ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ

ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ

ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE

AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY

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1. EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the University of Thessaly (UTH), Greece, 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 Constantine Passaris (Coordinator)
   University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

2. Professor and Associate Dean Tala Awada
   University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA

3. Professor Christos Christopoulos
   University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom

4. Professor Joseph Joseph
   University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

5. Mr. Rodios Gamvros
   Scientific Committee to Hellenic Food Industry Association, Athens, Greece

N.B. The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; the Committee's reply to those questions is meant to provide a general outline of issues that need to be addressed.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the University of Thessaly (UTH hereafter) on four consecutive days, from 7-10 December 2015, and worked on preparing its External Evaluation Report (Report hereinafter) through Friday, 11 December 2015. The on-site visit included visits to the campuses of the UTH in Volos, Trikala and Larissa. Specifically, EEC visited the School of Physical Education and Sport Science in Trikala, School of Health Sciences in Larissa, The City Museum, The Library, and The Research Office. The EEC scheduled visits to the School of Engineering, and School of Agriculture Sciences were cut short due to a student demonstration. Nevertheless, the UTH administration arranged for offsite meetings with various academic committees and representatives from these Schools.

The EEC had the opportunity to meet, visit and interact with the President and Members of the Administrative Council, the Rector, the Vice-Rectors, the Deans of all Faculties, the Heads of Faculties, the Chair and Members of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, and a good number of faculty members. The meetings included presentations, discussions, and question and answer sessions. The EEC also had the opportunity to talk with undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows, alumni, heads of administrative units, representatives of the administrative staff and external partners.

The UTH administration made available to the EEC The Internal Evaluation Report (IER) of the Institution, and samples of departmental review report and accomplishments. The IER was shared with the EEC electronically well in advance (October 2015) and consisted of five parts which included general information and statistics covering the following areas: Overview of the Institution; Internal Assurance System; Operation of the Central Administration; Information and statistics about Departments; Structure, procedure, forms and guidelines for implementing the Internal Quality Assurance System. Additional materials were made available to the EEC during the on-site visit.

The EEC, was highly impressed by the positive welcome and environment at

UTH, the organization of the visit, and the dedication of UTH community and administration to the mission of the institution and excellence despite the current challenges and severe budget cuts that are facing Greek Universities. The UTH (Central Administration, Faculties, Departments and administrative services) did a diligent work in preparing the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and other materials. The efficiency of UTH community and eagerness to accommodate requests and provide information were remarkable. The EEC wishes to express its thanks and appreciation to UTH for the co-operation and professionalism shown by the academic staff, the administration team and Rector.

The EEC Report is based on information shared during the on-site visit, discussions with UTH representatives, as well as information contained in the IER and other documents submitted during the visit.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

2.2 The Self-Evaluation Procedure

The EEC had the opportunity to study and evaluate the SER and other shared materials. The SER, a 208-page document contained very useful information about the University and its performance. The sources of documentation used to prepare the SER were adequate and gave an accurate description of the UTH. The documentation included extensive reports and statistics on faculty, research grants and expenditures, students (entering, enrolled, active and graduating), and

administrative personnel as well as on actions and activities by academic and administrative Faculties, and services. It also provided information on the actions, activities in the areas of teaching, scholarly output, research expenditures and grants, university engagement and outreach.

The self-evaluation procedure followed by the UTH was comprehensive, interactive, efficient and successful. To a great extent, the objectives of the internal evaluation procedure were met. That said, the EEC would have benefited from information and data on the range of indicators (max, min, and median), in additional to averages or totals that were provided, to get a better sense of the variability within and across Faculties. Additionally, while the institution provided a set of well-defined goals, measurable outcomes and impacts oriented implementation plans and timetables were not clear.

Some of the sources of difficulties for the performance of the UTH, including self-evaluation, stem from the ever-changing legislative framework concerning higher education in Greece and the current economic crisis in the country. The rigid legal framework impedes the efficient operation of Universities, however, where the law does not specifically forbids it, there is considerable scope for setting up well-structured bodies and interactions with stakeholders and between operating units within the UTH to optimize resources and enhance efficiency to help UTH realize its mission.

The UTH has embraced the task of self-evaluation with energy and enthusiasm. The EEC acknowledges that the self-evaluation process has become a conduit for improvement and coping with the challenges facing UTH.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.2):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3. PROFILE OF THE UTH UNDER EVALUATION

3.1 Institutional Governance, Leadership & Strategy

Please comment on:

3.1.1 Vision, mission and goals of the UTH

The main mission of the University of Thessaly as reported in their mission statement, is the promotion of scientific knowledge through research and the contribution to the cultural and economic development of the local community and wider society, and to be known for its excellence in research performance and outstanding scientific achievements, in accordance with the international standards.

