



**European University Association (EUA)
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN

EUA EVALUATION REPORT

December 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction: The EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme at the University of the Aegean	3
1.1	The institutional Evaluation Programme	3
1.2	Acknowledgements	3
1.3	The Evaluation Process	3
1.4	The self-evaluation process	4
2	The University environment	5
2.1	The University in the National Context	5
2.2	Autonomy of the University	7
2.3	General impressions	8
2.4	The Mission and strategy	9
2.5	Quality assessment and enhancement	10
2.6	University leadership	10
2.7	University budget	10
2.8	University buildings	11
2.9	Library facilities	11
3	Human Resources	12
3.1	Academic staff	12
3.2	Administrative staff	13
3.3	Career development for younger staff	14
4	Students	15
4.1	Undergraduate students	15
4.2	Master and PhD students	16
4.3	Alumni networks	16
5	Research	17
6	Bologna Process: curriculum reform and student-centred learning	17
7	Stakeholder involvement	18
8	Strengths and weaknesses	19
8.1	Strengths	19
8.2	Weaknesses	20
8.3	Opportunities	20
8.4	Threats	22
9	Recommendations	23

1 Introduction: The European University Association (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme at the University of the Aegean

1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme

EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme is a service provided to universities wishing to assess their strengths and weaknesses in terms of strategic policy and quality management. Offering an external diagnosis by an international Team of experienced university leaders, the Institutional Evaluation Programme focuses on the institution as a whole, taking into consideration the mission and goals of the university, as well as the particular contextual factors relevant in the local environment.

This dynamic peer-evaluation method aims to help the university examine its own goals - both short and long-term - to understand how internal and external factors affect and constrain its development, and to provide specific tools and recommendations to support institutional development. It does not offer a blueprint for development, nor does it evaluate the quality of teaching and research *per se*; it does however consider *management* of teaching, learning, and research as fundamental aspects of university quality. The review process is consultative and supportive and aims to develop quality as a central value guiding an institution's strategic development and management, thus enhancing both university autonomy and accountability.

Originally established by one of EUA's predecessor associations, the Association of European Universities (CRE) in 1994, over 120 universities across the European continent have benefited from the experience of the Institutional Evaluation Programme in its 11 year history, further improving the orientation of quality culture, good university governance, university autonomy, and strategic thinking across the continent's universities.

The review Team appointed by EUA for evaluating the University of the Aegean was comprised of:

- *Professor John Kelly*, former Registrar, University College Dublin, Ireland – Chair of the Team
- *Professor Johann Gerlach*, Former President of the Free University of Berlin, Germany
- *Professor Bertrand Weil*, former Vice-rector of Université Paris XII France
- *Mr David Crosier*, EUA Belgium – secretary of the Team

1.2 Acknowledgements

The review Team wishes to express its gratitude to the University and especially to the Rector, Professor Socrates Katsikas, but also to the many staff and students who shared their opinions on the challenges facing their university and society. The complexity of such an institution in this environment cannot be fully understood in two short visits, but hopefully something of the reality of higher education in Greece has been captured by the Team, as well as the spirit and ethos propelling the university. In particular, the Team wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Professor Nikos Litinas who acted as the perfect liaison person in successfully organising the visits, and responding to sometimes demanding requests.

1.3 The Evaluation Process

The self-evaluation process begins with the university preparing a self-evaluation report as described in the EUA programme guidelines.

On March 1 and 2 the evaluation Team had its preliminary visit to make initial acquaintance with the staff and students of the university, to assess how the process of self-evaluation had been undertaken, and to identify areas where more information might be required. During this visit, the Team met the Rector, the members of the Self-Evaluation Committee, as well as staff and students from both schools and departments in Mytilene – Schools of Social Science and

Environmental Science, departments of Geography, Cultural technology and Communication. The Team also met stakeholders from industry and local government.

The main visit was held from 31 May – 6 June 2005. Although the normal practice in the main visit of the EUA programme is to organise meetings over three days, in this case it was considered essential to visit all islands during the main visit, and due to the geographical dispersion of the university, this meant that the normal schedule was extended over a week. The Team, dividing into two pairs, met with staff, students and university partners on the islands of Rhodes, Chios, Syros and Samos, as well as visiting the university office in Athens. This enabled the Team to follow up questions raised in the preliminary visit, and to examine some key issues in greater detail. The Team then re-visited Mytilene together, and the visit concluded with a public presentation of the Team's oral report on Saturday 6 June 2005 which was attended by a number of the staff who had participated in meetings during the two visits.

This written report, which concludes the process, offers an elaborated version of the Team's findings and recommendations which were made at the oral presentation.

1.4 The self-evaluation process

The university took the opportunity provided by the EUA institutional evaluation programme to make a very thorough and comprehensive assessment of its development. The self-evaluation exercise, if undertaken in a suitably comprehensive and analytical manner, is the process where the university stands to learn most by and for itself, and is therefore worthy of comment.

In the case of the University of the Aegean, the process was conceived from the outset to involve university staff and students across all of the islands, and to examine problems and weaknesses of the institution openly rather than trying to avoid difficulties and problems.

In practical terms the process was excellently managed and coordinated. The Self Evaluation Committee, led by Professor Nikos Litinas developed a shared understanding of the purpose through much hard work and constructive dialogue, and determined to make use of the opportunity to take forward positive institutional development. Particular mention should be made of Professor Litinas. His open and democratic approach to the work was informed by a thorough analysis of objectives, and by a determination to ensure that each department engage in a thorough self evaluation.

The way in which the university made efforts to engage in this process as an academic community impressed the evaluation Team immensely. However, efforts were evidently more effective in some schools and departments than in others. Indeed, the Team was disappointed that no senior members of the Department of Sciences of Pre-School Education and Educational Design in particular were available to meet the members of the Team during the main visit. This indicates that although the commitment and engagement of the leadership was assured, there were some difficulties in reaching more deeply inside the institution.

Yet schools and departments also went through their own process of self-evaluation, and the combined result of these efforts is a great deal of highly valuable material which will certainly help to consolidate the difficult path of reform and development upon which the university has confidently embarked.

The resulting self-evaluation report is highly informative and an excellent outcome of the work. Credit should go to those responsible for the final draft – Dr Roumboutsou, Professor Litinas and Rector Katsikas. It should also be noted that much of the data for the self evaluation was gathered for the first time for this evaluation. Although some of this data may be useful only for a one-off exercise, other information might now be considered helpful to gather on a regular basis in order to improve institutional management. Questions regarding the kind of information that is required for proper institutional self-knowledge and self-awareness are therefore a theme that has been addressed throughout this report.

2 The University environment

2.1 The university in the National Context

An evaluation of the university of the Aegean inevitably has to begin with some consideration of Greek higher education, particularly with regard to the establishment of the university in 1984 as part of the drive to develop the Greek regions. This policy allowed the university to lay strong foundations, and in recent years – in particular since 1997 – a new momentum has been given, this time largely from within the university, to develop strongly the master programmes and the research capacity of the university.

The university has developed and progressed rapidly over the past two decades, and today is located on 5 islands, with 16 departments and close to 10,000 students.

The University of the Aegean is a unique institution – in Greece, and indeed in Europe. While there are a number of other universities situated over dispersed islands, there is none which can compare with the location of the University of the Aegean. Although the geographical dispersion of the university departments across different islands poses a number of challenges in terms of communication and coherent structural development, it also offers a stimulating and inspiring environment for university activity. The geographical location also provides the fundamental *raison d'être* and specific mission for the university.

Greece is, however, a country where the majority of the population lives in big cities that offer opportunities to staff and students with which a university on several islands cannot compete. While the islands offer a superb physical environment with enormous potential, nevertheless in economic and cultural terms they constitute a geographical periphery, with relatively low economic activity.

