike action prevented the Committee from visiting classrooms.

## II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

Please comment on:

- Appropriateness of sources and documentation used

The sources were complete and suitable for the process, including most of the information the committee required. It would be useful if the abridged English language version of the Internal Evaluation Report was expanded. Overall, the material was very rich and informative.

- Quality and completeness of evidence reviewed and provided

The internal evaluation report was reflective and open. The Department was very forthright in the provision of information and did not gloss over areas that could be interpreted as potential weaknesses. This was very positively remarked on by all Members of the Committee.

- To what extent have the objectives of the internal evaluation process been met by the Department?

We believe that the Department has been very diligent and conscientious in preparing its internal evaluation report. Individual members of Staff, both senior and junior have on several occasions mentioned very frankly that the procedure and the site visit have helped them reflect on themselves.

## A. Curriculum

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

### APPROACH

- What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum? What is the plan for achieving them?

According to the Department's own description, the main purpose of both undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, is to allow Students of the Department to participate in an programme of studies, giving them *"an interdisciplinary perspective on fundamental issues in the social sciences and humanities, as well as an understanding of contemporary trends in modern scholarship"* a mix that aims to increase *"graduates' employment prospects"*. Emphasis is placed on *"new subjects, along with traditional ones"*, creating an innovative discipline mix that the Committee finds particularly rich and stimulating.

The Department offers one unified BA Degree and one unified MA degree, each with the possibility to specialise in one of the three fields: History, Archaeology, Social Anthropology. The main original characteristic on the organisation of programmes on both levels lies in the freedom the students have to build their own 'portfolio' of classes. The postgraduate offering is further complemented by a PhD programme.

The originality of the Department within the overall "landscape" of similar university departments is based on its particular "discipline cross" (History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology), an aspect that the Committee found well worth noting. Thus the main educational goal is achievable and indeed remarkable. The other aspect of innovation, however, is employability.

To attain these objectives the **undergraduate curriculum** essentially divides the programme of studies into two parts: Years I and II (4 semesters) and Years III and IV (the remaining four semesters). The first part has one introductory class (μάθημα) each for History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology that are common and compulsory (Υποχρεωτικά) for all students; it also comprises a number of core classes (καταστατικά μαθήματα) that are chosen freely by the students and a number of electives, new technology classes, classes from other departments etc. Specialisation in one of the three directions takes place at the end of Yr II.

According to the Department' description, the **postgraduate programme** "[...] is organized around thematic cycles of especial importance in contemporary historical, archaeological and anthropological scholarship. These cycles guarantee the dialogue among disciplines without undermining the integrity of each separate discipline. Each theme traverses the three academic disciplines represented at the department, as well as many historical periods." Our opinion is that the openness of the undergraduate programme continues in the postgraduate area, following the same basic philosophy.

The **PhD** programme follows traditional patterns.

- How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders? How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted? Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?

The objectives for all levels of teaching were decided in the early days of the department and reviewed repeatedly, first when the original title (History, Archaeology and Folk Studies) was changed to include the wider area of Social Anthropology; the Committee was also informed of reviews in the organisation of the curriculum, to take account of the needs of the student population coming to the Department. All this process appears, on the whole to have been taken with a general consensus of all the members of the Department. It is our view that all this was done following proper academic standards.

Both the **undergraduate** and the **postgraduate curriculum** implemented by the Department are consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum.

Two of the three sections of the Department expressed a clear awareness of the needs of the society (with some emphasis on the labour market). Another section presented an intellectually inspiring readiness to change society views; this may be understood as an element of their scientific identity.

The Committee underlines the excellence of approach in all programmes offered by the Department, especially the BA and MA and their respect of international standards.

- Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?

The Department seems to have a healthy attitude towards revising the curriculum. The Department's General Meeting discusses curriculum design and revision, as and when the need arises.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

- How effectively is the Department's goal implemented by the curriculum?

Intellectually, the Department is effective in its implementation of both the **undergraduate** and the **postgraduate curricula** aims. This is confirmed by the view formed by the Committee both by the evidence given by undergraduate students and from current post-graduates who hold a BA degree from the Department.

Up to the year 2009, the undergraduate curriculum appears to have been adequately and effectively implemented. The cuts in contract teaching in 2010 that have been implemented, have limited to a degree, the effectiveness of the teaching programme. The Committee has also noted that many members of staff have been putting together new classes for a considerable number of years. This is highly commendable; it is probably a decisive factor in the maintenance of the wide choice of classes offered to students.

- How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study?

