

## **Executive Summary**

The Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), by submitting this self-evaluation report of the Institution for the period 2010-2014, is fulfilling its legal obligation to the Hellenic Quality Assurance & Accreditation Agency (HQAA), following the previous report (2010).

In the framework of its effort to the best possible information of the members of AUTH, MODIP has the obligation to inform the HQAA, but mainly the Administrative Bodies and all the members of AUTH, of some disagreements as to the spirit and the content of the proposed template (received on 29.04.2014). They have already been submitted to the HQAA, in written form (Protocol Number 28250/16-05-2014) and the Administrative Bodies and the Academic Units of the Institution were informed accordingly.

The most important disagreement is associated with HQAA's template, since MODIP considers it more appropriate for a Strategic and Operational Development Plan (SODP) than for a four years Evaluation Report, which MODIP had the obligation to deliver. MODIP and AUTH would have submitted the SODP, if it would have been brought to their knowledge in time and thus they would have had the time to be prepared, to take the necessary steps and to follow the appropriate methodology. Furthermore, most of the issues raised in the template, are defined by the Legislation, as it is evident from the provided answers. There was therefore no reason for these issues to be included in this report.

Beyond any disagreements, MODIP brought to the attention of the HQAA the fact that there were serious practical reasons –at least for the specific period of time- that would make the appropriate completion difficult. The most important reason was the upcoming change of the Rectorate Authorities and a possible redefinition of a four years planning.

Despite the above given facts and within approximately two months, the Secretariat and the Development team of MODIP, as well as the academic and the involved administrative Units of AUTH, put an excessive effort to meet the completion requirements of the template, that was -once again- asking for various quantitative figures and data.

Briefly, MODIP **attempts**, by utilizing data from similar existing studies , to answer the questions asked in the template, despite its desire and obligation to present all the work conducted in AUTH towards quality assurance, during the reported time period. If however, it had acted differently, it would have been impossible to meet the legal obligation of AUTH towards HQAA, according to the under-process template.

The Self-evaluation Report of AUTH consists of the following three parts:

**1<sup>st</sup>: Internal Evaluation Report and Tables Annex – according to HQAA’s template.**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: The External Evaluation at AUTH.**

**3<sup>rd</sup>: Units of the Central Administration, Independent Units and Offices, Committees of AUTH: Mapping the current situation with qualitative data.**

The last two parts are initiatives of MODIP-AUTH –under the freedom for slight adaptation- for reasons of transparency, proper information and accountability. The External Evaluation was completed recently and is very important for AUTH, while the presentation of the current situation with qualitative data in the Central Administration Units, the independent Units and Offices, as well as in some Committees of AUTH, is the first step towards recording, self-awareness, goal-setting, continuous monitoring of the progress and self-improvement of the personnel.

All three parts of the Report are structured in a spirit of honesty and self-awareness, as MODIP believes it must always do, within the framework of its authority, in order to assist the Administrational Bodies and contribute to the improvement of quality in all aspects of AUTH’s activities.

The External Evaluation process began at AUTH in April 2010 and was completed in the February of 2014. A considerable effort has been made to formulate the overall conclusions, which, however, are not sufficient to draw any particular conclusions and take appropriate actions. The Schools of AUTH are positive towards the external evaluation process and consider it very beneficial for their self-awareness and the improvement of the quality of their work, regardless of any specific comments and recommendations made

within a positive spirit and with willingness to contribute towards the improvement of the process. Besides that, they had the chance to comprehend far more problems and advantages beyond the ones that were recorded by the Evaluation Committees..

Most programmes of studies are evaluated from positively to very positively and some of them as excellent, which even surpass the international standards. Similarly positively are evaluated the level of teaching and the effort made by the teaching staff for the education of the students, their results in research and their response to the daily administrative obligations, under the present circumstances of underfunding and lack of support staff.

The administrative services of the Schools' Secretariats to the students and AUTH's electronic services are also positively assessed.

Many proposals are related to good practices of foreign Universities, most of which are not applicable, due to the lack of autonomy of Greek universities and limitations of the institutional framework.

Naturally, there have been various and detailed individual recommendations for each School, which are not negligible for the further improvement of the educational function, of the infrastructure, of the produced research work and the updating of the curricula.

The Schools of AUTH which had the appropriate time, have already implemented most of the recommendations, at least to the extent that was in their responsibility, i.e. changing the curricula, improving the number and quality of their publications, promoting the interdisciplinarity, the extraversion, as well as in their general planning.

