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ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

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

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN

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1. EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the University/Technological Education Institution named UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN comprised the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry kept by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 and the Law 4009/2011:

1. Professor Aphrodite-Daphne Indares (Chair)
Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada

2. Professor Andreas Efstathiades
European University Cyprus

3. Professor Michael Sideris
University of Calgary, Canada

4. Professor Antonis Tsakmakis
University of Cyprus

5. Dr. George Aislaitner
National Organisation for Medicines, Greece

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The External Evaluation Procedure

Dates and brief account of the site visit

Sunday 22/11/2015

Arrival of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) at the island of Lesbos

Monday 23/11/2015

EEC Teleconference with HQA and orientation meeting

EEC meetings with:

- a) Rector, Vice-Rectors and previous Rectors
 - b) President and members of the Council of the Institute (Board of Trustees)
- Tour of the Campus

Tuesday 24/11/2015

EEC meetings with:

- a) Self-evaluation team - Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) – Μονάδα Διασφάλισης Ποιότητας ΜΟΔΠΠ)
- b) Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) representatives of the Departments
- c) Chief administration officers
- d) Deans
- e) Chairs of Departments
- f) Members of academic staff
- g) Undergraduate students
- h) Post postgraduate students, PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers

Wednesday 25/11/2015

EEC meetings with:

- a) Alumni
- b) External partners
- c) Representatives of Sports and Cultural Student Groups

At the end of the day, the EEC presented a short oral report to the Rector and Vice-Rectors

The Committee met with:

- Prof. Stefanos GRITZALIS, Rector
- Prof. Sokratis KATSIKAS, former Rector
- Prof. Themistoclis LEKKAS, Emeritus professor and former Rector
- Prof. Andreas TROUMBIS, former Rector
- Prof. Paris TSARTAS, former Rector
- Prof. Amalia POLYDOROPOULOU, Vice Rector of Research and Development
- Ass. Prof. Alexandra BOUNIA, Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance
- Ass. Prof. Spyros SYROPOULOS, Vice Rector of International Relations, Student Affairs and Alumni
- Prof. Nikos ZOUROS, Vice President of the Board of Trustees
- Ass. Prof. Philemon BANTIMAROUDIS
- Prof. Georgios TSIRTSIS
- Ass. Prof. Aristides SAMITAS
- Ass. Prof. Maria LEKAKOU

Ass. Professor Lilian MITROU

Water and Air Quality Laboratory, Department of Environment:

Professor Christodoulos Pilinis, Assistant Professor Athanasios Stasinakis, Associate Professor Panagiotis Dimitrakopoulos, Dr. Maria Aloupi, Special Teaching Personnel [Ειδικό Διδακτικό Προσωπικό (ΕΔΙΠ)]

Cartography and Geoinformatics Laboratory, Department of Geography:

Professor Nikos Soulakelis, Assistant Professor Michalis Vaitis.

The Laboratory of Natural Disasters (Project AEGIS) was represented by PhD candidate Mr. Athanasis, undergraduate and post graduate students and post-doctoral researchers

The EEC examined the following reports, documents, other data:

A. Self-evaluation Report

B. Documents on the following aspects, which present the total picture of the institution under evaluation:

- Institution Leadership and Development Strategy
- Overview Of The Rector including: Vision, mission and objectives of the Institution, Strategic Organizational Development Plan and Strategic Academic Development Plan
- Strategic Planning for 2014–2020, including: Curricula for Undergraduate degree programs (first cycle), Postgraduate courses (second cycle), and Doctoral programs (third cycle)
- A brief overview of the SCHOOLS: School of Environment, Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Management, School of Sciences, School of Humanities
- Masters courses for 2015–2016
- Research strategy
- Economic organization and strategy
- Strategic planning and building infrastructure
- Environmental policy
- Social strategy
- Institution internationalization strategy
- Strategy for the student care
- Cultural & sporting activities
- Employment and career office (Δομή Απασχόλησης και Σταδιοδρομίας, ΔΑΣΤΑ)
- An overall analysis of the university policy and strategy

C. Internal Quality Assurance System - Global analysis

The University of the Aegean took the initiative for the organization of an Institutional External Evaluation in 2005, in cooperation with the European University Association (E.U.A). The EEC was provided with the evaluation document.

D. Documents pertaining to the operation of the administration of the Institution; presentations on the:

- Organization of the central and local administrations
- General administrative and technical support
- Management of administrative affairs
- Student support
- Financial Services and Special Research Account Fund (SARF) (Ειδικός Λογαριασμός Έρευνας - ΕΛΕ)
- Technical and communication services
- Library

<p>- Office of public relations</p> <p>E. Evaluation reports and responses from the departments</p> <p>- Reports of the External Evaluation of the Departments of the different Schools, together with the respective responses from the Departments</p> <p>F. Additional data</p> <p>- Economic analysis for 2014</p> <p>- Indicative results of the 2015 alumni survey</p> <p>- Indicative breakdown of undergraduate students upon entering the university</p> <p>- Gender map of undergraduate and postgraduate students, academic and administrative staff per department</p> <p>- Publications in peer reviewed international journals (Departments of Nutrition and of Marine Sciences)</p> <p>The EEC interviewed groups of: undergraduate and postgraduate students, alumni, academic and administrative staff. Also, discussions took place with local authorities that co-operate with the university and external partners (see the brief account of the site visit given above).</p> <p>Facilities visited by the EEC:</p> <p>Administration building and main campus in Mytilene</p> <p>Water and Air Quality Laboratory, Department of Environment and its laboratories</p> <p>Cartography and Geo-informatics Laboratory, Department of Geography</p> <p>Laboratory of Natural Disasters (Project AEGIS)</p> <p>Teaching rooms and lecture amphitheaters</p> <p>EEC also attended an event on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women event on 25th November</p>

2.1	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

The program of the visit was very well planned and properly allocated to the days of the site visit. The documentation provided was comprehensive and addressed all the points of interest. The schedule of the visit included a variety of face-to-face meetings, teleconferences and videoconferences with a good number of representatives from each group. EEC was at all times supported by technical staff and a member of the academic staff. Responses to requests for documents and minutes of meetings were very prompt and very informative. The EEC's overall impression is that the university could not have been better prepared for this visit.

2.2 The Self-Evaluation Procedure

The documents provided were compatible with the requirements of the national institutional framework for evaluation of universities (N. 3374/2005 & N.4009 / 20011), the Quality Assurance Criteria - Single European Higher Education Area and the specifications set by ΑΔΙΠ. Good cooperation between internal quality assurance groups [Μονάδα Διασφάλισης Ποιότητας (ΜΟΔΙΠ), Ομάδα Εσωτερικής Αξιολόγησης (ΟΜ.Ε.Α)] was evident.

It should be noted that well before the establishment of the Internal Evaluation Processes of Universities by the Greek Legal Framework, the University of the Aegean (UA) had taken the initiative for the organization of an Institutional External Evaluation in 2005.

The recommendations from the Institution's external evaluation by the European University Association have been implemented for the further development and modernisation of the UA.

Very comprehensive documentation was provided both as PDF files on USB sticks and on a dedicated webpage containing all necessary presentations and supportive documents, such as, e.g. previous external evaluation reports with the respective responses from the Departments.

Within the context of the internal evaluation, UA focused on:

- The best depiction of the Institution's identity and distinct character, considering that a rebranding of the University would better reflect and promote the unique position of the UA in the Aegean Archipelago.
- Determining clearly the Institution's objectives. The establishment of a culture of innovation, collaboration and internationalization has been a clear aim since the time of the first external evaluation. This is evident at all levels of the institution.
- Evidence-based assessment of needs and setting a hierarchy of priorities - Redefining objectives in research, teaching and programmes depending on needs. A scientific approach based on evidence supported by appropriate surveys and statistical analysis has been used.
- An internal dialogue and co-operation among Departments has been developed to improve the quality of teaching and the Departments' activities.
- Detailed SWOT analysis was provided at the level of Institution, Schools/Departments and Administration.

