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ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality Assurance in Higher Education
Guidelines for the Internal Evaluation Process

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Foreword

Quality assurance in higher education is closely linked with the evolution dynamics of HEIs. It is achieved through systematic internal evaluation (self-evaluation) procedures at all levels of the academic community.

The role of HQAA is to assist HEIs in introducing this novel institution, which aims at endorsing their achievements and securing support from the State, where needed.

Quality assurance processes reinforce the autonomy of HEIs by broadening the decision-making role of academic collective bodies in managing their work through transparent and objective procedures of social accountability.

The following guidelines apply, in part or in toto, to all phases of the internal evaluation process and are expected to be used:

- by academic units (departments or faculties) for the elaboration of *Annual Internal Reports*;
- by Quality Assurance Units (QAUs) for the composition of the HEI's *Internal Reports*, but basically,
- by Internal Evaluation Groups (IEGs) for the composition of periodic (every four years) *Internal Evaluation Reports*.

1. Internal Evaluation Process and Timeline

The Internal Evaluation or Self-Evaluation is a collective task which requires the participation of all the members of the academic community at all stages and phases of its implementation.

Self Evaluation is not only the first step towards external evaluation. It does not simply aim at satisfying the demands of the relevant legal framework, but at serving as the basic instrument for academic units and institutions to set up procedures supporting the constant improvement of their complex endeavors.

Before initiating the process of internal evaluation, each Department and HEI should constitute the following bodies :

- (α) the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG), which is responsible for the internal evaluation at departmental level;
- (β) the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), which is responsible for the internal evaluation of the HEI.

At academic unit level (department or faculty):

- The responsibility for the internal evaluation lies with the academic unit's IEG ; it presupposes the elaboration of *annual internal reports* on the unit's course of action during two consecutive semesters. The *annual internal reports* are submitted by the academic unit to the QAU of the HEI before the end of each academic year.

- The internal evaluation process is completed by the periodic composition of an *internal evaluation report* which is submitted to the QAU of the relevant HEI and via the QAU to the HQAA in view of activating the external evaluation process of the academic unit. The *internal evaluation report* is submitted to the QAU two months after the submission of the annual internal report of that particular year.

Respectively, at institutional level:

- The responsibility for the internal evaluation lies with the institution's QAU.
- It presupposes the elaboration every other year by the QAU of *internal reports* on the HEI's course of action, which are based on the individual *annual internal reports* of its academic units.
- The HEI's internal evaluation process is completed by the composition by the QAU of periodic *internal evaluation reports* on its operation, taking into account the *annual internal reports* of its academic units. The HEI's *internal evaluation report* is submitted to the HQAA in order to set in motion the external evaluation process.

The internal evaluation process is regularly repeated four years following the beginning of the last evaluation (see attached chart).

