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HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
H . Q . A .  
HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND  
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

## **EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**

HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY

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## ***1. EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE***

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the University/Technological Education Institution named: **Hellenic Open University** comprised the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry kept by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 and the Law 4009/2011:

1. Professor Constantine Passaris (Coordinator)  
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
2. Professor Stephanos Efthymiadis  
Open University of Cyprus, Latsia, Cyprus
3. Professor Triantafillos Mountziaris  
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.A
4. Professor Alexandros Paraskevas  
University of West London, London, United Kingdom

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

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 The External Evaluation Procedure

- Dates and brief account of the site visit

27 June-1<sup>st</sup> July 2016, site visits at Athens and Patras. From Monday 27 June to Wednesday 29 June we visited all four Schools and supporting infra-structure and have talked to all of the staff. The entire committee met with the President, the Vice-Presidents and members of the Governing Board. We had meetings with the Deans and the Faculty Members of the four Schools: School of Science and Technology, School of Applied Arts, School of Humanities, and School of Social Sciences.

From Wednesday 29 June to Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July we wrote the draft external evaluation report (EER).

- Whom did the Committee meet?

Nearly all members of the faculty (varying by faculty), representative members of administrative staff, student representatives (both undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate) selected by University officials, a few alumni, external stake-holders that maintain a relationship with HOU, and others.

- List of Reports, documents, other data examined by the EEC

1. Full self-evaluation report, in Greek.
2. Key Elements from the Reports of the HOU Schools' External Evaluation
3. A summary for the activities of the Schools, in Greek
4. Annual Reports Published by Schools
5. Statistics Reports Produced by the Internal Assessment and Training Unit

- Groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed

Groups by School for all Schools for teaching staff (mostly DEP and some SEP), all administrative staff in a single session, technical and support staff, a small number of undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate students, and alumni.

- Facilities visited by the EEC

Campus at Perivola, Patras, labs of the School of Science and Technology (Tsamadou Street), Library, Instructional Material Packing Facility, teleconference rooms.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.1):

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

Justify your rating (optional):

The EEC was highly impressed by the positive welcome and collaborative environment at HOU, the organization of the visit, and the dedication of the HOU community and administration to the mission of the University.

## 2.2 The Self-Evaluation Procedure

*Please comment on:*

- **Appropriateness of sources and documentation used**  
The report in Greek (243 pages) was detailed and informative. However, the information covered the period until April of 2015, that is prior to the appointment of a new Governing Board, which has introduced substantial changes in the strategy and operation of HOU since fall of 2015.
- **Quality and completeness of evidence provided and reviewed**  
The quality and quantity of the data provided were in general appropriate and comprehensive. The documentation included extensive reports and statistics on faculty, research grants and costs, student numbers (applying, enrolled, active, and graduating), and administrative personnel (both permanent and temporary) as well as on activities by academic and administrative staff, and supporting services.
- **The extent to which the objectives of the internal evaluation procedure have been met by the Institution**

Extensive documentation (in printed and e-form) was provided with regard to various statistics and metrics (performance indicators). The EEC benefited from information and data on the range of indicators, in addition to averages or totals that were provided, to get a better sense of the variability within and across Schools. Additionally, the new Governing Board of HOU orally communicated a new set of goals and impact-oriented implementation plans for the future.

There are additional objectives that the four Schools have set, and the EEC endorses, but cannot be met without the Greek State's support. These include:

1. More academics (DEP) and contract academic staff
2. More administrative staff

- **Description and Analysis of the Self-Evaluation Procedure in the Institution**  
Internal evaluation is an ongoing process at HOU. It is overseen by Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP), assisted by the Internal Assessment and Training Unit (MEAE).
- **Analysis of the positive elements and difficulties which arose during the self-evaluation procedure**  
No difficulties were reported. Note, however, the point made above regarding the period when the self-evaluation was completed. The HOU has embraced the task of self-evaluation with professionalism. The EEC acknowledges that the self-evaluation process has become a conduit for improvement and coping with the challenges facing HOU.
- **Whether the self-evaluation procedure was comprehensive and interactive**  
The EEC finds that the procedure was comprehensive and interactive.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&2.2):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):* T

The attitude towards the self-evaluation procedure was positive. The necessity for recurrent self-evaluation is shared by all HOU constituents.



### 3. PROFILE OF THE INSTITUTION UNDER EVALUATION

#### 3.1 Institutional Governance, Leadership & Strategy

Please comment on:

##### 3.1.1 Vision, mission and goals of the Institution

- What are the Institution's mission and goals

The academic mission of HOU is unique in Greece because it provides distance-learning degree Programs to students from a wide spectrum of demographic and income-level backgrounds. Parallel to that, it promotes scientific research both in the area of distance-learning and education and in the disciplines represented in the Study Programs.

- Priorities set by goals

The goals presented were three-fold:

First, to provide quality degree Programs by applying distance-learning methodology.

Second, to advance distance-learning technology and methodology.

Third, to promote scientific research.

