

Εθνική Αρχή Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης Hellenic Authority for Higher Education

on the Quality of Higher Education

SUMMARY REPORT



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HELLENIC AUTHORITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that we present HAHE's first Report on the Quality of Higher Education for 2020.

The independent Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) was established pursuant to law 4653/20 (Government Gazette 12A/24-1-2020), as the successor of the country's HQA (Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency), by simultaneously upgrading the organisation's role and expanding its scope. The Authority's main mission is to ensure high quality in higher education. In this context, HAHE:

- a. contributes to the formation and implementation of the national strategy for higher education and to the allocation of state funds to the country's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); and
- **b.** evaluates and accredits the operational quality of HEIs.

The first year (2020) of the Authority's operation was undoubtedly significant for higher education, considering the fact that the sudden appearance and rapid spread of Covid-19 forced higher education institutions worldwide, as well as in our country, to temporarily suspend their operation, in early spring 2020. This has impacted more than 220 million students, numerous researchers, and members of the institutions' teaching and administrative staff worldwide. The universities were forced to operate in an unprecedented environment of distance education, by mainly adapting their academic function to a context of synchronous and asynchronous distance education, and by combining alternative methods of assessment and information with digital tools and ICT methods. Unfortunately, the phenomenon and the effects of the pandemic are still ongoing and need to be thoroughly investigated. However, the first findings of studies conducted in Greece and abroad already suggest that institutions are faced with many shortand long-term challenges. Such challenges already outline a nexus of actions whose implementation includes the optimal possible use of technology, both in an academic and an organizational context. The same challenges also present opportunities for HEIs to adopt new methods of teaching, researching and interacting with society.

In Greece, 2020 has been a year of adjustment for eleven universities (out of a total of 24 Greek universities), which were required to operate with their new academic structure, following the changes of 2018 and 2019. These institutions had to develop new Undergraduate Study Programmes (USPs) alongside the already operating programmes of former Technological Education Institutes. HAHE monitors the course of these new Departments and records the problems encountered and the efforts to tackle them, made both by the institutions' administration and the Ministry of Education.

In this new demanding environment, HAHE, after completing the formation of the Supreme Council and the Evaluation and Accreditation Council with distinguished professors from Greek and foreign universities, promoted its strategic goals to fulfil its mission and its main responsibilities. It expediently and efficiently adapted the accreditation process to the use of electronic means, so that the work needed for accrediting Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) and USPs would proceed smoothly, without the need for the physical presence of experts from abroad.

On the basis of decisions taken by its two Councils, HAHE also implemented the following, during 2020:

- ✓ Drafting of a series of criteria for the foundation, renaming and relocation of academic units, as well as criteria for study programmes to comply with the provisions of article 46 of Law 4485/2017;
- ✓ Drafting of objective criteria for the allocation of the annual regular budgetary funds of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to HEIs, as well as criteria for the allocation of new teaching staff positions in HEIs;
- ✓ Drafting of two new quality standards for the accreditation of (a) Foreign Language Study Programmes, and (b) new Study Programmes;
- ✓ Planning of the financing of two Actions in the context of the 2014-2020 NSRF, aimed to strengthen the HEI's Quality Assurance Units (QAUs/MODIPs) and Career Offices, and the national graduate tracking mechanism;

- ✓ Organisation and completion of seven IQAS and 56 Undergraduate Study Programmes accreditations, and of the accreditation of the first Foreign Language Study Programme, during the second semester of 2020;
- ✓ Reorganisation of the Authority's internal operation, by adapting it to the new institutional framework of Law 4653/2020.

By quickly responding to the new conditions of the pandemic, HAHE managed to adapt to the new requirements and to provide its services in cooperation with the bodies involved, while safeguarding the health and safety of its staff. Using its know-how and its adaptability, HAHE will continue to stand by the HEIs of the country and to support them in every possible way, with the aim to ensure the quality of higher education and to improve the image of Greek HEIs at European and international levels.

This report was drafted by a group of HAHE officials and was unanimously approved by HAHE's Supreme Council by decision no 24/27-11-2021. It is submitted to the Greek Parliament and the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs in accordance with current regulations.

