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AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

SCHOOL OF LAW

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

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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 School of Law of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Professor Georgios Gounalakis (Chairman)
School of Law, University of Marburg, Germany

2. Professor Stathis Banakas
School of Law, University of East Anglia, UK

3. Professor Iakovos Farsedakis
School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Department of Law, European University Cyprus, Cyprus

4. Professor Georgios Pavlakos,
Faculty of Law, University of Antwerp, Belgium
and School of Law, University of Glasgow, UK

INTRODUCTION

The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation Committee visited the School of Law on 21-23 October 2013.

We met the following individuals and groups:

- The Rector of the University of Thessaloniki
- The Vice Rector of the University of Thessaloniki
- The Dean of the School of Law
- The teaching staff of the School of Law
- The administrative staff
- A group of undergraduate students (approx. 100)
- Postgraduate students and doctoral candidates and post-doc researchers (approx. 30)
- Representatives of the student union council

We interviewed separately academic staff, administrative staff and groups of undergraduate, post-graduate and doctoral students. We encouraged each group to speak to us in confidence.

We examined the following documents that were provided by the School:

- The 2013-2014 study guide
- The Law School's internal evaluation 2011-2012 (updated in March 2013)
- The Law School's Internal evaluation report 2012 (updated October 2013)
- Brief evaluation of structures (updates Sept 2013)

We had detailed presentations by Faculty staff on:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes
- Other study programmes (Erasmus programmes, life-long learning etc)
- Research output, funding and other activities (editorships etc)
- Awards, distinctions and other activities
- Webpage
- Library

We reviewed:

- Sample course descriptions
- Sample marked exam scripts
- Sample post-graduate dissertations
- Sample doctoral thesis

We visited the following facilities:

- The main building of the law school
- The teaching facilities
- The library
- The multi-media room
- The canteen

The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The sources and documentation were entirely appropriate. All supplementary information that we requested, including data on students, work allocation and retirement patterns of academic staff, the job descriptions of administrative staff and articles published by members of the School, was promptly provided. The materials were professionally prepared and of high quality. Those that were out of date were brought up to date by means of supplementary materials. □ The Internal Evaluation of the School gives a thorough and detailed picture of the history and the current state of the School and it provided an excellent basis for the work of the External Evaluation Committee. Finally, the presentations and demonstrations given by the Faculty members on location were thorough and of very high quality.

General setting of the evaluation

The Law School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki carries a long and venerable tradition of educating the legal community of modern Greece. Amongst its alumni and teachers count some of the leading intellectuals of the modern Greek state who on many occasions went on to occupy important international roles. There is a unique – even by European standards – blend of legal traditions which permeates the intellectual life of the School and the curriculum of studies, owing mainly to the fact that the majority of the members of staff are graduates of leading German, French and UK universities. In an age in which most legal scholarly communities tend to focus on their domestic legal culture, it is impressive to encounter such a concentration of legal traditions in the same environment. This puts the institution on a firm basis for claiming an important place amongst the law schools of Europe and worldwide, which until now has not been exploited effectively.

However in a number of respects, both in terms of adopting contemporary practices in education, research policy, renewal of Faculty and overall strategic planning but also in terms of retaining a state of the art infrastructure the School has fallen well behind its potential. While some of the shortcomings are to be attributed to wider structural shortcomings in the governance of modern Greece, others stem from a failure to undertake a self-reflective attitude with a view to undertaking dynamic reforms. Thus any efforts for reform undertaken in the last few decades have been far and few between and have failed to restore the School to its international potential.

This evaluation will aim to assess the current situation with an eye to suggesting appropriate strategies and practices for enabling the School to exploit its international potential to the full.

CURRICULUM

The study programme has two basic aims:

1. To provide students with a firm knowledge of the doctrine and practice of Greek law. To train them in the academic skills necessary for pursuing post-graduate and doctoral research in the various legal sub-disciplines in high-quality academic institutions at home and abroad.
2. To prepare students for the legal profession which is undertaken in any of the professional associations of the country.