Actions at the individual Department level included:

- Upgrading teaching and curricula
- Improvement of internationalization and networking
- The appropriate parameterization of the students' record (φοιτητολόγιο)
- The upgrading of the Departmental web pages
- The standardization and codification of statistics

The implementation of these measures is viewed as a dynamic and evolving procedure.

ΜΟΔΙΠ organized, designed and implemented the framework of the self-assessment process. Working groups for the collection and processing of operational quality and institutional quantitative data were established. There was a constant updating and cooperation within the Rectorate and with other Institution Services for applying a standard procedure.

Organisation of the evaluation process included the following:

- Recording and documentation of Departmental statistics
- Utilization of statistics for future purposes (e.g., in reference to student recruitment, monitoring vocational course graduates and maintaining communication)

- Publication of evaluation results and dissemination throughout the academic community

Analysis of the positive elements was divided into two parts: analysis for the Institution and for the Departments.

At institutional level, these include: Internal standardisation of the Departments' evaluation procedures; development of information infrastructure and systems for centralized data collection; total mapping of Departments' services and functions; comparative analysis of the various functions of the Departments.

At the department level, the benefits of the assessment include: Better targeting and focusing on the concept/wording of the identity of each Department; improvement of internal communication and cooperation at all levels; systematic monitoring of strengths and weaknesses, as well as efforts to improve them; better organization of operations and services.

The UA is familiar with self-evaluation procedures since 2005, well before becoming mandatory by law. This procedure resulted in the following positive effects:

Optimization of the Integrated Quality Assurance system of the UA to intensify standardization, and to overcome the difficulties due to the remote geographical locations the Departments and Schools of the Institution, which spread over 6 islands in the Aegean Archipelago.

Optimization of Integrated Information of the Quality Assurance System with the aim of speeding up and simplifying procedures within the current legal framework which is impeding the university's effectiveness and flexibility.

Direct dissemination of the evaluation results upon completion of the academic year, and supporting the operational element of the Departments for the following academic year.

Ability to display statistics and trends in each Department separately, and facilitate comparative analysis between Departments.

2.2

	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

It can be safely concluded that the self-evaluation procedures of the UA have been designed and implemented in a very effective manner. Formal processes have been established to communicate the information from the higher administration to the students and academic staff, and vice versa (i.e., the collection of information is based on a bottom-up approach).

3. PROFILE OF THE INSTITUTION UNDER EVALUATION

3.1 Institutional Governance, Leadership & Strategy

3.1.1 Vision, mission and goals of the Institution

The UA has the threefold mission to provide quality graduate and postgraduate education, state-of-the-art research, and contribution to society, in a relatively remote part of Greece. Key aspects of this mission are *innovation*, *internationalisation* and *outreach*.

With respect to education, these goals are achieved by developing and promoting (a) new multidisciplinary approaches reflecting the changing nature of societal needs; and (b) innovative educational methods. In addition, UA places special emphasis on the development of *international educational programs* and *summer schools*, as well as *lifelong learning programs*.

With respect to research, UA places emphasis on development of *new approaches* and their *practical applications* to societal needs, and has particular strengths in disciplines of strategic importance for the modern (and/or local) society, such as environmental, social, Mediterranean and marine studies. *Internationalisation* is achieved by the maintenance and further development of *collaborations* with renowned institutions worldwide and by promoting *mobility* of students and staff at a global scale.

The EEC feels that the goals and approaches are highly appropriate in the geopolitical context of the UA. This is a relatively young university, and given the present economic situation and the complex legislation system and bureaucracy at the national level, its operations, progress and success relies heavily on the involvement of young, dedicated and enthusiastic faculty members (ADP) and staff. *The EEC got a consistent impression from all the groups that there is a remarkable spirit of solidarity and commitment between (and within) the different groups. This ensures continuity and coherence of strategy. They adapt to challenges and adverse circumstances with flexibility and they have developed a remarkable ability to advance, change and evolve.*

3.1.1	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.2 Organizational Development Strategy

The EEC discussed with the Rector, deputy rectors and former rectors, as well as with the Council, about the organizational development strategy of the UA, both diachronically and at present. These meetings, together with the meeting with other personnel, gave the strong impression that there is a common front of devoted and effective officials who, through their individual roles, have developed an appropriate strategy and effective procedures and practices.

Operation regulations are of two types: (a) those set by laws of the Greek education system, which pertain to the general framework of operation of Greek universities, and to a first level of internal regulations; and (b) those set by the university.

UA differs from other Greek universities in that it is dispersed in 6 different islands, with limited transportation options between them. This poses special challenges to the administration at all levels, which are addressed to a large extent by communication via the internet (e.g., teleconferences, digital databases, common online systems). Despite the practical adversities, there is evidence that the quality of communication and interaction is high, and that decision-making procedures are consistent, transparent and effective.

Specific goals of the UA are to maintain the central organisation, as it fits the main vision of the institution, but further improve the communications and the synergy between the different units (by, e.g., standardisation of the communication and operational procedures).

All the groups interviewed by the EEC agreed that the administrative officials are effective in running on a timely manner the operations of the UA at all levels. It is worth mentioning, however that (a) they are understaffed and the 'smooth' operation is achieved only because of the staff's willingness to contribute personal unpaid time, if needed; and (b) unnecessary additional hurdles are imposed on the operations by the Greek bureaucracy and complex legislation.

3.1.2	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Given the general financial situation, the complex bureaucracy at state level and the special geographic circumstances, the achievements of UA in this respect are remarkable.

3.1.3 Academic Development Strategy

There is an effective bottom-up approach by means of consultation, internal committees, and promotion of the issues to appropriate agents within the Institution.

The main goals for academic development are to: (a) improve the quality of education in UA and keep up with the evolving societal needs; (b) increase and promote its international character; (c) create new multidisciplinary structures, to increase efficiency, all within the framework of the existing Schools and Departments.

There are continuing efforts towards innovation in programs of study, use of new and diverse teaching methods that promote active participation of the students in the learning process (rather than passive studying), blended learning, summer schools, joint degrees, etc.

Given the remoteness and dispersion of the UA and the current financial constraints, key issues are to increase: (a) the retention and presence of the students in the institution (e.g., improve infrastructure, ability to attract fellowships, excellence awards, increase in publicity); (b) efficiency in teaching by means of interdisciplinary common courses and e-diffusion of information.

The EEC got the impression that although UA follows appropriate timelines with academic issues, there are delays and complications in specific deliveries that are beyond their control (due to the frequent changes in Greek educational legislation, or due to delays in implementation of new laws, hiring new staff, etc.).

3.1.3	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.4 Research Strategy

UA's research strategy focuses on innovation and development/improvement of technologies for the dissemination of information, while it supporting both basic and applied research and promoting international exposure. Innovative research at UA aims to address challenges of both the modern society and the local/regional environment (e.g., research in nutrition, learning, environment and marine sciences).

For the next five years, implementation involves (but is not limited to) organisation of events and collaborations that disseminate knowledge, support for new research infrastructure, participation to International networks of excellence, adoption of the European Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, development of new international postgraduate programs, and expansion of collaborations regionally, nationally and internationally.

Laboratory work is a key aspect of research in most Schools of the UA. The laboratories are mainly supported by funds raised by external research programs and personnel funded by these programs, as well as doctoral candidates (in addition to the faculty responsible for the labs). However, technical support is very limited (owing to the lack of internal funds), making the work of the researchers less efficient. For instance, they commonly have to repair their instruments themselves, or they have to wait for a long time for parts and new items to arrive (even when funds are available) because of the complex bureaucracy at the national level. This is particularly detrimental to research at the doctoral level.