The Rector and his leadership team have presented to the EEC with a draft strategic plan for UTH, the final document has been shared with UTH administrators for feedback, but has not yet been approved or widely circulated.

The Administrative Council also shared with the EEC their proposed strategic plan prepared in March 11, 2014. These goals were well aligned with the draft plan that was shared by the Rector.

The goals of the UTH as reported in the draft document of February 25, 2015 and presented by the Rector consist of:

1. More effective administrative structure

2. Academic reorganization and development

3. Structure and equipment

4. Research and excellence

5. Strengthening of international relations

6. Improvements to teaching procedures, strengthening of students' creativity and enhancing employment opportunities

7. Outreach and links with society and economy

8. Enhance management of the university assets

9. Work towards a more effective collaboration with the ministry of education

In the course of the oral presentations and discussion with the EEC, the different Faculties and schools presented to the EEC with their vision, strategy, and goals in

conformity with their academic mission. The EEC finds that they are compatible with the Institutional mission.

Having a common vision, and strategy facilitate action plan for implementation and create positive synergies. The implementation plan is a work in progress. The EEC emphasizes the urgency to develop these plans with measurable outcome and impact oriented goals.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.1):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.2 Organizational Development Strategy

The organization of the administrative structure needs to be re-evaluated to reflect the UTH proposed vision and goals and the financial climate in country.

The administrative Council presented to the EEC their proposed short-term goals, but implementation plan needs to be further developed and defined. The EEC emphasizes the urgency to develop this plan with measurable outcomes and impact oriented goals and a timetable.

The EEC is of the opinion that while the individual Faculties and schools tend to be proactive, the administrative body needs to take a more proactive role in setting the overall goals and measureable outcomes for the Institution as a whole.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.2):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	x
Negative evaluation	

3.1.3 Academic Development Strategy

During the EEC's visit with the Faculties, we received evidence that the UTH is very responsive to Faculties' needs. The EEC recommends that the administration put more effort in place to set short and long-term goals and timetables under the various State funding scenarios of the Institution to accomplish sustainability and growth under the current financial crisis and budget cuts.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.3):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.4 Research Strategy

The University of Thessaly demonstrates a very good rating in research output, interdisciplinary collaborations and national and international recognitions, despite

its short history and funding climate. Research activities are coordinated by a central ISO certified administrative team (Research Committee) that manages research surpluses. It has developed several tools to encourage research team formations and collaborations, by providing small grants to junior researchers, seminars on proposals preparation, and assistance in proposals preparation, etc.

During individual interviews we identified a gap in communication of these initiatives as several faculty members were not aware of some of the services provided by UTH to promote research excellence. As a result, the number of research faculty who actively participate in research grants is slightly above 50% of the total. The EEC believes that the number can increase with increased efforts by UTH. On the other hand, the EEC was impressed by the efforts and determination of faculty to advance their research.

The Research Committee and Research Office at UTH have played an important role in terms of the services they provide during the post award stage.

More effort should be put in developing a proactive strategy to promote and facilitate the formation of new interdisciplinary research teams and strengthening existing ones in key anticipated areas of research.

In order to meet the university goals, further efforts are required to coordinate the research activities. In this respect, the central administration can play a leading role in facilitating this.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.4):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.5 Financial Strategy

The UTH, similar to all Greek universities, depends on State funding for operation, which has been severely cut. Current UTH strategy has been geared toward filling in some of the critical gaps created by this cut to maintain some of the critical

functions of the Institution, and does not follow a long-term strategy, vital for university sustainability and growth.

In the past, SARF (Special Account for Research Funds) funds were used to reinvest in research through the support of new faculty, research teams, and infrastructure. Due to budget cuts, these funds have been mostly used to cover basic daily operational expenses, which has negatively impacted the ability of the Institution to support research investments.

The Rector is being proactive in seeking multiple alternative sources such as EU funds to support much needed improvements to existing and new infrastructure. The EEC applauds this major effort.

The university needs to continue to develop a long-term alternative funding sources to meet its targets, e.g. through research or externally funded projects.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.5):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.6 Building and Grounds Infrastructure Strategy

The university has a well-developed plan to grow and improve infrastructure. However, budget cuts have put a halt on several of these activities.

Despite these cuts, UTH has managed to sufficiently cover its needs in buildings and land. This is mainly achieved through close support from local stakeholders such as municipalities, and Region of Thessaly that have a strong appreciation for the services of the University and in return support its efforts through land donations and other activities. UTH has also explored a possibility of low interest loans through the European Investment Bank.