The Committee believes that the standards in both the **undergraduate** and the **postgraduate curricula** are clearly within the universally accepted norms of the three disciplines of the Department. The additional positive aspect that distinguishes the Department from others is precisely its discipline combination, which may be used to foster innovative approaches to complex problems. It is apparent that a BA degree from the Department would be accepted as an effective qualification for postgraduate studies in other universities in Greece and abroad.

- Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated? Is the curriculum coherent and functional?

In academic terms both the **undergraduate** and the **postgraduate curricula** are rational and clearly articulated in the Departmental Programme of Studies. Further information is given at the beginning of each year to incoming students. An additional

very positive aspect is the existence and functioning of a system of advisors, one for each discipline, that further supports the curriculum. The Secretarial staff also appears to play an important role in supporting the students and staff in this respect.

There appears to be no question of coherence in the curriculum; on the issue of functionality, there seem to have been few problems until now. However, cuts in teaching staff may cause problems of functionality.

- Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient?

The answer to this depends of the level of studies. The University Library holdings are just about adequate for teaching purposes of most undergraduate courses. Library holdings are inadequate when one gets to even a BA thesis; it is woefully inadequate for most teaching beyond this. Computer equipment is old (the computer lab had a bank of computers that were 7 years old, close to museum pieces in computers). Some specialised equipment would help laboratories (including archaeology laboratories, which require most expensive equipment). The best equipped laboratory appears to be the Social Anthropology one. The colleagues are admirable in conducting teaching (and research) on shoestring budgets.

- Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum?

The excellence of the established academic staff of the Department permits them to achieve their tasks at a level that follows international standards. However, the University's characteristics and staffing levels lead the Department to use contract staff.

The Department has stressed (and the Committee shares this view) staffing problems, and the limitation of contract teaching because of cuts in funding. The Committee applauds staff efforts to cover the curriculum requirements and hopes that the current crisis and the limitations imposed by it does not affect the offering of classes and thus lower the current level teaching.

## RESULTS

- How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?

From the academic point of view, in both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, the results are consistently implemented. Particularly in the MA, the theses appear to the Committee to have a high standard, using international literature (despite the limitation of the Library).

However, there are three areas the Committee has identified that need examination and improvement. Neither can be attributed to the Department itself.

a) The first is financial. Despite financial constraints and reduction of personnel, the Department is doing well in implementing its academic goals. However, this will be affected by any further cuts and / or no replacement of staff that retire.

b) The second area is the absence of teaching that would normally be offered by a School of Letters (Φιλοσοφική Σχολή). This would complement the teaching portfolio of the Department, as is the case in most Greek Universities.

c) One further problem (also identified by students and staff) is that the balance between the BA thesis (when chosen) and the classes taken by the students does not seem entirely correct. Issues such as width of topics chosen by the students are mentioned in this context. The same, probably to a greater degree, applies for the

MA thesis. This may be one of the reasons why students (particularly MA students) delay to complete their studies.

- If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with? Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results?

The Department is reflecting on the above problems.

a) It is taking care to complete the gaps left by lack of new academic posts, mainly through contract teaching. The cuts in such teaching positions further limit the availability of staff for content-specific teaching by the three sections. Withdrawal of such teaching would have a negative impact, not only on the teaching programme but also (equally importantly) on the professional rights of the graduates. In this case, if graduates from the directions of History and Archaeology are unable to have the correct content in their degree, they will not be eligible to work as teachers in secondary education; thus the skills and innovative content of the degree will be lost to the State Education system.

b) The lack of an adequate Faculty, able to cover adjacent disciplines (Classics, Philology...) was clearly identifiable in the staff members views, that are also strongly shared by the Committee. Since part at least of the graduates aim to work in Secondary Education, they should be prepared in the best condition. At the moment the Department makes a concerted effort to supply this, as permitted by current conditions.

The Department Sections have expressed their concern about employability of graduates in the meetings and there seems to be some tension between innovation and employability. The Department has taken steps towards facing this challenge, in the form of practical training. This process places students with diverse organisations of mainly the public sector, for 35 days in summer. Students work for a rather small remuneration, however the non-financial aspect of this process is very valuable, creating links (as the committee was told) that help the 'interns' in their later career.

c) The Department is reflecting on the issue related to the weight of the BA thesis in the teaching programme.

#### IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?

The Department has stressed the need for increased Classics content in the curriculum (particularly Ancient Greek and Latin). This is therefore strongly recommended both on the level of staff and Curriculum content.

- Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?

The Department is considering its options. Its main concern is maintaining the current standards. However, in times of uncertainty (as is the case now) it is difficult to seriously consider change.

