

EUA EVALUATION REPORT
THE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY (GREECE)

Volos

July 2004

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1. INTRODUCTION

Aims and Purposes of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme

A central aim of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme is to examine the capacity for change in a university by studying its decision-making processes and organizational structures. It then assesses the extent to which these support academic vitality, innovation and strategic vision. It also explores if the university has developed the processes, tools and structures for an effective internal quality culture. The evaluation only takes place at the request of the university itself.

The ultimate purpose of an evaluation is to help a university achieve its desired objectives in teaching and research within the external constraints in which the institution is obliged to operate. It is not its purpose to pass judgments, nor to assess the merits of one university relative to others.

The programme has been in operation for ten years, and has been used by over 110 universities in 35 different countries (including 4 outside Europe).

General working methods of an EUA evaluation

Evaluation panels consist of three present or former university leaders from three different European countries. They are knowledgeable about European and international higher education trends, and experienced in understanding specific challenges faced by institutions in particular national and international contexts. The secretary to each panel is from the university staff of a fourth country.

The process begins with the preparation of a self-evaluation report by the university itself - and this is fundamental to the success of the whole exercise. Having read the report, the panel then makes a preliminary, two day visit to familiarise themselves with the local context of the university, its overall structure and the key people involved. They also visit a few of the faculties and university services, and meet a selection of students, academic and non-academic staff, as well as some of the external stakeholders. In the light of this experience, the panel usually requests further information and data to supplement the university's self-evaluation report.

The panel then makes its later, main visit, usually lasting three days. More detailed discussions take place to clarify and extend the panel's preliminary conclusions, supplemented by further visits and meetings with staff and students.

The four central questions most frequently raised by EUA panels are: a) what is the institution trying to do? ; b) how is the institution trying to do it?; c) how does it know it works?; and d) how does the institution change in order to improve?

The answers to these questions are considered in relation to factors such as the mission of the university and the general educational structure of the country in which it is located.

The main visit concludes with a brief oral report by the chairman of the panel. The detailed conclusions and recommendations are set out in a written report which is first sent to the university for comments and any corrections of errors before it is published.

The evaluation programme carried out at the University of Thessaly

Composition of the evaluation panel

The evaluation panel consisted of:

Prof. Regis Ritz (Chairman) Pole Universitaire of Bordeaux (France)

Prof. Johann Gerlach, Freie University Berlin (Germany)

Prof. Sir David Smith, University of Edinburgh (The United Kingdom)

Liudvika Leišyte (Academic secretary), Research Associate, Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), University of Twente (The Netherlands)

Self-evaluation report of the university

The self-evaluation report was produced by a self-evaluation team chaired by Vice Rector of the University of Thessaly, Prof. Napoleon Mitsis. Prof. Nicholas Vlachos was the coordinator and the EUA liaison person for the overall process.

The preliminary visit

The preliminary visit took place on 15-17 March, 2004. The purpose was to get an overall impression of the University of Thessaly and its local context. It consisted of a series of meetings with the faculty from different departments of different schools of the University of Thessaly as well as with a number of administrative staff, students (both undergraduate and post-graduate), and external stake-holders, such as the [Prefect of the Region of Thessaly, Mr. I. Printzos](#), the Mayor of Volos, Mr. K. Mitrou, and the General Manager of the Association of Industries in Thessaly and Central Greece, Mr. A. D. Papadoulis. Meetings were followed by visits to different locations of the University of Thessaly, namely, the School of Engineering, School of Agriculture, School of Human Sciences, School of Health Sciences, and the University Library.

The main visit

The main evaluation visit took place on 27-29 May 2004. During the visit, the evaluation panel had a number of meetings with the Rector, the Senate, the Committee for Academic Development & Strategic Planning, the Research Committee, central university policy-making staff, the office of Foreign languages, Career office, **International European Educational Programs** office, staff responsible for the budget and personnel matters as well as visiting the Schools of Sports Science in Trikala and Veterinary Science in Karditsa. The panel also toured many of the local facilities, such as the laboratories of the School of Agriculture and the School of Engineering, The Technology Park, the Metallurgical Industrial Research & Technological Development Centre (MIRTEC), and the University Press. At the end of the main visit, an oral report to the University was presented by the Chair of the panel, Prof. Ritz, to an audience consisting of the representatives of the University of Thessaly.