It is clear that educational needs are diverse and extremely important in Greek society. The importance of participating in higher education is widely recognised, and there are very high participation rates among the population. In this sense there is likely to continue to be a guaranteed “supply” of students, and one of the key challenges for the university is to make the “educational offer” and conditions for study and development as relevant and attractive as possible.

The nature of the higher education system in Greece places important constraints on the university. Firstly, higher education institutions in Greece certainly suffer from being under-funded in international and European terms, as the OECD table (see below) of expenditure per student in European countries illustrates. While the EU average expenditure on higher education is 5.5% of GDP, in Greece it is 3.6%.

Not only is the expenditure per student very low in Greece, but the system also provides, again compared to other countries in Europe, a very generous level of student support, with meals being provided to practically all students, accommodation offered free of rent for students with financial need, textbooks offered to students free of charge and many other subsidies provided for students. When these costs are factored in to the overall equation, it becomes evident that the amount of money left over for universities to develop teaching, research and services to the local community is extremely low.

A further aspect which needs to be considered for the University of the Aegean is the inevitable additional cost of running a university that is spread over five islands. Even if savings could be made through efficient management structures, which is not the case, as these structures are also determined by national law, there are a number of functions which have to be replicated on each island in order for the university to function. Hence the cost of running this university is substantially greater than the “average” Greek university. Yet the financial allocations from the government do not take proper account of this reality, and aside from an inadequate supplement to universities in a dispersed environment rather treat the university in an “equal” manner compared to other institutions. The effect of the Greek State behaving equitably towards universities in terms of funding allocation without adequately factoring in additional costs related to geographic reality results in unfair treatment for the University of the Aegean.

OECD TABLE: ANNUAL EXPENDITURE ON TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PER STUDENT (2001) in equivalent US\$ based on full-time students (extract from OECD REPORT EDUCATION AT A GLANCE 2004)

<i>Tertiary Education (including R&D activities)</i>				
	<i>All tertiary education</i>	<i>Tertiary type B education¹</i>	<i>Tertiary type A and advanced research program²</i>	<i>Tertiary Education excluding R&D activities</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Austria</i>	11 274	9 884	11 382	7 388
<i>Belgium</i>	11 589	x(1)	x(1)	8 084
<i>Ch. Republic</i>	5 555	2 789	5 907	m
<i>Denmark</i>	14 280	x(1)	x(1)	10 771
<i>Finland</i>	10 981	4 304	11 143	7 061
<i>France</i>	8 837	9 378	8 689	6 965
<i>Germany</i>	10 504	5 633	11 306	6 370
<i>Greece</i>	4 280	2 373	5 188	3 534
<i>Hungary³</i>	7 122	3 026	7 266	5 822
<i>Iceland</i>	7 674	8 067	7 671	m
<i>Ireland</i>	10 003	X(1)	X(1)	8 086
<i>Italy¹</i>	8 347	13 456	8 270	5 064
<i>Luxemburg</i>	m	M	m	m
<i>Netherlands</i>	12 974	7 380	13 044	8 075
<i>Norway</i>	13 189	X(1)	X(1)	m
<i>Poland¹</i>	3 579	3 341	3 582	2 864
<i>Portugal</i>	5 199	X(1)	X(1)	m

¹ Tertiary-type B education: A level of higher education classified according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Programs considered as tertiary-type B education are typically shorter than tertiary-type A programs and focus on practical, technical, or occupational skills for direct entry into the labor market, although they may cover some theoretical foundations in the respective programs. These programs have a minimum duration of 2 years of full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment at the tertiary level.

² Tertiary-type A education: A level of higher education classified according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Programs considered as tertiary-type A education are based largely on theory and are designed to provide sufficient qualifications for entry into advanced research programs and professions with high-skill requirements, such as medicine, dentistry, or architecture. Tertiary-type A programs have a minimum cumulative theoretical duration of 3 years of full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment, although they typically last 4 or more years and lead to the award of a bachelor's or higher degree.

³ Public institutions only

<i>Slovakia</i>	5 285		5 285	4 788
<i>Spain</i>	7 455	7 280	7 483	5 951
<i>Sweden</i>	15 188	X(1)	x(1)	8 356
<i>Switzerland¹</i>	20 230	6 785	21 815	m
<i>Turkey¹</i>	m	X(1)	X(1)	3 950
<i>United Kingdom</i>	10 753	X(1)	X(1)	8 101

2.2 Autonomy of the University

The Greek system is extremely centralised and highly regulated, with universities facing severe limitations to their activities by virtue of their status as public institutions. The Ministry of Education exercises tight control over the higher education sector, restricting institutional autonomy. The extensive range of controls which the State holds serves to stifle the development of the University ethos, and is damaging to both the quality of teaching and research in the university. In particular the following aspects of State-University relationships have a negative effect:

- i) Finance: earmarking all government funds, and providing only extremely limited space for institutional flexibility in allocating funds ensures that the university is not able to respond adequately to changing needs in the environment;
- ii) Academic staff appointments: filling positions according to a rather rigid and bureaucratic formula prevents the university from making the most appropriate appointments at the right time;
- iii) Administrative staff appointments; the selection and appointment of permanent staff by the High Council for Personnel Selection in Athens is unsatisfactory, and results in a high percentage of temporary staff appointments being required to cover for the inadequacy of the system;
- iv) Separation of Academic and Administrative Staff structures: this State-imposed parallel management structure is not helpful to the creation of a unified university ethos;
- v) Senate and Council Committee structures: these committee structures are dictated by the Ministry of Education, and do not necessarily provide for the most effective internal management and governance;
- vi) Undergraduate student admissions: numbers for each programme are determined by the Ministry, in many cases ignoring the stated capacity for the programme that the university declares it can manage effectively;
- vii) Greek language: the requirement by the State that the Greek language is mandatory for all undergraduate courses inhibits greatly student participation in European mobility programmes, such as Erasmus.

The Team is aware that the seven issues outlined above affect all Greek universities. While it is undoubtedly the case that all universities are handicapped by the effects of this State interference, the impact at the University of the Aegean is particularly great because of its five-island structure.

Greek law also determines the decision-making and personnel structures, including salaries of university employees. Not only is the Ministry of Education involved, but also the Ministry of Finance, which has responsibility for salaries and also for approving permanent staff positions. Again the law does not take into account the particular needs and specificities of a university

spread over several islands, and the separation of academic and administrative staff structures poses many difficulties. These issues are examined in greater detail in section 3 of this report dealing with human resource management.

As in many countries, duration of studies is also determined by the State. However, the State also has a far more pronounced role in other aspects of university affairs than in most EU countries. Most significantly the admissions system of students to universities in Greece is organised through a nationwide entrance examinations conducted by the *Central Committee of Entrance Examinations*. The number of the new students to be accepted by a university is determined by the Ministry of Education, so that universities cannot control the number of students in different fields according to the resources available to teach them. Indeed, while the University will suggest the number of places that should be offered on a particular programme, this will regularly be exceeded in the allocation made by the Ministry, which is governed by the logic of finding places for students who have passed the entrance examinations. The Ministry also has the final authority to decide what type of programmes and departments the university may have, what type of degree can be granted and is also required to authorise specialisations within a programme of study.

The central decision-making role at the university is also very restricted. Indeed central figures at the university, such as the Rector, and central bodies of the university, such as the academic Senate, have very restricted spheres of influence. Departments, rather than schools or faculties, enjoy a high level of autonomy, while the central bodies function essentially to represent those departments. Meanwhile, the official role of the Rector and her/his staff is mainly to execute the decisions of the central bodies. This leaves a gap where strategic decision-making and university-wide development should be taking place.