- How are the goals achieved

A. By improving and updating educational material

By introducing new methodologies in distance-learning education

By creating and/or adding new modules to the extant ones

By translating offered Programs to languages other than Greek

B. Planning and Designing new Programs of Study to be offered either solely by HOU or as joint degrees with partner Universities in Greece and abroad. The Governing Board has also decided to offer self-standing modules for those interested in acquiring special knowledge and skills without acquiring a degree.

C. Conducting research in educational technology and the fields represented by the faculty members' scholarly interests.

- Procedures established by the Institution to monitor the achievement of goals

There is a systematic procedure to evaluate teaching staff and performance. Data are collected from students, module coordinators, and study directors. An electronic system has since long been implemented. The student participation is satisfactory and the data compilations are comprehensive. There is a periodic revision and improvement of the questionnaires.

A special unit has been established to work on new Study Programs. The transformation of hard-copy teaching resources into digital formats is planned.

Labs, library facilities, and other learning resources have been upgraded in a continuous fashion.

Some units have successfully established collaborations with Faculty members of other Universities that led to external research grants.

- What is your assessment of the Institution's ability to improve

The EEC has noted a proactive culture and determination for improvement. Faculty members have variously expressed their dissatisfaction with the educational material currently in use. Efforts for replacing it are currently undermined by the extant legal framework which requires the ministerial approval, even of minor changes in course material. In consequence, the digitalization process which has already started will be painfully slow.

Generally, it must be acknowledged that, by its proper financial means, HOU is trying to achieve reprioritization of its targets in order to better meet its academic objectives.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&amp;3.1.1):</i>	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

HOU aims to supersede the limitations imposed by a highly restrictive legal framework that prevents flexibility, timely adaptation to educational requirements, and autonomous decision-making. The intention to also identify itself as a research University is praiseworthy.

The EEC believes that the Governing Board should join forces with the academic staff in pursuing the autonomy of HOU in the immediate future. This will be critical for establishing a well-defined strategic plan and achieving its goals in a reasonable timeframe.

### 3.1.2 Organizational Development Strategy

- Effectiveness of administrative officials

The EEC appreciated the efforts of the newly-established Governing Board to chart a new direction to the mission of HOU and raise its visibility both within Greece and abroad. The administrative support staff has shown a readiness to respond to new challenges. They have also demonstrated a strong commitment and loyalty to the University.

- Existence of effective operation regulations

The EEC realized that operation regulations exist and function adequately. As said, improvement of educational material, a critical component of distance learning, is hampered by current legislation. This is a critical cause of difficulties in updating the curriculum and modernizing its dissemination. Mechanisms are already in place in assessing and improving the teaching effectiveness of the academic personnel.

In its discussions with former and current students the EEC was informed that there are some inconsistencies between the institutional study regulation and the individual School study regulations, e.g., disciplinary action for plagiarism, appeal processes, etc.

- Specific goals and timetables

1. With regard to the self-evaluation report, there are specific goals in terms of academic development strategy and research strategy. However, there is no specific timeframe for the achievement of these goals.
  2. As far as the strategic direction of the new Governing Board is concerned, aspirational goals were presented but again without a specific timeframe.
- Measures taken to reach goals  
There are several internal projects currently running aiming at the implementation of the above mentioned goals. These include curriculum improvements, teaching staff development, technology platform upgrades, and new facilities.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.2):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

The EEC believes that the Governing Board must work in collaboration with the faculty of HOU to develop a common strategic direction and a time-bound road map for accomplishing the goals set. Consistency in internal regulation should also be checked and implemented.

### 3.1.3 Academic Development Strategy

- Response of the Institution to Faculties and Departments  
The EEC noticed that there have been some communication gaps between the former Governing Boards and the faculty. The current Governing Board is making an effort to bridge these gaps.
- Goals and timetables
  1. New Study Programs – No timetable given.
  2. Collaborative Agreements – No timetable given.
- Measures taken to reach goals
  1. New Study Programs were designed and announced to run from the next academic year. The same holds with offering of self-standing modules.
  2. Collaborative agreements were established by the new Governing Board very quickly to complement the existing ones with foreign Universities.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.3):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

The EEC was pleased to hear from the new Governing Board that there is a commitment to renew the HOU's educational provision by 50% within the next three years.

The EEC recommends that any renewal effort should be done strategically following a process of market research, feasibility study, and consideration of meeting current Greek society's educational needs. With regards to collaborative agreements the EEC equally recommends continuity of Study Programs that have proven to be successful based on specific metrics that correspond to the strategic objectives of HOU (e.g., enrolment for established Programs, enrolment growth for new Programs, social impact of specialized Programs).

### 3.1.4 Research Strategy

- Key points in research strategy

HOU was originally established as a primarily teaching University. Nonetheless, there has been a strong tendency for increasing its institutional research profile. This paradigm shift is driven by the hiring of research active faculty and the opportunities for research collaborations. As external grant money becomes available, the hiring of PhD students and post-doctoral fellows will further strengthen the overall research enterprise. There is an ongoing effort to improve research infrastructure.