Overall, the EEC is satisfied with the existing facilities, however several Faculties are facing space challenges including classroom and laboratory spaces, student residential facilities are absent, etc. The UTH has clear plans to improve its

infrastructure but the major obstacle remains the availability of funds.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.6):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Justify your rating (optional):

3.1.7 Environmental Strategy

The Institution environmental strategy is work in progress. The UTH has an environmental plan, however the implementation of these plans, is obstructed by cost and the approval process of the government. This needs a government intervention to incorporate green measures into the current requirements of new construction and refitting existing ones. Green measures can be best implemented during the tendering process. The UTH could aim at raising more awareness on environmental issues.

Despite these challenges, UTH has taken steps to promote and implement recycling on campus, and has facilities on two sites to deal with dangerous waste management. The EEC recommends that the UTH designates a person or a committee to oversee and evaluate laboratories and safety procedures across all campuses.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.7):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x

Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Justify your rating (optional):

The reason the university received a worthy of merit evaluation is because despite all the challenges it continues to promote environmental stewardship.

3.1.8 Social Strategy

UTH is clearly and strongly engaged with the local and regional communities, through several service and outreach activities in the various Schools and Faculties on campus. These include but are not limited to:

- Participation in setting and justifying regional innovation development plans (RIS3)

- Participation in municipality initiatives (Trikala)

- Participation in municipality studies on development (Volos)

- Participation and assistance on cultural initiatives (City Museum of Volos)

- Source of science based information though faculty outreach and service initiatives

The EEC was also impressed with the external stakeholders who attended a meeting during the onsite visit, particularly with their strong support of the University and their willingness to help during these challenging times. The EEC believes that UTH should continue to capitalize and strengthen external engagement and partnership with stakeholders to secure additional resources for

targeted new initiatives and meet the needs of the community.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.8):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.9 Internationalization Strategy

UTH has put several internationalization (globalization) efforts and practices in place across all its activities. The Institution has taken advantage of the Erasmus program, and has developed several joint academic educational and research programs with international academic and non-academic institutions.

The EEC was also impressed with the feedback they received from international students on campus, especially the personal support they receive from academic mentors. Faculty in various Schools, departments and campuses have been successful in leading and participating in EU projects with partners from across Europe and beyond.

The EEC regards global engagement and citizenship as a key to the success of a modern university and graduates, therefore we recommend that UTH continues to seek the acquisition of funds to support Greek students' efforts to study abroad.

The University of Thessaly is uniquely positioned to provide online courses and distance learning and certification to students around the world, especially students who wish to register for courses in Greek culture and heritage as well as other academic fields. These activities will provide future sources of revenue to UTH.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.9):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.1.10 Student Welfare Strategy

UTH recognizes the need for student hostels, student unions and sport facilities, on the various campuses. In some cases the land and plans are available. However, funding has not been secured to implement these plans. Students take advantage of municipal sport facilities to engage in activities and team sports.

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences provide support to students with special needs.

Meal plans are available to students who qualify.

The EEC applauds UTH's continuing efforts to address the welfare of the students and recommends that administration continues to seek new innovative partnerships to realize its goals in this area, e.g., joint facilities with the municipal authorities.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.10):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2 Strategy for Study Programmes

3.2.1 Programmes of Undergraduate Studies (first cycle)

One of the major accomplishments of UTH in response to individual departmental reviews that have taken place in recent years, is the serious evaluation and revisions of their offered programs of study. They have been successful in consolidating and reducing the total number of modules required by students to be in accordance with international norms and European requirements.

There is an effective process for collecting data from students on the quality of modules and the effectiveness of the instructor. Results are analysed and appropriate action is taken although this process is not consistent across Faculties, and results are not always communicated to students. The EEC recommends that guidance is given to all instructors and students about the process and value of these evaluations and actions taken "closing the loop" to advance the quality of the instruction. This practice will help increase students participation in the evaluation process which at present is patchy and low.

The EEC was impressed by the accessibility of the instructors (open door policy) and their willingness to help and mentor students. This was repeatedly communicated by students the EEC was able to meet with.

Students are required to attend laboratory-based classes. Attendance at lectures is not compulsory, with modest average rates of attendance, but there is a range of materials available electronically for self-study and also course work where appropriate. In some Faculties there are pre-requisites and/or a minimum number of passes for progression, but this is not universal. Faculties should use such tools

and also support students (e.g. through the tutorial system recently established) to encourage course completion within normal time.

Faculty/student ratios are high and unequally spread across Faculties. This needs balancing as resources permit.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.2.1):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2.2 Programmes of Postgraduate Studies (second cycle)

The UTH has a fair number of postgraduate courses in all Faculties. A strong point is the international character of many of these courses and programs. Several are run jointly with Universities abroad and a small number are taught in a foreign language (English, French). The EEC encourages the University to continue to enhance its international footprint in post graduate programmes. The EEC observed specific examples of actions taken to improve post-graduate courses as a result of suggestions from the external departmental evaluation committees. Several foreign students are attending courses and the EEC was able to meet some of them and confirm that they receive appropriate support from staff at all levels. The same comments and suggestions apply with regards "closing the loop" as in section 3.2.1.

