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HELLENIC REPUBLIC

H.Q.A.

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Department of Visual and Applied Arts
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
22 February, 2014



European Union
European Social Fund



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
MANAGING AUTHORITY

Co-financed by Greece and the European Union



REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The EEC wishes to stress that the presence of the Thessaloniki Department of Visual and Applied Arts is of major importance not only locally and nationally, but also in the broader Balkan area. The Department and School of Fine Arts contribute greatly to the cultural life, economic growth and social cohesion of the region.

1. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION PROCEDURE

Overall, procedures were deemed satisfactory. Yet the External Evaluation Committee (EEC henceforth) would like to note that the Internal Evaluation Report (IER henceforth) was received a week before the *in situ* visit and the online link to the IER was not always accessible.

As regards the *in situ* visit, the EEC henceforth would like to thank the faculty members for their continuous availability and congeniality; also for using private vehicles to transport us across the various sites. The EEC notes that all Faculty made use of PPT presentations, which were made available to us alongside a range of useful data.

18 Feb: Meeting with the Deputy Rector Despo Lialiou introduced the university structures and relevant data, and highlighted the conditions generated as a result of unprecedented funding cuts of the past two years. EEC also met with the Head of Department, the Deputy Head and other staff members. The evaluation team visited Tellogleio Institute as a collaborating institution.

19 Feb: The EEC visited the Department's Administration Office. We note that as a result of the funding cuts the Office has two administrative staff (down from six). Two former staff members, which have been made redundant ('ypo diathesimotita')¹ continue to offer their services full-time on a voluntary basis. The EEC visited Thomas Building (leased building) where the Head of Department presented a PPT on mobility, international collaborations, research, social engagement and impact, and contribution of the Department to Quality Assurance procedures. The EEC visited Painting Studios 2 and 4, the Sculpture Studio, Photography and Video Module site (incorporating impressive analogue photography facilities), Industrial Design

¹ 'Diathesimotita', which means redundancy or suspension of services, is a current issue in Greek public services more widely, due to funding cuts.

Module site, and Digital Imaging Module site. The EEC also visited the Library. Following that, four faculty members (Associate Professors) presented elements of the theoretical aspects of the curriculum.

20 Feb: The EEC visited the Old Themi campus, home to Painting Studios 1, 3, 5, and the Printmaking Studio. Finally, the team had an extremely well-attended meeting with current students and alumni. The day continued with a visit to MMCA [ΜΜΣΤ], with which the School has a long-term collaboration, including the hosting of the Degree Show ('Ptyhiaki') in the Museum's impressive premises in the city centre. Finally the EEC visited the Department's premises in Stavroupoli (leased building), where a number of studios house students on their 4th and 5th years of study.

2. INTERNAL EVALUATION

The Internal Evaluation documents were extremely detailed and, in the EEC's view, they offer an objective description and analysis of relevant issues, as requested by the HQA. Overall, it offers a comprehensive picture of the Department, outlining strengths and weaknesses as well as proposals for future planning. The EEC was positively impressed by the breadth of the information available, the extensive quantitative reports and graphs, and the reflective commentary.

The EEC acknowledges that the Internal Evaluation was conducted in far from ideal conditions as the funding cuts were underway, which made the collation of data particularly difficult. We also wish to stress that the Evaluation procedure does not take into account the specificity of Visual Arts as a discipline – a concern raised in the IER – which however is currently an issue for art schools in Europe at large. We note that the question 4.8 [How would you assess the connection between teaching and research?] received an inadequate response.

The EEC deems that all objectives of the internal assessment have been met by the Department.

A. CURRICULUM

- **Approach** (goals and objectives of the Curriculum, structure and content, intended learning outcomes): A presentation of the goals and objectives of the Curriculum was delivered by the Head of the Department (19.2.14). Those are also included in the IER. However the Programme of Studies Handbook does not include an adequate relevant section. The main objective is that 'the Department serve and advance consistently, and to the best of the faculty's abilities, the causes of

art and culture' (IER, p.4). The IER notes that the Department's goals are met and that there is no need to differentiate from its original goals (p.18). As regards the structure and content, the degree is completed in 10 semesters (5 years). There exist 5 Painting Studios, 1 Sculpture Studio, 1 Printmaking Studio. All other studio-based specialisms on offer constitute Modules and are not formally represented and do not constitute Pathways. English and French are offered as Foreign Languages. Pedagogy courses are mentioned in the Curriculum. The intended learning outcomes are detailed; however, only some Studios differentiate outcomes per semester, to reflect progress throughout the academic year.