1.1. Quality Assurance Unit (QAU)

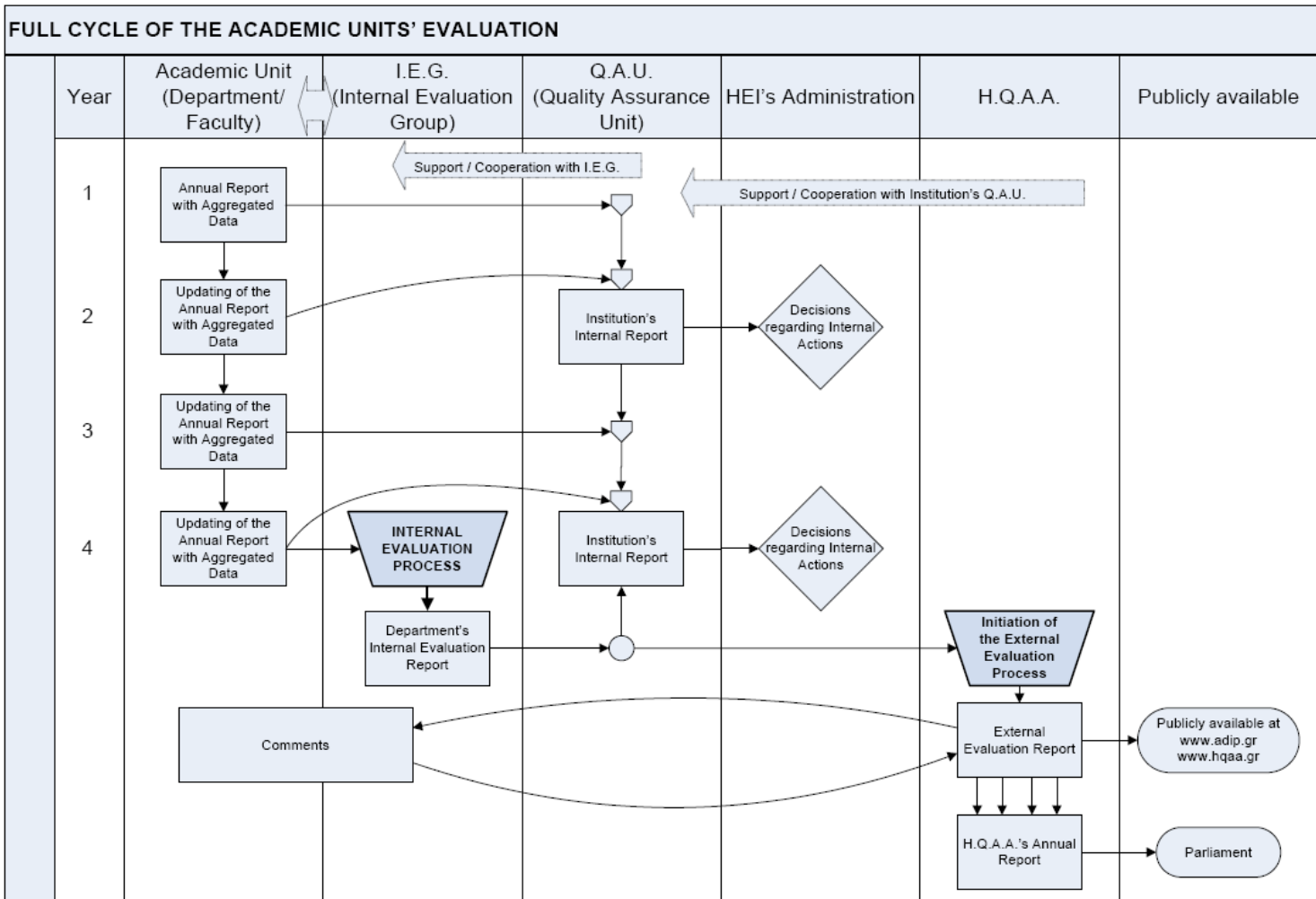
1.1.1. Constitution and Tenure

Institutional QAUs are constituted by decision of the HEIs' supreme collective bodies; , their composition, organization and functions are defined in Law 3374/2005, article 2.

1.1.2. Responsibilities

The QAU is responsible for the institution's comprehensive evaluation; it functions as the HEI's Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) (Law 3374/2005, article 5 § 4).

The responsibilities of the QAU's are specified by Law 3374/2005 and include:



* The first implementation of the unit's internal and external evaluation process does not presuppose the completion of the four-year cycle. It can start after the drafting of the first annual internal report.

- (α) the composition every other year of *internal reports* on the HEI's course of action, taking into account the *annual internal reports* of the its departments and faculties (Law No 3374/2005, article 2 § 5).
- (β) the composition, every four years of an *internal evaluation report* on the overall course of action of the HEI.

The QAU also sets into motion the external evaluation process of the institution's academic units by communicating their *internal evaluation reports* to the HQAA (Law 3374/2005, article 5 § 2).

Furthermore, the QAU is overall responsible for the coordination and support of quality assurance and evaluation procedures at institutional and academic unit level.

1.2. Internal Evaluation Group (IEG)

1.2.1. Constitution and Tenure

The IEG is constituted within each academic unit (department or faculty) by decision of their general assembly; it consists of members of the teaching-research (TRS) or education staff (ES). IEG members must hold the post of professor or associate professor, be universally acknowledged for their work and, preferably, be experienced in quality assurance processes. A student representative, appointed by the student union, also participates in the IEG (Law No 3374/2005, Article 5 §2).

The IEG's tenure lasts only for one period of internal and external evaluation and ends with the completion of the internal evaluation process.

1.2.2. Responsibilities

The IEG is assigned a strategic, coordinative and executive role: it plans, programs and coordinates the internal evaluation process and is responsible for the composition of the *internal evaluation report*.

The IEG has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the internal evaluation process at the academic unit level: it supervises the distribution of questionnaires (see *the Proposed Data Sheets*), informs all bodies and members of the academic unit about the responses and results of the dialogue between teaching staff and students and collects all necessary relevant materials.

Based on the above mentioned data, the IEG compiles the *internal evaluation report* (Law 3374/2005, Article 5 §2).

The IEG is assisted by all the members of the academic unit, requesting general participation and taking into account all opinions.

Right from the start, the IEG defines and circulates the procedures by which it assures the transparency of the internal evaluation (e.g. taking into account differing opinions, all communication with stakeholders, recording of communications, decision making,, encouraging of initiatives, dealing with disagreements, etc.).

It is important for the IEG to plan everything in advance, to standardize procedures and to inform all participants periodically.

2. Means and Procedures

2.1. Means for implementing the internal evaluation process

The following steps are required for implementing the process of internal evaluation :

2.1.1. Collection of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Required data are analyzed in the *Analysis of the criteria for the internal evaluation process* (see relevant document, version 2.0, July 2007). It is necessary and useful that the criteria and reference points are supplemented, adjusted and/or justifiably modified by each particular academic unit so as to correspond to their particular profiles. All modifications or additions introduced on the initiative of Departments or Faculties, will be in force for at least two evaluation periods.