- Research strategy objectives and timetables for achieving them

Capitalize on research specializations and interests of existing DEP faculty and build up research teams around them to focus on cutting-edge and relevant research topics. Timetables were not offered but there is an ongoing endeavor to recruit new research-active faculty members (DEP and SEP).

- Laboratory research support network

Existing facilities are continuously being improved and a research support network with other academic institutions is being developed in order to sustain the research focus.

- Research excellence network

Not applicable.

- Existence of research assistance mechanisms (for preparing proposals, capitalising on patents and innovations, finding partners for research programmes, etc.)

HOU has recently established a support group for assisting with the preparation and application processes.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.4):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

The positive evaluation of the EEC is not based on the current research intensity in HOU but in the individual efforts of academics to increase research activities.

### 3.1.5 Financial Strategy

- General financial strategy and management of national and international funds

Exceptionally for the Greek academic situation, HOU is predominantly a self-sustained Institution. As a result, it has not been greatly affected by the economic crisis and University cutbacks. Its current financial resources allow its further development and function as a self-standing University.

The Governing Board has planned the self-funding of organic positions of administrative staff needed for the effective function of the Institution. It cannot, however, invest on appointing new faculty members (DEP) as this is contingent upon governmental policy.

- Regular budget management strategy

The EEC was informed that there is a budget management strategy only on an annual basis.

- Public investment management strategy

Not applicable.

- Organisation and strategy of the Special Account for Research Funds (SARF)

The EEC has determined that SARF fully responds to its functional mission.

- Organisation and strategy of the University Property Development and Management Company

Not applicable.

- Existence of a Quality System for Financial Management (e.g. ISO), computerisation management and Budget monitoring (Regular Budget, Public Investments Programme, SARF Budget, etc.)

There are ISO certifications available and efforts to obtain further accreditation.

<i>Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&amp;3.1.5):</i>	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

The EEC was pleased to note that HOU is a financially healthy Institution. This gives HOU significant degrees of freedom with regard to their budget and a potential for further development. However, the EEC was not provided with any information about investment plans and an overall financial strategy.

### 3.1.6 Building and Grounds Infrastructure Strategy

- Strategy key points

Previously distributed in different facilities in and around Patras, HOU is now mostly based in a campus area. It is implementing its consolidation plans for infrastructure expansion and renewal.

- Objectives and timetables

Construction of a new building to host labs and an auditorium on campus is about to start. Gateways are planned to be established in several locations around Greece (Thessaloniki, Kozani, Komotini, etc) to better serve the needs of students and extend the HOU's outreach.

- Measures taken to reach goals

Budget has already been allocated for all the above constructions and lettings.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.6):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

The infrastructure strategy is consistent and dynamic. It will improve the function of HOU in pursuing its mission.

### 3.1.7 Environmental Strategy

- Recycling strategy and measures taken to reach goal

HOU enforces a University wide recycling program. Thanks to the good infrastructure and the assistance of laboratories, there is a clear pro-active attitude towards recycling.

- Hazardous waste management and measures are taken to reach goals

HOU has contingency for managing hazardous materials.

- Urban waste management and measures taken to reach goals

Infrastructure is in place.

- Green energy strategy and measures taken to reach goals

HOU has implemented a plan for energy efficient buildings on its campus and more green energy facilities are planned for the future in accordance with EU regulations.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.7):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

### 3.1.8 Social Strategy

- Exploitation and dissemination of the Institution's Research Activities for the benefit of society and economy

By its founding law HOU has a strong social strategy and engages with a broad spectrum of Greek society. It is now starting to broaden its outreach by offering Study Programs for such vulnerable societal groups as refugees. It will also embrace larger numbers of population by abolishing the lottery system for admitting students in the near future. Furthermore, HOU provides fellowships to financially weak students. Finally, the University is establishing a partnership with Patras Science Park to promote technology transfer to the commercial sector.

- Promotion of interaction between the Institution and the Labour Market

The HOU's academic mission targets students who are already in the work force with the objective to acquire new skills and become more competitive in the work environment.

- Sustained relationships with key local and regional bodies

There are good relations maintained between HOU and local bodies (e.g., University of Patras, Patras Science Park).

- Contribution to the cultural development of society, the city and the region

HOU offers Study Programs all over Greece.

- Reciprocal and long-lasting relationship with the alumni community

There is no formalized alumni management at the institutional level. During the meetings with alumni, the EEC noted their interest in a continuing engagement with the University.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.8):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

HOU is on the right path in broadening its range of activities in the country and increasing its social and economic footprint.

### 3.1.9 Internationalization Strategy

- Integration of the international dimension in the curricula  
 HOU recognizes that much of its future viability depends on enhancing internationalization of its provision. A right step towards this direction is the partnership with Wroclaw University in the MBA Program offered in English.  
 Growing the active participation of HOU in the Erasmus Program will assist in raising its international profile.
- Integration of the international dimension in research  
 There is a number of research Programs funded by European and international agencies as well as collaborations with international academics that have a positive impact on the HOU's brand image. Also, the University is planning a more effective use of the SARF towards the internationalization of its research.
- Integration of the intercultural dimension within the campus  
 Not applicable.
- Participation in international HEI networks  
 HOU is a member of European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU).
- Collaboration with HEIs in other countries (with a specific collaboration agreement) - measures taken to reach goals  
 There are collaborations mostly within the framework of postgraduate studies. A continuous effort towards establishing new collaborations has also been noted.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.9):

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

There is need of a global strategy on furthering the international educational character of HOU.