- **IMPLEMENTATION** (Rationality, functionality, effectiveness of the Curriculum): The Curriculum is implemented to the extent possible, often with voluntary labour or with labour exceeding contract hours and contractual commitments, despite the debilitating financial constraints of the past two years. We also note: first, the Department is *legally bound* to keep reproducing key aspects of the Curriculum, which makes it inflexible (limiting it to three pathways). Secondly, the 'applied' aspect is not active (with the exception of Industrial Design). Thirdly, the Curriculum requires urgent updating as regards both the represented pathways and the theory courses offered.
- **RESULTS** (Maximising success and potential inhibiting factors): Results differ across Studios, as these are to a great extent autonomous. Inhibiting factors: a) funding cuts b) staff deficit in some relevant specialisms c) legal framework d) working conditions.
- **IMPROVEMENTS** (planned improvement): Overall, the detailed improvement plan (see pp. 125-6 of IER) does not explicitly refer to the Curriculum in terms of content. It proposes improvements with regards to the delivery and infrastructure (e.g. exams) and procedures. However, it includes mention of a doctoral programme and its improvement. The EEC feels that the improvements proposed are relevant and should be supported. Additional recommendations by the Committee will follow.

B. TEACHING

- **APPROACH** (Pedagogic policy and methodology, means and resources): As regards Studio teaching, there is no general pedagogic framework across all studios. Each studio professor/team implements his/their (there are no female Professors) own pedagogic approach. This can be a positive aspect of teaching as it enhances a pluralism of methodologies and approaches and greater flexibility as regards experimental teaching practice. On the other hand, this may prove negative as Studios can be isolated (with few exceptions) and do not benefit from the advances of Education as an evolving discipline. This however depends on governmental policies. As regards

the theory courses, resources are minimal both in terms of human resources and the library. The library lacks specifically contemporary art history and theory material, including online journals. Funding cuts have played a key role here as well.

- **IMPLEMENTATION** (Quality and evaluation of teaching procedures, teaching materials and resources, mobility): There is evidence of mobility, both within Greece and internationally, often but not exclusively through Erasmus (12 EU countries) and bi-lateral agreements with Schools of Fine Arts (Belgrade and Novi-Sad). As regards the theory courses, the staff presentations attended by the EEC did not address issues of teaching methods and procedures. Only some Studios (Photography & Video, Industrial Design, Painting Studio 1) offered students a weekly schedule including focussed content and relevant reading. Students are not offered such material in the form of module Handbooks, which the Committee thinks are essential. Overall, bibliographies require some updating.
- **RESULTS** (Efficacy of teaching, understanding of positive or negative results): The mean average degree classification 8.55/10, which is extremely high. The EEC notes that Assessment is conducted internally, without External Examiners. However, this is standard practice in tertiary education in Greece. The quality of the studio work produced at Degree Show level was deemed high by the EEC.
- **IMPROVEMENT** (Proposed methods for improvement): In discussions of the EEC with Faculty and students, it became clear that the issue of infrastructure and estate improvements is essential for the successful delivery of teaching. Funding cuts have led to the absence of cleaning staff and technical staff, the non-provision of essential materials and issues in Health & Safety that may impede the smooth delivery of teaching. The latter issue was stressed in the meeting with the Students.

C. RESEARCH

NB: We note that research in the visual arts at present is minimally funded by the Greek government or competitively through research councils in Greece. We point to the comments on p.89 of the IER. According to the IER, the Department receives research funding from three internal sources: a) the Departmental Budget, b) the University Budget, c) the University Research Committee. At present the sum received from the University Research Committee is nil. The sum received from other sources is currently insufficient regarding the Department's everyday function and does not stretch to supporting current research.

- **APPROACH** (Research policy and main objectives): As EEC, we infer from the current evidence of research that research focuses on a) social issues, b) the body c) abstraction, d) public art, e) land

art. However, there is no evidence of a research policy document where a coherent approach to and understanding of research could emerge. We stress the need for developing a debate around *what kind* of art production constitutes research in the context of international research practices.

- **IMPLEMENTATION** (Research promotion and assessment, quality of support and infrastructure): All Studio faculty exhibit work (a detailed list is in Appendix 12 of the IER). However *not* all work can be understood as research.
- **RESULTS** (Research projects and collaborations, scientific publications and applied results): It is extremely difficult to evaluate research outputs at present. There are examples of good practice in the Department – for example, Industrial Design. The latter succeeded in procuring 90% research income, as well as awards. As regards the theory Faculty, there exist a number of peer-reviewed publications, although only a few in international contexts. We note the general absence of single-authored books by theory faculty at the level of associate professorship. See p. 171 of IER.
- **IMPROVEMENT** (Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement): The issue raised in the Internal Evaluation is the urgent need for research funding. The EEC agrees on that point. Yet we further recommend that the Faculty deepen their awareness of current international debates on the connection between research and artistic production and display. We also suggest to the theory faculty to pursue publications in peer reviewed journals of international standing and more single authored studies of relevance to a national and international academic community. Finally, the theory and Studio faculty in the Department to pursue collaborative research projects across their disciplines. This is essential for updating the Departmental research structures.