The evaluation panel's overall experience of the University of Thessaly

The evaluation panel wishes to express its deep gratitude to the Rector of the University of Thessaly, Prof. Constantinos Bagiatis, as well as to the Chairman of the University self-evaluation team, Vice Rector of the University, Prof. Napoleon Mitsis. The EUA liaison and coordinator, Prof. Nicholas Vlachos, prepared and organized the two visits in an exceptionally efficient and effective way. Prof. Constantinos Kittas, Prof. Paschalis Molyvdas, Prof. Stavros Perentidis and Assist. Prof. Marios Goudas were of great help to the work of the university's self-evaluation team. Particular and special thanks go to the larger community of the students and staff of the university, who provided all the information that was needed in the interviews, spoke honestly and frankly about their experiences, as well as showing the EUA evaluation panel examples of the places, classrooms and laboratories where they work.

In particular, the EUA evaluation panel appreciated the work carried out by the university's self-evaluation group, and indeed by the whole university community in contributing to the self-evaluation report. It was also grateful for the additional materials that were needed to clarify certain points after the preliminary visit, and to get a more comprehensive view of the current situation of the University of Thessaly. The self-evaluation report served as a reference for this evaluation report. The latter is the result of all the oral interviews at the University and written information that members of the EUA evaluation team received during the two visits.

2. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The higher education sector in Greece is very centralized. The Ministry of Education exercises tight control over the financing as well as the regulation of higher education sector. The universities are regulated by Article 16 of the Constitution and by the

framework law 1268 of 1982. This law reformed Greek higher education together with the subsequent law of 2083/1992 and 2517/1997.

These laws determine the decision-making structures and personnel policies, including salaries of university employees. The duration of studies (4, 5 or 6 years depending on the field of study) as well as much of the way in which the university operates is predetermined by the state. Admission of students to universities in Greece is organized through a nationwide entrance examinations conducted by the Central Committee of Entrance Examination. The number of the new students to be accepted by a university is determined by the Ministry of Education, so that universities cannot **directly** control the number of students in different fields according to the resources available to teach them. The Ministry also **has the final authority to decide** what type of programs and departments a specific university should have, what type of degree can be granted and determines which specializations within a program of study are allowed. However, the university enjoys autonomy in academic matters – exercised by the departments – so that neither the central bodies of the university nor the state (through the ministries) have influence on designing the curricula, the distribution of teaching load or assigning teaching methods for undergraduate studies.

There is no current national system of quality assurance in Greece. Although the law 2083 of 1992 introduced an evaluation procedure for universities and proposed that responsibility for overall evaluation belonged to a national evaluation committee, this committee was never formed; details concerning the whole evaluation procedure, the evaluation criteria and the performance indicators to be used were never determined. However, fostering the quality culture within the higher education system is one of the major objectives of the proposed Bill to the Parliament this year (2004), which aims at the establishment of the National Council for Quality Assurance and Assessment.

3. THE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The University of Thessaly was established in 1984 in the city of Volos in order to strengthen the regional dimension in East-Central Greece. This University evolved with the emphasis on Primary, Nursery and Physical Education, Agriculture, Engineering and Medicine. With the help of the EU funded programs that were introduced by the Ministry of Education, the University's academic profile was expanded and strengthened; over the years many new departments have opened, notably in Engineering, Health sciences, Agricultural sciences, Economics and Humanities.

The time of the undergraduate study varies according to the discipline from 4 to 6 years, the postgraduate courses vary from 12 to 15 months and the minimum duration of the PhD is 3 years. Currently, the University has around 5,500 **undergraduate and 900 postgraduate students, is** continuously growing and is regarded as one of the major pillars of the regional development in **the** East-Central Greece.

The University of Thessaly is aware of its successes and difficulties. Its main strength is its relatively young and talented staff. Consequently it has high scientific standards as a European University. The enthusiasm of its staff nourishes a quality culture that permeates the whole institution, and it was noted that certain departments had already carried out self-evaluations some years before the present EUA exercise was proposed. The University plays an important regional role and is active in the local community.

The preparation of the good and comprehensive self-evaluation report was a collective exercise which visibly helped the creation of a University identity as well as providing information and data that will be useful in future planning.

Moreover, the overall attitude of staff and students during the meetings and visits was positive, and the university community as a whole was frank and open to the EUA evaluation panel. This essential prerequisite for the future development of the University in the right direction therefore already exists.