### 3.1.10 Student Welfare Strategy

- Student hostel operation and development strategy  
 Not applicable.
- Student refectory development strategy  
 Not applicable.



- Scholarships and prizes strategy

Scholarships are provided for students from financially depressed backgrounds. Prizes are awarded to highly performing students in the forms of fee waivers.

- Sports facilities operation and development strategy

Not applicable.

- Cultural activities strategy

Not applicable.

- Strategy for people with special needs

Buildings are designed to be accessible to persons with special needs. HOU has implemented a plan to enable students with special needs to participate in its Study Programs. A high number (233) of positions have been made available for people with disabilities. However, the number of applications was very limited (29).

65% of the educational material has been made accessible to visually impaired students. HOU's website is 100% accessible to them.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.1.10):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

The current strategy of HOU towards accommodating special needs people is commendable.

### 3.2 Strategy for Study Programmes

#### 3.2.1 Programmes of Undergraduate Studies (first cycle)

*Please comment on:*

- the main strengths and weaknesses of the Programmes

The main strengths of all undergraduate programs are: their interdisciplinary character and the broad theoretical foundation that is offered to students; the maturity and work experience facilitate their comprehension and performance in their studies; the requirement of written essays is a good pedagogical tool and makes HOU unique in the Greek academic landscape.

Laboratory practical training supports the theoretical courses, as it was evident by the various facilities visited by the EEC. The adoption of virtual labs further enhances the students' engagement with their studies.

A large part of the teaching material is outdated and cannot be renewed due the rigidity of the existing legal framework. Modules have not been updated for the same reason. There is ample room for improvement in the use of digital technologies in enhancing educational material and the students' experience.

- the way the Central Administration of the Institution deals with any remarks and recommendations that the external experts pointed out in the External Evaluation of Academic Units

There is no evidence in the material provided and the discussions with faculty that any remarks and recommendations that the external experts pointed out in the External Evaluation of Academic Units were taken into account. Consequently, no action was undertaken. However, the EEC notes that the Governing Board intends to take action and resolve all these pending issues in the near future.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&3.2.1):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):* There are numerous positive aspects and the overall impression is that the HOU strives to offer consistent and targeted undergraduate study programs. Yet there are changes that are urgently needed in order to modernize the undergraduate Study Programs.

### 3.2.2 Programmes of Postgraduate Studies (second cycle)

*Please comment on:*

- the main strengths and weaknesses of the Programmes

Masters programs represent the core of HOU's educational provision. They are very well targeted towards the field of studies and several among them are not offered by any other academic institution in Greece. The majority of them are in good demand and positions on offer are fully covered. The impact of the education is very positive for professional careers and the satisfaction of the alumni is positive.

There is not always a link that allows students who have completed an undergraduate Program within HOU to continue with a postgraduate Program in the same Institution. Likewise, no priority is granted to those holding a B.A. degree from HOU for admission into a M.A. Program in a related discipline.

No introductory courses are provided for students coming from a different discipline background and admitted into a Study Program. Meetings either face-to-face or through teleconference are not as frequent as students recommended. An introductory meeting within the two first weeks of the Module is currently missing.

Similar to undergraduate courses, a large part of the teaching material is outdated and cannot be renewed due the rigidity of the existing legal framework.

- the basic obligations of students, e.g. attendance of lectures, course requirements, etc.

Post-graduate students participate in a course work at a high percentage, and the course requirements are clear and strict.

- the way the Central Administration of the Institution deals with any remarks and recommendations that the external experts pointed out in the External Evaluation of Academic Units

There is no evidence in the material provided and the discussions with faculty that any remarks and recommendations that the external experts pointed out in the External Evaluation of Academic Units were taken into account. Consequently, no action was undertaken. However, the EEC notes that the Governing Board intends to take action and resolve all these pending issues in the near future.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (& 3.2.2):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):* The post-graduate Programs meet good standards and the prospects of improving their performance have been identified.