UA has good record of attracting external funds as well as of collaboration with high profile foreign Universities and other agencies, and therefore provides a good environment for research development. Innovative findings are made available to the user community and interested agencies, and are published in peer-reviewed international journals, but the committee feels that more effort is needed to communicate results at a broader scale.

The good record of successful acquisition of external funds (EU and other international programmes, funding from industry) is an indicator of the quality of the researchers and the effective planning and support they receive from the institution when applying for research grants.

3.1.4:	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Given the location and size of the institution, the noteworthy impact of its research is even more remarkable.

3.1.5 Financial Strategy

The financial strategy of UA aims to: (a) maintain and develop the existing infrastructure; (b) fund basic research; (c) provide student welfare services; (d) cover salaries and increase temporary appointments; (e) cover operational costs; and (f) secure funds for international activities, innovation, and social work.

The institution's budget (around 7 million) barely covers the basic operational costs. Salaries of all personnel, academic and administrative staff are paid via the Unified Authority of Payments (Ενιαία Αρχή Πληρωμής) from the National Budget. Therefore the appointment of research and teaching assistants, the maintenance, acquisition and/or improvement of laboratory equipment and other infrastructure, as well as student welfare programs and other activities, relies on other resources. UA has been successful in attracting external funding but there is considerable room for improvement. Differences are observed among Departments regarding the amounts of grants they attract.

The management of the Special Account for Research Funds (SARF) secures the feasibility and continuity of the supported projects, as well as travelling and participation of scientists in European and international conferences.

Financial management largely has to follow the state legislation, leaving limited flexibility to the institutions. Still, the UA has adopted a number of good practices and flexible measures to cope with the number of islands and academic units, and the distance from the central administration.

There is a Financial Council with an advisory role to the Rectorate. UA has introduced the concept of the Basic Financial Unit (BFU, Βασική Οικονομική Μονάδα) as an adaptation measure in the multi-island structure of the Institution. UA has established one BFU for each island, one employee for the Library and one for the central administration. For each BFU a Management Committee has been established.

3.1.5	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.6 Building and Grounds Infrastructure Strategy

UA's facility development strategy follows international standards. The current strategy focuses on completion/improvement of existing facilities, and places special emphasis on the development of sufficient accommodation for students and visiting professors and researchers. The strategy considers separately the special needs of the academic units on each island.

For the next five years, a common goal in several units is to restore older buildings owned by the UA, and/or build/complete new ones in order to eliminate rental costs. In some cases (e.g., Student Residencies in Mytilene) the work is under completion, but in others (e.g., Chios, Samos) funding has not been secured yet. However, where funds are not available, there is a plan to request them from the European Bank for Investment.

Because of the location of UA on several islands, the Model 1 Campus/Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is not applicable. The model of campus with two Schools is partly followed in

Mytilene (where, however, one of the Schools has a department in Lemnos). Chios and Rhodes have one School each, but Samos and Syros have different Departments of the same School.

3.1.6	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.7 Environmental Strategy

Since its creation, the UA has a strong focus on the protection of the environment, and its Department of Environment, founded in 1986, was the first one in Greece. This Department offers two post-graduate programs and has produced several PhD dissertations.

In 2014, UA established an official Committee for Environmental Management (with members from all the academic units of UA) known as Green University. This Committee, taking advantage of the expertise of the School of the Environment, elaborates the environmental strategies and oversees their implementation. In addition, it interacts both with local and national organisations in order to exchange ideas on best practices.

Main goals of the Green University are to establish and implement strategies on recycling, management of toxic waste, reduction of the CO₂ imprint, and to incorporate environmental policies in all the procedures of the institution. Additional activities involve organisation of events to increase awareness on environmental issues.

A key environmental priority of UA is the improvement of the energy efficiency of its buildings (coordinated by the Committee of Energy Management), which involves change of practices and also upgrading of buildings. Four such buildings have already been identified (in Chios and Mytilene).

3.1.7	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.8 Social Strategy

UA has a strong tradition on linking research and societal needs, and this practice was unanimously emphasised by all the groups that the EEC met during the site visit. Key elements are: (a) the focus of most research programs on practical applications; (b) strong interactions between the UA and local and national agencies by means of internships, consultations, summer schools, etc.; (c) the integration of a wide range of activities in the local society (including organisation of cultural events, classes open to the public, participation in charities) and cooperation protocols with local agencies; and (d) continuing interactions with the alumni community. Of particular interest is the widespread practice of ‘internships’ as part of the basic studies, which prepare the students for the marketplace while they provide service to the society.

In addition, due to its location and dynamic approaches the UA has a positive impact on the local communities, and the distribution of academic units in several islands contributes to the integration of the local societies in the wider Aegean region.

Cultural activities and events are common on islands with large student numbers (e.g., Mytilene, Rhodes), and individual cultural groups organize cross-island events. In the past, the annual ‘Cultural week’ (organised at a different island each year) provided major links between units and local society. Unfortunately, lately this has been discontinued because of the costs involved.

Different Departments have different strengths in various types of social services; for instance, Geography in natural disaster protection systems, Marine Sciences in management of fishing resources, Environment in techniques for sustainable development, etc.

3.1.8	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.9 Internationalization Strategy

The UA has courses both at the graduate and postgraduate level in English, provides a number of joint postgraduate programs with foreign universities and plans to increase these numbers. In addition, the international summer schools organized by the UA are widely publicised. An important emphasis is on participation in the Erasmus program, especially in the area of environmental studies (MESPOM) where there has been collaboration with 5 international institutions so far, and in modern studies (Jean Monet). UA is also one of the five Greek Universities that offer courses in English.

There is a large number of research programs funded by international agencies, as well as collaborations with renowned foreign institutions that have a positive impact on the visibility of the UA. There are plans to create a database with all the elements of the international activities of UA, as well as to increase the effectiveness of the SARF.

There is an excellent record of participation to HEI networks and special collaboration agreements.

3.1.9	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Considering its size and means, UA's networking is impressive.

3.1.10 Student Welfare Strategy

The UA has a strong focus on student welfare, but this is especially challenging given the isolated and dispersed nature of the institution. In each academic unit there is a council for student welfare and there are established practices for all major aspects of student support. However, much more has to be done.

Most islands have some form of student residences, but numbers are still insufficient. Improvement of student accommodation is in progress, with new units under completion in Mytilene and in the planning stage in Chios. Selection of students for free room and board follows transparent and indisputable (economic) criteria.

There is provision for awarding scholarships and excellence prizes, but these depend on the financial state of the institution.

Sports and cultural facilities are minimal, and vary from island to island. The Mytilene unit is the only one that has a building for sports and cultural activities, and the refurbishing of this building has been funded recently by UA. The unit of Rhodes has infrastructure for two small soccer fields and a room for gymnastics. In addition, in all the locations of the UA, the university uses local sports facilities under the auspices of the local authorities. There is a coordinator for sports and cultural activities, but his role is limited due to the lack of infrastructure and official regulations pertaining to such activities.

Also, activities are sporadic, and often depend on the presence of motivated students to organise them. However once in place, there is a very positive response and participation of alumni, other students and the local community.

Students with special physical needs are rare in the UA, however there are provisions for them on a case-by-case basis. For those with mental problems or learning disabilities, there is organised support 24/7, and/or special arrangements with local hospitals.

3.1.10	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	√
Negative evaluation	

It is apparent that the availability of welfare services is limited, and there is an imperative need for improvement of student welfare.

3.2 Strategy for Study Programmes

3.2.1 Programmes of Undergraduate Studies (first cycle)

Undergraduate (UG) studies

The 16 Departments offer 17 Undergraduate Programmes, as the Legislation does not allow more than 1 UG Programme to be offered by each Department. One Programme (Mathematics) has two distinct tracks: Mathematics/Statistics and Actuarial-Financial Mathematics. A number of further programmes are also subdivided in tracks, which are selected by students in the so-called second cycle of the Programme (either in the last two years or in the last year). Alternatively, students can organize the second cycle individually according to their interests, by selecting a number of elective courses (compulsory elective courses). Students are encouraged to seek advice from their academic tutors for better planning their individual schedule according to their interests.