## ***B. Teaching***

### APPROACH:

Does the Department have a defined pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology? Please comment on :

- Teaching methods used

The pedagogic concept of the Department attempts to balance between the classic curriculum (with a specified pathway) of similar Departments of History and Archaeology with freedom of choice; innovation, combining theoretical and practical aspects with the introduction of new technologies and new subjects. There are three directions in the degree studies, History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology, defined by student choice and course content. In practice most of the obligatory course content is taken in years I and II.

**Undergraduate** teaching is undertaken by means of lectures (often with large audiences, up to 250 students); and small group teaching (usually seminars, of max. 20 students). Classes between these two categories may have anything in between 250 and 20 (or less) students. There are also other means of teaching (excavations, laboratory work, field work and practical training e.g. in museums, archives etc). Research activities organised by the Department (a weekly series of lectures by either internal or invited external speakers, as well as Conferences) are used as additional teaching resources. According to the information we received, these are relatively well attended and appear to efficiently complement teaching. We should also stress the pedagogical importance of the study trips for the curriculum, essential for some disciplines, being between theory and practice. Study trips also help to create cohesion (among the staff and students but also among students themselves) and build a generally positive atmosphere in the Department.

After Year II, students choose a specialisation (History, Archaeology, Social Anthropology); this allows students to concentrate in one field and complement it by classes from other areas. This appears a good way of handling the different fields and seems to respond to student needs. In Year III, students have the possibility of opting to substitute three classes for a written BA thesis. While there was initial widespread enthusiasm for this option, this now seems to have been reduced. Nonetheless in our meetings with them, the students expressed a clear desire to retain the choice of a thesis or more classes.

The general freedom of choice embedded in the philosophy of the Department's curriculum results in a considerable variety of student choice and the resulting student portfolio. Special (and positive) comment should be made here to the teaching methods used in seminars.

As regards **post-graduate studies**, in the first year the MA programme began, the Department offered a relatively large number of places. This was later revised downwards to fit with the existing realities. The fact that graduates of all disciplines are taken into a single common MA programme appears unconventional; however, in the Committee's view (a view confirmed by the students we have met) this seems to underline and underpin the interdisciplinary character of the MA and to be another element in the strengths of the Department.

The **PhD** candidates are not numerous (this is usual), but the fact that three of them study as part of a cotutelle programme with French universities, is an indication of the international recognition of the Department. As most PhD candidates are in full time

employment and usually have no studentships or bursaries to support themselves, most take a considerable amount of time to complete their PhD theses. The majority of students that join the Masters' and PhD programmes, are coming from other Universities; the main attraction of both programmes appears to be their strong interdisciplinary character.

- Teaching staff/ student ratio

On the basis of the information given in the Internal Evaluation Report and other material supplied and counting established staff (but not including contract teaching) the teaching staff/ student ratio in the undergraduate programme, appears to be in the region of 1:32. This seems relatively high in the experience of the Committee members; if we consider the very small overall budget which supports the Department, the negative effects of this student to staff ratio become even more pronounced.

- Teacher/student collaboration

All students we met have expressed satisfaction with the easy and friendly access they have to virtually all members of academic staff.

Elected representatives of the students take part in the general meetings of the Department, where all important matters relating to the Department are discussed and decided. One basic problem seems to be the over-politicisation of the student experience that seems to detract all involved from their main tasks. This was evident in the disrupting and delaying student interference in the work of the Committee. However, the very positive atmosphere in the discussion with the students, when it eventually took place, shows that there is good potential for improvement in this area. This may be linked to the practical aspects of the studies (students contributing to e.g., exhibitions, field research as well as excavations) which probably tend to draw staff and students together.

It is notable that none of the postgraduate students (even advanced PhD), undertake any teaching, even in an ancillary capacity.

- Adequacy of means and resources

The comments made above on Library holdings and overall support (see § Curriculum-Implementation) should be repeated here. These inadequacies are covered (at the moment: only just) by the commitment of all staff (academic, administrative, secretarial and support) to their work.

- Use of information technologies

Use of information technologies is part of the core of the Department's character. Classes belonging to this category have been present in the curriculum since the beginning; they have been evolving continuously. The Department is also pioneering in the use of e-learning, for teaching. It even has its own webmaster who also supports the e-learning platform. This is a rarity in many Departments both in Greece and abroad. It is again a pity that some of the computer infrastructure is so old, with all the accompanying limiting influences this has on the use of new technologies.

- Examination system

Most classes are examined by a) written examination b) coursework c) a combination of both. Some members of staff also take into account other factors (e.g. attendance and contribution to classes). Seminars also entail a wider range of assessment methods, including weekly presentations by students, coursework as well as attendance and

contribution to the overall discussion.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Please comment on:

- Quality of teaching procedures. Quality and adequacy of teaching materials and resources.