The three main constraints for the University as a whole are: the tight **state** control from the state; the geographical positioning of the University in four very dispersed locations (Volos, Larissa, Karditsa and Trikala); and the shortage of certain kinds of staff and resources to facilitate high quality teaching and research.

State control is visible at all levels of **the** university. The university has no control over salaries of staff since they are public **functionaries servants** and are directly paid by the state. Though the University has autonomy for the academic side of the selection process, the Minister of Education has control of the financial and legal side of the selection and appointment process, making it difficult to attract certain kinds of staff of the appropriate quality. Moreover, the decision-making procedures are over-regulated. For example, a proposal for any kind of **important** structural change in the University has to be approved by the Ministry before it can be enacted.

The geographical dispersion hinders communication within the University and the potential for co-operation between different departments. Most of those interviewed stressed this as a serious constraint on the sense of the belonging to the university as a whole rather than to a particular department. Students in particular noted the absence of **any** social activities which could embrace the whole University (as well as the near absence of social facilities in some locations). Geographical dispersion also results in the same subjects being taught in different departments in different locations, thus needing more faculty of the same field which is not a very cost-effective practice. The University has tried to overcome some of these constraints by regular visits (**Rectorate**, administrative staff) to the different locations, but considerable travelling time is involved so that this practice is not as frequent as it should be.

The problem of understaffing is illustrated by the disturbingly high ratio of faculty to administrative/technical staff of almost 4:1 (320 elected faculty and 380 visiting teaching staff versus 180 support staff). Highly skilled academic staff therefore have to spend sometimes considerable time on routine administrative tasks instead of carrying out research or supervising students. Moreover, since the University is new, the faculty size in the departments is relatively small in comparison to the number of students, with the extremes ranging from 18:1 in the Department of Planning and Regional Development to 6.5:1 for the Department of Economics. The Department of Veterinary Science has 350 students within its 5-year undergraduate programme and 26 PhD students - but just 15 elected staff among which there is only one professor and 7 technical/administrative staff. The under-equipment of certain departments is caused by the lack of financing from the state and eventually from the University. Again, according to the interviewees, the state allocations of funds for the development of infrastructure was reduced after 1999. Thus, some Departments in the School of Engineering could not receive EPEAEK funding (a Ministry of Education program using EU funds for education and initial vocational training) since they were established after 1999, but there were no other possibilities to fund the infrastructure in the laboratories. The internal funds of the University, on the other hand, have had to be mostly allocated to the construction of necessary new buildings.

Recommendations

The major recommendation of the EUA evaluation team is that the University of Thessaly must plan to maintain its current youthful vigour in the years ahead. If it can do this, then despite the severe constraints under which it currently operates, the University can compete at the European level as it matures, given its strong potential in research excellence at the regional, national and international levels, as well as its innate quality culture.

To counter the problem of geographical dispersion, the University of Thessaly needs to develop a strategy to improve communication and integration between its different locations. This could include publishing a University Newspaper, which would promote the university community spirit, **and** bring the life of the different departments out of isolation and allow sharing of the experiences and good practice among the faculty and students. Given that the university has an efficient and modern University Press, this could be a good example of building on the University's strengths. Further development of the University's user-friendly web-site could occur at the same time.

Another component of this strategy could be the organisation of cultural events (such as public lectures by well-known academics and tours of university facilities) at each location. These should be designed to attract an audience both from within the wider university and outside it. This would reinforce the mission of the university as being part of the development of the region at large.

A social centre for students and a faculty club for academic staff are much needed to give the identity of the university more cohesion.

3. GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

The University of Thessaly has a mission to transmit critical knowledge through teaching, generate new knowledge via research, and provide expert services to the wider society. The major aims are to produce and disseminate quality services, benefit the societal needs, participate in the cultural regional events, cultivate academic ethos, defend the democratic principles and promote the public status of the University. (Rectorate statement, May 2004). The EUA evaluation panel welcomes the emphasis on the university-society nexus and the university's willingness to contribute to the development of the region. For example, the contribution of the Department of Medicine with its new hospital in Larissa to the local community is very important. Likewise, certain projects of the School of Agriculture and the School of Engineering are valuable for the regional development and sustainability.