Every UG Programme requires 240 credit units, ideally to be obtained in 8 semesters. Credit units are in ECTS, and a Diploma Supplement is also issued by the University. According to statistics provided, students of the UA on the average accomplish their studies earlier than in most other Greek Universities.

The structure of each Programme is described in a separate, detailed Study Regulation, which is available on the Department's website and is easily accessible to students and prospective students. Every year the Departments publish an indicative course break down (ενδεικτικό πρόγραμμα σπουδών) which serves as a guideline for students. Programme websites also offer detailed information on summer internships (where applicable).

Goals, structure and learning outcomes of the Programmes (but also of individual courses) are clearly articulated in the Description of the Programmes and of individual courses, which are designed according to international standards. Compared to other Undergraduate Programmes offered by Greek Universities, the Study Programmes of the UA as a whole give the impression that they are conceived with the aim to serve real needs of the economy and society with special care to the regional development and the professional development of the graduates.

Courses can have the form of lectures, seminars, practical exercises, laboratory courses and field work, in varying combinations and analogies according to the requirements of each discipline; in some courses a dissertation and/or an internship is part of the curriculum (dissertation and internship can be compulsory or optional). As it is expected in a University with Programmes ranging from History and Anthropology to Industrial Design, a variety of teaching and evaluation methods are applied.

The meeting with students has clearly shown that students from early on develop a research mentality as many courses are project-based and instructors enhance individual initiatives, which allow students to become familiar with research methodology. When required, courses take place in laboratories and each student is assigned a workplace with the necessary equipment. Students also have access to laboratories for many hours during the day and can profit from the regular (also informal) contact with teaching staff, graduates and post-doctoral students.

Attendance of courses is compulsory, but in most programmes this principle cannot be enforced.

An evaluation of the Programmes at the level of the Department takes place every year, and minor modifications can take place according to the experiences and the needs. The formal evaluation process that takes place periodically (usually on a triennial basis) can lead to major revisions, if necessary. In this procedure, the Departmental Committee of Studies and the Internal Evaluation Committee are involved.

The regular programme revision procedures and the very good communication between students and staff are additional strengths of the University. An outcome of the discussion with students, but

also with the alumni, is that the teaching is very successful in enhancing the personal development of all students. Given its geographical position and the centralized system of admission to Greek Universities, the UA does not attract the most qualified candidates. However, the effective and well-designed programmes of studies, the use of technology, the emphasis on the quality of teaching and the supportive culture of the University help many of them to improve themselves considerably not only by acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills, but also by obtaining useful experiences for their career. According to the self-evaluation material provided by the University, all Departments responded acutely and effectively to the external evaluation reports and revised their curricula according to the recommendations. This was largely facilitated by the special traditions of the UA, which was among the first in Greece to adopt evaluation procedures independently.

Both the external evaluation of the Departments and the data that were made available to the EEC provide evidence that the graduates of the UA have relatively good chances in the job market, but also in pursuing studies on a higher level (postgraduate).

On the other hand, the UA is confronted with problems that are common to all Greek Universities and influence unfavorably the quality of studies. The number of staff is lower than necessary, retired staff cannot be replaced, in some fields there is no sufficient number of specialists (e.g., for the teaching of languages such as Arabic and Turkish), and the appointment of Teaching Assistants is decreasing due to the cut of financial resources. In addition, the response of students to the evaluation of teaching is very limited.

A further consequence of the financial crisis in Greece is that the dropout rate at the UA and other Universities outside Athens has been increasing in recent years. The ongoing deterioration of the level of public Secondary Education also has a negative impact on University teaching in Greece at large. Finally, it is to be stressed that Universities have very little influence on political decisions; on the contrary, the frequent changes of legislation cause an additional burden for the administration and are an inhibiting factor for effective planning in every domain of their activity including educational activities.

3.2.1	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2.2 Programmes of Postgraduate Studies (second cycle)

Postgraduate (PG) Studies

The Departments of the UA – with the only exception of its youngest Department (nutrition, on the island of Lemnos), which counts only 5 members of staff – offer from 1 to 5 PG programmes each; twelve of them have from 2 to 5 tracks. The total number of PG Programmes is 35.

The UA has made from early on a good reputation in Greece and internationally due to its high level and innovative PG programmes. All PG programmes are advertised in order to attract qualified students.

All PG programmes are clearly structured, and detailed information is provided on their websites which are regularly updated. Courses are credited with ECTS and the University provides a Diploma Supplement. Individual PG programmes comprise 10–13 courses, which lead to the accumulation of a total of 60, 75, 90 or 120 ECTS, according to the requirements of each

Programme. Goals, structure and learning outcomes of the Programmes (but also of individual courses) are clearly articulated in the syllabi, which are designed according to international standards.

There is an emphasis on inter-departmental collaboration. A trend towards internationalization is also evident. Many PG programmes are offered in collaboration with other Universities in Greece or in Europe. Research dissertations can be written in English, while a number of programmes are entirely taught in English.

Programmes consist of lectures, seminars, practical exercise, laboratory courses, field research, in varying combinations and analogies according to the requirements of each Programme. Attendance is compulsory. Blended teaching and block teaching is also applied in many programmes, in order to facilitate the attendance of students located in a place other than the Department. There is a variety of evaluation methods (research papers, presentations, examinations, projects) with emphasis on individual and team-based research-oriented activities. The definition and assignment of these activities take into account the state of the art, the technological challenges and the real questions and needs of the economy and industry. Consequently, PG research regularly leads to scholarly publications. The policy of the University is to enhance the participation of PG students in academic life, in UG teaching and supervision, and, when the means are provided, in research projects. The site visit of the EEC and the interviews with PG students of all levels and with alumni provided strong evidence that intensive collaboration between PG students and the academic staff is deeply rooted in the culture of the UA.

The development of PG studies faces certain problems such as the limited funding of PG students (the available scholarships cannot satisfy the real needs). In addition, many PG students extend the time of their studies because they are obliged to work. Finally, access to bibliography is not guaranteed for the future, as the Greek government is unable to promise the funding for further subscription to scientific journals through Heal-Link (consortium of Greek research libraries).

Despite these adversities, the UA rightly sees a great opportunity in the further development of PG studies. The expertise of the UA in this field can lead to the design and successful implementation of further programmes, which combine innovation and flexibility, and exploit existing and future collaboration with HE institutions in Greece and in Europe. The strong bonds with the industry, local communities and other stakeholders are a considerable capital of the UA, which has to be further exploited. The increasing demand for flexible and innovative programmes, the growing market for life-long learning programmes, the creation of better IT and communication infrastructures in the Aegean islands, and the emphasis on quality and international standards create opportunities of the UA to capitalize on its expertise and to expand its position in the academic market. In this respect, special mention merit the Summer Schools, which have been successfully organized by the UA in the past several years aiming at the education of young researchers in a specific field.

The EEC strongly suggests the development of a fund raising strategy and of targeted advertising activities in order to further develop and promote PG studies and research. In addition, the state should provide the means for the required infrastructure and human resources (academic and administrative personnel), which are urgently needed.

3.2.2

	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2.3 Programmes of Doctoral Studies (third cycle)

PhD studies

The same general strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats apply to PhD studies as in the postgraduate Masters Programmes of the UA. More specifically, the EEC would like to emphasize that high-level PhD studies are an important factor to further promote the visibility of the UA internationally.

PhD candidates have to hold a Master's degree, but the exceptional admission of candidates who do not possess a Master's degree is also possible, under the condition that this will be completed in parallel with the PhD studies. PhD programmes do not have graduate course requirements.