On the whole, teaching appears quite competent. Staff members coming from all sections are committed and enthusiastic for their work. The overall distribution of students between sections, does not appear to link to teaching; the popularity of History and to a lesser extent, Archaeology over Social Anthropology appears to be a reflection of the issue of professional rights and the better chances of access to the labour market these disciplines offer. However, staff in Social Anthropology should probably be a little more proactive in making a case for their rather less known discipline.

The overall budget for the Department per year is very low. This is approx. 5% of the University Budget, for a Department that accounts for approx. 10% of the total number of students and approx. 5% of academic staff; limited funding is available for archaeological activities (excavations) and the need for study trips either within Greece or abroad. Even local study trips appear constrained.

In this again we feel the need to stress the inadequacy of Library holdings and equipment. The sum traditionally allocated by the Budget to the Department for the purchase of books has been 10.000 € per annum. If divided equally by the members of staff the total comes to the woefully inadequate sum of just over 400 € per member of staff. This is a pitiful amount for any serious university; even this has not been paid for the last two years. We have been told that the budget for study visits has been cut, putting in danger this very important teaching activity.

- Quality of course material. Is it brought up to date?

The Department has an excellent teaching collection on flint raw material, ceramics, tools etc; a good holding of historical material, mainly on local history; and an equally good collection of teaching material relating to social anthropology and gender studies. All this has been built up and well-catalogued, through the commitment of the individual staff and the help of enthusiastic students..

An overly bureaucratic system of ordering books is a very serious hindrance to teaching. A great effort is made by individual staff members to cover this shortcoming; this however is above and beyond their duties. Furthermore, a relatively new institution should have the means to complete its library holdings by investing in back issues of journals, primary texts and essential texts. This entails a serious investment, which does not seem to have been made, ever.

- Linking of research with teaching

There is a high amount of linking of staff research with teaching. It is generally true that good research usually leads to good teaching; however, in the case of undergraduate curriculum, the link appears to be relatively high. In some occasions this leads to somewhat specialized classes that would be excellent for the postgraduate level but not necessarily for the undergraduate one.

The comment above has to be reversed when examining the MA. There, this close link between research and teaching forms (together with interdisciplinarity) is a very positive aspect of the programme, that appears as major area of strength. In some cases, staff research has led to the development of new teaching interests as well as the reverse; this has happened both on the undergraduate and the postgraduate level.

- Mobility of academic staff and students

There is some mobility of outgoing students in the framework of the ERASMUS programme. The staff tries hard to encourage students to travel, though this is constrained by the general financial situation. The Committee actually met three admirable cases of foreign students who originally came as ERASMUS students and have stayed on for further studies.

There appears to be limited staff mobility in this context; however, all members of staff travel on conferences and study trips on their own. The Committee would like to encourage staff to use ERASMUS staff exchanges and teaching visits to broaden their and the Department's experiences.

Some mobility takes place in the practical training stage of the undergraduate studies programme. In some cases this is limited (within the region) in other cases within Greece (sometimes close to the students' place of origin). Approx. 60% of students participate in the activity; the Department is considering making this optional activity an integral part of the programme.

- Evaluation by the students of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content and study material/resources

The Committee only read about student evaluations in the Internal Evaluation Report. During the visit we were told that students were invited to evaluate classes electronically, with very limited results (few students' evaluated classes). Some complaints were also voiced regarding the specific content of student questionnaires. The academic staff thinks that this process of evaluation, a relatively new feature of studies in Thessaly, will become better in the future.

## RESULTS

Please comment on:

- Efficacy of teaching. Discrepancies in the success/failure percentage between courses and how they are justified. Differences between students in (a) the time to graduation, and (b) final degree grades. Whether the Department understands the reasons of such positive or negative results?

The committee is concerned by the completion rate of **undergraduate students** within the four years of studies. The drop-out rate is very limited; however, a very considerable number of students go beyond (sometimes much longer) than 4 years of studies (see Table 11-6.2, p. 36 of the Internal Evaluation Report). Approx. 24% finish in 4 years, 56% take up to 5 years (so, it could be said that 80% of the total will take up from 8 to 10 semesters). The remaining 20% will take more than 5 years. This may well be the result of the latitude left by the general examination framework in Greek universities; nonetheless it should be addressed.

The Department appears fully conscious of the changing level of the student population enrolling year by year. They have attributed this to three factors: a) the falling level of secondary school education on the national level, compounded by the fact that the Department is often the third choice of applicants; b) the increase in the number of enrolments without a matching increase in staff and infrastructure; and c) the decision of most staff not to lower their standards to accommodate the students available, but to continue making the studies more challenging.

