



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

**Α.ΔΙ.Π.**

ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ & ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ  
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

**H.Q.A.**

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

**Department of Social Policy  
Panteion University**

February 2014



**European Union**  
European Social Fund



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

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### **External Evaluation Committee**

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Social Policy of the Panteion University of Athens consisted of the following three (3) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Prof. Constantinos Phellas (Coordinator)  
Department of Social Sciences, University of Nicosia, Cyprus
2. Prof. Dimitris Michailakis  
Department of Social and Welfare Studies, University of Linkoping, Sweden
3. Associate Prof. Marios Vryonides  
Department of Education, European University Cyprus

***N.B.*** *The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department.*

*The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The External Evaluation Committee [thereafter called EEC] visited the Department of Social Policy of the Panteion University of Athens from 17th to 19th of February 2014, and worked on its report until Saturday 22nd of February 2014.

On the first day (Monday 17th of February) the EEC met with the University authorities namely the Rector and Vice-Rectors, the Dean of the School, the Chair of the Department and the Department's Committee which was responsible for the writing up of the Department's Internal evaluation (MODIP). On Tuesday 18th of February, the EEC members held various meetings on site with (i) the administrative staff, (ii) the faculty and (iii) the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students of the Department. During the afternoon of the second day the EEC paid visits to (i) the Department's computer laboratory and held a discussion with undergraduate students who were present at the time (12 students), (ii) the Department's Laboratory –for Gender Studies where they met with the Laboratory's faculty and other research staff (iii) the Department's Research Centre (Centre of Social Morphology and Social Policy - KEKMOKOP) where they were presented with the Centre's various research activities. At the end of the second day the EEC met with 25 doctoral students and had a thorough discussion about their studies and general academic experiences (i.e., supervision, career prospects, facilities, etc.) within the Department. On Wednesday 19th of February the EEC visited (i) the University's Erasmus office, (ii) the University's library. Additionally, the EEC has held a group interview/discussion with a random sample of the faculty across all academic ranks with regards to their research interests and the department's research policy in general.

This report is based both on the information collected from the various on-site meetings as well as the information contained in the various documents supplied to the EEC by the Department, the University and the HQA.

The EEC was provided with the following documents:

- Two Internal Evaluation reports for the period 2010-2012
- Minutes of various Departmental meetings
- Structured presentations with regards to (i) the general description of the department's mission and philosophy, (ii) the curriculum of both undergraduate and postgraduate studies, (iii) a sample of students' evaluation forms. A sample of postgraduate and doctoral dissertations were reviewed from the e-platform PANDEMOS (<http://pandemos.panteion.gr>). Moreover, faculty members' lecture notes were also reviewed from the same platform. Furthermore, a sample of faculty profiles were

reviewed from international citation indices and databases. During the whole process the Department's (i) staff, (ii) Faculty and (iii) students were indeed very collaborative and helpful and provided the EEC with all the necessary information and documentation requested. The EEC would also like to thank whole-heartedly both the Department's Head as well as the rest of the department's faculty for showing a great spirit of collaboration and cooperation during the EEC's visit at the department. Additionally, all the participants who took part in the evaluation process at both the University level and the Departmental level acknowledged the usefulness and importance of this external evaluation process the results of which will enable them to re-evaluate their practices and introduce amendments for improving the quality of their academic work.

The EEC, however, would have liked to observe some lectures and/or seminars with undergraduate and postgraduate students but this was not possible due to examinations.

The Internal Evaluation Report appears to be descriptive and provides detailed quantitative information about courses, teaching hours, number of students and research activities, reports and publications. At a first glance the EEC observed that there is no monitoring mechanism for course content as well as for faculty personal academic and professional development. The way the department currently functions does not leave room for a speedy and immediate review, corrections and revisions through specialized channels. All things relating to the content and form of the courses appear to be left totally at the discretion of each faculty member.

The EEC found that there are a lot of things i.e. cultural dispositions, practices, academic activities, theses, research papers etc. that seem not to take into account the globalised context within which the current debates of Social Policy take place and rather focus on localized issues that are more practice and domestic policy oriented and not always relevant to global academic audiences. While the level of postgraduate dissertations appear to be of good quality and are comparable to good European standards the level of student doctoral theses suggest that there is still room for improvement to meet higher academic standards. This would make them more publishable to international publishing houses and relevant to a wider international academic audience thus making contemporary Greek social policy visible and therefore contributing to international debates.

## **A. CURRICULUM**

### Approach

#### *Undergraduate level*

According to the Internal Evaluation Report the Department's goal is a threefold one:

1. Educating students in the content of Social Policy theory
2. Providing skills and competences for social research
3. Practicum in various social welfare institutions and services.