A positive component of many UA PhD programmes is the requirement of publications in order to obtain the PhD. Further good practices are the annual workshops with presentations from all PhD candidates of the Department, the involvement of external members on supervising committees, and the connection of PhD research with the needs of the industry, society and economy.

PhD programmes need to be strengthened. The EEC subscribes to the pronounced goals of the UA in its Strategic Plan for 2014–2020 to further develop innovative and international Graduate Programmes, to promote the organization of doctoral studies and organize post-doctoral studies. Special mention deserves the fact that all Departments share these priorities; unlike in many other Universities, the EEC observed that there is no Department that lacks dynamism and potential for further development of PG/PhD studies. The emphasis on maintaining the existing and enhancing participation in new networks of excellence also meets EEC's full approval.

General impression (for the 3 cycles of studies)

The overall impression of the EEC is that teaching is kept on a very high level. The Programmes of study are designed according to best international standards, studies are well organized, and the environment is very student-friendly.

A distinct trait of many UA Programmes is that they are largely innovative, inter- or cross-disciplinary, and up-to-date. There is also a strong tendency to integrate research outcomes in teaching and to enhance entrepreneurship and innovation. Some programmes of study (e.g., Environmental Studies) were the first to be offered in Greece in the specific field and some still remain unique. Students have the opportunity to be acquainted with laboratory research (where the Programme requires this) and are involved to a satisfactory degree in research activities.

UA has developed a network of partners in industry, local economy and society, which ensures the bonds with the job market and justifies optimism regarding its further response to the needs of society. The existing infrastructures can be further improved, and the use of new technologies in teaching can be intensified. There is also a strong awareness of University officials about the challenges of internationalization. The numerous existing partnerships with foreign institutions, the innovative subjects taught and the offering of selected courses in English, contribute to this goal and provide a good starting point for further initiatives.

The EEC fully agrees with the points that the University identifies as opportunities for future development (investment in patents, focus on the environmental component, enhancing of the mobility of instructors and students, participation at an ever greater number of collaboration programmes, exploiting the increasing interest in Mediterranean studies, elaborating a strategy for the Πειραματικά σχολεία).

The UA is also aware of the considerable threats it is faced with. Most of them are neither new, nor

caused by factors that can be influenced by the University. Thus, brain-drain is an increasing problem for the country. Budget cuts have a negative effect on education, research, administration, and on the morale of all persons involved, including the students. The EEC has also registered a justified worry of the University about the purchase of consumables and the subscription to journals, two factors that threaten its ability to maintain the desired standards of laboratory teaching and research, and the work with updated bibliography.

3.2.3

	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

<p><i>3.3 Profile of the Institution under evaluation - Conclusions and recommendations</i></p>
<p>Specific positive points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clear and coherent vision and strategies at all levels. 2. Innovative programmes designed according to best international standards and use of multidisciplinary approaches 3. Flexible and innovative teaching methods 4. Good research record with strong emphasis on innovation; given the location and size of the institution, the impact of its research is remarkable 5. Emphasis on environmental and social issues 6. Emphasis on internationalization of studies and research, visibility 7. Interaction with industry, society, workplace, and strong presence in the local communities 8. Good communication within different units/levels of the institution, spirit of solidarity and devotion 9. Transparency in decision making, effective leadership
<p>Specific negative points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limited attractiveness for students and academics due to remoteness 2. Low level of starting undergraduate students due to the national system of assigning students to different universities 3. Insufficient number of staff members 4. Insufficient support for student activities and welfare
<p>Suggestions for further development of the positive points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The UA should further develop and pursue a strategy for advertising its programmes and identify potential target groups 2. The UA is proactive in reaching goals at all levels, but there is room for a more systematic and officialised approach
<p>Suggestions on needed steps for improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a follow up of the approval of the 'Postdoctoral Studies rules' by the Senate in 2015, increase the focus on post-doctoral studies 2. Systematic and intensified fund raising strategy 3. Strategy for decreasing the cost of living for students (especially in Rhodes), expand housing programmes, etc. 4. Development of alternative ways to provide a better framework for student activities

4. INTERNAL SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

4.1 Quality Assurance (QA) Policy and Strategy

Following the requirements as set by the National Framework for the evaluation of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Greece, the UA has developed a quality assurance system. The quality assurance system is organized following the bottom-up approach of collecting and organizing information and decision-making. The basic bodies that are operating as part of the quality assurance system are the MOΔIII at the institutional level and the OMEA at the departmental level. The design of the system is based on established operating procedures at the level of the department, design of tools that are needed in collecting the necessary information (questionnaires, reports, etc.) and the development of an integrated computerized information collection system. The collection of information is facilitated by the use of structured questionnaires specifically designed for each thematic area and guidelines are provided as to the structure of the interviews. The integrated computerized information collection system facilitates the quick collection and proper analysis of the collected information and the preparation of the reports. The system is operating anonymously, safeguarding biased interventions and discriminations.

Although the university collects information through informal meeting with the stakeholders, the QA system does not include formal procedures for collecting information from all the connected and external stakeholders.

The students are involved in the decision making process as members of the various QA committees and individually by filling up the questionnaires. The response rate in filling the questionnaires is very low. The reason for this is that attendance is not mandatory for the courses without a practical/laboratory component. On the other hand, students are reluctant to participate in the various committees either because of lack of interest or due to the fact that are not fully informed.

The design of the quality assurance system has made a provision of the evaluation of its effectiveness by establishing the process of external evaluation. The university has undergone an external evaluation of the QA system in August 2014.

4.1	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.2 Design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of the study programmes and degrees awarded

The design of the study programmes and the individual courses is done by establishing learning outcomes for each programme and each course separately. The design of the programmes is based on the needs of the labor market, student needs and the research outcomes.

The participation of the students in the design of the course is safeguarded through their participation in the Academic Programs Committee at the Department level. There are also some other informal ways of collecting information from the students (Erasmus students, internship experience).

Information on research outcomes is safeguarded through the participation of the faculty members in the Academic Programs Committee. Information on the labor market needs is taken from the various stakeholders through the contacts that faculty members have established. There is no formal procedure of collecting information from the external stakeholders.

All the information regarding the course content, learning outcomes, course prerequisites, assessment system, etc., is uploaded on the electronic platform of the university and is open to the students who are registered in the course.

The achievement of the learning outcomes is monitored through (i) written examination (assignments, projects, final exams), (ii) oral examinations and presentations of practical work, and (iii) questionnaires that are filed by students at the end of the course.

All the courses are designed and implemented based on the ECTS system. No evidence is provided on the procedure that is followed regarding the way that the number of ECTS allocated to each course is calculated. No formal procedure is in place in collecting information in order to identify whether the number of ECTS allocated to each course is correct and if not, how corrective action is taken.

The programmes are evaluated every year for minor adjustments following information collected from students' evaluations, new research outcomes, etc., and every 3–5 years for any major adjustments regarding course delivery methods, and needs of the stakeholders. Information is collected from the stakeholders in an informal manner. No formal procedure has been developed.

The design of the programmes has taken into consideration international mobility of the students, giving placement opportunities to the students for gaining practical experience (internships).

4.2	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.3 Teaching and learning - Assessment by students

General information regarding the programme content and characteristics is provided on the department webpage. Additional information is provided to the students when they register for the programme. Special welcome days are organized by each Department, providing the necessary information.

At the beginning of each course, the instructor prepares a Course Outline. The Course Outline provides information regarding learning outcomes, course content, course delivery mode, and assessment method and course prerequisites. All this information is uploaded on the course platform and is accessible to the students who attend the course.

Based on the specific requirements of the courses, the appropriate delivery method is adopted. Multiple methods are utilized, including seminars, practical workshop exercises, case studies, and e-learning. The e-learning method is fully utilized by offering hybrid courses. Due to the geographical dispersion of the Departments, the UA has developed hybrid courses giving the opportunity to the students to attend the course remotely.