The collection of quantitative and qualitative data can be significantly facilitated if all faculty members are invited, each one separately for their work, to periodically fill in the *Data Collection Forms*, proposed by HQAA (see relevant document, version 1.0, July 2007). The proposed *Data Collection Forms* may be modified if academic units think it necessary. They may also be replaced by any other method suitable for the collection and recording of the requested data, if the IEG thinks it necessary.

However, it is important to understand that the proposed *Data Sheets* are only to be used for documenting the Department's internal reports and NOT for evaluating individual academic staff members.

2.1.2. Formulation of Judgment

The collection of *Data Sheets* for at least two consecutive semesters, provides a detailed and analytic record of the work accomplished in academic units; it facilitates the drawing of a comprehensive judgment and, eventually, the compilation of the *annual internal reports* as well as of the *internal evaluation report* of the Academic unit.

In order to formulate judgments that will be, as far as possible, commonly accepted, all faculty members can and should participate in the analysis and interpretation of data critical for the academic unit, .

2.1.3. Suggested Actions

- (a) Setting specific goals and timely scheduling.
- (b) Grouping of data (per source, per time of collection, per participant [TRS or ES, administrative employees, students and so forth] or per functional combinations thereof).
- (c) Creating small working groups: TRS or ES, administrative employees, students or mixed groups.
- (d) Sample recording and first-level data processing to detect possible problems (i.e. absence or unreliability of available data, difficulties in collecting the data, etc).
- (e) Periodic, frequent and repeated briefing of all participants in the course of the procedure.

It is important to notice that commonly agreed rules must be established as aiming at ensuring:

- The participation of all faculty members;
- The protection of personal or other relevant data;
- The expression and recording of varying personal opinions.

2.2. Analysis of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The academic unit should give priority to the analysis of data which best illustrate its goals, focusing on the criteria which best relate to these goals. Moreover, particular importance should be given to:

- (a) understanding and highlighting factors which are responsible for specific positive or negative results;
- (b) defining initiatives necessary for development or for dealing with possible problems;
- (c) applying quality assurance procedures in the academic unit.

Finally, self-evaluation should focus on:

- (d) the present situation (as reflected in the data which have been collected);
- (e) the distance between the present situation and goals to be achieved;
- (f) the formulation of rational readjustment proposals (for goals which have already been achieved) or/and measures for achieving those goals (if unaccomplished as yet);
- (g) improving the efficacy of quality assurance mechanisms at departmental level.

2.3. Participation of Teaching Staff

All members of the Department's teaching staff, including scientific and laboratory assistants and staff employed under the presidential decree 407 should:

- fill and submit to the IEG by the end of each semester the proposed *Course Data Form*, and by the end of each academic year the proposed individual *Teacher's Data Form* (see above 2.1.1);
- participate in designing and periodically reviewing quality assurance procedures;
- participate in the collection, periodic feedback and analysis of data, as well as in the formulation of conclusions.

Their participation may be secured, e.g.:

- through timely and comprehensive briefings by the IEG;
- through timely and clear scheduling and dissemination of commonly agreed «rules»;
- through conveniently standardized documents, procedures and communication.

2.4. Participation of Students

According to law 3374/2005, student representatives participate in the IEG and the QAU (article 2 § 4 and article 5 § 2, respectively).

Students participate in internal evaluation procedures mainly by filling special questionnaires which give them the opportunity to express their own opinion (see the *Questionnaire for Students* proposed by HQAA).

Student participation is secured through, e.g., comprehensive, timely briefings by the IEG, timely and clear scheduling, conveniently standardized documents, procedures and communication.

It is advisable that all students receive a briefing by the President of the academic unit in collaboration with the IEG.

2.5. Participation of Administrative and Other Staff

Administrative and other staff members participate in the internal evaluation process and are responsible for providing and/or monitoring:

- the majority of necessary data, especially during the phase of data collection, and
- comments on the operation of the academic unit (e.g. use of infrastructure, standardization of documents, simplification of procedures, etc).

3. Compilation of the Internal Evaluation Report

It should be borne in mind that the *internal evaluation report* refers to the work performed by the academic unit as a whole; it **is not an assessment of individual performances**. Therefore, the academic unit is expected to:

- protect communications and personal data
- make sure that all opinions are heard and taken into consideration.

The *internal evaluation report* and the *annual internal reports* should include in their conclusions:

- advisable –in the Department’s opinion– ways for implementing necessary improvements, and
- realistic objectives for development in the subsequent period, based on the rate achieved during the current period.

Overall, it becomes clear that, regardless of the external evaluation, the *internal evaluation report* as well as the *annual internal reports* must be seriously taken into account by the academic unit for decision-making and scheduling.

4. Contacts

The improvement of the quality assurance system depends on close collaboration between the HQAA and individual academic units under evaluation. The HQAA seeks and encourages communication with departments; their comments and remarks are welcome

and it is expected that they will help in designing and organizing an improved quality assurance system.

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