The linkage of postgraduate courses to market needs is not always documented although evidence of interaction with stakeholders was presented. This process however needs to be deepened further and also be implemented on a more regular and structured basis. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the availability, in the central web pages of the University, of succinct descriptions of the teaching, learning, research and consultation activities of UTH, in a layman language accessible to the general public will further enhance involvement of stakeholders with the University.

Due to the current financial crisis, and to promote and foster interdisciplinary

research and teaching activities, UTH should continue to encourage and facilitate more sharing of modules across Faculties and in making it easier for students to attend modules and receive credit outside their home Department.

As above, the major strength is the quality, enthusiasm and accessibility of faculty at UTH, confirmed by students in all our discussions.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (& 3.2.2):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

3.2.3 Programmes of Doctoral Studies (third cycle)

All Faculties have doctoral students who are engaged in research that conforms to international standards. Supervision and mentoring arrangements appear to be effective. The doctoral students undergo a mid-term review, as well as regular checks to support help students develop professionally and address challenges. Graduation requires at least two peer-reviewed publications that meet international standards. Completion time varies within and among departments, depending on the disciplinary needs and financial support of student (due to limited internal and grants funding that aim at supporting students, several are effectively part-timers). Financial support of students is available through research grants, but only a limited number can be supported. Several projects are linked to industrial needs and this encourages linkage with regional and national stakeholders. The EEC recommends that faculty continue to seek research grants, and to explore new venues for funding, like partnership with the Industry and other entities. Areas of improvements are the involvement of new and/ or non-research-active faculty in existing research teams and a more pro-active approach to funding. This will enhance the capacity of Faculties to secure more research funding.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (& 3.2.3):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Justify your rating (optional):

3.3 Profile of the Institution under evaluation - *Conclusions and recommendations*

Please complete the following sections regarding the overall **profile of the Institution under evaluation**:

- *Underline specific positive points*:

The EEC applauds the efforts of the University of Thessaly for implementing recommendations from the last external Departmental reviews and was impressed with the positive, collegial and receptive environment within which the current external Institutional evaluation took place.

Overall, the UTH strives for academic excellence within an inadequately funded public university system. It is commended for responding proactively to severe budget cuts and State laws and policies. It is continuously and constructively discussing ways and searching for means to cope with these challenges and successfully serve its mission.

The faculty is generally highly qualified with international training or background, and enthusiastic and dedicated to the mission of the Institution. It is noted that several faculty members are being aggressive and proactive in seeking external grants and in participating in or leading European research teams to increase research expenditure and support infrastructure. Along the same lines, it is noted that, although the instructor/student ratio is quite high and some facilities are not adequate, the enthusiasm and dedication of faculty members keeps the quality of

teaching at high standards.

Active registered students including those in first, second and third cycle, are committed to their studies and programmes, and seem to be satisfied with the education they are receiving.

The Academic Programmes are updated and appropriately designed to serve the mission of the Institution according to international standards and societal needs. The faculty follows widely used pedagogical practices and instructional methods in teaching.

There is a healthy research culture among faculty and doctoral students who display enthusiasm and dedication.

UTH has an international orientation, especially when it comes to research and education standards. The Institution also participates in international programmes, events and activities, and support faculty requests for sabbatical leave.

Administrative support is efficient and satisfactory under the circumstances, but modernizing and enhancing facilities will assure the continued offering of quality services and the ability to meet effectively the needs of the UTH.

In terms of general environment, the University offers satisfactory services to the students and the staff.

- *Underline specific negative points*:

Severe budget cuts, State bureaucracy and outdated (and ever-changing) laws and regulations are main sources of difficulties for the UTH and other Greek Institutions. UTH cannot be held responsible for the negative consequences of these challenges, which is negatively impacting sustainability and growth of the Institution, and retention of its faculty.

The spread of the UTH over five different locations (towns) creates challenges for the creation of an integrated academic community and the overall functioning of the Institution and its academic and administrative units.

The increasing number of non-active students connected to the financial crisis of the country is a growing problem.

There is no formal established policy and efforts across campuses for broadening and improving teaching and research skills, especially for new faculty.

- *Make your suggestions for further development of the positive points*:

The EEC suggests that UTH continues to adopt good practices, while maintaining and strengthening the process of internal self-evaluation, especially on critical

issues of quality assurance.

The University should adopt a strategic plan and overall coherent policy for maximizing its full potential and further enhancing research quality and output. It is in a position for doing so, given the motivation, enthusiasm, excellent academic credentials, and international orientation of its faculty.