The President Professor Pericles A. Mitkas

Summary

Introduction

The first part of the report highlights the international developments in Higher Education and presents the position of Greece in relation to OECD member countries and member states of the European Union, in terms of the most important figures and indicators. The data is derived from internationally recognized sources, such as OECD, UNESCO, Eurostat, ELSTAT, EUA, Scimago and National Documentation Centre (EKT), as well as the HAHE's database. In addition, the first part of the report includes a selection of current issues and developments from the international and European area of Higher Education.

The second part of the report outlines the Authority's activities during 2020. HAHE, with its expanded responsibilities granted by Law 4653/2020, implemented actions for quality assurance and fulfilled its advisory role to the Ministry of Education on issues, such as the allocation of state funds and resources to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the transformations needed in the academic map of the country.

Finally, the third part refers to the internal structure and operation of the Authority as well as the activities it developed in order to fulfill its mission and achieve its goals.

Part A: International Overview of Higher Education

The percentage of higher education graduates both in Greece and internationally is increasing over time.

OECD's and Eurostat's data shows that the level of education of the general population, internationally, presents an upward trend over time, both in the ages of 25-34 and in the ages of 25-64. Among OECD countries, people aged 25-34 have, on average, a higher level of education than older people. In terms of gender, women graduates of higher education are numerically superior to men. In Greece, the percentage of higher education graduates aged 25-34 is close to the OECD average: 42% versus 45% in OECD. On the contrary, in the 25-64 age group, the percentage of higher education graduates is significantly lower: 32% compared to 40% in OECD. Regarding gender, women graduates in Greece (levels 5-8) outnumber men by 15%. However, the salary of women with a higher education degree corresponds to a percentage of 78% of male graduate salary.

The employment of graduates in Greece is lower compared to other European and OECD countries.

Greece ranks amongst the low performers in the OECD list of countries, in terms of employment of higher education graduates aged 25-64 (76%) and younger graduates aged 25-34 (73%) (levels 5-8), 12% away from the OECD average. However, the acquisition of a postgraduate degree increases the chances of employment by 7% (Master's) and by

13% (Ph.D degrees), compared to bachelor's degree holders.

Regarding the salaries of graduates, Greece ranks again in a relatively low position among OECD countries, 16 percentage points below the average. The facts that a) the unemployment of graduates, especially of young people, is increasing and b) the total unemployment of graduates in Greece is still the highest in the EU (despite its decline between 2016 and 2020), are points of concern. The unemployment of female graduates in Greece exceeds that of men by almost 20%.

It should also be noted that students' choices differ significantly from those in EU, with a greater

preference for social sciences and humanities and a significantly lower preference for health and social welfare sciences. It is pointed out that the preference for computer science and communication systems (3.42% of preferences) appears lower than the labour market's needs and skills demand in the future.

The Greek student population remains among the largest in Europe and the OECD, but the number of graduates is the lowest.

Greece has one of the highest percentages of undergraduate students in relation to its general population. However, it should be noted that due to the fact that the measurement is made on enrolled students and a large part of them are considered inactive, the comparison does not accurately reflect reality. For the same reasons, the percentage of graduates in the total number of students per year (8.91%) remains the lowest among the European countries and is significantly lower than the European average (25%).

It is also noteworthy that in Greece the percentage of men compared to women in the first study cycle remains higher in contrast to what happens in most countries. However, both in the number of graduates and in the case of postgraduate studies, women outnumber men.

Teaching staff in Greece remains the lowest in relation to the student population and presents the most unfavorable ratio between women and men, among European and OECD countries.

Greece remains the country with the highest ratio of undergraduate students per teaching staff, far behind the European average by about 28%. However, the ratio is unfavorable due to the relatively large student population, which includes inactive students. In addition, Greece has the worst male / female teaching staff ratio, with a much higher percentage of male teaching staff (64.3%) compared to European average. The percentage of teaching

Public funding in Greece is increasing compared to previous years.