### 3.2.3 Programmes of Doctoral Studies (third cycle)

Doctoral studies at HOU are in place and there is a reasonable demand for them. Students working in the Sciences are locally involved in research projects. Students working in the Humanities and the Social Sciences are working from a distance and are not involved in externally funded research projects.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (& 3.2.3):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

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

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

- HOU is in a unique position to meet the challenges and opportunities of postsecondary education in Greece in the twenty-first century. The ability to provide distance learning and taking advantage of e-connectivity as well as their financial independence through direct student fees provides them with a solid foundation to carry on with their academic mission and seek partnerships with Universities in Greece and abroad.
- In the contemporary global economy and the need for enhancing human capital in Greece HOU contributes in a significant manner, especially in targeting the age profile of the working population with the opportunity for acquiring additional educational and professional skills.
- HOU is widening access to education for students of low social economic background and people who have already entered the work force.
- The overall impression of the University is positive in Greek society and demand for its Study Programs is high.
- There is an effort to obtain the targets set by the Institute by positive actions.
- Facilities such as space available for teaching are evidenced.
- The laboratories are fully functional and well equipped.
- Administrative support is efficient and satisfactory under the circumstances, but modernizing and enhancing facilities will assure the continued offering of quality services and the ability to meet effectively the needs of the HOU.
- In terms of general environment, the University offers satisfactory services to the students and the staff.

*Underline specific negative points:*

- HOU is bound by an inflexible legal status that does not allow innovation through updating of educational material. This is not the fault of the Institution but the EEC has detected a critical need for changes in this domain.
- The progress of digitalizing the course material is slow and only a small portion of it is available in an e-format.
- The number of new permanent faculty members (DEP) should be increased. The current number is not sufficient to cover the demand for new Study Programs and a significant percentage are managed and coordinated by external faculty members (DEP of other Universities and SEP).
- There are more opportunities for increasing synergy between HOU Schools.
- The EEC noted some dissatisfaction regarding the present internal structure and Study Program integration within some of the Schools.
- There is no specific internationalization strategy and a lack of adequate administrative support for this effort.
- There is no central alumni management.
- University wide, there is no specific reward system for faculty and students (e.g., to the highest ranked teacher in student questionnaires, or to the best M.A. thesis).
- Establishing a grant office, would allow actions like participation in the European Joint Doctorates or other Horizon2020 actions.
- Establish a company to develop commercial use of some high-quality facilities, such as the main Auditorium for e.g. Congresses.

- Establish a Technology Transfer Office, that would be centrally responsible to develop and apply rules for contract research, transfer of intellectual property, consultancy actions towards the public and private sectors, would be highly desirable.
- Establish a central office for consolidating and disseminating to the students all available collaborative efforts with professional bodies, both public and private.
- Establish central alumni management.
- Open-day actions like parent-student site visits for first year, or even an open-day for last-year secondary education students.

## 4. INTERNAL SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

### 4.1 Quality Assurance (QA) Policy and Strategy

- the Institution's policy and goals regarding QA and Improvement

From the start of its function HOU has developed a culture of QA and Improvement. In that respect it is a pioneering Institution in the country. This is an ongoing practice which has at times been revised and improved. It embraces the Institute as a whole.

- whether the Institution has developed a specific system of QA

It has a special department dedicated to this cause.

- how the Institution's internal QA system has been organized

There is a central unit of QA (MODIP), assisted by the Internal Assessment and Training Unit (MEAE).

- how the students and staff of the Institution are protected from biased interventions and discriminations

The anonymity of the procedure assures its confidentiality. There is also a legal counselor who advises on pertinent matters.

- whether a detailed implementation guide has been put together, containing an analysis of the QA system's operating procedures

There are detailed guides provided to the EEC.

- the involvement of students in QA

The students are passively involved by means of having to fill up e-questionnaires concerning the performance of the teaching staff, educational resources, and the Study Program as a whole. The response rate is not as high as desired perhaps on account of the non-mandatory nature of the procedure.

- how the Institution evaluates the effectiveness of its QA system regarding the achievement of its goals

QA system provides exceptionally rich information. However, there is no evidence that this information has been actioned, thereby closing the loop of QA.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.1):

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

Justify your rating (optional):

The work of MODIP and MEAE is commendable. However, more needs to be done in terms of responding to the data collected.

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

There is a strong desire for updating and redesigning Study Programs which have functioned on the same curriculum for a long period of time. Current legislation has been restrictive in allowing changes and updates. The existing internal procedures for monitoring an evaluation of study programs are sufficient. There is a comprehensive amount of data collected from teaching evaluations. These data can be used to assess the performance of current Study Programs and redesign the curriculum.

*Please comment on:*

- whether the learning outcomes have been clearly formulated and whether they have been published  
All departments have detailed study guides.
- whether the programmes are designed in such a way as to involve students and other stakeholders in the work  
Students or other stakeholders are not directly involved in the process.
- how the achievement of learning outcomes is monitored  
Through written assignments and exams in each Module; laboratory exercises wherever applicable; a comprehensive student evaluation of teaching performance and educational material.
- whether there is a published Guide regarding the organization of programmes of study  
Such guides are available for all Study Programs.
- whether the ECTS system is taken into consideration and implemented  
The ECTS system is fully and correctly implemented.
- whether there is a periodic evaluation of the programmes according to set procedures and criteria aimed at safeguarding their consistency and regular updating  
There is no such procedure.
- the student participation in the QA procedure of the study programmes  
Students express their views through the Module evaluation forms.
- whether the programmes include well-structured international mobility and -where appropriate- placement opportunities  
Not applicable.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.2):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

Everything is well in place and consistent with the HOU's mission. Restrictions imposed by current legislation have been an impediment for renewal of Study Programs where needed.