Efforts to streamline administrative services, especially through electronic means, should be a priority. In this regard, a general policy should be formulated to move in the direction of expanding digital capabilities.

Serious effort should be directed at further exploring prospects for funding and other support for research and the University at large. Innovative ways for securing funding should be explored and efforts intensified, especially in the direction of European programs and industry, but not exclusively. This process requires coordinated and concerted efforts not only within Departments and Schools, but also at the Institution level.

Introduce structured observation of teaching by colleagues or expert individuals. Once a year, each instructor is observed during a regular lecture for one of their classes, with feedback provided to faculty on positive and needed improvements. This should be done in a collegial environment. Only a record of the date of this discussion is kept without any further details. More precisely, the EEC suggests that the details of the discussion between the instructor and the observer should not be recorded.

- *Make your suggestions on needed steps for improvement*:

Renewing, updating and utilizing IT are constant challenges that the University has to meet, although available resources are extremely limited.

A systematic and continuous compilation and dissemination of information on all aspects of the University's activities are recommended. Some of these suggestions include the re-evaluation of the University's and individual Faculties' webpages to address the needs of its appropriate stakeholders, effective communication through electronic newsletters university highlights in research, teaching and outreach activities.

The EEC is cognizant of the financial constraints faced by the Greek government due to the current fiscal crisis. However, it would like to underline the important role that human capital and educated human resources will play in the Greek economic recovery and in achieving a level of sustainable economic development for Greece in the foreseeable future. In consequence, the public funding of Greek universities and in particular the University of Thessaly should become a strategic investment and a financial priority.

The EEC recognizes that the University of Thessaly faces unique challenges that

require innovative solutions particularly because it is situated on five campuses in five different cities. Some suggestions for improvements include, facilitating transportation between campuses, access to all UTH students to the sport facilities at Trikala, research day every year to bring faculty together form across campus, facilitate face to face interactions between faculty from different campuses, etc.

4. INTERNAL SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

4.1 Quality Assurance (QA) Policy and Strategy

The UTH is going through a transitional phase with several improvements and integration efforts in response to QA requirements. The Council and the Rector office identified nine strategic steps to move forward research, teaching, outreach and engagement efforts to enable UTH to better compete with other academic Institutions on a national and international levels. The Council and Rector office have identified short-term university priorities to implement, despite the negative political and financial pressures on academic Institutions in Greece. These include implementation of strategic plans; re-evaluation of UTH mission, goals and procedures; development of fund raising strategies; evaluation of existing promotion and tenure policies; and improvements to the education systems and university engagement.

It is important at this stage to develop a list of measurable objectives and plans on how to best implement these strategic plans, and engage the university community in the discussion. It is important to have a buy-in from the various units and stakeholders. The plans are now being shared with the various Departments and Schools and we recommend that Departments, students and stakeholders be involved in the process.

UTH is taking positive steps in addressing the QA policy, and we recommend that UTH and the Council develop a timeline for implementation of the various steps and perform annual self- evaluation for progress or needs for change. The software that was developed to collect information pertaining to research and education is functioning and faculty are required to enter their information related to projects, peer reviewed publications and students evaluations in the system. There is room for improvement in the system related to non-funded proposals submission, outreach efforts, and university engagement.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.1):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

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

There are on-going efforts to improve the design and implementation of Departmental evaluation. These efforts have been mainly led by individual Departments and Schools (bottom up approach), thus the policy and process varies between Schools. The EEC was impressed by the level of dedication of the various Schools to implement the recommendations from QA programs review that took place in the past five years. Units have reduced total credits to be aligned with international norms, and reviewed and consolidated majors when applicable.

There needs to be clear procedures and policy development by the University committee that oversees the process and there has to be an evaluation of the performance and progress of the various Schools on an annual basis. Students' participation in faculty evaluation remains modest (<30% on average). There needs to be a specific set of measurable goals and implementation plans to increase students' participation at all levels. That said, the EEC committee was impressed by the faculty and their willingness to help and mentor students. This was observed in all colleges. Students mentioned the open door policy, openness of the faculty to receiving feedback in classes, dedication of faculty, and the quality of education they receive at UTH.

All Schools and Departments have international plans, with regard to students exchange in the Erasmus program. There needs to be more flexibility with the programs outside those that have a MOU with UTH to recognize credits.

The EEC recommends that UTH continue to spread best practices across all

Departments and Schools.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.2):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.3 Teaching and learning - Assessment by students

All Schools and Departments use modern technologies in classroom teaching. It was clear to the EEC that UTH offers a very positive learning environment. Students praised the faculty open door policy, the help they provide on a personal and professional level, and the mentoring of students. There needs to be a better effort to deal with redundancies in the various programs, increase efficiency and extend instructional opportunities to incorporate more online and hybrid courses. This may increase class participation and effectiveness of knowledge transfer.