University funding based on their performance and funding allocation models are two of the issues that, according to European University Association (EUA) 2020/21 report, present great interest to member states and institutions. In the United Kingdom (excluding Scotland), the Government has already announced a major review of the Research Excellence Framework.

At the same time, there is a strong interest (a) in the financing of infrastructure and especially in technological infrastructure due to pandemic, which forced higher staff under the age of 35 (3.30%) is particularly low (the lowest in Europe), due to the significant lag in recruitment of new faculty members during the years of economic crisis.

Negative variations are also observed in the percentage of higher education teaching staff in general population, where Greece lags behind by 13 percentage points of European average

education institutions to conduct their educational process through the Internet, and also (b) in the provision of funding in combination with increasing efficiency.

Public funding of Higher Education in Greece recorded the lowest rates in the EU, according to EUA data for 2018, with a simultaneous increase in the student population. In 2020, a small increase was noted, especially in staff salaries, however, the annual grant of operating expenses by the Ministry of Education remained stable as in previous years.

Research in Greek HEIs is at relatively good level, which is further enhanced by the active participation of the Universities in European competitive programmes.

Greece constantly appears at a relatively high position (18th) in terms of the number of scientific publications among 52 European countries, and at 17th position in terms of citations per publication ratio. However, the country's performance (26th) in terms of the number of publications per researcher is relatively low (among 28 countries). Research funding is still low, but R&D expenditure in Higher Education has increased since last year; the total number of researchers of higher education has increased from previous year, but remains at lower level compared to 2015. The participation of Greek HEIs in European research programmes is quite high and exceeds the European average by 1.4%.



New PhD researchers in Greece are migrating in search of stable employment in their field, while noting the lack of innovation and similar work positions in Greek enterprises.

Dealing with the phenomenon of brain drain mainly affects PhD holders and according to studies it is related both to the existence of research working positions in academia, and to the recognition of the researcher profession in the labour market.

The results and the relevant conclusions of studies by the Greek National Documentation Center are presented below:

- Regarding the educational profile of postdoctoral researchers, it appears that at a percentage of more than 75% for all 3 levels of higher education, they obtained their degree from Greek institutions. The largest percentage of degrees from institutions abroad is recorded in postgraduate studies (23%).
- It was found that there was a previous cooperation among researchers and collaborating faculty members / Special Education Staff / Researchers with the Institution (81.6%) while less than 16% stated that this was a new collaboration.
- Concerning the phenomenon of brain

drain of scientific staff, it appears that 28% of post-doctoral researchers have lived abroad for the last 5 years, due to: a) professional reasons (59.1%); b) studies (30.3%); c) financial situation (7.6%); and d) other personal reasons (3%).

Post-doctoral researchers (24.2%) stated that they decided to return to Greece, in order to be able to participate in a specific funded project, while 53% had already returned. It is worth mentioning - in combination with this observation that such projects prevented researchers from seeking employment abroad at a percentage of 33.9%, however 36.4% post-doctoral researchers stated of that they continue to think about this possibility. The question, then, is why this is happening. The three most important reasons are: (1) the search for a specific type of employment in research / academic field, (2) the current situation in the country and (3) the prospects of a professional career.

Finally, post-doctoral researchers emphasize, among others, on (i) the importance of the announcement of permanent researcher posts (97.1%), (ii) the consistency and the repetition of such announcements (92.5%), (iii) the longer duration of scholarships (88.7%), (iv) the greater focus on innovation (81.2%) and (v) the connection with the market/industry (67.8%), in order to deal with brain drain of scientific staff.

Greece is relatively behind in terms of its performance in the European structural indicators for Higher Education.

The European Commission's annual report on education presents the progress of national education systems in achieving European goals through 35 structural indicators focused on European education policies. Progress is recorded according to indicators, such as a) larger participation of under-represented groups in higher education; b) monitoring of the socio-economic situation of undergraduate students; c) recognition of nonformal and informal learning upon entering higher education; d) integration of studies completion rate in quality assurance procedures and e) performancebased funding mechanisms of higher education.