The Rector is a strong unifying force at the top management level, and there have been three positive developments in the University which deserve attention:

- a) The introduction of the middle management, such as elected deans, represents a new way of making decisions at the central university level. They will help to coordinate the activities of different departments of schools and will allow for better communication both horizontally as well as vertically within the University.
- b) The appointment of a new vice-rector will also allow for more coordination within the University especially in public and international affairs under the supervision of the Rector. The new vice-rector will develop the positive trend of opening the University to international cooperation business and also the functioning of the ad-hoc committees in the University.
- c) The ad-hoc committees, such as the Research Committee, the Committee for Academic Development and Strategic Planning, the Library Committee are very important, since they are located at the centre of the decision-making of the university; they are transversal and help to establish a good environment for the decision-making procedures. Their proposals to the Senate reflect the decisions reached by the consensus of different members of the committee, therefore representing different schools and departments across the University as a whole.

The positive developments in the financing of the University are its income generating actions, especially when it comes to research projects and services to the businesses and industry. Here two fields of research are very active. 60% of funding from research

projects come from Engineering and 25% from Agriculture. Such income provides the possibility of infrastructure development at the departmental level. Donations and postgraduate program fees bring in additional income as well. Also the participation in the EU funded programs that are administered by the Ministry of Education (EPEAEK) are welcome.

The fact that university decision-making structures are determined by the government is a significant obstacle to their efficient improvement through innovative new ideas from within. Although the university can propose certain changes to them that have to be approved by the Ministry of Education, the bureaucracy involved is a further demand on very limited resources.

The major weaknesses of the management of the University are the dispersed departments, the consequent difficulty of bringing them together, and the **apparent** lack of incentives for them to cooperate with each other.

A further weakness highlighted by both faculty and students is the high percentage of votes allocated to students when electing chairs of departments, **deans professors** and the Rectorate. This is another example of an unsatisfactory process determined by the government and not the university.

Inadequate financing is a common problem for universities internationally. In the context of Greece, the problem is exacerbated by the extent to which the allocation of the budget within the university is determined by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy and Finance, leaving little flexibility to the University management. The fact that salaries come directly from the state leaves little opportunity for the University to develop its own employment and personnel policies. The experience of other European countries is that the greater the financial autonomy of an institution, the more efficient is the use of the limited financial resources available to it.

A further problem is that departments which have little orientation to applied research have much less ability to attract external research project funding. Therefore, they are even more dependent on the very limited central university financing provided by the government, and there is a consequent threat of becoming marginalised.

Recommendations

A strong focus on the region is welcomed, especially since the university also benefits from the region. However, if the University defines well its local and regional positions, a clear definition of its national position is also important. The University of Thessaly

should therefore consider advertising more strongly its strengths and importance for the national level of higher education in Greece.

The University should consider further development of its middle management, bringing greater unification to its dispersed departments, strengthening the common university ethos with the help of increasing numbers of ad-hoc committees, and putting such important bodies as the Career Office and the Research Committee on its permanent structural map.

The government of Greece must be persuaded that the experience of other countries in Europe and elsewhere is that its present rigid, detailed and centralised system of financing and regulating universities may not be the most effective way of providing a high quality educational system. If the budget of an institution such as the University of Thessaly is allocated as a bulk sum, this would allow for more efficient prioritizing resources for the crucial areas of University development. It would provide room for manoeuvre for the top management of the University who, after all, are the persons with the most direct experience of what is most needed to improve the institution. This would bring in a more effective decision-making process and contribute to solving the centre/periphery problem at the University.

4. ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The departments are relatively independent in creating their programs and organising their courses from the central bodies of the University and the Ministry of Education.

Research performance is excellent. The University attracts substantial amounts from the EU projects, which indicates that the scientific achievements are high by international standards. Young researchers are active in publishing, and there are important links between the University and business. Also there are well-developed consultancies and other services in the departments that are geared towards applied science (e.g. the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering)

Departments are mostly discipline-oriented and there is little interaction between them, even in the areas that are common between them.

Research is concentrated on the applied side, but this may be a consequence of there being little funding available for any basic research that needs to be carried out (e.g. the Department of Medicine, the School of Engineering)

Recommendations

The University should consider developing more inter-departmental, multi-disciplinary, programs. For example, the Department of Veterinary Science could have common courses with the Department of Medicine and with the School of Agriculture. The Department of the Sports Science might benefit from cooperation with the Department of Medicine and the Department of Biochemistry /Biotechnology in Larissa. Moreover, different departments in different schools could create multi-disciplinary programs including, for instance, psychology and economics/management, and in this way cooperating with the School of Human Sciences and the Department of Economic Studies. A new program in tourism could bring together history, archeology, economics, languages.