Departments and instructors need to better communicate with students the justification and value of class evaluation especially the value of "closing the loop". Departments and Schools vary in their method of implementing class and faculty evaluations and their use of data collected. University has to develop an overarching policy and provide guidance with regard to development, implementation and response to these evaluations.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.3):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.4 Admission of students, progression and recognition of studies

UTH has little flexibility with regard to undergraduate students admission. Various programs have been required by the State to admit over 50% of their maximum capacity, which has created several challenges related to classroom and lab space, organization of hands-on activities and projects and laboratory sessions. Due to severe budget cuts, there is shortage of both operation funds and personnel. The situation is not sustainable and will eventually impact the momentum of the UTH and the quality of education, and faculty retention.

Departments and Schools have been successful in changing the total number of credits requirement to comply with national and European standards. Most programs require internship experience and students receive credit for such activities. Learning objectives and expected outcomes for each module are shared with students in the various Departments that were visited by the EEC.

The new UTH software offers an opportunity to collect students' data. University has to take advantage of this to evaluate students' performance and needs for change. The software can also be tooled to evaluate students learning outcome and progress to address.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.4):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.5 Quality Assurance as regards the teaching staff

Departments vary in their level of opportunities and services they offer to their faculty for professional growth and development. The EEC is of the opinion that greater efforts for coordinated and standardized strategies are needed across campus. In this respect we recommend that the University uses resources and experts from the Humanities and Social Sciences to establish such programs.

Faculty and Departments that were visited by EEC, showed a clear science based and innovative approaches to delivering classroom materials in terms of method and content. Feedback to faculty varies between units.

UTH needs to develop guidelines and procedure, and make existing procedures available to students and faculty with regard to instructor evaluation.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.5):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	

Negative evaluation	

4.6 Learning resources and student support

The EEC was impressed with the support and recognition of the hard work of Faculty and staff to serve students and to deliver science based and up to date educational programs using modern technologies and face to face instructions (see previous sections for examples).

The library is well established and contains large collection of books, reports and peer-reviewed journals to aid the University community accomplish their learning and research goals. More Library study places are needed.

Lectures and notes are posted online and are available to students. More computer working access points are needed.

Senior and graduate students play an important role as well in mentoring students.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.6):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.7 Information Systems for Recording and Analysing Data and Indicators

UTH is serious about the implementation of the software that they have developed.

There have been clear and serious efforts to encourage Departments and Schools to enter their information and collect academic data.

We recommend that UTH develops and implements action plans with measurable goals and outcomes in their efforts to analyse their data in order to extract more in depth information of importance to the operation of the university with regard to student learning, research and engagement.

It appears that some of this information originates from paper-based questionnaires, but this clearly consumes staff time to process further. The UTH should look at having all such information entered online.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.7):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.8 Dissemination of information to stakeholders

The UTH has a webpage that highlights the organizational structure, Schools, Departments and educational programs in Greek and English. Faculty also have individual webpages. Departmental and faculty webpages vary greatly with their content, i.e., some have highlighted and provided up to date information on classes taught, research objectives, grants, publications, and engagement efforts, while others have provided minimal information. The UTH webpage as a whole needs to be revamped, and content re-evaluated to target stakeholders and highlight accomplishments and events lead by faculty and university.

With regard to UTH's outreach and engagement efforts the EEC recommends the implementation of new initiatives in two areas. First, that the University needs to step up its efforts to reach alumni and stakeholders, through regular Newsletters,

social media, and other means, targeted to provide information about current initiatives and challenges. Second, the EEC was favourably impressed with the external stakeholders that attended a meeting during our onsite visit and particularly with their willingness to help during these challenging times. The EEC believes that the external stakeholders can be more involved to provide future financial and in kind support for certain targeted high priority initiatives.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.8):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	x
Negative evaluation	

4.9 Continuous monitoring and periodic review of the study programmes

Departments and Schools have been responsive to programs review and have taken steps to address the challenges within their capabilities under the current financial crisis. As stated in previous sections, UTH has been successful in changing the total number of credits requirement to comply with national and European standards. Learning objectives and expected outcomes for each module are shared with students in the various Departments that were visited by the EEC. We recommend that evaluation of these changes and their impacts on learning outcomes should be followed on a regular basis and changes be made when needed to continue to meet the current and future challenges facing UTH, promote critical thinking, and address students' needs to keep them competitive in the job market.

The new UTH software offers an opportunity to collect students' data. UTH can take advantage of this to evaluate students' performance and needs for change. The software can also be tooled to evaluate students learning outcome and progress to address.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.9):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.10 Periodic external evaluation

UTH has well established procedures for evaluating all Departments and Schools according to established national norms.