Undergraduate degree (UG)

The UG degree is structured in 8 semesters distributed over 4 academic years.

Interestingly the curriculum starts with a mix of compulsory and elective courses and progresses in later years with an increase in the number of compulsory courses. In addition there is a plethora of elective courses (well over 100) which supplement the programme of studies.

The structure of the curriculum partly reflects the aims of the degree. However the design of the curriculum seems to have been the result of years of horse trading between the Sections (Tomeis) which compromises the rationality and coherence of the degree and does not take into account the interest of the student.

It is hard to see the logic of offering more elective compulsory courses to untrained students in the early years while placing the bulk of the compulsory courses in later years. An example of lack of structure of the degree is the pairing of general commercial law and law of industrial property in the second semester of studies. Following standard practice in most European law schools we would suggest that students be provided with compulsory courses in the early years.

There is lack of a foundational course on the methodology or philosophy of law in the early stages of the degree that would provide students with the necessary skills of the study of law.

Further, it is hard to comprehend the criteria on which some courses are deemed to be compulsory (for example: tax law). More generally, the study programme should aim at conveying deep knowledge in a narrower range of core subjects rather than spreading itself thin across too many subject areas. Those should be left to the student to opt for in the later stages of the degree.

Erasmus courses, with the exception of a limited number, currently appear to form a separate pathway which targets only international students. Ideally all Erasmus courses should be incorporated into the main programme. This would lead to a better integration between home and international students and would introduce an element of ‘internationalisation at home’ which would be highly desirable. During the presentations by Faculty we were impressed by the success in either of those respects of the Erasmus WTO class which is offered to home and international students.

The structure of the undergraduate study program appears to be compatible with the requirements of the so called “Bologna process” and the ECTS system. According to this system the undergraduate study program offered by the Department would be classified as a 240 ECTS point BA study program, with 30 ECTS points awarded for each 21 hours per week semester teaching load.

Postgraduate study programmes

Currently the School offers 8 postgraduate study programmes

- 1) Civil, Procedural and Industrial Law
- 2) Public Law and Political Sciences
- 3) International Studies
- 4) Commercial and Financial Law
- 5) History, Philosophy and Sociology of Law

- 6) Criminal and Criminological Sciences
- 7) Joint Masters Programme in European and Comparative Social Law (with the University of Toulouse)
- 8) Joint Masters Programme in Civil Law (with the University of Zürich)
- 9) Inter-departmental Masters in Contemporary Medical Acts Legal Regulation and Bioethical Dimension

Further the School participates in another inter-departmental Masters in Informatics and Administration (with the Department of Economics).

Postgraduate (PG) programmes cater mainly for students who are employed in legal practice. As a result the duration of the PG study programmes varies between five semesters (teaching 4 semesters and 1 semester dissertation). Effectively, programmes are fashioned as part-time even though they are described as full-time. This creates problems for students who are prepared to devote themselves to their studies full-time. Commendably so, there are plans to shorten these programmes to 3 semesters. An alternative solution would be to make a distinction between full-time and part-time students.

Finally there is no training for PhD students. The PhD degree is awarded only on the basis of the doctoral thesis. This may have contributed to the very low completion rate and the very long average time of study (6,5 years) for the doctoral degree. Notably the number of completed PhD theses over the past 12 years has been 108 (yearly average: 9 theses). Out of these only 4 were international students. These rates are low compared to the international standards.

Outcomes-Suggestions

The committee was particularly impressed by the richness in offer of elective courses and the overall width and breadth of the degree. The UG degree could gain substantially if rendered more coherent and balanced with due attention paid to the issue of progression from foundational compulsory courses to more specialized elective ones. Further a clear indication of the skills conveyed to students would be desirable. It is mandatory that the undergraduate study program be made fully and

transparently compliant with the Bologna process/ECTS requirements. This can be done without altering its overall character and its four-year duration.