For each student the university assigns an advisor, upon his/her registration to the program. The role of the advisor, who is a faculty member of the respective Department, is to provide guidance and support to the students throughout their studies. Faculty members assign office hours during which they are available to the students, but the practice at the UA has always been for faculty members to have an open-door policy above and beyond their regular office hours.

4.3	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.4 Admission of students, progression and recognition of studies

UA has in place specific procedures for admission to postgraduate programmes. These include: (1) Advertisement of the vacant positions on the department web side. (2) Electronic application. (3) Formulation of the evaluation committees. (4) Interviews of the prospective students. (5) Communication of the decision to all prospective students. The process is open and the results are published to the candidates, who have the right to appeal the decision.

The admission process for a doctoral degree begins with the request of the applicant or by advertisement of the vacant position by the Department. Once an application is received the Department assigns an evaluation committee and the prospective candidate is called for an interview. Upon his/her acceptance by the committee (Γενική Συνέλευση Ειδικής Σύθεσης Γ.Σ.Ε.Σ), a supervisor and an advisory three-member committee are assigned. The student must conduct an open presentation of the progress of the doctoral research, once a year, in consultation with the supervisor and the advisory committee, and submits a progress report to Γ.Σ.Ε.Σ of the Department once a year, until the completion of thesis.

UA has in place procedures of recognition of study periods and prior learning at other Departments for the undergraduate studies only. The number of courses recognized for transfer students cannot exceed 10% of the overall number of required courses of the program of study he/she is admitted to. No procedures are in place for the graduate and doctoral degree courses, and/or recognition of non-formal and informal learning (e.g., summer schools, training courses).

All diplomas/degrees are supported with a Diploma Supplement, providing information regarding the degree conferred to the student, the achieved learning outcomes and the content of studies he/she successfully completed.

UA has in place an Integrated Information System that is used to collect, and process data regarding the student's progression. The information provided covers qualitative and quantitative indicators, including: grade per course, ranking, number of participants in tests, number of courses attended, credits, course evaluation, etc.

4.4	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.5 Quality Assurance as regards the teaching staff

UA utilizes and takes advantage of the electronic database (Μητρώο Εσωτερικών Μελών Πανεπιστημίου Αιγαίου APELLA) that provides a list of internal and external faculty members. UA has in place an electronic integrated management system of election procedures and faculty development, and maintains a registry of internal and external members. All prospective faculty members are called to deliver a lecture for the assessment of their teaching skills.

UA offers opportunities for the professional/scientific advancement of its faculty members. Through the ERASMUS plus initiative faculty members have the opportunity to collaborate with other institutions abroad, exchanging good practices, establishing collaborations and undertaking research activities for mutual benefit. Special (sabbatical) leaves help faculty members to collaborate with colleagues at other institutions in research and teaching activities. Funding is provided, when available, for the participation of faculty members in conferences and for publication of their work in scientific journals.

There is no official procedure of identifying professional development needs of the faculty members. Some tools that are in place (such as student questionnaires) and can be used to extract relevant information.

UA takes some ad hoc initiatives in helping new faculty members establish their research by providing a form of financial support for their research activities. Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty of in the long-term availability of funds, no formal procedures are established

As stated in other sections of the report, in the process of program evaluation and development there is an established procedure that accounts for the integration of research findings in the program curriculum.

UA has developed formal procedures so that the teaching staff members receive the necessary feedback on their course delivery through questionnaires that the students are filling at the end of each course. The implementation of this initiative is rather problematic due to the low response rate among the students. This is partially due to the facts that, in the majority courses, attendance is not mandatory and because students are reluctant to fill the questionnaire (fear of being identified).

UA has in place a regulatory framework for the investigation of disciplinary and academic misconduct of the teaching staff.

4.5	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.6 Learning resources and student support

One of the main goals of the UA is to provide adequate and continuous support to students for their educational activities, as well as for personal development and wellbeing. A set of procedures has been adopted, which periodically and systematically monitor the effectiveness of student services. Besides that internal and external evaluations of the University as a whole and its Departments individually, these include the evaluation of the courses by the students, and the evaluation of UA and its services by student questionnaires. Although the course evaluations are done for each course offered and show that students are, on average, quite satisfied (80% of responses are very positive), the student participation is low. This is partially due to the facts that the questionnaire is (a) rather lengthy (more than 30 questions) and different for different courses, and (b) delivered electronically, which is raising concerns of anonymity for the students. *One way to overcome these (real or perceived) problems and increase student participation is to simplify, shorten and standardize this questionnaire, and deliver it in class on paper, using scanable and machine-recognizable forms.* UA is also periodically sending questionnaires to recently graduated students, thus collecting additional information about its programs and services.

UA's Library consists of a set of networked libraries on six islands. It offers a large number of books, periodicals and journal subscriptions, as well as access to international data bases and digital maps. Users can access it electronically, and queries can be answered by the Helpdesk via phone, email or web input. Students can access articles, borrow books and order missing articles. Information about these services is provided to graduate and undergraduate students via seminars organized annually by the Library. Since 2012, the Library has also been providing electronic services (Open eClass and Moodle) for the delivery of classes, and academic, inter-departmental and life-long learning programs. The operation of the Library is threatened by the lack of continuous funding to university libraries for subscriptions to journals and electronic learning resources. *This is a serious problem that requires the immediate attention of the government.*

The Information and Telecommunication (IT) infrastructure of the UA is very well developed, and is indispensable for the effective operation of a university that spans six islands. More specifically, the IT services enable the development of distance learning, teleconferencing and real-time telecommunications for the delivery of courses, seminars and lectures, as well as for the communication of administrative and support personnel on different islands. Curricula, class material and submission of assignments are available to students electronically on the web. Student files, grades and program information are also maintained electronically. This IT infrastructure also allows UA and its Departments to provide easily accessible information online about their programs and services.

UA prides itself as being a student-centric university, and therefore devotes a large amount of effort and resources to develop and improve student services. Support is provided through assigning an individual Study/Program Advisor to each student, and by the Offices of Internships, External Liaison, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Erasmus. Internships in industry and/or government organizations are available in several programs, and are very much appreciated by students as well as by the employers, who expressed to the EEC great satisfaction with the quality of the students who worked in their organizations. Health services are also provided through arrangements with local hospitals/clinics, and the university is providing access to advisors and psychologists to students who are experiencing mental health issues - *a problem of increasing frequency and intensity, given the current economical situation in Greece, that certainly requires the allocation of additional resources.*

Overall, learning resources and student support services are effective and are monitored, revised and improved based on information and suggestions collected by ΟΠΣΔιΠ. (Ολοκληρωμένο Πληροφοριακό Σύστημα Διασφάλισης Ποιότητας), in the student evaluations, and in the internal and external evaluations of the university and the individual Departments.