Departmental external evaluations have taken place typically within the last four years. The EEC has seen evidence of positive change in response to suggestions from the external departmental evaluation committees. Most prominent amongst these is the significant reduction to the number of modules required for the award of a degree (reduction of student load) in accordance with international norms. Changes were also made to postgraduate courses to distinguish them from advanced undergraduate courses and to make them more relevant to Industry needs and employment paths. The EEC is satisfied that procedures set in place to revise courses and to respond in good time to changes suggested as a result of evaluations (internal or external) are effective.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.10):	Tick
Worthy of merit	x
Positive evaluation	
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

4.11 Internal System of Quality Assurance *– Conclusions and recommendations*

*Please complete the following sections regarding the **internal system of quality assurance**:*

- *Underline specific positive points*:

UTH provide a positive and collegial work environment; faculty, staff and students have embraced a positive culture and participated in the process of evaluation and have served as the agents of change.

UTH has developed a strategic plan for QA and Departments and Schools have taken steps to address recommendations.

Electronic resources and IT office offer excellent means and services to the university at large.

- *Underline specific negative points*:

There is no consistent implementation and sharing of best practises across units.

Actions taken in response to points raised by students are not always completed and communicated to students (closing the loop)

UTH, Departmental and Faculty webpages vary in their information and it is not

clear who is the target audience for many of these pages.

- *Make your suggestions for further development of the positive points*:

UTH has a great IT service and data collection capabilities for QA purposes which could be used more effectively to further assess the learning and research outcomes and improve the learning and research processes.

All employees within UTH should be empowered to participate, lead and contribute to the quality process and the optimum use of university resources.

- *Make your suggestions on needed steps for improvement:*

Develop goals and objectives with measurable outcomes and impacts to meet the outlined strategies developed by UTH.

Revise the webpage of the University to better engage the stakeholders, highlight big initiatives, and recognize accomplishments.

Share best practice perhaps through designating a representative in each OMEA from another Department within the same School.

Provide feedback to students on actions taken in response to issues raised in courses and instructor evaluation (closing the loop).

Promote innovative ways of delivering course materials and improve students' participation in classroom.

5. OPERATION OF THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE UTH

5.1 Central Administration Services of the UTH

The EEC met with the Central Administrative staff and was impressed by the commitment and good will of the staff towards UTH. There has been a reduction in the number of staff and an increase in the number of students and workload. This challenge has been partially addressed by the creativity of the IT staff to optimize resources and efficiency on campus. It was not clear to the EEC if there is a process to receive feedback from students and faculty and administrative staff across campus in a structured way. The EEC recommends the possibility of creating a survey to gather feedback on the range and quality and of the support services provided. This could be administered during the last semester of student's

program of study and periodically for staff and faculty.

The special account established for research funds is a good tool for supporting research activities, however, a broader and more coherent research strategy and research priorities should be formulated to give direction (targeted funding), and provide incentives and coordination for exploring new sources for funding.

The multiple campuses provide an asymmetric access to students to library resources in terms of place of study and hard copy books. That said, the library seems to be well populated with books and publications relevant to the UTH departments.

The EEC recommends holding regular meetings for all of the University's administrative staff for the purpose of sharing best practices and coordinating the University's overarching strategic plan. These meetings can become catalysts for brainstorming sessions and developing a big picture scenario for the operation of individual administrative units.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&5.1):	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

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

*Please complete the following sections regarding the **operation of the UTH's central administration:***

- *Underline specific positive points*:

Very committed and motivated community that reflects a positive environment.

The EEC was impressed by the openness of faculty, staff and students, and their willingness to adopt recommendations and embrace change.

- *Underline specific negative points*:

The EEC did not observe a concerted effort to use a holistic approach for addressing common challenges and tasks related to better and efficient use of IT, streamlining procedures, redundancies and duplications in efforts, team based approach to research and other activities.

- *Make your suggestions for further development of the positive points*:

The EEC recommends that UTH administration improves communication with its campus faculty and staff, and their stakeholders via improvements to the webpage, newsletters, training short courses, events and face to face communications.

Develop campus wide activities to promote relationship building between teams based on different campuses with the objectives of enhancing efficiencies of services provided on campus and generally empower staff to drive change.

Promote engagement with the stakeholders and the industry.

- *Make your suggestions on needed steps for improvement*:

Re-examine the structure and role of various committees and define their responsibilities and how they relate to each other with the objectives of addressing UTH mission and improving efficiency, services and speed of decision making.