### 4.3 Teaching and learning - Assessment by students

*Please comment on:*

- whether multiple and coherent learning paths are provided according to the needs of students in the Institution's Departments / Faculties

Judging from the evaluation reports and the meetings of EEC with students at HOU, the learning paths within Study Programs are in a good direction.

- how proper guidance and support is offered to students by the Departments / Faculties' teaching staff

Students we met were extremely positive about the teaching staff (both DEP and SEP).

- whether students are informed clearly and in detail regarding the strategy of evaluation that is implemented for their programme of study, the exams or other methods of assessment they will be subjected to, what is expected of them and which criteria will be applied for the evaluation of their performance

The EEC confirmed that the students are informed.

- whether there is a formal procedure for addressing complaints and objections by students in the Departments / Faculties of the Institution

Students are encouraged to appeal to the coordinator and the director of studies of each Program. Complex issues are addressed by the legal counsellor of HOU.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.3):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

#### 4.4 Admission of students, progression and recognition of studies

Please comment on:

- whether the procedures and criteria for admission to the second and third cycle of studies are implemented with consistency and transparency

Criteria for admission to the second cycle of studies are depending on the Study Program of study and are published on HOU's website.

- whether there are clear and distinct procedures within the Departments/Faculties, as regards recognition of higher education degrees, periods of study and knowledge acquired at an earlier stage

There are existing procedures.

- whether there are clear and distinct procedures of recognition of study periods and prior learning (including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning)

Schools are responsible for the recognition of prior studies.

- whether there are clear procedures in place regarding the cooperation of other Institutions with national ENIC/NARIC centres for ensuring coherent recognition and mobility among programmes within / among Institution (s)

HOU falls under different criteria for mobility and has the advantage of participating at EADTU which allows the virtual mobility of its student population.

- whether students are provided with detailed information (e.g. Diploma Supplement) regarding the degrees conferred to them, the achieved learning outcomes as well as the framework, the level and the content of studies they successfully completed

Students can acquire detailed information concerning their studies, as they wish.

- whether the Institution has in place processes and tools to collect, monitor and use information regarding student progression

Tools for collecting such information centrally are in place.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.4):

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

Justify your rating (optional):

Complaints have repeatedly been expressed regarding the lottery system of students' selection but the Governing Board have decided to abolish it.

#### 4.5 Quality Assurance as regards the teaching staff

Please comment on:

- how it is guaranteed that the vacancy notices and recruitment of teaching staff include procedures which provide assurance that all new teaching staff members have at least the basic teaching skills

The recruitment of non-permanent staff follows specific criteria that ensure that they have at least the basic teaching skills.

- opportunities offered to the teaching staff for their professional/scientific advancement
- There are plans to make instructional development courses mandatory for all teaching staff.

- how potential weaknesses of the teaching staff are identified as regards the delivery of their teaching courses

Negative evaluations by students are reviewed by coordinators and directors of Study Programs.

- the Institution's procedures for the support of new teaching staff as regards the teaching and evaluation methods

There are procedures in place to support new teaching staff.

- how scientific activity is assessed and encouraged among the teaching staff in order to strengthen the connection between education and research

Scientific activity is assessed positively by the administration and is encouraged. In the case of HOU, the connection between research and teaching is not fully developed, especially because of the inflexibility in updating teaching material.

- the procedures in place so that the teaching staff members receive the necessary feedback on their personal performance as well as on the opinion of students

There are set procedures to receive feedback from the students.

- whether a regulatory framework is in place for the investigation of disciplinary and academic misconduct of the teaching staff

The regulatory framework for such issues is set by the current state legislation, and the institutes have limited influence. Issues related to academic staff are investigated by a special committee and may be referred to the legal counsellor of HOU.

Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.5):

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

Justify your rating (optional):

It is the EEC's concern that the evaluation outcomes are not always actioned.

#### ***4.6 Learning resources and student support***

Students are first provided a set of educational material typically by regular mail. Teaching staff may provide additional material through the e-platform used by HOU. Library resources through HOU's library and affiliated institutions are available. For certain Study Programs laboratory exercises are provided in HOU's facilities in Patras. There are some laboratory exercises that are remotely available to students via the Internet.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.6):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

A significant amount of educational material needs updating and should be converted to electronic format.

#### 4.7 Information Systems for Recording and Analysing Data and Indicators

*Please comment on:*

- whether the Institution possesses reliable means for collecting, analysing and utilizing valid information in respect to key performance indicators, the profile of the student population and student progression, success and drop-out rates

HOU has set all appropriate mechanisms in place for the purpose of collecting and analyzing information with respect to instructional performance and effectiveness. Evaluations are submitted both by the students and teaching staff. Significant potential exists for utilizing the data for updating educational material and designing new Study Programs.

- whether the Institution possesses reliable means for collecting, analysing and utilizing valid information regarding its other functions and activities

Extensive recording documentation exists regarding the interaction between the HOU and the students and vendors of educational material.