In addition, although the value of mobility in higher education is well-documented, in many cases it is hampered by factors such as participants' language skills, inability to transfer funding for mobility from country to country in EHEA, recognition of qualifications and provision of comprehensive information and guidance. Therefore, three (3) structural indicators have been established for the systematic monitoring of progress in mobility: a) the possibility of funding transfer (portability) from country to country, b) the percentage of institutions using ECTS and c) the automatic recognition of qualifications.

Only in 10 national higher education systems there is the possibility of automatic recognition of qualifications, while in 15 cases this is partially provided and in 16 systems it is not provided at all. In 33 systems a full implementation of the ECTS system is recorded, while in 6 cases a national ECTScompatible system is applied. Greece has not yet established a system of automatic recognition of qualifications, monitoring of the socio-economic background of students, recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as portability of funding. However, progress was made in monitoring employability, quality assurance, ECTS establishment, participation of under-represented groups and implementation of HEI's performance-based funding mechanism.

Indicators for Graduates aged 30-34	Greece	Indicators for Graduate Employability	Greece
 Quantitative targets for widening participation and/or attainment of underrepresented groups 	~	 Regular labour market forecasting used systematically 	\checkmark
2. Monitoring of socioeconomic background of students		2. Required involvement of employers in external QA	\checkmark
3. Recognition of informal or non-formal learning in entry to higher education		3. Requirements OR incentives for work placements for all students	
4. Completion rates as a required criterion in external QA		4. Career guidance for all students in HEIs	\checkmark
5. Performance based funding mechanisms with a social dimension focus		5. Regular graduate surveys used systematically	

The presence of Greek HEIs in international league tables remains relatively stable, despite the fluctuations of their position among ranking organisations.

The position of Greek HEIs in the main international rankings of ARWU, THE, QS, Scimago, URAP and Webometrics, varies but still remains relatively stable from place 200 and lower, based on the most recently published data. It is observed that, among Greek Universities, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, National Technical University of Athens and University of Crete are in the highest positions, with several variations in ranking according to the ranking system. With regard to the ranking of Greek universities in these league tables, it is found that all Greek Institutions are in the highest places, mainly in SCImago and Webometrics, while they appear in lower places in ARWU, THE and QS tables. This is probably due to the reputation search in THE and QS and to the great focus on the number of Nobel laureates in ARWU. On the contrary, when there is a wider range of criteria based mainly on publications, citations and backlinks, Greek Universities may be placed on a proportionately higher position.



Pandemic conditions have led Institutions to face a number of challenges for the optimal use of technology at academic and organizational level.

The first researches by organizations such as the American Council on Education, European Association for International Education, Erasmus Student Network, Quacquarelli Symonds, American Association for Collegiate School of Business, Greek National Documentation Centre and by a great number of researchers, have already been conducted on a large scale. Researches record the impact of the pandemic and the concerns of Institutions' administrations on a range of issues both academic (i.e. educational process, mobility, internship) and operational (i.e. need for crisis management know-how, quality assurance, staff support), but also ways of reaction / response and Institutions' initiatives, students' impressions and experience and impacts on research staff. At the same time, organizations such as UNESCO and World Bank have issued guidelines for the use of technology in distance learning (due to COVID-19), which can be used by HEIs, students and teaching staff.

These studies conclude that institutions face a number of short- and medium-term challenges, which outline a set of actions to be implemented such as best utilization of technology either in the academic or the organizational environment of Institutions.

For the first time, Greece participates in the European and national system for tracking the professional career of graduates.

The development of the National Tracking System of Higher Education graduates is based on the relevant EU Council Recommendation and supports co-operation with existing institutions' tracking systems in order to promote synergies. Greece participates in the European initiative with HAHE being the national reference point, due to its institutional role (law 4653/20). The benefit for our country from the European Graduate Tracking Initiative (EGTI) will be important since: a) a European Tracking Network of Graduates is being developed according to EU Council Recommendation 2017, in order to promote cooperation, exchange of knowhow and best practices among member states and to achieve the best possible coordination between national systems and European graduate tracking system, b) national reference points are established (HAHE in Greece), and c) care is being taken for scientific and financial support of Member States in this matter.