Even though the internal report mentions that in 2008 there was a radical revision of the undergraduate program there is still an unnecessarily large number of compulsory and optional courses. Although the faculty argued that the strict regulatory and administrative legislation does not allow much room for flexibility nevertheless the EEC believes that this is an impediment to modernizing the curriculum according to international trends and standards. The curriculum needs to be revisited at regular intervals so as to be always up to date.

The EEC concludes that the structure of the program represents the wide variety of disciplines of the teaching staff, and during the third and fourth year of their study the department's students may select from three categories of applied Social Policy subject areas thus leading to an informal specialization even at an undergraduate level. It is the EEC's view that this practice leads to fragmentation that often undermines the provision of a uniform body of knowledge throughout the four-year cycle of studies for every student. Perhaps a more uniform body of knowledge would make the program more focused. As this system stands it can be argued that even though it gives the opportunity to every student to plan his or her path of learning it can be a risky method in the absence of a structured consultation mechanism for students in the form of personal tutoring with members of staff. The system of personal tutoring is not impossible to be implemented in this particular Department if one considers that it will account for only 6-7 students per year for every faculty member. When students' evaluations are conducted about the content of the courses the EEC found no evidence that their feedback is taken into account in the revision of the content of a course. This might possibly explain the fact that students during the EEC's discussions with them reported that they are not particularly enthusiastic about the evaluation process of their courses and the way this is done.

There is a 7 member internal departmental committee for curriculum review which was set two years ago. The EEC would propose the following recommendations as a step towards improving the mechanism regarding the curriculum review:

- 1) Membership to the CIC should be rotated

- 2) Meetings should be recorded
- 3) Consultation with other European Universities regarding curriculum development
- 4) A mechanism should be introduced regarding the updating of the existing bibliography and development of new trends in Social Policy internationally.
- 5) To this end the curriculum and students need to be more open to international literature especially from English speaking sources so as to be constantly up to date with current developments in Social Policy at European and International levels.

### ***Postgraduate***

The postgraduate program overall is a very interesting and academically stimulating one. However because of the small number of students that it attracts there is a mismatch with the large number of courses offered leading to some classes being very low in numbers and consequently not properly taught but rather delivered in the form of independent study. The EEC appreciates the fact that there is a student selection procedure that intends to ensure quality level students. Moreover it appears that not all students who register manage to graduate something which may imply that the evaluation of the postgraduate courses is to a high level.

After reviewing a random number of postgraduate dissertations the EEC has concluded that these are of a good caliber. The practicum which is at the core of the curriculum should be strengthened through the establishment of external collaboration with likewise postgraduate programs in other Universities at a European level. Faculty also suggested that the practicum should be more problem-solving oriented.

### ***Doctoral***

There is no structured program for doctoral studies.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The curriculum is clearly articulated and presented. Moreover, it is easily accessible through the Department's website. The committee has no evidence that appropriate universally accepted standards for the study of Social Policy are taken into consideration when planning the curriculum. The EEC suggests that a way to address the above could be to establish an Advisory Board with internationally recognized scholars who can offer their expertise and suggestions with regards to international standards and trends.

## **Material**

During the EEC's various meetings with the faculty it has become apparent that the courses' material are available on-line through the e-platform PANDEMOS. The EEC has found 18 such links out of nearly 80 courses offered at the Department. Some members of the faculty offer material for 2 or 3 courses and others do not offer anything at all through this system. When the committee browsed through a random sample of the material it found that these were mostly photocopies from a wide range of books instead of authentic material prepared by the faculty themselves. Some of the books appeared to be out of date too.

## **Recommendation**

The EEC would like to suggest the following action plan:

- 1) Faculty should upload their original lecture notes i.e. Power Point presentations
- 2) Faculty to provide updated material (or list of optional readings from the international literature which should be made available in the library even if this might be mostly in English).

The Department follows the University's credit point system whereby the student needs to successfully complete 150 credits (50 courses X 3 credits) to be awarded a degree. This credit system is based on the number of teaching hours per course which seems to strongly respond to and greatly accommodate the needs and the availability of the teaching faculty without taking into consideration the students' needs (something which is central at the ECTS philosophy which calculates the amount of student effort and contact hours with teachers in lectures, seminars and tutorials). Moreover, it does not take into account the scientific needs of having an adaptable and flexible curriculum that meets the contents of an ever-changing science.