The postgraduate programs face a more substantial compliance problem with the Bologna process/ECTS requirements. This circumstance makes student mobility at the postgraduate level between the School and foreign universities and related institutes difficult, since ECTS compliance has to be determined on an individual basis. Both Greek and foreign students would benefit immensely from the expertise provided by the programs if this disadvantage were obliterated.

As it stands the curriculum is lacking in clear identification of the skills it purports to convey. Interviews with students strengthened our feeling that the introduction of a foundational course on the methodology or philosophy of law in the early stages of the degree would cater for the necessary skills for the study of law.

As regards the PhD programme, following suggestions are to be made: 1) An induction programme with introduction to research methods and rules of good practice in research and writing of a doctoral dissertation. 2) The issue of the length of studies is addressed by the new legislation which reduces maximum duration to 5 years. 3) The reasons for the low completion rates need to be investigated. A strategy for improving completion rates would be to organize annually a research students' conference where candidates present their work.

TEACHING

In the undergraduate programme teaching is mainly based on lectures and less so on seminars. While there is provision for undertaking written coursework the option is not used as often as it should be. As a result the average number of written coursework undertaken during the undergraduate programme of studies is about 4. On the other hand in the post-graduate programme extensive use of written coursework is being made, consistently with international practice.

Assessment is generally done by written exam at the end of each semester. Students can ask for an oral exam but from the documentation we received it is not clear under what conditions students are entitled to it. Finally, there is provision for continuous assessment at the discretion of each member of staff. However, according to student reports rarely available in practice. Finally written exams are not anonymised as is the international practice. A more widespread use of continuous assessment is strongly recommended.

Practices for providing feedback and advice are in place but differ widely across courses and programmes of study. Also contact and communication between students and staff varies. Staff make themselves amply available to students however there is no established practice of advertising office hours across the board. While there are good relations between students and staff there is room for improvement with some students complaining about particular members of staff.

While E-learning is in progress and the main structures have been put in place, it should be used more extensively and in more subjects. Each subject should have its own blackboard space where the syllabus, study materials and goals and outcomes should be given in detail. A substantial obstacle to e-learning is the inadequate Wi-Fi coverage throughout the building of the law school. Further all staff should be given adequate support in developing blackboard for their subjects, as students should be encouraged in using blackboard as their first port of call.

Teaching facilities are not always adequate in number and size. There is no smart classroom (to be developed further in section 'Infrastructure' below).

The scholarly publications of staff in their special field are a great benefit to the students contributing to the quality of the teaching that they receive. However, a serious complaint by students in the context of free distribution of textbooks is that students are entitled to receiving one single volume. On many occasions the course involved multi-volume textbooks and the students have to buy the additional volumes by themselves, which they consider very unfair.

A lot of time is devoted to the teaching of specialist optional subjects. This affects in a negative way the provision for teaching large compulsory subjects. Furthermore there is overlap and unnecessary repetitiveness between subjects which seems to stem from lack of coordination between teaching teams.

In some subjects the failure rates are alarming – as low as 18%. In those subjects teaching outcomes are obviously not achieved.

With the transfer of course evaluation by the students to the online platform a decrease in participation has been observed. The School should devise practices to motivate students to complete the online evaluation and the transfer of the results to the teaching staff.

Outcomes-Suggestions

A significant number of students who have graduated from the Law School have gone on to undertake postgraduate studies and/or doctoral research in leading international institutions abroad with excellent results. This attests to the high quality of the study programme of the School. Moreover, a significant number of alumni return to continue postgraduate study in Thessaloniki which shows their loyalty and appreciation of the education to which they received.

Student attendance is identified as a problem by both students and teaching staff and should be dealt with more effectively. This contributes to the unsatisfactory

completion rates within the prescribed normal period of 4-5 years. The faculty is aware of this issue and it must be further investigated to establish to what extent this delay of education is due to academic reasons or is caused by other factors. In this context a number of good practices might help: increasing the quality of teaching across all courses by distributing comprehensive teaching materials and achieving better co-ordination between teaching teams; developing of continuous methods of assessment which will motivate students to attend consistently; finally, a requirement of compulsory attendance should be introduced, at least for core courses.