Furthermore, e-learning programs could be an added value for a university that is widely dispersed in different locations. Also e-learning would certainly be an advantage as an interesting alternative to the available courses. Related to this is the development of adult education in general and the new life long learning European program. The university could exploit this area not only by providing services to the society, but by bringing adults back to professionally oriented programs.

In research, the cooperation between the University and business is to be encouraged. So far, an interesting example is the cooperation with the Technology Park. Universities with good applied science often wish to establish their own spin-off companies to develop ideas with commercial potential. However, experience in other countries shows that expert advice on technology transfer is essential to success. The performance of MIRTEC (Metallurgical Industrial Research and Technology Development Centre) is outstanding. It could be a promising partner for the University, though more concrete cooperation, endurance and long-term planning is required. In other words, the University could have a research policy that would build on the present strengths and try to develop links with the business, provide support on technology transfer and strengthen research performance in the long run.

5.EUROPEAN DIMENSION AND INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING

The ECTS system has been applied for different programs in different schools as a result of participation in the Socrates Programme as well as in other European programmes and exchanges. Departments are collaborating with foreign partners in their respective fields in order to establish similar curricula for undergraduate and postgraduate programs with the hope that it will improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Student mobility has been promoted at the national level for the last three years. At the University of Thessaly, an **International (European Educational Programs)** office has

been established. It is a positive development, since the image of the university is essential for its future development. In the Erasmus program there have already been exchanges of students: 32 outgoing and 24 incoming during the academic year 2003/2004.

Faculty are active in publishing internationally in the national and international peer-reviewed journals and participating in exchanges with the foreign colleagues during visits abroad for conferences and seminars.

The first international postgraduate program in Greece was started by the Department of Regional Planning and Development of the University of Thessaly. It is also pioneering joint programmes. For example, the Greek-French joint master programme was established between the Department of Planning and Regional Development of the University of Thessaly in Volos and the Department of Geography of the University Blaise Pascal in Clermont-Ferrand.

However, there is inadequate awareness of the developments and changes in higher education in Europe. This has resulted in unfortunate misconceptions of the Bologna process among the student body and even among the faculty.

The ECTS system is disparately applied by different departments. There is no clear coordination and help on this issue across the University.

The **International (European Educational Programs)** office could devote more of its efforts to helping students who wish to go to universities in other countries besides what is available under the Erasmus program. The Career office does not perform this function, so there is a lack of information to assist student mobility. To make matters worse, useful information is even more difficult to acquire for students of the university studying in locations other than Volos.

Consequently, the visibility of the University in other countries is not well developed.

All courses are taught in Greek due to the state regulations. This is probably one of the reasons for the low number of international students at the University.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to organising a university-wide student workshop (or 'European day') so that the students would be properly informed about the developments in higher education that are taking place in Europe. Accurate information must be made available about the Bologna process, and it is important to be aware of the

nature and importance of ‘harmonization’ and that in no sense will it be a threat to the University’s own identity.

The number of mobile students is too low; a precise target should be defined to double, within the **next 2-3 years**, the total of outgoing and incoming students at the University. This concerns mainly Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci students but there are many other opportunities offered to students internationally. Many programs also encourage faculty staff mobility through financial help.

The further development of joint postgraduate degrees is to be encouraged since this will allow for new perspectives while having international students in classes.

Language training has definitely to be facilitated, perhaps by establishing a Greek **Modern Language/Foreign Language Institute**. This could provide not only language training but also courses on culture and civilization. Such an Institute would help the adjustment of the foreign students and faculty to the local environment, attract more foreign students, and help the local students to learn more about the language and culture of the country where they plan to study. The Institute would need a clear position on the structural map of the university, possess relevant human resources as well as office/laboratory/classroom space and infrastructure support.

More cooperation between the Career office and the **International (European Educational Programs)** office should be encouraged. This could lead to the development of a database of international scholarships/grants and study programs abroad in areas of interest to students of the University. Frequent visits to the different campuses of the University will be needed. It will be important to spread information about the University’s international mobility, since this increases the attractiveness of the university and advertises its quality. A participation in the new Erasmus Mundus programme at master level could be a good opportunity for widening the international exchanges.

Also important will be the training of the **International (European Educational Programs)** office staff, encouraging the networking with colleagues from Greece and other countries, and participating in the EAIE, ACA and similar conferences. In the long run, the knowledge and experience gained would encourage not only student mobility, but also that of faculty and administrative staff. This will bring the awareness of the University’s strengths to the international community.