The effect of these structures and practices is that the university mission is largely defined and given to the university by the government, and significant obstacles are then placed in the path of the institution in its attempts to fulfil this mission.

2.3 General impressions

It would be mistaken to expect any evaluation Team to understand fully the complex reality of a university after two relatively short visits. The Team is aware that it remains ignorant of many aspects of this university, but nevertheless hopes that readers are able to use this report to question or think differently about some aspects of their reality.

The first strong impression that the Team would like to convey, or reflect back, is that this is an extremely dynamic and engaged university. Clearly there have been great steps forward in recent years, and important processes are now underway. For a young university, growth over the past two decades has been steady and consistent, but it certainly takes time to develop fully an institutional academic ethos.

Although progress has been rapid and significant, basic infrastructure needs have not always kept apace, and the picture from island to island is quite distinct. A few departments are located in excellent university buildings, but particular care needs to be taken on the islands of Rhodes and Syros to ensure that educational needs are properly met. As yet, the university buildings on these islands are not ideally adapted for a modern university.

Although the Team was very impressed by the teaching and research output of the academic staff, it was also apparent that there are insufficient permanent staff overall, and indeed that many of the permanent academic staff are not in a position where they are able to concentrate full-time on their work within the university.

The main reason for this lack of permanent staff is that the State, in a public system, is unable or unwilling to provide them. Regarding academic staff, the university suffers from the rather widespread phenomenon of frequently travelling professors who are combining work within the university with other personal and professional engagements on the mainland. While an element of engagement with mainland professional activities is of course desirable – to avoid academic isolation and promote research - the average amount of academic staff travel raises some

serious concerns. Indeed all the academic staff are obliged to make difficult choices in their professional and personal lives which entail either accepting a lower standard of living in order to remain on the islands, or juggling life between a city and islands.

The situation of administrative staff is in some ways even more problematic. Administrative posts are filled through a national list system, where all those who are suitably qualified are placed on a list until vacant positions arise. In practice, this means that a suitably qualified person from the mainland may be selected for a position at the university, but will only accept reluctantly and will seek to move back to the mainland at the earliest opportunity. Meanwhile there may be highly motivated potential staff living on the islands who have to wait their turn in the national system. While this system is clearly “fair” from a formal point of view, it is not the most efficient way for the university to ensure that it has the administrative staff it needs.

Partly to alleviate the problem of insufficient permanent staff – which the university can admittedly do very little about – there has been a recruitment of a large number of temporary staff, in both academic and administrative work. While this has been absolutely necessary, it raises questions about definition of duties and responsibilities, employment rights, and whether a critical mass of permanent staff is in place to carry forward the university successfully.

The island reality made a strong impact on the Team. However, while the islands provide the mission and the “unique selling point” of the university, there is also a danger of isolation in different forms. The Greek tradition of organising the university around departments that enjoy very high levels of autonomy has a tendency to create distinct and separate academic islands. Moreover research practice seems in some cases to be very isolated from other activities in the university. No university is an island, and even universities situated on islands need to bear this in mind.

2.4 The Mission and strategy

The University was created with a mission to provide high quality teaching and research and to promote regional development – although with significant constraints as to how this could be achieved. One of the first implicit questions for the evaluation Team to address is what the university has been able to do to fulfil this mission given the circumstances.

Clearly the university has achieved a great amount, and is equipped to make even greater strides into a new future – provided that the Greek government and other university stakeholders also adapt to a changing context. Tremendous progress has been made in recent years, and the university certainly possesses some great assets. Notably the quality, but not the quantity, of the human resources at the university is impressive. This is a university which has been able to attract well-qualified staff from within Greece as well as a significant number of excellent academics with international experience living and working abroad. The staff therefore possesses great research expertise and experience.

In its daily work, the university has to cater both for the academic needs and the cultural well-being of its students, and it is therefore important for the Team to consider the students that it met. In general, although there was a part of the student body that, for political reasons, did not wish to engage in discussion, nevertheless those that we did meet conveyed a picture of enthusiastic, engaged and positive scholars. For many, their expectations of the university had been greatly exceeded, and this also tallies very well with the impressive data on graduate satisfaction with the university. Along with the trend of increasing preferences in undergraduate admissions to this university, this indicates that the reputation of the university is increasing.

Overall, despite the problems posed by geographic dispersion, the university is a genuine academic community united by cohesion and commitment and fitting very well the notion of a community of scholars.

Until now, key decisions on the founding of the university, and selecting the islands which will house departments and schools, have largely been taken in Athens. Looking towards the future, the Team believes that it is important for the university itself to play a greater role in developing proposals for coherent development. In setting priorities for the future, the university has to

balance the need for consolidation with the need for further expansion and development. Difficult choices may arise when an Aegean island states that it would be keen to open a new department, and presents strong local arguments in favour of its position. Such models of new and innovative development may be very attractive, yet should be balanced against the development needs of existing departments. While funders in Athens may be seduced by arguments in favour of the new and innovative, the case for academic coherence, and sustainable investment in existing departments needs to be clearly articulated.

2.5 Quality Assessment and Enhancement

The Team learned that new legislation stipulating a standardised system of Quality Assessment in Greek higher education is imminent. Hopefully this process of institutional evaluation, and particularly the self-evaluation work that has been undertaken, will prove to be timely and help prepare the university in dealing with these new national requirements.

Until now, there has been no central office responsible for quality improvement, and some schools and departments have consequently devised their own systems. The Team now strongly urges the establishment of a central office, with its Director reporting directly to the Rector. The office would be responsible for a range of monitoring and improvement-oriented activities. As well as overseeing the implementation of a standardised system for the evaluation of teaching, it would also be involved in a programme for the recognition of academic excellence in both staff and students. A range of activities could include, for example, the annual award of the "Rector's Medal" for outstanding achievement in a particular field - a vital part of academic management in the contemporary university.

2.6 University Leadership

The complexity of managing this university across five islands can hardly be over-stated, and the review Team left with admiration for the way in which the Rector, professor Socratis Katsikas, along with his team of Vice Rectors and Deans, is addressing the challenges. Leading this university requires considerable vision, energy, enthusiasm, as well as great management and negotiation skills. The Team's impression is that the university has the leadership it needs and deserves.

The Team had the opportunity to meet the Rector both in formal and informal contexts, and particularly welcomed the opportunity to observe some working meetings. It was apparent that the Rector has a vision for the development of the university as a socially responsive, dynamic and research-driven institution, and is keen to push the university in this direction by all means at his disposal. His management of university affairs is very open, and he sets a fine example in listening and engaging in dialogue with colleagues and with the wider community. Professor Katsikas also displays an acute awareness of the need to act in a pragmatic fashion, with a clear sense of what is possible. Priorities are defined in realistic rather than idealistic terms, and strategy is developed in a corresponding manner, recognising the limits of the physical and cultural environment.

2.7 University Budget

The distribution of state grants to Greek universities is carried out in accordance with agreements reached between the Ministry and the Rectors' Conference, and based on a formula derived primarily from quantitative input factors, i.e. numbers of academic staff, administrative staff, and students. Using input factors only means that funding is not quality-referenced. For quality to be taken into account, the outputs and achievements of funding would also need to be considered. The Team would therefore recommend that the State examines seriously alternative funding models, even if agreement cannot always be reached with the Rectors' Conference on all issues.

With few exceptions, the same procedures for budget allocation are followed within the University. Here the Team considers that it should be the task of the central leadership to distribute at least a part of the budget according to output factors and recognised quality indicators. This sort of procedure may lead to conflicts, which can only be overcome when there is a shared commitment by the members of the university to strive for quality improvement.