Rationalization of optional courses available and better pulling of teaching resources across sections to service teaching of core subjects (for example the core subjects of Civil Law could be taught jointly by Faculty of the section of Civil Law and the Section of History, Philosophy and Sociology of Law).

General lack of essay writing skills can be addressed through the introduction of an essay writing course early on in the curriculum.

It is recommended all the Erasmus courses already taught in foreign languages – and for which the School is to be applauded – be integrated into the existing undergraduate curriculum. This has worked well for those courses that are already integrated and would further help to achieve a higher degree of integration between the foreign and the home students as well as enhance the process of internationalization at home.

RESEARCH

The general impression is of a scholarly community which takes itself seriously and encourages its members to be active in research and publish. Indicative is the rule that the publication of a substantive monograph is a requirement for promotion at every level, however this can also have an adverse effect as noted below. In addition there is an impressive output of publications in a wide range of subjects which make a substantial contribution to Greek legal science and scholarship. Several members of Faculty are involved in active participation in legislative drafting and are members of editorial boards and editors of leading academic journals at home and abroad. Finally, there is evidence of individual research achievement of an internationally high standard which occasionally culminates to publications in established foreign journals. Staff participate in 47 international research collaboration programmes and 31 national ones. Further there is an impressive participation of Faculty in international and domestic conferences, be it as organizer or speaker, despite the lack of funding about which we comment below.

There appears to be no general managing structure for coordination and planning of research as is the practice for example in British universities. This must be linked to the difficulties in generating external research funding, publishing in international peer reviewed journals and effective provision of study leave for research. Further, there appear to be no internal standards for assessing research.

There is no research seminar that acts as research forum for all Faculty to report and communicate on their current research, even though individual sectors have taken initiatives in this direction. But this needs to be institutionalized across sectors.

The faculty makes the most out of the research facilities they can afford and there is excellent support by library staff. Some obvious recommendations on library resources to add to the existing ones, conditional on the current financial situation, are: Hein-on-Line; DALLOZ on line; Lexis-Nexis.

The faculty's main objectives are stated as being contribution to Greek legal science and scholarship, contribution to Greek law reform and academic support and consultancy in all aspects of public life. Examples include legal services offered to the university, the training of judges in the National Academy of Judges, seminars for the judiciary and other public service institutions, as well as pro bono work (legal clinic). These aims so far as they go have been achieved, however there is no stated aim of a contribution to international legal scholarship and world-leading legal research. This is in our opinion an important aspiration for an internationally ranked Law School.

Outcomes-Suggestions

The department is acknowledged within the Greek legal community and there is little doubt that within Greece the School enjoys the standing of a leading center of legal research. A great of number of distinctions, awards and rewards have been awarded to individual members of Faculty and the School collectively as detailed in the School's Internal Evaluation Report.

While its domestic research ambitions are commendable, in our opinion the department has to reorient itself toward world-leading legal research. To this aim we offer the following suggestions:

1. Establishment of a research management structure led by a school research committee. It is important that this committee cuts across all sections of the School. Its tasks should include amongst others: planning of research strategy that would include an effective scheme of research study leave; support in applying for study leave abroad; monitoring of research plans; support in applying for external funding; mentoring of younger researchers.
2. Institutionalisation of a staff research seminar across the entire School.
3. Introduction of internal research criteria, including research metrics according to international research standards.

4. Prioritisation of publication in international peer reviewed journals over the Greek language monograph, especially with regard to promotion and workload allocation. The school should make the most of the international experience and linguistic abilities of several members of its staff who should be more motivated to continue publishing internationally and in leading law reviews.
5. Prioritising external research funding applications (e.g. Marie-Curie scholarships; ERC grants and the new European funding framework ‘Horizon 2020’). This will also fund the appointment of research assistants who in turn will generate additional research outcomes, both in terms of publications and fund-raising.
6. Creation of a research culture and community which involves every research active member of the school, including the younger researchers and PhD students. This is particularly important in the light of the need for future recruitment of staff.
7. Research dissemination through participation in worldwide research networks such as SSRN (Social Science Research Network).