- whether the Institution collects information about student satisfaction with their programmes of study and the career paths offered to graduates

The EEC met with current students and alumni and found that there is a significant satisfaction with the quality of the educational process and the positive impact on their careers. DASTA is offering career advice to graduating students but does not track career paths offered to HOU graduates.

- whether the Institution seeks comparison with other similar establishments within and beyond the European Higher Education Area, with a view to developing self-awareness and finding ways to improve its operation

EADTU offers an opportunity for comparative studies and benchmarking which is not yet fully exploited.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.7):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

There is potential for improving the monitoring of alumni, assisting students with career placement, and benchmarking of HOU with peer Universities.

#### ***4.8 Dissemination of information to stakeholders***

*Please comment on:*

- how the Institution sees to the publicization of information on the programmes offered, the expected learning outcomes, the degrees awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures it uses and the learning opportunities it offers to students

HOU has a comprehensive website describing all Study Programs and degree opportunities offered.

- whether the information regarding the Institution's offered programmes of study is available in English or in other languages

Only a few Study Programs' site is available in English.

- whether the teaching staff's CVs are included in the publicized information, both in Greek and in English

CVs of academic staff members are not easy to find on the extant internet site and, if so, they are available mostly in Greek.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.8):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	X
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

Continuous improvement of the HOU's website is critical for further raising the profile of the University. The academic profile of its teaching staff must also be showcased.

#### ***4.9 Continuous monitoring and periodic review of the study programmes***

*Please comment on:*

- the procedure followed with regard to assessment and periodic review of the contents of study programmes

Study Programs are evaluated only through students' evaluation and an assessment by the teaching staff.

- whether this procedure takes into account the changing needs of society

HOU are aware of the changing needs of society and are developing mechanisms that will enable the updating of teaching materials and Study Programs.

- whether this procedure takes into consideration the findings emanating from monitoring the graduates' career paths

HOU has not developed a record or a system that would monitor the career paths of its graduates.

- the procedure with which the reviews take into account the students' work load, the progress rate and completion of studies

According to the information given by HOU, reviews take into account the students' work load as well as other parameters. Depending on the Study Program and on account of varying student expectations with respect to difficulty, there is significant attrition during the first year of studies. HOU students generally have no problems of obtaining their degree after they progressed into their second year.

- whether this procedure takes into account the cutting edge research activities in that particular discipline

HOU teaching staff follow the current trends in research and new instructional technologies in their fields. A portion of the teaching staff is engaged in cutting-edge research programs, that are funded by competitive grants.

- whether the involvement of students and other stakeholders is secured in the revision of the programmes

There is no direct involvement of students in the revision of Study Programs.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.9):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

There is a need to close the loop between evaluation and revision of the Study Programs.

#### 4.10 Periodic external evaluation

*Please comment on:*

- the procedure already planned by the Institution in order to deal with the observations of the Institutional External evaluation

The EEC was informed by the Governing Board that periodic external evaluations will be implemented in the near future.

- how the anticipated implementation of plans by Departments / Faculties is monitored in response to any comments included in their external evaluation and in the accreditation of their programmes

The EEC was assured that a mechanism will be implemented to revise Study Programs in light of both internal and external evaluations.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&4.10):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

HOU must endorse periodic external evaluations and quality assessment.



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

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

- *Underline specific positive points:*

HOU has in place a comprehensive system of assessing the effectiveness of the educational process by the students and the teaching staff alike. An extensive amount of valuable data is collected thanks to this process.

- *Underline specific negative points:*

The extensive data collected during the assessment process must be fully analysed for revising and updating Study Programs (when necessary) and designing new Study Programs.

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

A mechanism should be in place by the Governing Board and the teaching staff so that the data collected during the evaluation process is used for improving existing Study Programs and introducing new ones.

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

The EEC recommends that the current legal framework be modified to enable HOU acquiring more flexibility and autonomy in updating and developing its own curricula.

## **5. OPERATION OF THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTITUTION**

### **5.1 Central Administration Services of the Institution**

Please comment on:

- The operation of the central administration services of the Institution in regard to the:  
Special Account for Research Funds (SARF)  
The impression is that this fund functions appropriately.

Financial services  
Satisfactory.

Supplies department  
Satisfactory.

Technical services  
Satisfactory.

IT services  
Satisfactory.

Student support services  
Adequate.

Employment and Career Centre (ECC)  
Needs to be established.

Public/ International relations department  
Needs to take more initiatives and be expanded.

Foreign language services  
Not applicable.

Social and cultural activities  
Not applicable.

Halls of residence and refectory services  
Not applicable.

Institution's library  
Satisfactory.

*Please decide in respect to the specific evaluation area (&5.1):*

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

*Justify your rating (optional):*

A career services office should be established. The same holds with the international liaison office.