Despite the risks of conflict, this is not a task that should be simply ignored, “for the sake of peace and harmony”.

2.8 University Buildings

The physical environment for the university is not ideal, and varies quite dramatically from island to island. Where the university is well integrated in the local community – such as on Lesbos, Chios and Samos – many buildings are well equipped for the needs of the institution. For example in Mytilene a new campus is a great asset to the institution, and is still in the process of being developed to allow other departments to be integrated, and in Chios the university buildings that the Team was able to visit were impressive – although these buildings are only a minority of the university’s stock on the island, and cannot be considered as representative.

Overall, the university clearly has to devote too large a part of its resources to rent buildings. Indeed the Team learned that in some islands as much as 40% of the university’s operational budget is spent on rent.

The university strategy of developing a single campus on each island is an excellent initiative, and although it will take time and considerable funding to be achieved, it is one which should be enthusiastically pursued. The strategy towards building acquisition and renovation has also been pragmatic and sensible, and the work of the Property Management Corporation is excellent. Throughout the university, the Team was impressed with the quality of student canteens, while on some of the islands the standard of university-run student housing was also very high. The Team is, however, aware that such accommodation is available only for a small number of students, and that the cost of accommodation on the islands is proving to be a problem for many students.

Some schools and departments are also in a less fortunate situation, and notably the buildings in Rhodes and Syros are lacking for the needs of the university. Particular attention therefore needs to be paid to the parts of the university that are most in need. In this context a major problem is that many buildings are dispersed in different parts of the islands, accentuating the problems of interdepartmental academic cooperation and administrative efficiency.

A final observation is that there is a lack of facilities for students which are managed by students themselves. In general, although student accommodation and canteens are extremely well managed and run, there is little real student involvement. While financial issues need to be borne in mind, it would be a very positive move to offer a building or some rooms on each island for students to participate in developing the most important services that they feel to be lacking. Indeed, the quality of university life for students is often determined as much by the range of extra-curricula activities and services as by the quality of formal teaching. Student societies, cultural events and sports activities are essential to a high quality student life, and students should play their part in deciding and organising this sphere of the university’s activities.

2.9 Library facilities

One measure of the quality of any higher education institution is the management of its library facilities, and this is an aspect of the evaluation to which considerable attention has been paid. The library services inevitably suffer from being dispersed over five islands, yet since the library managers have always had to work over a wide geographical area, strategic development decisions have sensibly taken account of this reality.

Management of the library, and particularly the main library in Mytilene, is excellent. The decisions to invest in electronic journals and an e-learning platform make complete sense for this university, and have enabled the limited resources available to be used to maximum benefit. Both the library staff, and the overseeing university managers are highly commended for their policy orientation of keeping access as open as possible to local communities - working with other local libraries and local schools, and offering services to citizens. Such an orientation should be encouraged and further developed to help the university play its full role as a vital institution of the local community.

The main problem with the physical library services appears to be that they are dramatically under-used. During our visits the EUA Team encountered students who admitted to having never set foot in the university library. In the view of the EUA Team, there is a need for university staff to develop their relationship with the library, and particularly to encourage students in using library facilities. Currently activities such as library assignments for first year undergraduate students, which are commonplace in many universities, are a rare exception at this university. The State policy of providing free text books for courses also seems to have a negative impact on wider curiosity-driven learning. Indeed, if students are encouraged to believe that they can succeed by reading only the prescribed textbook, they are less likely to consider it necessary to spend time on reading and research in the library.

On some islands there were also problems of the library being under-staffed and often closed at times of the day when students could be expected to use the facilities. Clearly the staffing problem is difficult to solve, and the Team also heard that experience of using students to staff the library had not always been positive and was difficult due to the low salaries that could be offered. While it is unfortunate that the university is not able to offer more competitive salaries, some students may nevertheless be motivated to undertake library work if the service is perceived as being needed and useful. The objective for library managers should therefore always be to offer a high quality service for users, and for facilities to be as accessible as possible.

3 Human Resources

For any university, people are the greatest indicator of quality, and management of human resources the most vital and critical challenge. In the case of the University of the Aegean, therefore, the first point to underline is that many of the staff management issues are out of the control of the university, and depend upon decisions made by the government. Indeed, as a Greek public university, the university is obliged to work within a set framework whereby administrative and academic staff are separated in terms of structural organisation, and where the internal committees responsible for human resource management and development are also determined by the State. It is important to consider both the effects of these parameters – in particular any negative impact on the university development - as well as to consider whether there are problems which could be addressed without breaking legal restrictions.

3.1 Academic staff

With regard to academic staff, the structures, as in all Greek universities, are dominated by the academic autonomy of departments. While there is certainly no “ideal model” of university organisation, some of the strengths and weaknesses of the system in place need to be examined and understood in order to make progress. From an external viewpoint, the main weaknesses of this tradition lie in the difficulty of establishing functional cooperation within and between departments, and in setting and supporting priority areas for the university as a whole. Under this system, development is likely to take place mainly within departments, rather than through the interaction of departments. While this may be healthy and positive in some respects, as a strong academic disciplinary base is critical for successful development, nevertheless there is also a danger of invisible barriers being erected around departments, and an overall perspective of the university mission being sacrificed in favour of individual or departmental interest.

Another consequence of such organisation is that academics will have to guard against isolation both in their teaching and research. Many of the staff that we met described only minimal cooperation with colleagues within departments, and even less with those from other departments.

Within such a university structure there are many different interests, some of which may at times be in conflict. The University Senate, which may be called upon to resolve such conflicts, is inevitably going to function as a body where compromise is the main mode of conflict resolution. While this may have advantages in maintaining a harmonious environment, it also makes it difficult to pursue tough but sometimes necessary reforms. Again the geographic dispersion will also act as an important factor in these dynamics.

The phenomenon of frequently travelling professors also raises concerns. Many of the academic staff are absent from their principal workplace for at least half of the normal working week, and the majority of academic staff have a strong attachment to Athens, both for family and scientific reasons. With the number of academic staff who juggle employment at the university with life on the mainland being so high, this has to be considered as a significant human resource management issue. There are, however, no simple solutions to be found, and some level of acceptance of this reality is inevitable.

However, this does not mean that the university is powerless to act. Indeed the problem has been tackled and is greatly alleviated in many cases by an excellent information technology strategy. The university has an IT system facilitating virtual contact between students and professors, and providing remote access to all staff and students at the university from any work station. The attention to IT policy and the investment made in developing such an excellent system is remarkable and represents a great strength of the university.

While many of the additional staff commitments on the mainland are inevitable, there are also anomalies of the system which encourage staff to work on the mainland rather than on the islands. For example, professors may earn additional income giving guest lectures in other Greek universities, but their high teaching loads within their own department generally do not permit them to teach in other departments of their own university.

3.2 Administrative staff

While the university cannot develop without high quality academic staff, neither can any university function without attention to administrative structures, nor without the commitment of highly skilled administrative staff. Overall, the quality and commitment of the administrative staff is remarkable and their continued will to keep the university moving forward with common purpose will be vital to the challenges that lie ahead.

The structural separation of academic and administrative staff nevertheless poses problems. While cooperation between the current academic and administrative leadership is excellent, it is unhelpful that the President of the Administration Council is not responsible to the Rector or to any academic bodies.

The main complaint voiced in the university with regard to administrative staff is that their number is insufficient. In the view of the Team, this complaint is well founded, and the fact that the university is spread over several islands exacerbates the problem. Many administrative functions which could be organised simply or rationalised within one campus have to be duplicated when there are several sites. To cite only a few examples, this is the case for support to academic staff, financial management, building maintenance, library services, student accommodation and canteen management. In addition to these replicated needs, the university also requires an administrative office in Athens. Hence it is clear that the Greek government, by applying a common formula to decide on the number of permanent administrative positions for all universities fails to recognise the particular requirements being faced by this university.