ALL OTHER SERVICES

Administrative support

The School is greatly concerned with the present threat of dismissal of several administrative staff. The School has approximately 5000 students and close to 90 academic staff. If Government plans for reduction of administrative staff in the School from 29 to 12 are implemented, the School believes that their operations will be seriously affected and we agree with this assessment.

The present situation appears to work satisfactorily, although with current staff often having to work overtime without pay. In addition office space is at a premium; some Faculty members have no office. This needs to be addressed urgently.

Each section has its own administrative support, and the Dean's office too. More use of electronic processing of information and student requests and other administrative procedures can reduce the administrative burden. The School accepts the need to do more in this respect.

Students are unhappy about opening hours of the School's Secretarial Service, which they consider inadequate for their needs. We agree. This is an issue that must be addressed.

The School should develop a policy of simplifying administrative procedures although this may be difficult at a time of such uncertainty about the future of administrative staff currently employed. The School should perhaps consider pooling all secretarial services, currently dispersed in the different Sections (Tomeis) in one central School unit.

It has been brought to our attention that some of the current administrative staff were research personnel with research qualifications, who in the past were forced to accept their transfer to administrative positions in order to save their jobs. Such practices must obviously be avoided in the future. Research staff should be protected and their

job security guaranteed so long as they offer important services to the University in the field of research.

Academic Services for students

The library occupies a space of 2500 square meters. There are 180 working spaces for readers, which are obviously not adequate, and serves 300 to 350 users daily. Its budget has been dramatically reduced in recent years and they can no longer continue with periodical subscriptions and purchase of new books and new editions of commentaries and textbooks as before. The librarian has done an excellent job in organising and keeping Library stock. Library hours, 8am to 8pm daily except weekends, are not adequate, and especially postgraduate students have requested longer hours, or readjusting current hours to 10am-10pm. There is a shortage of Library personnel, which could be partly met with the use of the services of volunteers, among students. This would allow longer opening hours and weekend opening as in most Universities in other countries.

There is a computer room with a small number of pc working stations for student use. A serious omission is the lack of Wi-Fi access throughout the La School building, which can be easily remedied with the installation of a Wi-Fi antenna connecting the School to the University Wi-Fi network. Electronic learning platforms exist, but greater development and use of the Blackboard in all subjects is necessary, preceded by appropriate training offered to students and staff.

Student counseling, currently not systematically available, must be provided, on the basis of the monitoring system proposed in this report.

We received no information on athletic or other extra curriculum activities, which are Internationally considered as vital parts of the academic community.

In conclusion, administrative facilities seem to be adequate but more time should be available for direct student contact with administrative support staff. The School does not have any specific plans for improvement of this infrastructure and we recommend considering the suggestions in this report.

Outreach activities

The School has an excellent record of outreach activities, including original and innovative life-long learning programmes, contribution to the teaching at the locally domiciled National School of Judges, and other events jointly held with other public and private organisations.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The present financial crisis and the resulting uncertainty as to the continuing funding of state universities in Greece is the main inhibiting factor for long-term strategic planning. We were impressed by the resilience, courage and inventiveness of our colleagues in the face of such adversity. In such an economic environment it is hard to expect strategic planning.

Additionally to this general malaise of the Higher education in Greece the School actively faces challenges in several main areas including recruitment of new staff, release of new posts for new staff, threats of administrative support and cuts in library funding, general infrastructure and funding of research including funding for participating in international conferences and study leaves abroad.