Finally, an important issue is the development of a high-quality web-site and a public relations campaign (a communication plan) that would improve the visibility of the university not only within the local and regional community, but also nationally and internationally. Moreover, a good web-site could provide up-to-date information to the

wider university community and could be a valuable tool for bridging the gap between the centre and periphery.

6. STUDENT ISSUES

The University of Thessaly provides good facilities for learning. Financial support from the state is generous compared to many other countries, and includes subsidies for books, transportation, food and lodging.

The University is actively building new premises, such as the **University Hospital and the Pre-clinical Medicine** building in Larissa, the **Sports** buildings in Trikala, and the **Central Library** in Volos from which students will definitely benefit. **Also new buildings for the departments of Civil Engineering and of Mechanical & Industrial Engineering are under way in Volos.**

The Career office is active and provides useful links with the employers, especially during the practical training period of the undergraduate students, which is a valuable and positive experience for them.

Quite a number of departments have developed quality assessment procedures for their **courses** in which students participate.

Relations between teachers and students are good compared to many countries, and this may be another benefit of being a relatively young university.

The first web-based distance postgraduate course is run by the Department of Physical Education and Sport.

However, there is little university-centred social life for students due to the dispersed locations, the absence of a social centre, and no student newsletter or radio (as occurs in some universities).

The length of undergraduate studies tends to be longer than prescribed and attendance at classes is not compulsory.

The University has no centralised quality assessment of courses, which means that there is not necessarily a follow-up of any problems revealed by quality assessment.

There is no possibility of appeal to a central university body if a student fails an examination **and believes that his grade has been unfair.**

The Career office is not yet established as a permanent part of the university structure. It is a very important facility for helping students to find employment.

There is inadequate help for students to travel between the different locations where they must study. For example, there is only one bus in the Department of the Veterinary Science to reach the animal farms/field work.

Recommendations

There should be a central university body that coordinates the assessment of courses, ensures the spread of good practice between departments, and ensures there is an effective follow-up to assessments.

There should be a central body to which students can go for an impartial appeal if they believe their exam grades have been unfair.

The Career office must be made permanent and with central premises in Volos as well as adequate subsidiaries in the other locations. It must be recognised that employability is a central issue for students.

A student social centre should be established at least in the central location and facilitated with some kind of media interaction such as a newsletter and possibly a radio station.

E-learning for certain programs could be helpful to bridge the gap of the multi-disciplinary programs and different locations of the University.

Given the degree of dispersal of the University of Thessaly between and even within its different locations, more help should be provided by the state to facilitate travel by students between the different places where they are required to study.

7. PERSPECTIVES AND DYNAMICS

While the University is maturing, it is important for it to consider its institutional policies, strategic planning and priorities, mainly its capacity for change. The University of Thessaly could allow itself to experiment in certain fields in order to improve. For example, to strengthen and manage the excellent research base of the University, a Research **Institute** could be established - perhaps initiated at the central level by the present Research Committee. Also the development of the joint post-graduate degrees, multi-disciplinary and e-learning programs could be pursued. This would allow for cooperation not only with outside partners, but also between the dispersed departments of the university. It would help build on its strengths in the region and nationally. To

monitor such processes in research and teaching programs, a central **Quality Management/Evaluation** office would be a paramount requirement.

Finally, building on its good quality in research and teaching, its high standards and good community spirit, the University could make internationalisation a priority for the the immediate future. It could help to establish its international reputation both within the European context and in the world. In other words, there is a need for strategic planning for the future, a mechanism for the implementation of change so that the University of Thessaly can become a pro-active rather than remain re-active to the dynamics of an ever-changing environment.

8. THE CAPACITY FOR CHANGE: AN **ACTION PLAN**

These various recommendations that have been widely discussed during the two visits could be part of a general **Action Plan or Strategic Plan**, for the coming years. The University is invited to define its priorities, objectives and perspectives. Very much aware of difficult constraints but also very conscious of its immense potential, of its high scientific standards, the University of Thessaly can define a new type of policy, based on innovation and pioneer work in many fields. It possesses - or will soon possess - the mechanisms (centrally and departmentally) to implement the changes and improvements: the necessary committees and administrative services. Above all this University has a strong identity, a very good spirit, the will to act and is open to new ideas; it will become in the next years ever more attractive to Greek, European, international students, teachers and researchers.