In order to compensate for the under-staffing of permanent administrative staff posts, a significant number of temporary administrative staff recruitments have been made. The university is obliged to use research funds to cover the costs of employing these temporary staff. This creates a situation of precarious employment for the staff concerned, as they may only be paid when an installment of project funding is received, and also makes the cost management system highly complex, as money is used not only for the purposes for which it is intended, but also to cover the deficits of insufficient permanent staffing.

Another aspect of temporary staff employment at the University of the Aegean in the current economic environment is that temporary posts are often filled by over-qualified personnel. Many of the people that we met working in relatively low-level administrative posts had a second-cycle (masters) degree, sometimes obtained from a university outside Greece. In a better economic environment, such personnel would be highly employable, yet because of the difficult economic situation on the islands they are prepared to accept lower-level employment. While in a sense the university is very fortunate to be able to benefit from this situation, at the same time it is important

to recognise that human resource development strategy is required to motivate and retain such staff.

Although the Team recognises that there is much which is beyond the control of the university, nevertheless certain action could be undertaken to better manage the human resources available. Notably, it seems that there is a lack of clear job descriptions and documentation showing the reality of the work in which administrative staff are engaged. It would be particularly helpful both for the university – in order to understand its own manner of functioning – as well as for stakeholders and government, to clarify and describe accurately the functions attributed to each administrative post, as well as to break down the amount of time required for these different activities. Such practice is currently only undertaken in isolated cases, while the bureaucratic procedure of outlining posts to the government fails to specify real tasks and workloads.

Several consequences to a lack of such overall human resource management and planning can be highlighted. Currently the absence of task descriptions within posts means that the responsibility for defining tasks and functions is often left to the personnel occupying the posts. This can lead to inter-personal tension, and create problems which are difficult or impossible to resolve from the distance of another island. Some examples of such cases, although the exception rather than the norm, were nevertheless apparent to the EUA Team members.

Secondly, if clear job descriptions and task monitoring were in place, it would make the university case for more permanent posts far stronger to present to the government. The university ought to be in a position to outline its required posts not simply by naming the posts in a formulaic manner but by describing the tasks which need to be fulfilled. By outlining tasks for each required post, and then matching this outline against the allocation of permanent staff, the real needs of the university – currently covered up by the work of temporary staff - will become transparent. Hopefully this will also help the university to formulate a strong case to transform the temporary staff posts to permanent positions and alleviate the situation of precarious employment. In the absence of such an inventory of the reality of administrative work, discussion with government is likely to be restricted to a “political” negotiation, rather than grounded in the reality of university practice.

Finally, with regard to both administrative and academic staff, there does not appear to be a system in place to evaluate and reward performance. This is a central question of quality enhancement. Such a system of regular performance appraisal is required also to identify training needs as they arise, and to ensure that in a process of permanent change and innovation at the university, the administrative staff are fully operational and equipped to support the pedagogical, scientific and service functions of the university.

3.3 Career development for younger staff

Another aspect of human resource policy which, in the view of the EUA Team, requires attention, is nurturing the career prospects of young academic and administrative staff. Currently, while there is evidence of excellent practice in stimulating relationships between experienced and junior staff, little overall strategic policy was evident to encourage the career development of younger staff.

Part of the problem is that departmental structures appear to be quite strongly hierarchical. The Team rarely had a strong sense of collegial decision-making taking place within departments, and indeed in some departments rather had the impression of a strong culture of departmental power going down from top to bottom. This is a phenomenon that the university should be aware of, and which it could monitor. Given the fact that the university possesses excellent departments of sociology and anthropology, a research project on the culture of university organisation could prove valuable in thinking about decision-making and structures within the institution.

For new staff, and for those in need of skills updating, it would also be a good idea to ensure that some professional development courses on teaching methodology are offered. By doing this periodically with staff from different departments, some personal links could also be forged which enhance future inter-departmental and academic cooperation.

4 Students

One of the primary functions of the university is to respond to the needs of its students, and it has therefore been an important aspect of the evaluation to consider the students that we met, and the views that they expressed. In general, although there was a section of the student body that, for political reasons, did not wish to engage in any discussion at all, nevertheless those that we did meet conveyed a picture of enthusiastic, engaged and positive learners. For many, their expectations of the university had been greatly exceeded, and this, coupled with the trend of increasing preferences in undergraduate admissions, indicates that the reputation of the university is steadily strengthening from year to year.

4.1 Undergraduate students

Although the current national undergraduate admissions system cannot be changed by the university, but hopefully will soon be reformed, the effects of the system obviously have a major impact.

The fact that many, indeed most, students come to study a subject in which they did not choose to specialise in a university that was not their first preference puts additional pressure on the university. The institution has a responsibility to attempt to motivate all learners and enable them to achieve their potential. So a major question is whether the educational offer of each department is suited to the demands of the students who enter the university.

This is particularly difficult when many students have not chosen the discipline area, and may therefore be, at least for an initial period, reluctant learners. It is easy to understand, for example, that a student who hoped to study architecture in Athens may be frustrated at receiving a place to study design in Syros, and unless particular care is taken, such a student may soon become a “non active” member of the student body.

While the Team met a number of undergraduate students who would rather have been studying somewhere else, others outlined a very different experience. Indeed some students had initially considered themselves as having failed to make the grade for the university and discipline of their choice, yet by the end of their undergraduate studies had reached the opposite conclusion that they were privileged to have had the opportunity to study at the University of the Aegean, and had benefited enormously from the experience.

Several factors seem important in explaining the difference in experience between those who “drop out” and become inactive students, and those who go on to benefit fully from their university life. Inevitably in a system which removes student choice and university selection, there will be a hopefully small percentage of students that do not “fit in” or adapt to the study conditions in the department to which they are assigned. The difference with most systems is that such students elsewhere would “drop out” whereas in Greece they tend to remain registered as students and continue to receive the fringe benefits of student status. By remaining perpetual students, they also give a false picture of the university’s success in supporting other students through their studies.

Meanwhile there is likely to be a more significant proportion of students who are somewhat uncertain about the future that lies ahead of them upon arrival at the university. For this category of student, if the university and department are able to offer the right support - particularly in the early stages of undergraduate study, and around the first examination period - the student should be able to fulfil her or his potential during the study programme. This is one aspect to which greater attention could be paid, and certain activities could be easily organised. For example, specific induction courses, acknowledging the difficulties that students will face, and pointing out the different sources of information and support available, can make a vital difference to students “at risk” of giving up almost before they have started. This is an example of an area of activity that the university could usefully take forward with student representatives.

Many features of life at the University of the Aegean are attractive to students. The university deserves high praise is in its handling of student accommodation and canteen facilities. These are managed to an extremely high standard - indeed the EUA Team would be surprised if such

excellent provision could be found at such a price anywhere else in Europe. Such high quality accommodation for those fortunate enough to benefit and food, which is free for all, makes an important and positive impact on students.

Nevertheless some departments seem to be managing the challenges thrown up by the Greek student admissions system more successfully than others. Certain factors again seem worthy of mention.

Adapting to island life is not something that all students or staff cope with easily. Often students come from large cities and have to get used to the slower pace of life of an island, which may be highly attractive in the summer months, but of little interest to a young person during the winter. Moreover the vast majority of students have to find their own accommodation, which is becoming increasingly expensive. Hence there is a widespread phenomenon of students at this university being obliged to work. Here the problem is that work is not always easy to find, while there are some that do find work, end up spending too much time working, and hence fall behind in their studies.

