



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (International HE)

INSTITUTION: Athenian Artistic and Technological Group (AKTO): Thessaloniki site

ADDRESS: 38-40 26th October and Andreou Georgiou Streets
Thessaloniki
Greece

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dimitrios Tsirkas

Accreditation status: Accredited

Date of inspection: 26 February 2016

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION ON ACCREDITATION: 14 April 2016

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

The Athenian Artistic and Technological Group (AKTO or the College) was established in 1971 and is one of the largest private providers of arts education in Greece. AKTO's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are validated through a long-standing (1992) collaborative relationship with Middlesex University. AKTO has been accredited by BAC since 2005. The premises and the programme provision of AKTO are licensed by the Greek Ministry of Education.

2. Brief description of the current provision

Within its portfolio of art and design provision, AKTO currently offers eight undergraduate degree courses and one Masters-level programme, together with a range of sub-degree level vocational courses. All courses are delivered and assessed in the Greek language. The College also offers a number of its degree level programmes in a technology-supported open and distance learning mode. The College's degree-level programmes are offered in identical form at both its Athens and Thessaloniki campuses, and are subject to the same administrative and quality assurance procedures. AKTO has around 1000 students, of which 191 students are following the College's programmes at the Thessaloniki campus, which was the focus of this inspection.

3. Inspection process

One inspector visited the Thessaloniki site of AKTO for a half-day interim inspection. The primary purpose of the visit was to view and report on the College's Thessaloniki site premises and facilities. This site was acquired in 2011-2012 and it was not included in the reaccreditation inspection that took place in 2014.

The inspector met with the AKTO Quality Officer for Athens and Thessaloniki, and with the BA and MA Co-ordinator for the Thessaloniki provision.

A detailed tour of the accommodation was made, together with a discussion of its use for the delivery of the College's programmes in Thessaloniki. The opportunity was also taken briefly to discuss recent developments at AKTO, and to review the actions completed by the College in addressing the requirements and recommendations that were made following the 2014 reaccreditation inspection.

AKTO was informed that the next reaccreditation inspection would take place under the procedures for the revised International Higher Education scheme. The main features of the new scheme were explained and the Quality Manager was given a copy of the scheme document.

4. Inspection history

Accreditation inspection: 18 and 19 January 2005

Interim inspection: 17 May 2006

Reaccreditation Inspection: 1 and 2 November 2010

Reaccreditation inspection: 29 and 30 April 2014

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

1.1 Change of Premises

AKTO acquired new premises in 2011-12 for the delivery of its programmes based in Thessaloniki. The new campus is located close to the centre of the city, in a modern office block. This is leased by AKTO under an agreement which lasts until 2023. The accommodation extends over two floors, previously occupied by the company offices for an international business, and covering a total of 2791 square metres. The available space has been subject to very substantial modification for educational purposes, with new partitioning, renovation and redecoration.

The premises are part of a modern high quality building, and the accommodation is spacious, clean, full of light, and with excellent circulation space. In 2012 the premises were subject to a full inspection and subsequent approval by the Greek Ministry of Education, which addressed health and safety, provision for disability and special needs, and adequacy for planned student numbers. Licensing by the Ministry was issued in August 2013 and renewed in May 2015.

Access to the AKTO premises is by a lift from the building entrance to the first floor, progressing through a large atrium space to the AKTO reception area, which is permanently staffed. The atrium provides a large area for student meeting and relaxation. Inside the AKTO premises, the environment is welcoming and colourful, with student work, posters and murals exhibited throughout the location. Throughout there is excellent passage space between the classrooms, giving a contemporary, open and airy impression.

The accommodation provides for a total of 13 general classrooms. These include a large lecture theatre that can be divided by partition into two classrooms and can thus be used flexibly, accommodating all of the College's students if required. Two of the classrooms are equipped for freehand drawing and two are equipped as small lecture rooms. The rooms are furnished as appropriate with desks, whiteboards, projection screens, drawing boards, PC stations, etc. The larger rooms have overhead video projection installed, while the remaining classrooms are served as required by 5 mobile stations with video projectors.

The general study environment is complemented by specialist facilities supporting the art and design subject areas:

- A separate library of 120 square metres provides study spaces and internet stations for student use, with a holding of subject-relevant texts, appropriate in scope for the size of the provision, and including copies of student dissertations
- Approximately 50 PC workstations are sited in two work labs, providing study-relevant software such as Studiomax, Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, Dreamweaver; there is a secure room for network operation and management
- A fashion studio with tailor's dummies, sewing machines, materials etc.
- A large, fully specified photographic studio
- A dark room with enlargement and developing facilities
- A model making workshop with machine tools, lathes and cutters (full first aid-related signage and kit is displayed here)

There is a small but adequate student cafeteria. A number of informal meeting spaces are available, furnished suitably for small group study and project work.

There are separate male and female toilet facilities on each of the two floors. These include access for the disabled, and are adequate for the student numbers and show a good level of cleanliness.

First aid stations are prominently marked and are accessed both centrally and in all those locations where there is more likely to be any risk of injury. Fire extinguishers are located appropriately throughout the building, mainly in corridor spaces.