The Greek Higher Education in numbers



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The Greek Higher Education in numbers





Universities' governance systems, internationally, are increasingly demanding for autonomy, accountability and effective management.

At the level of internal (or academic) governance, the dominant trend is to strengthen institutions' autonomy, both in terms of academic and administration issues. Autonomy operates in an unbreakable relationship with accountability in order to provide the required information to interested parties, for example on the quality of the curricula offered, on the efficient use of financial resources, on their environmental performance, etc. Generally, the improvement of autonomy was gradually accompanied by increasing levels of accountability and detailed quality assurance procedures. At the same time, new requirements were created for institutions governing bodies with regard to the ways of exercising leadership within the institution, the communication among their units, the election of their members, the administration by using management tools, the decision-making systems, the creation of an institutional identity, the balance between collective and individual responsibility in governance and even representation issues of the interested parties (for instance students).

Conclusions

Higher Education in Greece is making progress in many areas, especially in research, digital transformation, entrepreneurship strengthening and in boosting efforts in order to increase HEIs autonomy and accountability. On the other hand, the negative effects of decades-long absence of a national strategy for higher education become apparent in a number of indicators related to the situation in higher education, in which, as mentioned above, Greece appears either at the last or at one of the last positions in the EU. Of particular concern are indicators related to graduation rate and employment prospects for graduates, which is due not only to the long-lasting financial crisis but also to inadequate professional orientation and the non-systematic connection of HEIs with the country's productive fabric. HEIs need to enhance student internships and link their study programmers and curricula with the labour market, in order to effectively help their students and graduates. At the same time, the strategic plans of the state and the institutions should include reforms of the country's academic map, so that all disciplines meet the needs of science, education, society and economy.

Part B: HAHE's actions

HAHE, during 2020, organized and carried out the accreditation of seven (7) Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) and fifty seven (57) Undergraduate Study Programmes of HEIs'.

The results of these accreditations are presented below.



Conclusions from the accreditation of IQAS demonstrate the need for universal implementation of strategic management, quality documentation, increase of accountability and extroversion.

The analysis of the accreditation reports of IQAS that are submitted by the External Evaluation and Accreditation Panels underline the following:

- Most weaknesses are noted on strategic planning and the full implementation of quality processes, the updating of KPIs and their relation to goals, the strengthening of IQAS (in terms of funding and staffing), the need for more effective use of data, and the processes of quality documentation.
- Focus is placed on the need for the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations and the creation of advisory committees, through which feedback from internal and external interested parts

will be systematically utilized.

- The greater use of new technologies and data (i.e. information systems) is suggested to steer decision-making, the improvement of infrastructure, the increase in the number of academic staff and its support.
- Great emphasis is placed on the content presented on the institution's website and the extent to which this content is comprehensive, up to date and available in a structured way in English.
- Other recommendations refer to the need for student motivation to participate more in evaluations, to establish alumni associations and to reinforce extroversion.

The conclusions from the accreditation of Undergraduate Study Programmes (USP) demonstrate the need to improve the structure and content of courses, the alignment with the labour market, the monitoring of students' progress, the recruitment and the development of teaching staff.

The accreditation reports of Undergraduate Study Programmes include recommendations made from the Evaluation and Accreditation Panels. The most frequent recommendations refer to:

• The documentation of quality, the thoroughness of strategic plan, the goalsetting process and KPIs. In addition, recommendations focus on the improvement of the structure of the curricula (internship issues, ECTS, English courses) and their update, the utilisation of students' feedback, the connection of teaching with research and extroversion. Other recommendations concern the recognition and reward of students' excellence, the mobility and monitoring of their progress, the need to establish incentives in order to increase attendance, the use of new technologies and modern methods of evaluation and teaching, the institution of students' counseling and the complaints' management system.

