

3.1. Appreciation of the Programmes

The Graduate programme of the Department is described in minute detail in the Main Report.

The *Graduate Programme* is one of the strongest assets of the Department. Although it has been in operation only since 1995, it is already well established. The programme is, from the theoretical and practical standpoint, of high standard, flexible and all-encompassing. Courses are well designed with a view on the jobs market for statisticians. Topics relevant to the private and the public sector are well covered and their treatment satisfactorily deals with all the important aspects of the current trends in Statistics.

The introduction of a two-year *Part-time Master Programme* has been an excellent decision and a splendid innovation. The fact that some 80 students have signed up over a two-year period proves that the Department of Statistics found a genuine gap in the study market. The self-supporting programme gives its students an extra value. For some there results an improvement in their employment condition while others value the personal fulfillment. The positive attitude, the motivation and the commitment of the part-time master students impressed the Review Team immensely; it considered them to be the most active and devoted group among all graduate students. The teaching staff of the Department responds superbly to the unusual age structure and different backgrounds of the students.

Also the doctoral students are pleased with the supervision of their thesis advisors. Currently important areas of statistical research are opened up as thesis subjects and the available choice is wide. It is remarkable to learn that all representatives from the group of doctoral students expressed a wish to remain in academia after obtaining their doctorate.

The introduction of *English* as a main language of instruction in the full time graduate programme, as well as the writing of theses in English, is of paramount importance. It makes accessible to the student an immense amount of literature on their subjects, and it enables the Department to establish further contacts with experts from all over the world by inviting them to act as external examiners of the M.Sc. and Ph.D. theses. Moreover, this choice for the Lingua Franca in science increases enormously the credibility of the Department as well as the value of the degree ultimately obtained by the students. Those who graduate from the programme are well equipped to compete on the international job market, not just the Greek one. Also all the literature of the Department (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Prospectuses, instructions for writing theses and reports, student's questionnaires etc.) is available in English.

The names and the reputation of the scientists that have acted as *external examiners* so far are indicative of the quality of the theses written. The positive influence of the practice of external examination and of mastering English is also shown in the large number of M.Sc. and the totality of Ph.D. students that participate in international conferences where they present their work.

The provision for full time graduate students to take one to two term courses in accredited *foreign Universities* in some special areas of statistics exposes the students to a broader spectrum of statistical theory and applications. The arrangement with the Catholic University of Leuven especially, that allows students to spend one full semester following the graduate programme at this institution, gives students a chance to add a European dimension to their studies.

It is no coincidence that all students that have obtained their M.Sc. degrees from the Department of Statistics at AUEB find jobs immediately after graduation, some of them even before that.

The Review Team noticed with pleasure that a number of *helpful documents* are available to all generations of graduate students. For example, Ph.D. and M.Sc. theses as well as essays from practical training are at their disposal and can be read in the laboratories. Instructions for the writing of project work and theses are available to current students. Even more attractive is the availability to students of actual, completed examination papers from previous examinations sessions, a practice not followed at other Greek Universities.

The Review Team appreciates the good practice that the graduate students' progress, overall and in each course, is assessed and determined at a faculty meeting.

Perhaps the most important innovation introduced by the Department of Statistics is its *Distinguished Visiting Professorship Programme*. The names of the distinguished Professors who have already lectured in the Department makes an impressive reading; it is a simple illustration of the high regard that the Department has earned itself on the international forum.

3.2. Recommendations

3.2.1. Overall

(1) The lack of *meeting facilities* for the graduate students within the building of the Department is deplored by the reviewers, who know how much graduate students can positively stimulate each other. The small group of doctoral students needs to have an office within the building.

(2) The Review team noted that the Department has a seminar series where occasional visitors, faculty and graduate students present their work. The Review Team advises the Department to turn this activity into a regular *seminar series* with more speakers from abroad. Due to its favourable geographic position, the Department should profit from the availability of potential speakers from abroad, and participants from other Departments of the capital.

(3) Thesis supervisors at all levels should put positive pressure on their graduate students to publish their work in the scientific literature. Limited support should be given to the better students to bring their work to an international platform by presenting it in meetings and conferences.

3.2.2. Full-time Master Programme

3.2.3. Part-time Master Programme

(1) This initiative beautifully fits within the realm of *Continuing Education*. Knowing its potential, the Department needs to find out whether it can provide similar programmes tailored to specific needs of the public and/or the private sector. Through this kind of activity AUEB will integrate itself in a gradually emerging European market of long-life learning.

(2) The part-time students have special problems in accessing the facilities of the library. See further under 5.1.2.(4).

(3) Also, their contacts with staff and other graduate students are limited due to the special lecturing hours of their classes. In particular, these students need special help to find and evaluate topics for their Master's thesis. To facilitate this search, staff members should be able to use the website of the Department to propose appropriate subjects and to ease the negotiations between thesis promotor and graduate student.

3.2.4. Doctor of Philosophy Programme

(1) Doctoral students do not get the maximum profit from the available expertise and opportunities. As there is no obligation to follow additional graduate courses, doctoral students may be reluctant to do so while some of them do so voluntarily. The Review

Team strongly suggests to the supervisors of doctoral theses to persuade their students to broaden their scientific horizon by sitting in in courses and to participate in seminars.

(2) Doctoral students have a number of complaints about their financial situation. The burden of doctoral fees is of the same order as the supplementary income that doctoral students might gain by giving tutorials and grading assignments. The Department needs to investigate means to acquire additional money for such purposes from central funding in order to make doctoral studies more attractive.

(3) In the same vein, the Review Team deplors the fact that there are no sufficient assistantships or scholarships available to doctoral students. This sad situation is in strong contrast with that in almost all other countries within the European Union. The problem supersedes the responsibility of the Department of Statistics. Perhaps through some concerted action, the Chairmen of the Departments - or even better the Rectors of the Universities – could put pressure on the Ministry of Education to set aside a reasonable budget for the support of the better qualified candidates for doctoral studies.