## 5.2 Operation of the Central Administration of the Institution – Conclusions and recommendations

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

- *Underline specific positive points:*

The new Governing Board has identified existing problems and inefficiencies and are currently implementing mechanisms for addressing and mitigating them. The EEC met with the Central Administrative staff and was pleased with the performance and dedication to advancing the mission of the University. It is a positive fact that staff employed on a contract basis (ESPA) were reintegrated into the administrative ranks with HOU funding. The EEC was satisfied that there has been effective management with respect to establishing remote sites across Greece.

- *Underline specific negative points:*

Centralized management of administrative procedures cause inefficiencies and slow reaction to everyday issues.

Different services sometimes work in silos risking communication breakdowns.

Lack of integration of new technologies with result to a lower productivity.

Antiquated and inflexible legal framework may lead to lack of accountability.

All in all, the lack of autonomy prevents HOU from implementing a coherent vision for development and a strategic plan for the institutional advancement. This affects the way HOU administration is delivered.

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

The EEC recommends that the following points be taken into account:

1. Acceleration in the changes of the current legal framework must be pursued vigorously to enable greater autonomy and flexibility.
2. The current atmosphere of institutional advancement being cultivated by the Governing Board should be embraced and supported by the administrative and teaching staff alike.

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

The EEC recommends that the following points be taken into account:

1. Holding regular meetings for all administrative staff in order to share best practices and coordinate the implementation of HOU's strategic plan.
2. Evolution of DASTA to central alumni relations and a career placement office.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*In connection with the*

- general operation of the Institution
- development of the Institution to this date and its present situation
- Institution's readiness and capability to change/improve
- Internal system of Quality Assurance of the Institution

*please complete the following sections:*

- *Underline specific positive points:*

HOU is a unique institution of HEI in Greece. It is only nineteen years old and has a mission that goes beyond the simple provision of education to those attending its Study Programs. Its appeal to the Greek society is noteworthy.

The EEC acknowledges the enthusiasm, professionalism, and motivation of HOU's faculty and staff.

The good reception of its Study Programs and the well-structured educational process guarantee the success of its mission.

There is a current understanding shared by all that educational material must be updated and new Study Programs be introduced.

HOU is a financially healthy institution and in a position to invest its own funds into a growth plan.

It is currently expanding its infrastructure with an additional building and its footprint by establishing a network of gateways across Greece.

HOU has in place a comprehensive mechanism for quality assurance, data collection, and analysis. It is developing a research culture through establishing support services and encouraging collaboration with other Institutions, participation in funded research projects and recruitment of doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows. It provides seed funding to groups of faculty to support new research projects.

HOU has embarked on an effort for its internationalization through collaborative agreements with foreign Universities and the provision of Study Programs in English.

HOU has also extended its links with Greek national Universities by offering joint degrees and enabling its students to benefit from their facilities.

- *Underline specific negative points:*

HOU's educational material has not been updated for a long time. This has caused the dissatisfaction among students and frustration among teaching staff.

There is a very limited digitalization of the educational material.

The use of available e-learning tools has not been widely adopted by the academic community.

The number of permanent faculty positions (DEP) is low in comparison to the needs of the Schools and the continuously expanding Study Programs.

There is currently a limited participation of HOU in mobility Programs like the Erasmus Program.

The EEC has detected a lack in coherence in academic strategy within Schools which is reflected on certain Study Programs.

There is a pressing need for closing the feedback loop between evaluation assessment and action (hiring/terminating staff, updating educational material, introducing/eliminating Study Programs).

Students appear much concerned about the lack of contact with the teaching staff especially at the very beginning of their studies.

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

The special status of HOU as the only Institution in Greece that offers distance learning degrees must be preserved.

There is a need for developing a collegial spirit among the permanent faculty members (DEP). A mechanism for achieving this will be to organize the development of research communities among Schools.

A strategic approach is needed in the development of new Study Programs which should involve market analysis, feasibility, and financial sustainability.

The social dimension of the University can be enhanced if a mechanism is established that rewards outstanding student performance. It would be advisable to also establish an internal reward system that acknowledges meritorious performance by faculty and staff (DEP, SEP, and administration).

HOU should capitalize on its membership in EADTU in order to raise its international profile.

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

The EEC recommends that a timetable be developed for a gradual transition of the University towards autonomy.

HOU should consider raising the standard of its educational material and making it available in the open market.

The move towards full digitalization and embracement of e-learning technologies in all Modules should become an urgent priority of HOU.

Study Programs should be chaired by permanent faculty members of HOU, irrespective of rank, on account of their close familiarity and engagement with the University.

### 6.1 Final decision of the EEC

Please decide in respect to the overall Institutional evaluation:

	Tick
<b>Worthy of merit</b>	
<b>Positive evaluation</b>	X
<b>Partially positive evaluation</b>	
<b>Negative evaluation</b>	

Justify your rating (optional):

The EEC has reached the conclusion that HOU meets our expectations in pursuing its academic and social mission. There is much that has been accomplished thus far and is now at a turning point that provides opportunities for strategic initiatives that will further raise its profile in Greece and abroad.

**The Members of the Committee****HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY**

Name and Surname

Signature

**Prof. Constantine Passaris**

University of New Brunswick, Canada

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**Prof. Triantafillos Mountziaris**

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