## **Results**

The curriculum is structured around two groups of courses, namely: Compulsory and electives the latter being grouped into three streams. It was suggested by the faculty that a fourth stream could be added (i.e. Management of Social Welfare provisions). These streams should be more balanced in terms of number of courses each one offers. The EEC feels that there is no scientific justification for this wealth of specialization at an undergraduate level and that students should be able to choose from two main streams. After all, specialization is a feature mostly found in postgraduate studies.

## **B. TEACHING**

### ***Approach***

The department seems to lack a defined and coherent pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology (e.g. problem solving method). The EEC has the impression that this is left at the exclusive discretion of the teaching faculty. Teaching is mostly done through lectures and a small number of courses which is delivered in seminar form. Attendance to almost all courses is optional and the faculty has informed the EEC that on average 50% of the registered students attend classes.

Courses are almost exclusively examined via a single final examination (written or oral). No compulsory (short or extended) essays either an individual level or in collaboration are required. This latter would have encouraged a frequent interaction and collaboration between the teachers and the students. The written exams usually take the form of two or three dictated questions by the examiner to which the students provide detailed answers.

The oral exams are conducted in groups of four to five students whereby they present themselves at the teacher's office and respond to a variety of questions put by the examiner. The EEC notes that there is no evidence of a depository of such questions which may be easily kept by the teachers or the Department's administration office. Moreover, more problematic is the fact that no written documentation exists for the performance of each individual student taking an oral examination. Even though in the internal report this procedure is presented as flawless the EEC strongly believes that this procedure is subject to a series of biases and malfunctions. Furthermore, this procedure has never been independently evaluated by external sources and it is entirely left to the subjective discretion of the examiner.

Additionally the EEC feels that the establishment of an Examinations Committee at a Departmental Level where the content and procedures of the exams would be regularly, randomly assessed and reviewed would minimize undue bias by the examiners and would improve the quality of the examinations. The EEC was unable to observe any lectures because the period of the EEC's visit was the examination period for the Fall Semester. Faculty however, reported that the means and resources available to them for conducting their lectures were inadequate or non-existing with the exception of the two laboratories (i.e., The Computer Lab and the Lab for Gender Studies) and KEMKOPOP which nevertheless can accommodate only a small number of students.

The EEC was left with the impression that some courses that are not popular by the students or have low enrollment rates are sometimes not effectively taking place and because students only register to the courses towards the end of the semester there is no practical way to predict this in advance and cancel or substitute a course. This inhibits the rationalization of the courses offered and effectively might create a situation whereby the lecturers teaching time is not utilized in its full capacity.

The true ratio of students-teachers in terms of teaching cannot be accurately defined. Effectively we can only calculate the ratio on paper against the one actually taking place in practice. On paper this figure is 1017:19 (50:1). In practice and based on the anecdotal information that the faculty provided to the EEC the real figure is much lower. Specifically if classes are regularly attended by half of the registered students this ratio comes down to roughly 500:19 (25:1). Either way both of these figures are large and do not create the conditions for a more personalized communication between the faculty and the students. The EEC notes that the Department consistently requests fewer students to be centrally allocated to the Department but the Ministry usually offers more places which together with students registered under special provisions create an over-populated department on paper. The situation is likely to improve in light of recent changes which prescribe a fixed term for studying. The EEC sees this change as a positive step toward the right direction. The number of postgraduate students is satisfactory. No comment could be made regarding the teaching at the Doctoral level because no such courses are offered by the Department.

### ***Implementation***

As mentioned in the previous section this aspect of teaching appears to be rather weak. This is due to a number of factors i.e. the lack of infrastructure, the lack of facilities, the lack of teaching space, the lack of administrative support. No real and constant communication between the faculty and students exists because there is no mechanism that can support this. i.e. an intranet system or an e-platform. The EEC recommends that faculty adopts an open-source software (there are plenty available that are free i.e. moodle) that allows for better delivery of teaching material, information and more crucially can act as a platform for continuous communication between the teaching staff and students which is presently non-existent.

The system regarding the evaluation by the students both in terms of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content is an area that also needs substantial improvement. The students themselves have pointed out during the committee's visit that the evaluation questionnaire itself is unsatisfactory (both content-wise and style-wise) and according to them is frequently not taken seriously by the students when they are being asked to complete it. Moreover, there is no real and effective way to establish the reliability and effectiveness of the process. Other than frequent references to the

insufficient infrastructure the faculty offered no concrete suggestions as to how to improve the quality their teaching.

During the EEC visit to the PC laboratory it was found that there is a good effort to maintain a functional laboratory even with very little means. The laboratory works rather well but students complained about the internet speeds and access to various on-line resources.