Cultural issues linked to the geographic situation should not be underestimated. In terms of social integration, students may also find themselves marginalised in small island towns. This is an aspect where there is surely a role for the towns themselves to encourage cultural activities, and to encourage a positive attitude among islanders towards the university community.

Finally, the State of university buildings also has an important impact. If students find themselves attending classes in dilapidated or incomplete buildings, and where the equipment is inadequate or inaccessible, it will be a contributory factor to feelings of dissatisfaction at finding themselves at a university they have not chosen.

Each department therefore needs to assess whether it is successful in attracting and retaining students to the discipline. The university should also monitor whether individual departments and the university as a whole improves its rate of “active” student retention and success. As suggested in section 2.4 of this report, such monitoring activities, which ought to include surveys of students who drop out from active study soon after arriving at the university, should be the responsibility of a University level Quality Office.

4.2 Master and PhD students

Many of the “problems and challenges” related to undergraduates are different for students on master programmes or studying for doctorate qualifications. Here the students have made a positive choice to be at the university, and in general are extremely committed, and have a very positive impression of the courses and professorial staff. Indeed the post-graduate study programmes appear to be very attractive to highly motivated students.

While many of the postgraduate programmes are rather new and thus in the process of early development, there are possibilities to think about how to make even better use of them. For example, the Team came across some very good examples of post-graduate seminars with doctoral students presenting and discussing their work regularly with peers in other related disciplines, and such practice should be strongly encouraged. While the island reality again restricts the impact of such work, it should be extended when possible to under-graduate students and interested local stakeholders.

One of the main problems which some master students face is the tuition fee – which many find high – and which obliges students to combine study with professional work. While the university clearly needs to charge tuition fees for graduate programmes, it could also examine ways in which some scholarships could be developed for students suffering important financial hardship.

4.3 Alumni networks

Until now, there has been no successful attempt to create alumni networks, or to benefit from the positive experience of graduate students. The alumni issue is indeed one which is difficult to address, as it would require considerable work to become effective in the early years. However

such networks can help reinforce the university's key role in society, and can also be used to attract financing for particular projects further in the future.

In a more short-term perspective, there are also great benefits to be gained from marketing the university more effectively, and here graduate students can also play an important role in highlighting their positive experience of the university.

5 Research

Research is certainly a strength at the University of the Aegean. The research output of each individual and department is impressive given the relatively poor funding, and extremely well presented in a major university publication. However, while there is a sizable number of staff working in the University Research Unit, beyond encouraging individual research, no institutional research strategy was discernible to the Team. The publication of research output does not appear to be used, for example, in the attribution of university research money to departments. It is also difficult to gain any clear sense of institutional priorities in research, or to see on what basis projects are encouraged and resourced. Research seems therefore to be driven by the interests of individual academics, and more by accident than institutional design will it address priority issues for the institution or region.

The evaluation Team therefore recommends that the university conducts its own analysis of research strengths and regional needs, and on the basis of this analysis attempts to determine the areas on which to concentrate efforts and resources. In addition, it would be very positive if the University set priority areas for each major discipline – also in response to the analysis of regional needs. If the university adopts this approach, a consequence is that it will also have to make some difficult decisions about what research activities it should **not** support – which will inevitably be a source of difficult discussions.

The Team also noted that the University Research Unit is mostly concerned with administering research funding while the Athens office investigates national and international research programmes for funding opportunities. Staff from this office tend to visit the islands to discuss particular grant opportunities and applications with academic staff, but it may prove to be more rational and cost-effective for such work to be centralised in Athens, with staff from the islands travelling to Athens for this purpose.

6 Bologna Process: curriculum reform and student-centred learning

For many in Greece the Bologna process has become a catch-all synonym for everything that is feared or disliked in higher education. Protesting students at the university regard the Bologna process as an endeavour to privatise higher education, to introduce commercial ethics and business values to higher education, and to denigrate public responsibility. Such positions would have inspired greater sympathy from the evaluation Team had any of the students espousing such views actually read either the Bologna Declaration or any of the subsequent Bologna texts. As this seemed not to be the case, the only conclusion to be drawn was that the level of information about what is happening in Europe can only be described as inadequate.

The university could do much more to improve information about the real aims and activities being undertaken within the Bologna process. The internet would certainly be a good vehicle for this, and it should not prove too time-consuming for key documents to be made available for everyone at the university.

In terms of the structural reform in higher education that many countries in Europe have been experiencing in the past few years, Greek higher education appears to have remained almost untouched. Although the basic structure of Greek qualifications has not needed to change since the Bologna process came into existence, ECTS has been introduced in a way which simply describes existing courses in terms of credits, but does not affect the content of courses in any meaningful way.

In this sense the opportunity to re-think and reform curricula as a result of European developments has so far largely been missed. Learning outcomes for qualifications are not

defined, and neither are specific learning outcomes for different courses and modules. Furthermore, these matters do not appear to be a topic of discussion between departments.

Information provided to students about courses is also inadequate. Students tend to ascertain information about course requirements from the outline of contents in syllabus and from previous examinations. However, students are given no prior information about teaching and learning methods for specific courses, and could only answer questions about teaching methods employed at the university in terms of describing the teaching that they had experienced.

While there are many examples of excellent teaching and learning practice in the university, there seems to be little sense of a common strategy to move towards a learner-centred pedagogy – which is perhaps the most important aspect of Bologna reforms. Excellent practice exists in some departments, and project-learning and other creative methodologies are common in some departments. Yet this seems to be driven largely by the initiative of individual professors within departments rather than by a conscious strategy.

While the university may or may not be motivated by Bologna reforms in particular, there is no doubt that many benefits can be gained from thinking more thoroughly about the teaching and learning process, and producing more transparent information about study programmes. The first step in this would be to re-examine ECTS documents and to consider the implications of re-thinking curricula on the basis of credits defined in terms of student workload. This means thinking about the programme objectives not in terms of conveying the knowledge and information that professors feel important to transmit, but by starting from the question of what students need to learn. Such an approach will not be simple, and cannot be achieved overnight – but there is now a considerable body of expertise to draw upon concerning the issues of how to reform university curriculum.

One of the outcomes of such a process should be that students receive clear information about the goals for each course, the expectations which the course has of its students, the means which will be used to achieve the learning objectives, and the manner in which learning will be assessed. By focusing upon learner needs, the goal should be to support students in developing the skills that they need to continue learning throughout their lives – either in formal or informal settings.

Despite having a staff that has significant international and European experience, the university also seems to be relatively under-developed in terms of promoting student exchange. It was rare, although not unknown, to find examples of professors who are exploiting links with universities where they have research or teaching connections for mobility purposes, and more encouragement could be given to students to study abroad. The number of outgoing students on the ERASMUS programme is low, and while numbers of incoming ERASMUS students are increasing, they are also at a very low level in European terms. This is of course partly a reflection of the problem of Greek constitutional law requiring all undergraduate programmes to be taught in Greek. At the moment, however, the result is that opportunities to benefit from a diversity of inter-cultural student activities are being missed.

7 Stakeholder involvement

In a university where regional development provides a defining feature of its mission, it would be normal to find a high level of cooperation and involvement with the local community. However, given the restrictions on university autonomy, it is not surprising that stakeholder involvement is less developed, and that the university's self evaluation report notes that "very few representatives from the external environment have some influence on the formulation of university strategy". It is also clear that interaction with local community varies from island to island, and is greatly affected by inter-personal connections. On some islands there seemed to be very little evidence of any university cooperation with local stakeholders.