It is noticeable from the Department's internal evaluation that the overall level of degree grades has been falling during the past few years, due to the falling level of enrolling students (see Table 11-6.1, p. 36 of the Internal Evaluation Report). This aspect is

particularly evident in the compulsory classes which have a rather high failure rate. If the duration of studies and the grades achieved are linked, the same general trend of a falling level is also evident in the correlation of tables 11-6.1 and 11-6.2 showing the distribution of grades and the number of years needed by students to complete their studies. It is very complimentary for the Department that they have not lowered their standards to accommodate the student population. On the basis of experience from their own institutions, the Committee endorses the analysis of the Department and agrees with its policy.

The problems are further compounded by the reduction in the number of staff. In a better world more staff could lead to more individual attention that would address some of the shortcomings of students.

As regards **the MA**, results seem to be different. Quality remains high over time and the range of results is not affected; however, most students need more than two years to complete their MA studies. The reason given is mainly the fact that most are in full time employment to support themselves (in some cases also their families).

Regarding **the PhD**, the length of time to complete theses, the minimum time is approx. 5 years; this is also linked to lack of funding for PhDs: funded PhD students finish within the time allotted; candidates who need to work in order to fund their studies obviously need more time. The Committee believes that the length of time required to complete a thesis is a problem. Despite the fact that this may be an internationally observable trend, the issue of excessive time for PhDs should be addressed by the Department.

#### IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department propose methods and ways for improvement? What initiatives does it take in this direction?

The Department is actively considering the ways by which it can improve its teaching and the members of staff seem to be reflecting on the problems, of which they are aware. Beyond what will be described below, we are not aware of any concrete proposals at this stage.

The Department is also considering changing the weekly 3-hour block used for teaching. One way forward would be to divide this into two -2X1,5 hr or even 2hrs + 1 hr in two slots in the week. The Committee strongly encouraged this trend.

There is no single solution that would solve all the problems outlined (and others that may have not been identified).

The administrative staff is also following the students' progression, trying to monitor their studies and refer them to academic staff to advise them.

## C. Research

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

### APPROACH

- What is the Department's policy and main objective in research? Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?

The Department's academic staff is research oriented and clearly strives for excellence. There is no common overall policy for staff research. This is natural, given the wide dispersal of research interests among the staff. The younger members of staff as well as the senior members enjoy wide-ranging freedom to develop new research interests or deepen and widen existing ones.

Despite the above, there are some common research programmes, organised on an *ad hoc* basis, to which a number of members of staff participate. Moreover, staff keeps looking for ways to collaborate with each other; this is particularly pronounced in the links between pairs: History and Social Anthropology, Social Anthropology and Archaeology, Archaeology and History.

An interesting example of such a co-operation is a project mentioned that involves all three sections, that is the plan for the new museum of Volos. This is a project run essentially by one section, where there is a significant input by the other two as well as another department of the University (Architecture). If this project is funded and comes into fruition it may act as a pilot for further collaboration between all three sections. The Department has not set internal standards for assessing research.

### IMPLEMENTATION

- How does the Department promote and support research? Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support.

The Department tries to support research, to the limit of the financial constraints it is under. Staff tries to secure external and internal (University) funding, and is successful in a number of instances. Archaeology seems to be successful in getting money for excavations from external institutions; history and social anthropology are also successful in securing external funding. Some activities of members of the Department (local, national and international exhibitions, links with museums and research of local interest) attract or may be used to attract the interest of external funding bodies.

The inadequacies of infrastructures (particularly the Library) described in the section on teaching (above) transform into great insufficiency when we turn to research. Essentially what the Department can offer to staff is sabbaticals when possible, and its blessing (both relatively inexpensive). Part of the staff research is done by funding from the salary of the staff itself.... However it is immoral and wrong to expect staff members to have to decide between the needs of themselves and / or their families and advancing their own research, something required by the job description of the post they hold!

Virtually no funding is available by the Department for PhD research.

- Scientific publications.

Members of staff are 'research active'; among other activities they are publishing monographs, editing collective volumes and publishing articles in scholarly journals.

- Research projects. Research collaborations.

Numerous research projects and even more numerous conferences have been organised by the Department. Some of them attract international interest; others are important nationally or regionally. Some are organised by the sections, others by members of staff from different sections.

## RESULTS

- How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented? Scientific publications.

Table 11-9 has a concise presentation of staff research between 2004 and 2008. (Details of publications are to be found in pp. 61-89 of the Internal Evaluation Report). During the period 2004-8 staff members published 21 books, 9 of which are in foreign languages (some by prestigious publishing houses); and 96 articles in refereed journals, of which 37 are in languages other than Greek. On average, each staff member has at least two publications each year. Many are monographs (their number is particularly high), editing of collecting volumes, publications in scholarly, peer reviewed journals, both in Greek and in foreign languages.

