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**National & Kapodistrian  
University of Athens**

**FACULTY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION & SPORT SCIENCE**  
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**Response to the External Evaluation Report**

This report constitutes a high quality academic document. It undoubtedly reflects the desire of the EEC members to submit a detailed but fair and fruitful evaluation of our Department. The effort is impressive and must be appreciated as a significant contribution to our School. Expressing our gratitude to the members of this committee for preparing such a professional and comprehensive report is of high academic priority.

The report is rich of constructive observations, comments, and recommendations on many vital aspects of our School's identity and status. In its present form it can be taken as an original academic reference for our department. Its detailed structure and completeness left only limited margin for corrective comments, beyond those stipulated in the external evaluation procedures. But reports of this length and density are always permissive to some improvement.

A second more comparative reading of this report led to the identification of a few aspects of our department's status that were not presented completely / accurately, and a few useful points that appear to be missing.

This communiqué serves the purpose of providing EEC with additional information / clarifications regarding these points. Our hope is that, in light of these clarifications, EEC revisits the respective evaluative and conclusive remarks, in order to maximize this document's academic and scientific value.

1) Faculty with at least two Departments

A highly important aspect that is "missing" in this report is our well founded and constant ambition to have a Faculty with at least two departments. Past efforts to improve and complement our academic curriculum was heavily influenced by this aspect. This goal remains "alive" and it should have been taken into consideration when assessing the past and current scientific structure-content of our curriculum.

In 2013 we submitted to the University of Athens a well justified proposal for the transformation of our department into a faculty



comprising two departments. For reasons beyond "common logic and science", this proposal was not fully approved, a "development" that definitely deprived our School from the historical opportunity to split curriculum content and "burden" in two departmental entities, allow academic and administrative staff and students to "invest" their energy, time and hope more effectively, and, most importantly, to serve sports science and physical education at a higher level of academic quality and potential; that would benefit our science and future researchers - professionals. It would, then, be vitally useful if the final EER makes a special reference to that point, which, contrary to the current economic crisis, would enhance our future efforts to achieve this goal.

### 2) Infrastructure, Equipment, Funding

Although this report identifies inappropriate facilities, labs with substandard equipment, library deficiencies, very low funding, and the burden of educating a very large number of students, it recapitulates solely on describing a number of undoubtedly useful recommendations. But specific conclusions reflecting these serious aforementioned problems are lacking. A set of conclusive remarks on the infrastructural and financial profile of our department is needed prior to recommendations, along with a short assessment on how this profile compares to some highly ranked Sport Science and Physical Education Schools in Europe and North America.

The ECC correctly reports most of the major problems our School is faced with since its establishment (several decades ago). Yet, no conclusions are stated in the "Final conclusions and recommendations" section to emphasize on these inhibiting factors, prior to recommending strategic actions and tools to deal with. A hierarchical arrangement of these major hindering conditions would be very useful considering this report's impact for the present and the future of our Faculty. This would be especially useful in convincing the rather conservative decision making bodies of the University of Athens and the Ministry of Education to initiate the implementation of proper strategies for the solution of these problems.

### 3) Current Status and Future Orientation of our Curriculum

This report gives the impression of a bias towards the "idea" of adapting our curriculum to the current "economic crisis". This is quite evident at several points of its text, and as a whole it reflects the simplistic perception of a "market-oriented" University in general. In addition, the repetitive proposition to urgently shift the focus of our curriculum towards a "sports, health and well-being" direction is intense and reflective. But, there are "truths" and "myths" in this proposition.

Firstly, with regards to the potential of our science and profession to serve the dimension of "health & well being", our School has made significant steps, by organizing relevant congresses, symposia, and seminars (described below), and by providing a specific "exercise, fitness, health" specialization, along with several health-fitness related taught



courses for years now. We are aware of this potential, and some distinct efforts to that effect have been successful so far. But adapting our curriculum to this dimension requires modernization of labs, up-to-date (expensive) equipment, and decent funding. At the same time deciding to "what extend?" is a challenging issue to deal with, as a large part of our academic staff serves sports, pedagogy, training, and physical education for years, with good success, and these specialties are still valuable to our society.

Secondly, the traditional Physical Education and Scientific Training dimensions have not "deceased", nor have been put in secondary places in many PESS programs internationally. In fact a PESS curriculum weak in its sports and physical education components would prove to be inadequate as a solid basis for implementing and cultivating a "health and well being through exercise and physical activity" academic prospective. To be successful in this regard we have to strengthen physical education and fitness through sports at the primary and secondary school level, and obviously at our department. This requires a substantial part of our curriculum to keep focusing on these specific traditional aspects of our profession. Otherwise efforts to that effect at the University level may not lead to the expected success in terms of societal benefits, as the merit of these efforts will be lost in the course of years due to the inability of young people to entirely perceive, appreciate and adopt an "exercise for health oriented" life style.