4.6	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.7 Information Systems for Recording and Analysing Data and Indicators

UA possesses a number of information systems that collect, analyse and utilize information in support of the operation, decision-making, strategic planning and internal evaluation of the university. In particular, its Quality Assurance Unit (MOΔΠΠ) has established an Integrated Information System (ΟΠΣΔΙΠ), which collects and processes information available in subsystems such as those dealing with student and personnel records, accounting, payroll, library, and special research fund (ΕΛΕ). Information provided by the student records system includes lists of registered and graduated students, and of students holding scholarships, and a large number of key performance indicators and statistical information on courses, students, services, evaluations, both on a Departmental level and on overall university level. Statistics can be displayed in tables and diagrams and analyzed by year, gender and other selectable parameters both in an absolute and in a relative, i.e., comparative, way, which shows clearly the time progression and variability of various indicators and allows for meaningful comparisons between courses, departments, faculty members, student groups, etc. Course evaluations, as well as the internal Departmental self-evaluation reports, are enabled and analyzed by ΟΠΣΔΙΠ. Student satisfaction reports are collected electronically from both the current and the recently graduated UA students. It is worth mentioning here that UA has established a database and a way of tracking the career paths of its students and feeding them information about the activities and status of the programs they graduated from. *To improve the effectiveness of this system, it is suggested it be fully web based and automated in a way that individuals can update their own contact information and employment records as often as needed.*

UA has already, or will be introducing/upgrading in the near future, systems for collecting, analysing and utilizing information regarding its other functions and activities. These include: an interoperable platform for the joint support of its financial and administrative services (personnel records, payroll, budget, accounting, supplies, contracts and university property); system software for the special research fund (external research grants/contracts, information and statistics on research funding, etc.); an umbrella system that links the systems of the Offices of Employment and Careers (ΔΑΣΤΑ), Internship, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Liaison Office, provides announcements on position opening, graduate programs, scholarships, internships, etc., lists companies and external sponsors, and gives access to CVs of academic staff and current and past students; and a pilot program of Business Intelligence that will create a Greek Universities Network (GUNet), link the information systems of all academic institutions and allow exchange of information and comparisons at national level.

EEC cannot assess whether UA has, or is planning to, benchmark itself against other similar universities within and outside Europe, as no such information was provided during the site visit. Nevertheless, it is evident from the information provided that UA's IT infrastructure and information collection and analysis systems compares well to those of well-established universities around the world.

4.7:

	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.8 Dissemination of information to stakeholders

The publicization of information at the UA is done via electronic and printed means. The latter comprises the monthly sixteen-page newsletter of the university (AΓΓAIO.edu), which is printed in 10,000 copies and distributed at the university locations, and the monthly pamphlet about events organized by/at UA, which is printed in 2000 copies and distributed inside UA and sent to local authorities. The former comprises posting in social media (facebook) and the web pages of the university, which are kept current via regular updating. There is a wide spectrum of information available to the stakeholders, ranging from information about learning opportunities for new students to the promotion of student and faculty awards and cultural events at the university. UA's central web site provides information on the university's history, administration, academic programmes and services, as well as current news, announcements and job postings. It also provides direct links to the web pages of the Departments including their programs of life-long learning and summer schools, the Library, the Research Committee, the company managing the university estate, and the offices of Academic Programmes and International Collaborations (Erasmus), Quality Assurance, Internships, External Liaisons, and Employment and Careers. Available online are also the CVs of the academic staff, the internal and external evaluations of the Departments, and a database (OCTOPUS) of the registration and promotion of the research output (publications, research programs) of the faculty members. The online information addressing the needs of current and prospective students is very well organized, and includes detailed downloadable (in pdf format) guides about the requirements of the various programmes of study and about 'surviving' as a new student in a new environment.

On most, though not all, web pages of the university, the information is provided in both Greek and English. It is worth mentioning that some of the web pages, such as, the one of UA's Liaison Office, are providing online forms for the evaluation of the available online information and the quality of the service provided by a particular office or service of the university.

4.8	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.9 Continuous monitoring and periodic review of the study programmes

Since 2009, UA has been continuously monitoring its academic programs and is making major revisions every three to five years. Each Department can make smaller changes annually based on the feedback received by its stakeholders. Such changes are typically proposed by the Academic Program Committee to the Department's Council, which then discusses and approves the changes. At the School level, the approval is given by the School's Council. The proposed changes take into account factors such as the students' course evaluations, the students' workload per course (ECTS units), lecturing and/or laboratory requirements, international trends and the changing needs of society. This type of information is provided by internal and external processes, such as the

monitoring of the graduated students' career paths, links and collaborations with past students and external sponsors, the needs of industry and professional organizations, and the recommendations in the internal and external evaluations of the Departments and the university. In addition, some of the academic units produce an internal Progress Report on an annual or biennial basis, which contain quantitative and qualitative information that is valuable for the evaluation and periodic update of their programs of study.

Although links and contacts that provide suggestions for improvements are in place on a personal level – and have resulted in important changes such as the introduction of new courses and directions, the strengthening of inter- and multi-disciplinarity and internal/external collaborations, and the shortening of the students' program completion time – they have not been formalized officially. *It is recommended that each Department form an Advisory Board, with representation from students and each of its main stakeholders, which will provide input and recommendations annually for any changes necessary to the academic program in order to meet the personal and professional needs of the students as well as the needs of a rapidly changing society.* In their meetings with the EEC, the representatives of stakeholders, past students and sponsors of UA expressed strong support for, and a keen interest to participate in, such Advisory Boards as soon as they are established.

4.9

	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.10 Periodic external evaluation

As the requirement for university external evaluations was established by law in 2011, and even though its programs have had external evaluations already, this is the first time that the UA is being evaluated by an EEC. UA has, however, already undergone an external evaluation in 2005 on its own initiative. This evaluation was organized in collaboration with the European University Association (EUA) and was conducted by a committee of three international experts. The evaluation praised the university for its dynamism and determination, quality of academic and administrative staff, quality of research, and the positive atmosphere between academics, students and support staff, which is conducive to the success of the students and the continuous improvement of the university and its programs. These positive characteristics, which are very hard to develop in universities as young as UA, were also observed by the members of the EEC. The EUA evaluation identified also some weak points, such as the monitoring and further improvement of the academic programs, the more effective use of the available human resources, attention to students issues, enhanced internationalization, public relations and promotion of the university. The EEC was very pleased to see that the university has put plans in place that address these issues through the strengthening of UA's Quality Assurance Office, the implementation of IT systems that reduce the workload of administrative and support personnel and enable the online evaluation of courses and programs by students, the establishment of international educational and research programs and collaborations (e-learning, co-supervision, mobility of students and staff, summer schools, courses in English, etc.), and a committee/office tasked with promoting the university locally, nationally and internationally.

Both the EUA evaluation and the current evaluation by the EEC have confirmed that the existing laws that govern the organization and operation of universities in Greece are too restrictive and hamper the effective operation of the institutions and their flexibility to respond to the challenges and changing needs of science and society. *These outdated laws are in urgent need of revision to allow for real self-governance of universities (based on internationally acceptable standards and practices), which is necessary in order to achieve their true potential and for their students to succeed in the very competitive international stage.*

4.10	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.11. Internal System of Quality Assurance –Conclusions and recommendations

Specific positive points:

1. The quality assurance system is organized following the bottom-up approach of collecting, organizing information and decision-making.
2. The integrated computerized information collection system facilitates the quick collection and proper analysis of the collected information and the preparation of the reports. The system is operating anonymously, safeguarding biased interventions and discriminations.
3. UA is a student-centric university, and devotes a large amount of effort and resources to improve its academic programs and service to students.
4. Since its inception, the university has created a positive environment for its students, staff and support personnel that facilitates close ties and a climate of trust between students, professors and administrative staff.
5. The university initiated an external evaluation long before it was mandated by law, has acted upon the recommendations of that review, and has now established procedures for the periodic internal evaluation and improvement of its programs.