- Research projects. Research collaborations.

Details of Research projects and Research collaborations are to be found in pp. 98-107 of the updated (March 2010) version of the Department general information handbook. The members of the Department are also active in research collaborations with other Departments of the University of Thessaly, local and regional bodies and other institutions. Some of the outcome of research projects is published in scholarly publications; some is published on the web; virtually all is used in teaching. The Laboratories appear well equipped, probably as a result of successes in securing external funding.

- Efficacy of research work. Applied results.

Research is highly efficient. Research projects function as the applied results of individual research and collaborations; in other instances research outcomes are applied in collaboration with public institutions.

- Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department?  
Rewards and awards.

The presence of academic staff from the Department is highly visible in the scholarly circuit. They also have an input in the University of Thessaly Press; they also publish themselves collections which members of the Committee can identify as being of major scientific interest and impact. Members of staff are also present in Editorial Committees of journals and/ or act as external referees for scholarly journals. Visibility is enhanced by the good presentation of research (completed and ongoing) in the Department's webpage.

No evidence was available on either rewards or awards.

## IMPROVEMENT

- Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary. Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department.

The staff is highly self-reflective; they do their research well (with the differences in level and popularity of subject expected in any similar group anywhere in the world).

The Committee commends the department on the overall academic level and output of

its research activities; it does not feel any change is required or initiatives undertaken in this area.

## **D. All Other Services**

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

### **APPROACH**

- How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students).
- Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically?
- Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?

The Department (staff and students) appears highly appreciative of the Services provided by its Secretarial Staff. This is natural, given the high degree of professionalism, readiness to help and the positive view towards their work that the Department's Secretarial Staff has. The collegial climate fostered in the Secretary's office is probably attributable to the abilities of the Staff working in the Secretariat there.

The Department is trying its best to simplify procedures, as much as this is allowed by the rigid and intrusive general framework. The Committee commends the readiness of the Department to use of electronic means.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).
- Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g. library, PCs and free internet access, student counseling, athletic- cultural activity etc.).

The Secretarial staff has increased by one since September; since then, conditions have been markedly better as far as the work of the service is concerned. Currently four members of Secretarial staff work to support the Department (students and staff). They handle admissions and enrolment; organisation of academic life (teaching timetable, classroom booking etc; the Senior Secretary also supports the Department's general meeting); the administrative side of staff elections as well as part of the financial details of the department; they monitor student progress and choices (a demanding task given the character of the curriculum); they also deal with these and all other similar tasks connected to the functioning of the MA and PhD students. The office space available for the Secretariat is suitable, well planned and adequate for its work.

The Department has its own webmaster (a luxury in many Departments both in Greece and abroad), and a support person for the Computer Laboratory, who also does some teaching in new technologies). Archaeology also has its own support staff (2) for its laboratories. All support staff are highly qualified.

The Committee notes and commends the use, wherever possible that the Department makes of electronic means (particularly e-class, supporting the practical side of teaching).

### **RESULTS**

- Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?
- How does the Department view the particular results.

As regards the functioning of the Secretariat, the Committee has noted commitment to the Department, a good collegiate climate and a readiness to take initiative. All of these

seem to support the Department to a degree that goes beyond mere adequacy and functionality. The Secretarial staff seem to be appreciated by their Academic colleagues and work well with them in a complex and challenging environment. The basic problem seems to be the IT platform that supports their work: the previous platform had serious limitations as regards the Department's needs and caused problems that held back the activities of the Secretariat; the new platform has not yet been evaluated. Further problems in this area are book purchase and the process for paying bills. The overall problem of course is the monster called over-regulated bureaucratic processes; any steps to limit this would help the Secretariat function more efficiently and spend less time in chasing up related problems. If this happened, no further investment in new personnel (an issue raised by the Secretarial staff themselves) would be required.

#### IMPROVEMENTS

- Has the Department identified ways and methods to improve the services provided?
- Initiatives undertaken in this direction.

The Department has expressed no complaint whatsoever regarding the functioning of the Secretarial Staff.

No matter what the Department wishes are, they are severely constrained by the bureaucratic regime imposed to Universities. An abundant number of rules and regulations seems to limit the options available. It would be futile to even discuss this question before steps are implemented centrally (by the university and / or the State) in limiting bureaucracy.

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

Please, comment on quality, originality and significance of the Department's initiatives.

The Department and individual members of staff in the respective sections are active in building links with local and national organisations. History works with the Municipal History Archive (ΔΗΚΙ) and the Municipal Library. Archaeology is equally active in its collaborations with the Archaeological Ephorates in the Region of Thessaly and beyond, museums etc. Social Anthropology is also active working e.g. with migrants alongside the other two.