Some of the university's projects engaging with the local community are excellent examples of the potential that can be developed in this field. The work of the mathematics department on Samos in collaborating with local school teaching, or research projects in Chios on the cultivation

and marketing of the Masticha plant, are just two such examples that could be mentioned in this context.

Many of the needs of islands and islanders could be addressed through developing educational programmes and modules in a lifelong learning perspective – but for the moment such activity is rendered difficult by legal restrictions. Research that is relevant to the islands does take place, but in the view of the EUA Team could be much further developed.

There is also a tendency for the local government and business community to be aware of the university departments that exist on their particular island, but not to consider other departments on other islands. While evidently it is simpler to develop projects with local partners, the university does have the capacity, even if this is under-developed, to work across departments and across islands.

While there would be little to be gained from establishing unwieldy structures with local government and business, the EUA Team would recommend developing cooperation to a much greater extent. University Community Development Councils could be established on each island, providing opportunities for the local stakeholders to formulate requests and for the university to respond. Typically, issues such as student employment, extra-mural courses, island-oriented research could be addressed in regular meetings. These five island Councils should also take the opportunity of meeting each other regularly to share ideas, and to help stakeholders build up a sense of the range of potential which the university has to offer.

The EUA Team would also recommend to the Greek government it monitors effectively the impact of the university on the development of the islands. Such impact studies could help to highlight the positive role that the university is playing, and to point to ways in which support to the university can be improved in order to fulfil the goals of supporting the development of the islands.

8 Strengths and weaknesses of the university

In considering the capacity of the university to respond to the challenges of the evolving environment, the EUA Team considered the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

8.1 Strengths

The first strength identified is that the size of the university at the moment is entirely appropriate for its mission and to enable creative and innovative processes to develop. The university is not too large - a factor which often contributes to difficulties in reform - but has the necessary critical mass to play an important role in regional development. Moreover there is a strong sense of shared values, and a very healthy and positive atmosphere inspiring excellent staff-student-stakeholder relationships. In short, the University of the Aegean is an institution that staff and students are proud to identify with, and which offers excellent conditions for future development.

In many different respects, the university is fortunate to possess such excellent human resources. Ultimately all learning institutions rely upon the quality of their staff and students to establish and develop their reputation. Although, as this report has highlighted, there are issues to consider regarding human resource management, the starting point for the University of the Aegean is to acknowledge that it has high quality academic and administrative staff, a student body with the potential to be inspired by learning, and excellent and supportive relationships among the university community.

Under the current leadership of Rector Katsakis it is also clear that the university has an excellent sense of how it should reform and develop, and a very strong will and capacity to pursue such a strategy for change.

Apart from the strategic importance of the location, and here the particular challenges of developing academic cooperation with Turkish universities should be regarded as a key strategic opportunity, there is also major benefit to be gained from the attractiveness of the islands. Combining the extraordinary beauty of the geographic location with the welcoming and supportive

atmosphere of the university gives great potential for open academic cooperation. While this is fairly small-scale at the moment, during our two visits the EUA Team nevertheless met several researchers working on specific issues related to particular features of the islands in different disciplinary fields. These researchers clearly found the university to be an inspiring location for their research projects.

Another strength that is evident at the university are the entrepreneurial and enterprising qualities of many staff and departments. Such factors will play a major role in the future development of the university, and the excellent cooperation that has been established with local business and the chambers of commerce on some islands provides strong foundations to meet local needs.

The research profile of the university is also very strong. While the Team has some concerns that institutional research strategy is lacking, nevertheless the importance of research is recognised and highly valued.

8.2 Weaknesses

In order to improve, develop and perform as effectively as possible, the university should also recognise and address its current weaknesses. Fortunately the EUA Team identified far fewer weaknesses than strengths.

The first matter to highlight is paradoxically also the institution's greatest strength – its geographical setting. The geographical dispersion of departments on different islands is strictly speaking, not a weakness, but a constraint which requires the university to take appropriate action to facilitate communication, inter-departmental cooperation, and cultural activity. Currently, with the lack of autonomy and the definition/imposition by government of statutory bodies and governing committees, there is very little that remains under the control of the university. Consequently the amount of time and money spent upon travel for meetings whose business often could be dealt with effectively within more adequate structures and by making use of appropriate technology is a waste of energy which is draining the university, and means that some staff lose focus from more important questions.

The university does, however, make very good use of IT facilities and makes every attempt to work in an efficient manner. It is therefore mainly at a political level that things need to change in order for the university to be empowered to take better decisions within more appropriate structures.

No university would ever claim to have sufficient resources to meet its needs – and no doubt as resources increase so new needs emerge. However, there do appear to be problems with lack of staff – particularly administrative personnel – and also with lack of resources to develop library services. Nevertheless, the more crucial problem than lack of resources is the government restrictions on managing existing resources in a flexible and efficient manner.

In a global age, it is also extremely important to develop international cooperation activities. While many individual academic staff have strong research links with universities in other countries, there seems to be a lack of strategic partnerships and strategic international cooperation – although this is certainly changing under the current university leadership. Moreover, again largely as a result of Greek government policy regarding language of instruction in higher education, student exchange is under-developed.

8.3 Opportunities

Despite the weaknesses identified, and the major difficulty of lacking sufficient autonomy to address challenges, nevertheless the medium and long-term opportunities for the university appear very promising. The work which has been undertaken for the self-evaluation process provides a very good analysis of the state of the university, and hence lays strong foundations upon which to build. Moreover, there is a strong culture of cooperation and collaboration, and great commitment among the academic community as a whole.

The Team would highlight several issues where these opportunities can best be exploited:

Structural reform

Departments have undertaken their own self-evaluation as part of the university self-evaluation process. Having this thorough collection of snapshots of the different aspects of the university is itself a great opportunity. However, consolidating the outcomes of all this work will not be a simple task. There is a need for departments to continue to pursue their own processes of structural and curriculum reform, whilst at the same time ensuring that this is done under the framework of a common university umbrella. Particular attention will be required to make sure that the good ideas and initiative of staff and students in geographically dispersed faculties are brought together. This would be a difficult challenge in any university environment, but when a university is operating across five islands, it requires specific intent and appropriate mechanisms.

Young academic staff

As identified by the university itself, one of its greatest opportunities is the wealth of young academic staff. While the intention of the university to develop the potential of such staff is excellent, more professional human resource management, and professional development structures should be put in place. From the Team's conversations with a number of younger staff throughout the university, it is clear that many of these staff members would like to be able to develop their careers in the university. However, the university may face problems attracting new young staff from the mainland, and this aspect of human resource planning requires policy and structure – as well as the freedom for the university to act.

Even when staff and students leave the university, maintaining contact can have great benefits – possibly opening up new institutional relationships and international academic cooperation, and offering unforeseen possibilities for international research projects. Tracking the career paths of young academics and graduate students should therefore be an important aspect of university policy.

With regard to teaching and learning, the role of younger staff is also critical. While it would be completely incorrect to equate capacity to learn and change with age, younger staff nevertheless have less experience of previous systems and methods, and can often adapt more quickly to new concepts and trends. In a university environment where change is essential, it is often the role of younger staff to guide their more experienced colleagues.

For example, younger staff and students could play a key role in grasping the implications for curriculum reform of fully utilising ECTS and a learning outcomes approach. For this to be successful, trust should be invested in the younger staff. From the evidence gathered by the Team, the combination of youth and experience in the university offers exciting prospects for institutional learning.