D. ALL OTHER SERVICES

- **APPROACH** (Quality and effectiveness of services provided by the Department): The Department clarifies in the IER that the administrative services are inadequate. The EEC would like to commend the administrative staff for their dedication and the level of services they offer despite the funding cuts.
- **IMPLEMENTATION** (Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department)): As far as the EEC could see, all services have been severely compromised in the past two years as a result of the funding cuts. 895 undergraduate students and 35 doctoral candidates (2012-13, see Appendix 'Επικαιροποίηση', p.6) are serviced by just two administrators. The provision of administrative service is clearly inadequate.
- **RESULTS** (Adequateness and functionality of administrative and other services): Results are obviously not satisfactory. All auxiliary/support services need to be supported by additional staff.

- **IMPROVEMENTS** (Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement): The most urgent improvement is the provision of funding for the hiring of cleaning staff and the provision of health services. Despite the mention of such provision, the EEC established through its meeting with students that access to this provision is extremely hard. Students are also deprived of the free meals, which they are entitled to.

E. STRATEGIC PLANNING, PERSPECTIVES FOR AND DEALING WITH POTENTIAL INHIBITING FACTORS (Short-, medium- and long-term goals and plans of action proposed by the Department).

There is a clearly articulated plan as regards the goals set by the Department. Among those, we support in particular the following:

Short-term goals: ALL (see p.125)

Mid-term goals: ALL, and in particular the goal of bringing all services of the Department in shared or neighbouring premises (see pp. 125-26). The EEC does not consider the provision of a Departmental Gallery a priority.

Long-term goals: None mentioned in the IER.

The EEC commends Faculty and students for their perseverance and for effectively running the Department and producing work with minimal resources. In considering how the Department deals with inhibiting factors, there is action on a practical level to address everyday issues as they arise. Faculty and students routinely clean the premises themselves, including the toilets. Staff re-deploy disused equipment and furniture from other departments. Students buy themselves some of their basic materials (pigments etc.), though they still receive the free textbooks. Effectively, to reach most of the premises one must have access to a private vehicle. Because of the rigid legal framework however, it is virtually impossible for the Department to develop a formal plan to deal with existent inhibiting factors.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organisations

The Committee was impressed by the Department's continuous and intensive engagement with a range of social, cultural and production organisations. Some indicative examples include The Tellogleion Institute, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (both of which the Committee visited and met representatives of) Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, Print-making Centre Hlios (Sun), the Social Policy Committee of the Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki, the art journal *Ta Nea tis Tehnis* (Art News) which organises the Biennale of Schools of Fine Art and many more (IER, p. 99). The Department also works closely with local schools and several Municipalities.

The percentage of students taking part in collaborative actions with social and cultural organisations is deemed adequate (approximately 1/8 of the overall student population). The Committee would like to see a greater percentage of the student population partaking in such collaborations at least once in the duration of their degree. This could be a formal requirement of the degree. Nevertheless, the Committee would like to highlight the personal effort and added workload such collaborations entail and to commend the Faculty for implementing the vast range of existing collaborations and demonstrating a desire to further develop the Department's outreach and social engagement.

F. FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EEC (on the development and present situation of the Department, good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process, recommendations for improvement).

Good Practices

We commend:

- The Department's continuous and intensive initiatives for social engagement.
- Impact on urban environment, the cultural sector (galleries, museum), local and regional economic growth, secondary education.
- International mobility and academic collaborations.
- Staff initiatives for creative solutions to inhibitive factors as they arise, especially in regards to problems caused by the funding cuts.
- Staff dedication to their service and personal investment in their academic practice.
- Effort to communicate and disseminate the Department's cultural practices and production in society.
- Excellent prospects of collaboration and cross-fertilisation between the Department of Visual Arts and the other Departments (Drama, Music, Film) in the School, which is the largest in the Balkans.

Weaknesses

- The Department is housed in several locations across the city and its suburbs, a serious impediment to the smooth function of the Department at large.
- Lack of funding and resources cause major issues to the day-by-day function of the Department, such as lack of technical support, lack of materials and life models, problematic and even

dangerous working conditions due to lack of heating, air-conditioning (e.g. in Print-making studios where acids are being used), cleaning, etc.