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

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

Please, comment on the Department's:

- Potential inhibiting factors at State, Institutional and Departmental level, and proposals on ways to overcome them.
- Short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- Plan and actions for improvement by the Department/Academic Unit
- Long-term actions proposed by the Department.

Not enough emphasis may be placed on the effect of the issues of bureaucracy and funding on an academic institution.

Bureaucracy creates a straitjacket that inhibits teaching, research, growth and more than occasionally goes against common sense. No matter what the Department wishes, they are collectively and individually severely constrained by the bureaucratic regime imposed on Universities. An abundant number of rules and regulations seems to limit the options available. It would be futile to even discuss this question before steps are implemented centrally (by the university and / or the State) to limit bureaucracy.

Funding is equally (if more) important. The impression of the Committee is that the Department has already reached (or is very close to reaching) the critical point from where further cuts may begin to take their toll on teaching standards, the student experience and the quality of research. This would be highly wasteful, short sighted and very bad planning by the State, in view of the investment it has already made in building up the Department.

On the level of the University, more attention should be paid to the needs of the Humanities. Even relatively cheap areas of the Humanities have a price tag. A fairer distribution of funds available would achieve this goal.

Until the above are resolved, the feeling of the Committee is that the Department will stay in a state of flux; and this, along with the accompanying uncertainty, is probably a most serious inhibiting factor that the Department is facing.

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

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

Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- the development of the Department to this date and its present situation, including explicit comments on good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process and recommendations for improvement
- the Department's readiness and capability to change/improve
- the Department's quality assurance.

The overall impression of the Committee is that the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly is very close to becoming a centre of excellence in its field. In our view this is a trend that was established early on, during the founding phases of the Department and has never stopped since.

There are areas where the distance to excellence is very small; in others some additional effort needs to be made. In some cases the additional effort should be made not by the Department, but by the State and / or the University (funding, bureaucracy). In other areas the effort should be made by the Department itself. Nonetheless, this does not alter the overall very positive image.

The External Evaluation Committee wishes to propose some topics, which in its view should be reflected on and perhaps acted on. Unless otherwise specified, these topics apply to both the undergraduate and the postgraduate programmes.

### **CURRICULUM**

The originality of the undergraduate studies programme has already been stressed previously. The Committee was very positively impressed by this aspect.

However, as things stand, the relatively low regulation of the undergraduate curriculum requires heavy investment in time, by both academic and secretarial staff, for managing the student choices. We have been told that despite the free choice aspect, the outcome for most students is what staff would expect it to be. This shows that the staff are themselves thinking on the issue of free choice; this observation might also indicate directions towards organising this choice to a lesser or greater extent.

The Department could consider ways more actively ways of directing student progression a) in the early stage of their studies and b) from there to the latter part. In the first part of the studies stronger emphasis could be put on ensuring a more wide common grounding for the students. The latter part could continue to cater for special needs required by their chosen specialisation. In the dialectic between freedom of choice among the unifying elements and the specific ones, young students need more rules and guidance.

It is the view of the Committee (also shared by some members of staff in the Department) that in the History Curriculum there is a concentration on social history. While this may be an area of strength (even excellence) of the Department, it may lead to a biased image of history by the students. This seems truer, particularly since the academic staff has on several occasions stressed the gaps in basic knowledge the undergraduates carry with them from secondary education. It is recommended to strengthen the aspect of the political history content of the curriculum allowing the

students to build-up a stable knowledge base of history. Since a considerable part of secondary school teaching also centres on similar aspects, this also would “feed into” and fit with the education system requirements.

### **TEACHING**

The Committee would like to suggest greater collaboration of the three Sections in planning teaching, in order to achieve thematic ‘*bouquets*’ of classes (examples would include study of e.g. ‘Empires’, ‘the Urban phenomenon’ ‘Migrations’, ‘Politics, Power and the State’ etc). Some effort in this direction has already taken place in the past (classes in some of the subjects mentioned have appeared in the curriculum); we believe that such an initiative undertaken in a more structured way, would further draw out and even enhance the interdisciplinary profile of the Department.

The budget for study visits **must** be increased. They should not be limited to the region or even to Greece. It would be very helpful for the students to be able to visit foreign countries (e.g. Italy, France, Turkey etc.)

PhD candidates should be integrated into teaching. They need teaching experience for their future careers; their input would also be appreciated by students and staff.

The Committee proposes the addition of small-group tutorials for high-failure classes in the Undergraduate programme, which was welcomed by staff (in fact they mentioned they had used such a system in the past but it was discontinued (for unspecified reasons).

The full content of **the MA** programmes should be described in more detail and have better visibility in the webpages. They should include full English language version of the class descriptions and general content, in order to attract students from abroad.