## **C. RESEARCH**

### ***Approach***

The EEC found that most of the research at a Departmental level focuses around the Department's research centre KEKMOKOP and the Laboratory for Gender Studies. At a Departmental level the EEC could not discern that there is a clearly articulated research strategy. The faculty justified this observation by the fact that there is a wide dispersion and heterogeneity of academic and research interests among them. Moreover they attributed this to the lack of funds and infrastructure. There is a tendency to publish more in Greek speaking monographs most of which are not peer review evaluated. The faculty has attributed the preference to the Greek speaking publishing houses to a long past tradition at a University level which was placing more weight and emphasis on such activities. From the discussions that the EEC had held with faculty members it was apparent that there are at least two underlying modes of thought on this issue. There seems to be a group of faculty members which argues that the Greek literature needs to be strengthened through such publications which have an interventionist underpinning stemming from an ideological standpoint that is pro-societal change. Others, perhaps more contemporary oriented place emphasis on international peer reviewed publications and acknowledge the need to engage in an international academic dialogue on Social Policy issues.

In terms of volume of publications produced at a departmental level the EEC acknowledges what the Internal Evaluation Report has also commented: the fact that production of various forms of research output is unevenly distributed between faculty members possibly reflecting the ideological paradigms as described above.

## ***Implementation***

### **1. Laboratory for Gender Studies**

This laboratory is quite active in securing external funding for projects and appears to have established collaborations with European Research Centres in the same areas. Furthermore the faculty currently employed at the Laboratory appear to have a noticeable publication record. The Laboratory's web-page is constantly updated (in both Greek and English) with regard to the Laboratory's activities as well as other relevant information at a national and European level. The Laboratory's successful activities so far show that Greek academia could make considerable achievements at a European level if they operate in an outreaching rather than inward looking manner. The Laboratory's permanent staff have managed to successfully recruit able researchers who would compensate to the lack of centrally distributed funds. This practice could easily serve as an example to the rest of the Department's faculty.

### ***Recommendations***

1. Establish an interdisciplinary Postgraduate Program on Gender Studies focusing on contemporary trends in this area
2. Extend the scope of Laboratory's research activities by including topics such as Masculinities and Sexualities
3. Set up a bilingual journal on Contemporary Gender Issues in collaboration with other Research Centres

### **2. KEKMOKOP**

This has been the Department's flagship for a number of years and has produced noticeable research output for the promotion of Social Policy Research at a national level. Furthermore it has operated as the main supporting infrastructure to the PhD students of the Department. During the EEC's visit the faculty closely associated with the Centre showed enthusiasm and collegial spirit. The Centre houses a noticeable collection of books and journals and provides working space for Doctoral students to work, meet, socialize and exchange ideas, experiences and best research practices. Moreover it is a place for organizing seminars and colloquia. The Centre organizes successful summer schools for doctoral students the cost of which is mostly covered by faculty and students themselves. However, it appears that the Centre's webpage is currently inactive and subsequently not contributing to the Centre's activities.

The EEC suggests that the Centre reaches outside national boundaries to likewise institutions and Universities in order to establish collaborations at an international level and to share experiences and research output with a wider academic and policy-making audiences.

### **3. Doctoral Research**

The EEC has reviewed a random sample of PhD theses that were deposited at the PANDEMOS system. The topics appear to cover a wide range of issues primarily focusing on Social Policy at national level. The fragmentation observed in the faculty's research interests and activities is being replicated here as well. Even though the doctoral theses deal with domestic Social Policy issues it is recommended that an effort is made to link with wider processes in Social Policy developments something which would also appeal to international audiences. In other words Social Policy as a discipline should be conceptualized at its global reach rather than through a local narrow lens.

The EEC notices the absence of an Ethics Committee (either at a Departmental level or at a University level) which would deal with issues of ethics in social research. Such a committee is essential for any academic institution that is involved in research with human beings.

Additionally the EEC recommends that the various meetings between PhD students and their respective supervisors need to be documented and recorded so that a clear path of progression is mutually agreed and understood between the two parties. As the system now stands it is only recorded at annual intervals by an annual progress report and this can have negative consequences for the monitoring, accountability and smooth development of a doctoral thesis. The EEC has noticed that there is a balanced gender distribution amongst the doctoral students and all appeared quite enthusiastic and eager about their doctoral pursuits.

#### ***Implementation***

The faculty through the past few years have secured funding for a number of mostly domestic research grants. The EEC was not able to secure information about the overall budget of these projects and as a result the EEC does not have a clear idea as to the true impact of these projects. It is customary when such projects are presented in official academic reports to cite more detailed information with regards to the funding secured and the exact role of researchers in the projects to accurately portray the scope and overall contribution of such research projects.