Thirdly, although employment for PE graduates in both public / private schools and Sports teams - organizations has been reduced over the last 10 years, this trend does not constitute a safe proof for underestimating the importance of PE and Sports in the society as a whole. The phenomenon is temporary, and PE and Sports was, is, and will be the very basis of our science and profession in the future too.

Therefore, although a reduction of the course work in the respective Olympic sports specialties will be beneficial in saving time for research and teaching (and this can and must be urgently made), efforts must also be made to protect the historical decision of our School to provide Physical Education and systematic training in the Olympic sports, a constitutional demand since its establishment.

#### 4) Reduced Student Participation & Curriculum

The comments of EEC regarding low student participation, as well as low graduations to yearly registrations (>250) rates is useful, but their analysis of the reasons behind this serious academic problem is partially correct. There are social and financial constraints that "force" students to adopt a part time pattern of participation and to silently "withdraw" the program at some point of their study. In addition to that, prospective PE students (i.e. high school students) may expect more sports, games, and practical courses than theoretical ones, but our curriculum correctly requires a substantial part of study to be spent for the theoretical foundation of our science and profession. Other factors being constant, this disappoints some students and lead to additional "withdrawals".



Therefore, it is not the heavy curriculum alone that creates the low graduates to registrations ratio so far. Besides that, students appear to also be disappointed due to the poor facilities and installations of our school as well as due to lack of technical support in teaching and practicing, which constrain staff efforts in efficiently organizing their academic responsibilities. Needless to say, students are some times faced with the not infrequent "phenomenon" of unexpected class cancellations for various formal and informal reasons, and this has detrimental effects on their attitude towards attending classes.

#### 5) Scientific Congresses, Conferences & Symposia

Our School has organized several conferences and symposia over the last years. We suggest some reference to these activities be included in the final EER, as this is indicative of the efforts of our School to organize quality events contrary to the previously mentioned financial and infrastructural problems.

Since 2008 our department has organized the following activities:

2008, the 12th Panhellenic Congress of Sport Psychology entitled "Exercise and Sports in Children and Adolescent: Psychological Approach".

May 2011, the 1st Congress of Sports Science entitled "Research and Applications in Sports Science",

April 2013, the 2nd Congress of Sports Science entitled "Exercise & Health",

July 2013, the XIV International Conference entitled "Environmental Ergonomics",

November 2013, the 3rd Congress of Biochemistry & Physiology of Exercise.

From November 14 to June 2013, weekly daily seminars were organized on topics relevant to various fields of sport science (exercise in water and health, risks during exercise, prevention in team sports, physical disability, dance as a motor development activity, new didactics in track and field, social and philosophical perspectives in physical activity, contemporary training in team sports, contemporary methods in resistance training, space-time and emotions in Sports.

#### 6) The Graduate Programs

- A notable contradiction in EEC's evaluation of our post-graduate programs is evident in pages 8 & 10. One reads in page 8 "the curriculum of the graduate program is intense but appropriate ...", and in page 10 "... the ratio of core to highly specialized taught courses is not appropriate". One then may ask "what is an appropriate ratio of core to highly specialized courses?", but, since an answer is lacking in this report (and it could not be differently), a logical answer is "first we decide upon the content of our curriculum based on academic and scientific criteria / expectations and then we calculate ratios". Our central objective in designing both graduate programs was to "create" young researchers



capable of quality scientific thinking, and this requires good theoretical background, rather than emphasizing only on hands-on practical competences, that would diminish later on for the very reason of not being theoretically founded.

- The impression of EEC that the requirement (PESS Graduate program) of one published paper for graduation "may inadvertently lead to significant delays in completion of the program" is unfounded. Although this point was clarified in the oral and written presentation of the program, EEC did not notice that this requirement has been implemented in 2011-12 in place of two 3-credit core courses, which were then deleted from the program. Therefore the inclusion of this requirement in our PESS Graduate program led to a 6-credit reduction of its curriculum in terms of core courses. Besides that, current evidence is contrary to EEC's doubts on this point. Discussions with the students that entered our program since 2011-12 led to the impression that this requirement makes them more dedicated to their studies and more alert in designing and carrying-out quality research. The connection of this requirement with a 6 academic credits workload gives graduate students a strong incentive towards designing publishable research, for their own benefit and for the benefit of our School.

- Page 8. " ... it is not clear what happens to students that fail to complete the graduate programme within the stipulated deadlines". Regulations in our graduate programs with respect to this academic problem are quite relaxed for obvious inadvertent social and financial reasons that started to arise far before the current economic crisis. We expect master's students to complete their studies in two to three years and doctoral students in four to five years. These are nominal deadlines, as the economic reality limits better student efficiency towards timely graduation in our programs. There are many cases of otherwise successful students that are forced to temporarily quit their studies due to problems with their jobs (many have lost their jobs over the last few years though), families, and their inability to sustain living and studying expenses etc. When faced with cases of students with problems of these types, we silently continue to keep them in our official lists in the hope that "soon" they will manage to resume their studies and research requirements, as a number of them are reducing efforts due to these social problems after the presentation of their research proposal.

The Head of the Department

Professor S. Athanasopoulos