In what follows we are making some suggestions for making the most out of a bad situation:

1. We recognize that in the present financial crisis budget cuts in the public sector are inevitable. However we underline the importance of ring-fencing the Higher Education budget to safeguard the country's future. We bear in mind the example of other European countries where despite similar financial difficulties this was done.
2. The present operation of the Sectors (Tomeis) needs to be seriously reconsidered. There seems to exist a culture of antagonism which must be overcome. While this does not require an administrative change it can be achieved at the level of the suggested synergies in a number of areas: common research policy; development of common research seminars; developing trans-sectional team teaching.
3. Reform of the Curriculum. The School seems to be conscious of this issue, but has failed to achieve this goal so far despite repeated efforts, because of internal obstacles. These obstacles need to be overcome in the near future. A

possible way forward is for all Sections (Tomeis) to agree that a Curriculum Reform Committee of a maximum of three members will prepare within a short period of time (max 6 months) and submit a draft proposal in the light of our earlier recommendations which will be put immediately before the general Faculty meeting for approval.

4. This curriculum reform should additionally address the vital issue of rationalizing teaching of optional subjects and pulling resources together for the teaching of compulsory subjects by adopting, amongst others, the format of cross-sectional team teaching.
5. So far as possible, a mentoring system and increased pastoral care of students should be put in place. This can be achieved by introducing a mentoring system in which every student has a member of staff as mentor. This is feasible in the light of the very good staff/student ratio (1/22) of the school. One member of staff who, on a rotational basis, will act as senior advisor will coordinate this structure.
6. The school should implement a strategy to improve student performance in exams and a shortening of average duration of studies, which is to be strongly recommended. The mentoring system (point 4, above) may form an important part of this strategy.
7. The School must develop a recruitment strategy based on its teaching and research needs over the next 5-10 years in the light of the comments above for improvement in these areas. Concrete strategies should be sought for engaging young researchers from the early stages of their academic career in the structure of the faculty. This can be achieved by opening new posts in combination with successful external funding.
8. The School must develop a culture for raising external research funding (see recommendations in section 'Research', above).

9. A related strategy would be to promote publication in international peer reviewed journals by linking it directly to the evaluation of staff, the procedure of promotions and the calculation of work allocation.
10. The School should continue and further its excellent record of developing international network with emphasis on networks that are research oriented.
11. A key aim of the School should be the development of a cross-Section English language Masters programme (LL.M). This should pull together the research strengths of the School and be offered both to home and international students. This programme would be of immense benefit to the entire community of the School for a number of reasons: it would contribute to the international reputation of the School; it would provide additional income for supporting the infrastructure of the School and creating new posts for teaching assistants; finally it would create a pool of high-quality international graduates that can be recruited for PhDs and, when funding allows, other research positions.
12. The infrastructure needs updating: the Wi-Fi environment needs to be extended in all areas of the Law School; equip lecture rooms with modern teaching facilities (smart rooms).

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The department is acknowledged within the Greek legal community and there is little doubt that within Greece the School enjoys the standing of a leading center of legal research and education. The teaching staff are dedicated to teaching as well as research. An appropriate adjustment of the teaching programme to reflect a more coherent structure and more rational use of the teaching staff (including cross-Sectional team teaching of a smaller number of core subjects) is likely to contribute to more student satisfaction, a decrease of the average time of studies and better results in exams. In addition, graduates of the program will increase the already high rates of success either in finding employment in the public or private sectors or in being admitted to strong postgraduate programs worldwide.

In regard of research, owing to the strong international background of its Faculty members, the School has the potential to become an international center in legal research. To this purpose the School must develop a common research culture and common research policy in pursuing publications that are internationally more visible (peer reviewed journals) and in identifying the research strengths of the School that can lead to successful applications for research funding.

The School is aware of its strengths and of the weaknesses we have identified in this report. Many of the weaknesses are not the fault of the School but of Ministry policies over which the School and the University have no control and from which it (and presumably other departments as well) suffer. As to the weaknesses that are within the power of the School to address, the Committee believes that the School wants to make improvements possible within the limits of available human and material resource.

The Committee's overall assessment of the School is positive. We conclude by pointing out that the recommendations indicated herein are intended as ways to improve an already strong School.

Athens, 26 October 2013

The members of the committee:

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