## **ELKE**

A dominant theme in the discussions about the role of research in the Department focused on the perceived dysfunctional role of ELKE. Faculty almost unanimously blamed the rather weak picture of their research activities over the last few years on the lack of support from ELKE. Furthermore, the faculty claimed that any attempts made to make full use of funding secured from various sources, was obstructed by the dysfunctional administrative routines from ELKE. This ongoing situation has created feelings of frustration amongst faculty resulting to unwillingness to initiate new proposals for funding at present or in the near future. A slightly different picture however was drawn by the Rector of the University who has reassured the EEC that ELKE has recently been reformed/ restructured and although understaffed it is now capable of offering such assistance for bidding for externally funded opportunities.

The EEC discerns a level of conflicting perceptions as to the role of ELKE. Perhaps the Rectorate could take initiatives to mobilize faculty to become more proactive in claiming funding opportunities especially from European projects which are currently available. This should be an issue of utmost importance and priority for the Department and the University in general especially at an era of financial hardships.

#### **D. All Other Services**

The Department's administrative offices appear to be understaffed. Only two secretaries were present at the time of the visit. This situation does not allow for support beyond the basic assistance regarding the administrative running of the Department's daily activities. According to the faculty this situation further results to extra administrative burden for them at the expense of teaching and especially research activities.

The EEC has also visited (i) the Erasmus Office, (ii) the Library and (iii) the student's restaurant. During the EEC's visit at the Erasmus Office and the Library detailed presentations were made as to their activities. The EEC concluded that both the Erasmus Office and the Library are staffed by very competent and effective staff who do their utmost in carrying out their duties as efficiently and successfully as possible.

The EEC noted, however, that the decision making with regards to the selection of the Department's students eligible for the Erasmus scheme has been carried out over a large number of years by the same faculty member. The EEC would recommend that this role is rotated by faculty members every couple of years for accountability and transparency purposes.

The EEC was particularly impressed by the Library's facilities and especially by the Chief Librarian's professionalism. The excellent library's facilities are something that the Department can build on to strengthen both its research and teaching output.

The restaurant where the EEC had lunch on the second day of the visit was satisfactory, the environment was clean, the food of good quality and the EEC appreciates the fact that at times of economic hardship the University has increased the level of spending in this area to meet the increasing needs of students coming from poorer family backgrounds.

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

According to the information the EEC has received during its visit the major inhibiting factors stem from (i) the State's administrative complex systems and particularly the complicated legislative framework within which faculty are obliged to operate and (ii) the Ministry of Education with its unnecessarily centralized philosophy

which does not leave much room for academic innovations. The above impediments are over and above the already substantially reduced state funding of the University's and subsequently the Department's activities. The EEC believes that if the Department was allowed to generate funds through research, consultancies, even selective fees from short courses offered to specialized audiences (private or public bodies either domestically or internationally) then this would improve the poor financial situation of the Department. This in turn would create a flourishing and vibrant academic environment.

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

The EEC is of the view that there is ample evidence to shift the modus operandi of the Department's philosophy. The Faculty claim that the current culture of curriculum design and teaching places emphasis on the public, mass and open character of the education offered. This does not necessarily reflect the hard facts EEC has come across. The way this "ideal" is materialized does not always serve the real needs and best interests of the students neither does it serve or promote the scientific interests of Social Policy as such. It rather serves the perpetuation of old and traditional practices which could be found in previous decades and mostly corresponded to the needs and interests of the faculty members. Modern educational systems of higher education have at their core the students as recipients of the service offered. The EEC acknowledges that this is a dominant characteristic of the Greek Higher Education system and that change should come from a bottom up approach rather than waiting for a legislative and centrally orchestrated change as it is the case now. Such a bottom up change might in the end lead to a radical re-invention of the Greek Universities away from practices and dispositions which seem to hinder the modernization of the Higher Education System. The current academic debate must not and should not be limited to the current lack of funds and/or administrative support as these limitations are only part of the problem and often may be used as excuses to resist change and introduce innovative approaches and practices (i.e. the use of ICTs, international literature, branching out to non-Greek audiences). Finally, the EEC strongly believes that the Department of Social Policy is in an advantageous position (due to the Faculty's promising research and teaching potential) to reflect upon these remarks and recommendations and proceed with dedication, courage and professionalism in order to take all the necessary actions and measures to modernize current teaching and research practices which would eventually reshape the overall academic culture of the Department in a desirable and professionally fulfilling manner.

### The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname

Signature

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
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