Specific negative points:

1. Although the university collects information through informal meetings with the stakeholders, the QA system does not include formal procedures for collecting information from all the connected and external stakeholders.
2. The students are involved in the decision making process as members of the various QA committees and individually by filling up the questionnaires. The response rate in filling the questionnaires is very low. The reason for this is that attendance is not mandatory for the courses where a practical element is not part of it. Also, the students are reluctant to participate in the various committees either because of lack of interest or due to the fact that are not fully informed.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. No evidence is provided on the procedure that is followed regarding the way that the number of ECTS allocated to each course is calculated. No formal procedure is in place in collecting information in order to identify whether the ECTS allocated to each course is correct and if not take corrective action. 4. No online system to collect and self-update contact and employment information of UA alumni. 5. No benchmarking against comparable universities in Greece and abroad. 6. The existing laws that govern the organization and operation of universities in Greece are too restrictive and hamper the effective operation of the institutions and their flexibility to respond to the challenges and changing needs of science and society.
<p>Suggestions for further development of the positive points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1&2. Ensure that adequate resources (human, financial, infrastructure) are allocated for the effective operation of the Quality Assurance Units of the university. 3&4. The university is encouraged to continue nurturing the positive work and study environment it has developed, with emphasis on the needs of its students. 5. UA should maintain and support the culture of frequent internal reporting and evaluation that its Departments and Schools have already developed and implemented.
<p>Suggestions on needed steps for improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>It is recommended that each Department form an Advisory Board, with representation from students and each of its main stakeholders, which will provide input and recommendations annually for any changes necessary to the academic program in order to meet the personal and professional needs of the students as well as the needs of a rapidly changing society.</i> 2. <i>One way to overcome these (real or perceived) problems and increase student participation is to simplify, shorten and standardize this questionnaire, and deliver it in class on paper, using scanable and machine-recognizable forms.</i> 3. <i>Improve communication to students regarding the operation of the Departments and the role of the committees in decision-making and recommending improvements, and encourage them to assign representatives to each committee.</i> 4. <i>Develop a process that ensures that the ECTS units of each course are commensurate with the actual student workload.</i> 5. <i>To improve the effectiveness of this system, it is suggested to be fully web based and automated in a way that individuals can update their own contact information and employment records as often as needed.</i> 6. <i>EEC cannot assess whether UA has, or is planning to, benchmark itself against other similar universities within and outside Europe, as no such information was provided during the site visit.</i> 7. <i>The outdated legal framework that governs the organization and operation of universities in Greece is in urgent need of revision to allow for real self-governance of universities (based on internationally acceptable standards and practices), which is necessary in order to achieve their true potential and for their students to succeed in the very competitive international stage.</i>

5. OPERATION OF THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTITUTION

5.1 Central Administration Services of the Institution

The program of the EEC did not include site visits and separate discussions with administration departments on procedures and management practices. The EEC opinion is based on the information provided and the interviews conducted with key administrative officers, and on the documentation provided (see D in section 2.1, p.6).

Comments on several services can be found in earlier sections of this document.

The total number of administrative staff at the moment is 255. Based on various studies conducted, this is considered as very low.

The special circumstances (geographical dispersion, low number of administrative staff, remoteness from mainland Greece) has forced the UA to develop a set of procedures and practices which provided solutions to the acute problems it was facing over the years. The experience of the administrators and the good practices developed are an asset for the institution.

It became evident that flexibility, inventiveness, a high spirit of collegiality, and sense of responsibility and devotion became part of the culture of the UA. Formalization and standardization of most procedures has been successfully accomplished. There is efficient collaboration and division of tasks between the central administration and the local units, which are located in each island. However, successful management seems to be empirical and improvised rather than according to a documented or certified approach based on any certification standard (e.g., ISO 9000).

A notable difficulty faced by the administration services is that the approval by the state of the Institution's organization chart and internal operation regulations is still pending. Although there is provision for the appointment of a Head of administrative services (Γραμματέας), this very important position has not been filled yet. The ratio of administrative to academic staff is very low. Although the members of the EEC were impressed by the high degree of dedication of all staff members they met, they also realized that the workload of administrators is very high, and this is potentially a threat for the efficient operation of the institution. Some services are entirely lacking, such as a legal office and a permanent doctor. There is also a notable absence of technical support personnel (ειδικότητες τεχνικού προσωπικού).

5.1	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	√
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

This rating is based on the efficiency of the administration services, despite the existence of major structural problems.

5.2 Operation of the Central Administration of the Institution – Conclusions and recommendations

Specific positive points:

The development of the UA hitherto is the result of insightful and perceptive planning. Further on, the EEC singles out the following strong points:

1. Flexible and effective management
2. Largely standardized and formalized internal procedures
3. Proactive leadership
4. Sense of duty and positive attitude on behalf of the staff

Specific negative points:

1. Understaffing at all levels, most acute in the case of the Technical Support Services. The position of the Head of Administration is vacant.
2. Lack of services such as a legal office and a permanent doctor based at the Institution.
3. Insufficient state funding
4. Delay in the approval of the institution's internal operation regulations (Εσωτερικός Κανονισμός) and organization chart (Οργανόγραμμα) by the state.

Suggestions for further development of the positive points

The suggestions listed below aim to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and to facilitate operations.

1. Although internal procedures are increasingly standardized, it is suggested to develop, in addition, certified procedural approaches.
2. There is a strong need to increase the number of staff at all levels.
3. Intensification of the use of the opportunities for EU funding may allow to better support the different operations of the Institution.

Suggestions on needed steps for improvement:

Improvement would be notably facilitated if the Institution would be able to achieve a larger degree of autonomy from the state. As things stand now:

1. The state should approve as soon as possible the set of regulations (Εσωτερικός Κανονισμός).
2. The position of the Secretary (Γραμματέας) should be filled as soon as possible.
3. Alternative ways should be sought, to increase the number of staff.

6. FINAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific positive points:

1. Consistency and continuity concerning vision and strategy
2. Very good organisation and synergy between the different levels of administration
3. Innovative research and educational programmes designed according to best international standards
4. Flexible methods and wide use of modern technology in education
5. Strong outreach component by means of life-long learning programmes and summer schools
6. Ongoing internationalization – emphasis on networking, mobility and establishment of collaboration protocols with international institutions
7. Strategic location in a large, developing area and emphasis on the contribution to regional development
8. Emphasis on evaluation and quality
9. Excellent communication between students and faculty

The UA has an excellent record of quality assurance procedures and has demonstrated a remarkable ability to change/improve. It is noteworthy to remind that in 2005 it organised an External Evaluation by the EUA, the recommendations of which have been implemented for the further development and modernisation of the Institution. The EEC received consistently the impression that UA is a highly dynamic and evolving environment.

Specific negative points:

1. Very limited infrastructure
2. Insufficient welfare and social services for students
3. Insufficient personnel (academic, administrative, and technical support) and low ratios of faculty members to students and administration members to faculty members
4. Limited financial resources from the state, affecting the general development of the institution
5. Limited influence on decision making on the state level
6. There is a general lack of certified procedural approaches, although it is clear that procedures at the UA are increasingly systematized and formalised.

Suggestions for further development of the positive points:

1. The University should insist on the implementation of its strategic plan despite external adversities.
2. Further emphasize internationalization, intensify and systematise quest for external funding, both from the EU and from the private sector.
3. Capitalize on their assets and good name of the University, its alumni, as well as on its unique geographical location - rebranding.

Suggestions on needed steps for improvement:

The majority of negative points raised in this report, are linked with limitations imposed by the state and the financial situation in Greece. The amendment of these limitations requires to revise the outdated legal framework, allow self-governance, and decrease bureaucracy according to

internationally acceptable standards and practices! This is necessary in order for the UA to achieve its true potential and for the students to succeed in the very competitive international stage.

At the Institution's level, there is room to:

1. Develop a more coherent and intense fund-raising strategy.
2. Develop alternative ways to provide a better framework for student activities and welfare.
3. Move towards the use of certified procedural approaches, and to further systematise and formalise the existing practices. For instance, formal links can be developed between Departments and the stakeholders to gain input on a yearly basis for any changes needed in the academic program, in order to meet the personal and professional needs of the students as well as the needs of a rapidly changing society.

6.1 Final decision of the EEC

Overall Institutional evaluation:

	Tick
Worthy of merit	√
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

The EEC was impressed by the performance and achievements of the UA, especially in terms of innovation, internationalization, research, outreach, both in teaching and research, as well as in terms of management, leadership and strategy. All this is **worthy of merit**.

The Members of the Committee**UNIVERSITY OF AEGEAN**

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