The Committee suggests the Department explores the possibility of introducing part-time studies **in the MA**, in order to lighten the pressure of time on students and reflect more precisely the reality of post-graduate student life. However, this might be a mixed blessing: currently students appear to finish in four years, as provided by the full-time study rules; change may lead to delay. The grades received show that students are well motivated; no students seem to abandon their MA, which indicates commitment to their study.

The Committee believes the evaluation system should be refined (particularly in relation to the questionnaire). Part of the Committee believe, students should be strongly encouraged (some would say: compelled) to evaluate classes regularly.

An essential strength of Social Anthropology is its content in skills that are specific to the discipline, but may be used much more widely and may be of interest to employers. These skills should be identified and their teaching strengthened.

The ERASMUS opportunities for staff mobility should be used more. This will allow members of staff to build-up their contacts, encourage wider intellectual exchange and will also feed back into research.

### **RESEARCH**

The good overall level of research has been presented in the relevant section. Therefore, very few specific comments apply to it.

The main area where some improvement may be considered is, in our view inter-section

cooperation. We are aware of some complaints regarding research support by one section. We believe collaborative projects involving all three sections (such as the Museum of Volos project mentioned) may help improve and integrate individual research with a wider-ranging remit.

Funding should be secured to support research, both individual and group. This could take the form of e.g. 'seed money' (i.e. initial funding to allow members to develop projects). Funding for individual research support (e.g. for going to conferences) should be increased and the process of securing it should be de-bureaucratized.

### **OTHER**

Overall, the Department seems to have a good informal system of quality management.

Limiting bureaucracy is of great importance. This would have an immediate and positive impact on academic staff, administration, the students, the Library and ultimately, **quality**. For more details, we would like to refer the reader to the relevant sections of the report, above.

Particular care should be taken to cover **immediately** retirements of staff that have taken place or will take place in the next few years, so as not to further weaken the Department. In cases of replacement of professors going into retirement, it should not be automatically assumed that the post should be advertised at a lower level (e.g. Lecturer or Assistant Professor). Some attempt should be made to recruit academic staff at higher level; this would ensure a grafting of new views and ideas into the Department. This would make it more outward looking, breaking the cycle of internal promotions (from e.g. contract lecturer to lecturer to assistant professor etc, all in the same university).

Additional funding should be allocated to the University Library. A well funded Library is an essential precondition for any research-oriented department. Its absence or underfunding is the most important inhibiting factor in the Department's quest for excellence. Furthermore, the paucity in the local library resources impedes the students, leading them to other, better endowed libraries, away from Volos. This leads to social discrimination: only students of a certain financial level can undertake as research.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The academic and administrative staff of the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly, at Volos, welcomed the External Evaluation Committee with the greatest readiness and facilitated our work with a high sense of cooperation and transparency. This attitude completes and confirms the seriousness, the exhaustiveness and the rigor of the documentation resulted from the internal evaluation of the same Department. Together, they allowed us to: a) broach the questions discussed in these report, according with the items proposed by the ADIP template, concerning the functioning of the Department as well as its academic offer; b) to propose, in a kind of dialogue, possible ways of improvement for the problems that seemed important to us.

In the present report, we underline the following strengths as the principals ones: a) the excellence and the original approach of the programmes offered by the Department,

especially the BA and MA; b) the excellent international academic profile and the high level and quality of publications of the Department's members; c) the very high level of professionalism, commitment and conscience of the administrative staff.

In this late and others sections we also pointed out the efforts that could be made by the Department itself. Among them: a) to strengthen the teachings of general or fundamental knowledge topics of the three Department's Sections, in the first two years of their common BA; b) to augment the attractiveness of the BA thesis (whose quality and respect of international standards has been underlined) for the students' choice; c) to reintroduce thematic clusters of courses; and, on a more general level, d) to reach a greater collaboration among the three Sections in teaching, PhD seminars and research.

We also emphasize a) that the University and/ or the State agencies should guarantee the means allowing the maintenance of efforts the Department makes in some central activities, for instance by assuring the teaching of philological courses in the absence of a School of Letters (Φιλοσοφική Σχολή), and others; b) that an additional effort should be made by the State and / or the University in matters like funding, bureaucracy and library.

We began this final section of our report underlining how close of excellence at the international level the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly is. It is a young department (created in 1993), which maintains a strong dynamism and a great capacity in changing the issues that its members think should be corrected, demonstrating to share a commitment on the maturity of their Department. The External Evaluation Committee strongly believes that the enhancement to some of the aspects mentioned above – with a particular attention on the library collections – will drive the Department to that level of excellence.

### The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____