Digital communication is critical in this day and age, therefore, UTH should take steps to enhance their webpages to meet the needs of its audience, and highlight their accomplishments and project a positive image. In addition, electronic newsletters are at present underutilized at UTH but properly used can serve as effective tools to communicate Departmental, Schools and University accomplishments.

In order to confront the challenges caused by declining State operational grants to the UTH, the EEC recommends that a concerted effort me made to secure external revenue streams, in kind or financial such as international student fees and/or partnerships with municipal and regional authorities. This will require a proactive approach in which all levels of UTH, including senior administration, faculties and departments, are engaged in this process.

6. FINAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Underline specific positive points*:

The EEC recognizes the enthusiasm, talent, quality, and motivation of UTH's faculty, staff and students.

UTH is a young institution and is well positioned to take advantage of the current academic landscape and make its mark nationally and internationally.

Positive environment, outreach, and global engagement efforts of the UTH impressed the EEC.

The UTH community is open to change and embrace the quality and innovation culture.

- *Underline specific negative points*:

Geographical spread of the UTH in multiple locations is a challenging structure to manage.

Difficult to take strategic initiatives under the current financial pressure.

Key aspects of infrastructure are not well developed, e.g. student hostel, student union building, etc.

Lack of funds to fully equip new critical buildings like the Biochemistry and electrical engineering.

The issue of aging equipment in laboratories on campus must be addressed.

Long commutes between some campuses and lack of university operated transportation is an impediment to increasing efficiency and optimization of resources uses.

Retention of key faculty as a result of budget crisis is becoming a serious challenge.

- *Make your suggestions for further development of the positive points:*

The university should make every effort to maintain the goodwill of its faculty, administrative and laboratory staff, and students.

Enhance further schemes for recognition of talented faculty, staff and students through awards or prizes. As an example of rewarding excellence, best students could be given priority in accessing training and specialization services.

Promote and reward transdisciplinary team work, collaborations and contributions. Explore synergies and if possible remove barriers between staff working in different but related areas e.g. medical staff working for the UTH and the National Health Service.

Make your suggestions on needed steps for improvement:

The EEC observed a tension in the organizational academic structure of UTH between the University Administration and the newly elected/ established University Council. The EEC recommends that legislation should be introduced in the Greek parliament for the purpose of achieving clarity regarding the academic mandate and mission of the university council. It is essential that the legal framework in which Greek universities operate is stable over a long period of time to allow them to plan and grow. Despite this, we encourage UTH to move beyond these differences and work as a team to address the serious challenges facing academia in Greece.

The State should set up the legal framework for the governance of universities and cease to micromanage university related activities.

The university has plans for much needed infrastructure for students facilities (e.g. students hostel), which need to be addressed and funds identified at the earliest possible time.

Proportion of returns from research activities should explore the reinvestment in a strategic manner to accomplish maximum impact and advance the research mission even in this difficult financial climate to avoid negative impacts on faculty momentum and quality of research and innovation on campus.

The UTH needs some financial stability to reduce uncertainty and allow for future planning and goals implementation.

Undoubtedly, the rigid legal framework impedes the efficient operation of Universities, however, where the law does not specifically forbid it, there is

considerable scope for setting up well-structured bodies and interactions with stakeholders and between operating units within the UTH to enhance efficiency and accomplish its mission.

It may help to introduce structured observation of teaching by other teaching staff. Once a year and for one hour each teacher is observed by another teacher during a normal lecture. At the end of the lecture there is an informal conversation between the two parties to identify good and not so good points and discuss improvements. This is done in an unthreatening environment without minutes being kept. The two parties simply sign a paper to indicate that this interaction has taken place and record the date, time and place.

In order to confront the challenges caused by declining State operational grants to the UTH, the EEC recommends that a concerted effort me made to secure external revenue streams, in kind or financial, such as international student fees and/or partnerships with municipal and regional authorities. This will require a proactive approach in which all levels of UTH, including senior administration, faculties and departments, are engaged in this process.

Finally, the EEC is duty bound to urge the Greek National Authorities responsible for the Higher Education Sector to respond to this and other evaluations, even if in a limited way under the current financial circumstances, so that the QA process is perceived as a developmental tool and a driver for change. This will address major urgently needed infrastructure improvements and make QA the agency through which the University and the State each honour their respective responsibilities.

6.1 Final decision of the EEC

Please decide in respect to the overall UTH evaluation:	Tick
Worthy of merit	
Positive evaluation	x
Partially positive evaluation	
Negative evaluation	

Justify your rating (optional):

UTH is on an excellent track. There have been serious efforts to move the Institution forward despite the financial challenges. The EEC believes that with

hard work and dedication, the UTH will be able to reach its full potential in the near future.

The Members of the Committee

UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY

Name and Surname   Signature

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University of New Brunswick, Canada

Prof. Tala Awada
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