A negative conclusion of MODIP-AUTH is that important problems, such as the inadequacy and the need of renewal of several facilities and equipment, the insufficient capacity of the classrooms and so on, which were identified and recorded in the External Evaluations of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle (2010-2012), were also identified in the External Evaluations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle (2013-2014). Although the solution to these problems is a responsibility of the University, it is directly linked to the recommendations made to all the Schools, namely the urgent need for funding increase, the reduction of the number of students

admitted to the Institution and the concomitant increase of teaching and administrative staff.

This is a fact that underlines the reality that everyone in AUTh is already aware of: the problems not only continue to exist, but have deteriorated, even though all the reports were handed to the competent authorities during the past four years.

Some brief comparative data between 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 are worth mentioning (the details are available in the Compendium of the Report and even more detailed in the Tables Annex):

During the last five years, the total number of faculty members decreased by 8.5%, of various teaching staff categories by 22%, of administrative staff by 42%, of laboratory staff by 36%, while the budget has been decreased by 44%. The number of students at the normal period of studies (n+2 years) has been reduced by about 9%, while the total number of registered students is increased by around 8%.

The presentation of the current situation with qualitative data, conducted for the Units of the Central Administration, the Independent Units and Offices and certain Committees of AUTh, demonstrates that the excessively small number of administrative personnel- in relation to the size and the range of AUTh's activities (and in proportion with other Higher Education Institutions)- strongly affects the everyday reality of the Units. However, the personnel cope with their obligations thanks to their skills, dedication and eagerness. The employees are frustrated by the working conditions at the Institution at all levels (continuous staff reductions, lack of financial resources, inadequate facilities, legislation complexity) and fear that the socioeconomic developments will, most likely, worsen the situation.

It should be noted that the staff, definitely, care for the progress and the perspective of the Institution, as well as for their personal training and development. They are greatly concerned and suggest modern ways of improvement in order to meet their obligations, while, at the same time, they set goals and approach their achievement with cautious optimism, by taking advantage of any opportunities that they hope will occur.

The mapping of the current situation by the Units of the Central Administration and by the Committees of AUTH, held at the initiative of MODIP, was welcomed by the officers, since they had the opportunity to record their overall views for the first time.

MODIP regards this mapping as very important and useful, since it can be a significant tool for the governing bodies to understand the situation and believes that it should be extended to all administrative Units of AUTH and conducted systematically, in combination with the goal setting and the continuous monitoring of the achieved progress. In the framework of the establishment of the Quality Assurance System of AUTH, these actions will be designed and implemented carefully, in conjunction with the relevant legislation and the Institution's Strategic Plan.

Finally, the most crucial conclusion that can be drawn from all three parts of the Self-evaluation Report of AUTH, which has consequences for its Faculties and Schools and must concern the Institution in general and especially in view of the obligation to create a Quality Assurance System for all its structures (Law 4009/2011), refers to the repeated remark regarding the strategic planning of the Schools and the Institution, and more specifically: any planning seems to be formulated as response to external stimuli (e.g. change of the legislation) and not as a permanent and established internal procedure; at the same time, we can identify the longitudinal lack of commitment to a strategic plan, comprising specific strategic and tactical objectives, to the implementation of individual strategies and actions, to the continuous monitoring of their achievement and, last, to the revision and the establishment of any corrective measures required.

The External Evaluation of AUTH by EUA (2002), the two Strategic Operational Development Plans (SODP) of AUTH for 2002-2010 and 2006-2015, as well as AUTH's Roadmap (2013), are extremely comprehensive studies the State is aware of (the SODPs were requested and funded by the Ministry). Unfortunately, as it is proved in practice, they have not been taken into consideration by the State and their realization has never started..

After looking through the above studies, it is important to mention that not many things have dramatically changed in the AUTh over these 14 years. The Institution follows with success the overall developments in Higher Education and in new technologies and in the same time has become more extroverted. The strengths of the Institution remain the same, while the weaknesses- that are always associated to the state- are greatly aggravated.

MODIP's proposal –within the responsibilities conferred to it by Law- is the following: The Governing Bodies of AUTh, the Faculties, the Schools and the administrative services should set as a priority, not simply the formulation of an integrated Strategic and Operational Development Plan, with specific strategic objectives and actions (as they are defined in its existing draft Regulation), but its application and implementation.. Simultaneously AUTh should put emphasis on the assurance and the continuous improvement of quality in all its fields of activity, as it should be realized through the establishment of the Internal Quality Assurance System.

AUTh has to aim at the achievement of the above, as soon as possible and by all available means,, by utilizing the –admittedly- capable and high-level personnel of all categories that still has. For this purpose it has full backing of its scientific staff, specialized in various areas, research, administration, services and technologies.

(translation: Kristina Mantasavili)