 Recommendations were also made for academic staff. In particular, they focus on the need for new hires, faculty support, mobility, recognition and reward for excellence in teaching and research and staff development systems. Initiatives to improve infrastructure and funding, a better connection with the labour market, the collection of additional data (for example staff satisfaction, graduates' careers), the greater utilization of information systems, are also encouraged. Finally, emphasis is placed on the need to implement recommendations from previous evaluations, to make use of feedback from social stakeholders and other interested parties, and to strengthen the internal quality assurance system with the necessary resources. In terms of marketing and promoting Undergraduate Study Programmes, the use of social media and the English version of their sites is strongly advised.



During 2020, the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE):

- ✓ Developed two new quality standards for the accreditation of (a) Foreign Language Study Programmes and (b) New Study Programmes.
- ✓ Developed a series of criteria for the establishment, renaming, relocation of Institutions as well as criteria for the examination of Departments under article 46 of law 4485/17.
- ✓ Developed criteria for the allocation of state funds and new teaching positions to HEIs by the Ministry of Education.
- ✓ Planned the financing of two Actions in the context of the 2014-2020 NSRF, aimed to strengthen the HEI's Quality Assurance Units (QAUs/MODIPs) and Career Offices, and the national graduate tracking mechanism

Part C: HAHE's strategic and development activity

In 2020, HAHE promoted its strategic goals, which derive from its mission and key responsibilities, as follows:

- Reorganized its internal operation, subject to the new institutional framework established by Law 4653/2020.
- Organized the procedures for the nomination of its governing bodies.



- Prepared the new Organization/Regulation of internal operation and submitted it to the Ministry of Education for further actions.
- Conducted 7 accreditations of IQAS, 56 accreditations of Undergraduate Study Programmes and 1 accreditation of Foreign Language Study Programme, while it also carried out the necessary control of submitted proposals for the accreditation of HEIs' Undergraduate Study Programme.
- Continued to support HEIs in accreditation processes and quality assurance activities.
- Continued to support HEIs through information and guidance activities.
- Exercised its advisory role to the Ministry of Education on issues of Higher Education.
- Participated in European and international meetings for quality assurance in Higher Education, as a member of ENQA and INQAAHE.
- Publicly announced its actions at University Rectors' Synod.
- Managed NSRF-funded projects.

Afterword

The comparison between national and international higher education statistics clearly shows that Greece produces a relatively large number of graduates, through public expenditure. The expected public benefit from the full utilisation of such expenditure for the country's national economy is therefore limited, as graduates either remain unemployed or leave the country, as a result of the lack of perspectives and the structural weaknesses of Greece's economy. Consequently, a significant part of this investment ultimately benefits the countries to which graduates migrate. Greece also seems to be lagging behind in key factors of Higher Education, which affect the level of studies and the international position of Greek Universities in league tables, such as the unfavourable teaching staff/student ratio, the low graduation rates, the gender gap in teaching staff members and their low rate of renewal. A similar gap exists also in HEIs governance due to institutional weaknesses in independence and accountability. On the contrary, there are also notable achievements in terms of research activities and participation in European research projects. However, such achievements have not yet been capitalised and utilised in the context of an appropriate research strategy.

The ongoing accreditation process of IQASs and USPs shows that the quality of education has strengths

and is improving with reference to the accreditation requirements. It also has deeply rooted weaknesses, which have an impact on the academic qualifications of graduates. These weaknesses concern (a) the structure of study programmes and the lack of a systematic monitoring of international scientific developments, (b) their occasional alignment with the needs of the labour market and the economy, (c) the low rate of implementation of internal quality processes for monitoring teaching and learning, as well as the low participation of students and other external bodies in the quality assurance systems.

HAHE, which since 2020 operates subject to a new institutional framework, as the successor of HQA, has reorganised its procedures and activities, so as to respond to its upgraded statutory role. In this context, the Authority has supported and promoted the quality of HEIs by issuing new standards, rules and guidelines, by assisting HEIs in the utilisation of NSRF funds for their benefit and by regularly interacting with them. In addition, HAHE made recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs on matters of the national strategy for Higher Education, on the structure of the academic map, and established criteria and indicators for the allocation of state funds and teaching staff positions to HEIs.

HAHE governance

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