- The Programme of Study has numerous gaps and was deemed dated: this is, in principle, an outcome of the rigid legal framework that does not allow it to follow current international developments in a timely manner.
- Structure of the Department: a) comparatively small visibility of the existent pathways of Sculpture and Print-making, b) the division of the Department into separate Studios, each (informally) identified with the Professor in charge rather than the Studio's specific artistic approach and direction. We stress that the rigid legal framework prevents the Department from growing in a currently relevant direction (e.g. autonomous digital technologies and new media pathway), despite the efforts of the Department in this direction. Due to Applied Arts being non-active (apart from the module of Industrial Design), the Department's title does not represent its structure and offering at present.
- The Department currently offers a PhD programme, which requires some improvement: students are not offered the option of practice-as-research, there is a lack of methodological seminars, postgraduate training, and dedicated postgraduate infrastructure. The Department is aware of those weaknesses (IER) and is planning to update the programme.
- The EEC observed a lack of clarity and understanding regarding research, both in terms of artistic practice as research, and in terms of valid theoretical research outputs (e.g. peer reviewed outputs). This lack of clarity, especially regarding practice as research, is not particular to the Department, as the specific methodologies of this type of research output have not yet been acknowledged by relevant Hellenic governmental agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-term

- The EEC observed major issues of malfunctioning in the Department, which are caused by the recent funding cuts. Those affect every aspect of the Department's everyday function, including administration, teaching delivery, mobility, growth, and research, and poses health and safety issues to students and staff. The EEC wants to commend the Faculty's heroic efforts to preserve the Department's operability and good practices despite the unacceptable working conditions, and stresses the need for urgent funding of certain priority areas, such as: cleaning, heating, consumables, student transport (due to the School's distributed premises), student subsistence

(for example, in decentralised campuses in Thermi), maintenance of studio spaces and equipment, and adequate technical and administrative personnel.

- The provision of a written Research Policy Document where the Department (the Faculty members) outline the Department's policy in terms of a) personal research b) collaborative research.
- The EEC suggests that students submit a theoretically informed reflective account alongside their artistic practice for their dissertation.
- The theoretical aspect of the programme is dated: the EEC recommends that the offering is reconsidered, focused and updated, with an emphasis on current (post-2000) artistic developments, following internationally accepted good practices.
- The student group met by the EEC expressed a concern regarding lack of awareness of practices other than painting at the point of their admission to the Department. Some students suggested that the first year of studies could familiarise students with the various directions of by the Department, and the EEC supports those student recommendations.
- The student group met by the EEC said that they do not currently have access to the pedagogic modules and the two out of four foreign languages stated in their Programme Handbook. The EEC recommends that the Programme Handbook accurately reflect the current offering (ideally protecting all areas currently mentioned).
- Invite and engage the full range of arts professionals (e.g. curators, critics and so on) to the Studios to discuss student work in progress).

Mid-term

- Funding for additional premises and resources (including equipment and human resources) according to the Department's proposed plan (see p. 126 of IE).
- The activation and expansion of the Applied Arts part of the Department, which may also generate revenue.
- The introduction of a Digital Media pathway.
- The student group requested more information regarding current international opportunities for mobility and employability (e.g. residencies, exhibition invitations, postgraduate programmes, scholarships). The EEC is fully aware of the Department's inability to respond to this request at present but supports its nonetheless.
- The theory PhD degree should be supported by a Research Methods module (at least a semester long) delivered by expert staff.

- Research should be aligned to the written Research Policy Document (see short-term recommendations above).

Long-term

- Adequate sustained funding to meet the Department's expanding and developing needs *in teaching and research* in a competitive international context.
- The Department to be housed in appropriate and shared premises, covering needs at undergraduate and postgraduate level.
- A re-conceptualised and expertly delivered Curriculum to a) reflect the title, b) meet the current requirements of the disciplines represented by the Department, c) respond to the needs of contemporary society.

Conclusion

Though the Department needs to address certain issues relating to its function, curriculum, teaching delivery and research, the EEC wants to reiterate its importance as an asset locally, for the Greek education sector, and internationally, especially in the Balkan region. The EEC commends the commitment and devotion of both Faculty and students who are together striving for the Department's survival within the current adverse conditions.

External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Visual and Applied Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. _____ (President)
(Title) (Name and Surname)

(Institution of origin)

2. _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

(Institution of origin)

3. _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

(Institution of origin)

4. _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

(Institution of origin)

5. _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

(Institution of origin)