Bologna Process

In implementing change, the university should pay attention to developments taking place in Europe under the heading of the Bologna Process. Although this process is evidently widely misunderstood in Greece, the main action lines and concepts underpinning the Bologna Process are of great relevance for the university, and can provide useful reference points in moving forward. Providing accurate and updated information on the Bologna Process on the internet would be a great service to the university community. Through focusing upon European reform and European benchmarking, the Team is confident that the university will better be able to meet local needs, and to attract greater support for its work.

Educational offer

The Team would emphasise that in terms of its educational offer, opportunities exist to develop more locally relevant research and programmes. The universities in Greece have been characterised in the past by having rather similar educational programmes, and this is mainly a result of a teacher-centred approach to curriculum. The opportunity of opening up to student-centred learning therefore has multiple potential benefits. In re-thinking the challenges of innovative curriculum development, the university should also pay great attention to the future

professional prospects of its graduates, and the knowledge and skills that they will need to serve them in later life.

Although until now the university has been forced by law to abstain from developing lifelong learning programmes, courses addressing local community members with a need to update skills or an interest in learning for self-fulfilment are challenges for which the university should prepare. These are by no means simple tasks, and in this environment will require major effort. Nevertheless, as the university has the goal of serving society, it needs to consider the development of such programmes in the spirit of meeting the societal needs of local island communities.

Geographical setting

A major opportunity for the university is also its geographical setting. While the island settings pose problems and difficulties, the challenge of developing such a university provides many opportunities for Greek higher education. On the borders of the current European Union, and indeed situated on one of the most sensitive European borders, the university is ideally placed to be a major player in developing Greek-Turkish academic relations. The importance of this role is evident to all at the university as well as to local stakeholders, and hopefully some of the initiatives that have already started in terms of student exchange and academic cooperation can be pushed forward with greater intensity in the future.

8.4 Threats

The review Team is extremely confident that the university is capable of harnessing its strengths and taking advantage of the opportunities that exist in the local environment. Nevertheless it should be aware of the threats to its development if some of the current realities do not evolve.

Lack of functional autonomy

Lack of functional autonomy is, in the view of the EUA Team, the greatest brake on the university development at this current stage. As a result of lack of autonomy, although the university is aware of appropriate solutions to many of the questions it faces, it often simply lacks the power to take decisions. This situation needs to change for the benefit of Greek higher education in general and the University of the Aegean in particular. One particularly negative aspect of this problem is that the structures imposed by Greek legislation do not provide enough space for strategic, central leadership.

State interference

Interference by government into matters which would be better managed by the university is a serious problem. In addition to the legislative and structural interference, it is also regarded as a normal part of reality that student unions are organised not around student interests, but along political party lines and that, along with trade unions and other interest groups, they seek to influence the policies of the university in accordance with their party ideologies.

While acknowledging the modern historical role played by Greek universities as a place of resistance and eventual overthrow of the Regime of the Colonels in 1974, the practices which have been put in place from this era, particularly with regard to Greek university elections, can now be dysfunctional and overly influenced by national politics. While everyone may be used to such a system, nevertheless it can be detrimental to high quality academic management.

9 Recommendations

This section outlines the main recommendations to be drawn from the report:

Recommendation 1: Quality

The Team's first recommendation is to continue with the quality improvement processes that have been set in place. In this context, the following components of a university-wide quality policy should be considered:

- **Systematic institutional monitoring** of matters such as student success and dropout, gender equity (staff and students), international staff and students
- The establishment of a **university level quality office**, responsible for developing and implementing internal procedures aiming to improve quality within the university.
- Under the aegis of the quality office, a **common student evaluation procedure** for all courses, with reasonable and appropriate consequences
- **University awards for excellent performance** in different areas, such as student achievement, teaching, and research
- An important step in improving the quality of the university's services for regional development would be to **establish University Community Development Councils on each island**, providing opportunities for local stakeholders to formulate requests and for the university to respond.

Recommendation 2: Human Resource Strategy

Human resource management needs to be overseen effectively at university level, and several key actions should be taken forward:

- **Drawing up full task descriptions for all administrative posts**, with workloads realistically estimated
- **Developing a staff evaluation system, linked to staff training and incentives** such as performance-related pay. The Team understands that financial incentives may not be possible in the Greek public system, but considers that this topic could be discussed with government, and/or other incentives devised.
- Taking action to **address the problems of academic isolation**, such as **encouraging inter-departmental links and inter-disciplinary research projects**.
- Paying particular **attention to the needs for career development of younger members of staff**

Recommendation 3: Student Affairs

As the university becomes more learner-centred, **student voices should be heard in an appropriate manner on all aspects of university life** that affect them. This implies:

- **Gathering feedback on student experience** ranging from courses and teaching methods to accommodation, careers advice, guidance and counselling services etc
- Improving student participation in the organisation of core student services through **creating a student affairs office**, and offering space – and hopefully a budget - for

students on each campus to develop and manage services that are currently missing or inadequate.

- **Giving particular attention to new undergraduate** students to help them settle in to the university and understand the academic expectations of them. Induction activities should include initiation to library services.
- Examining the feasibility of **creating some university student scholarships for low-income but high-achieving students** on master and doctoral programmes.

Recommendation 4: International Relations

The international arena offers many possibilities to the university both in research, and in teaching and student exchange:

- A general strategy towards university pedagogy should be developed. **In terms of curriculum, the university should examine the experience of other universities in Europe** in re-thinking curricula from the basis of a learning outcomes approach using ECTS.
- **Course information and requirements** should be outlined more explicitly to potential students
- **Attracting international staff** for sabbatical periods or for short-term research projects should be a higher priority.
- **All academic staff** should consider it their responsibility to **encourage students to participate in organised mobility programmes** such as Erasmus
- In the medium term, international links could also be strengthened through **creating an alumni network and activities**, although this would take some considerable support and investment in the early stages.

Recommendation 5: Research

The considerable research activity at the university could be better sustained and developed within a **clear university research strategy**.

- **Priorities should be set** on the basis of a thorough analysis of research output, and **resources should follow**.
- **Local community stakeholders should be consulted** thoroughly on projected research needs to benefit the islands.

Recommendation 6: Marketing

The excellent work of the university deserves to be better known both within Greece and internationally. **Greater attention to marketing** would help the university to make significant progress. In Europe and internationally, the university's masters programmes could be more effectively targeted to attract international students

Recommendation 7: University Autonomy

The **final recommendation** is not addressed to the university but rather to **the Greek government** and other stakeholders of the university. Throughout this external assessment, the Team has been extremely impressed by the excellent work which the university is undertaking. Indeed the university is an extremely exciting academic project for Greece and Europe which merits continued support and encouragement.

The suggestions and advice in this report have the sole purpose of supporting the positive development of the university. While the university has made great leaps forward over the past two decades, its ability to respond to challenges ahead requires some changes in the relationship with the Greek government. While public service higher education should not be compromised, there is an evident need for the University of the Aegean to be empowered with greater autonomy, and to be enabled to take decisions for itself that can help to fulfil its mission successfully. Issues such as undergraduate admissions, internal governance and management structures, infrastructure development and building acquisition, and recruitment of administrative staff are examples where it is clear that the current situation could be greatly improved. In particular, it is recommended that the Greek government modify its university budget allocation procedures to take account not only of the quantitative input factors which are currently used, but also of academic output factors and other recognised quality indicators. Furthermore, the Government should appreciate that the administrative costs of running a university over five islands are substantially greater than those of a single campus structure, and in this respect the University of the Aegean's budget should be greatly increased.

Excessive State control sets Greek universities apart from developments around Europe, and it should be recognised that many aspects of university affairs are more effectively managed by universities themselves than by governments. The Team is confident that, if the University of the Aegean is provided with real functional autonomy, it will act responsibly and accountably to government and citizens, and that it will be better equipped to respond to the educational challenges that lie ahead.