Overall, the Thessaloniki campus of AKTO offers an excellent learning environment for Art and Design students. It is contemporary, spacious, clean, attractive and very well maintained. Social space for students and staff is good. The high quality teaching and learning facilities are clearly designed to meet the specialist needs of the AKTO design programmes, and the library and IT resources are entirely fit for purpose.

The inspector considered that the AKTO Thessaloniki premises fully met the criteria and standards for the International Higher Education Inspection Area: Premises and Facilities. There are no requirements or recommendations made for this inspection area.

1.2 Change in provision: additional programme

In 2015, the BA in Product Design, already offered by AKTO at its Athens site, was validated and approved by Middlesex University for delivery in Thessaloniki.

2. Response to actions points in last report

2.4 - The College policy on Equal Opportunities and Discrimination should be evidenced in student handbooks

The policy is included in all handbooks and is accessible through a link on the College website. It is also included in the College regulations.

25.4 - The College must ensure that all accidents are recorded.

AKTO now has an accident report form, and copies of the completed forms for all reported accidents are kept in a dedicated file. This file is inspected regularly by the College's Health and Safety Officer.

25.4 The College must ensure that regular fire drills take place and that a log of these is maintained

It was reported that full fire drills now take place regularly at both AKTO sites. In Athens these are organised once each semester. In Thessaloniki the building is shared with other floors of the building accommodating business offices and therefore a co-ordinated fire drill vacating the whole building is held once every year. Weekly tests of fire alarms are made. There is a Fire Officer at each AKTO site and a log is kept of fire drills.

Recommendations for improvement:

The organisation chart should be developed further to list the membership, terms of reference and frequency of all committees in order to clarify the process of quality assurance.

This recommendation has been followed and the information is included in the Staff Handbook, a document seen by the inspector.

The existing informal staff appraisal and development procedures should be extended to include a measure of recording to further increase transparency and as a means of identifying and formally disseminating good teaching practice across the College.

The inspector was informed that staff development for learning and teaching and exchange of good practice were both currently addressed through the reports of Programme Leaders, and through the subsequent discussion of these reports in the Programme Board. Programme Leaders comment on the work and achievements of the academic staff programme team. It was judged by AKTO that more formal appraisal and recording, as recommended by BAC, was best approached as a gradual process of development and change, taking into account the institutional culture. The inspector pointed out that in the IHE scheme the expectation of a more formal process was included as part of the criteria for a minimum standard.

The current informal classroom observation process should be extended to include a measure of recording to increase transparency and as a means of identifying and formally disseminating good teaching practice across the institution.

The inspector learned that AKTO values the more informal procedures of peer observation of teaching that it currently follows. The exchange of good practice relating to learning and teaching takes place through programme leader meetings and reports and other procedures. Staff development and programme enhancement needs are identified through this approach. Using more formal individual records was considered by AKTO to be potentially counter-productive, as it could be considered unnecessarily bureaucratic and might not be readily accepted by teaching staff. It was envisaged that more structured arrangements for peer observation and appraisal might be introduced over time.

The College should consider developing the 'Staff Development, Academic Staff' document further into a staff handbook which will include information about discrimination and other aspects of employment rights.

A Staff Handbook publication has been produced and was judged by AKTO to be a useful innovation and a support for staff.

Further investigation should be made into the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

AKTO has acquired and installed a VLE, and it is being progressively populated with materials and information relevant to the AKTO programmes.

The College should extend the analysis of progression, retention and withdrawals data over a longer period in order to increase the oversight of student performance

AKTO has taken up this recommendation, producing tables of programme cohort analysis going back to the commencement year of each of its programmes. This data analysis was reported to have provided valuable information regarding trends in student recruitment and performance, thus making a valuable addition to quality assurance.

Overall, the inspector took the view that AKTO had given careful consideration to the requirements and recommendations of the 2014 Reaccreditation Report. Requirements have been met and the College has been responsive in acting to meet recommendations, wherever the changes were straightforward and in accordance with the institutional structures and priorities, and had a good fit with its academic culture.

3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

3.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
This inspection area was not given detailed consideration in the course of this interim inspection. The judgement on compliance is made on the basis of the last inspection report, 2014. Actions taken by the College (as confirmed above) indicate further improvement in this area.				

3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
This inspection area was not given detailed consideration in the course of this interim inspection. The judgement on compliance is made on the basis of the last inspection report, 2014. The facilities for learning and teaching at the Thessaloniki campus were seen to be of high quality.				

3.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
This inspection area was not given detailed consideration in the course of this interim inspection. The judgement is made on the basis of the last inspection report, 2014. There are suitable spaces for student meetings and activities on the Thessaloniki campus.				

3.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments:				
The Athens site was not visited in the course of this interim inspection and the judgement is made on the basis of the last inspection report, 2014. The Thessaloniki site was judged to be of excellent quality and found to meet all the criteria for this inspection area.				

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Institution's strengths

This inspection was primarily concerned with the College's premises in Thessaloniki. The high quality of the teaching accommodation available together with the learning resources provided at this site are a strength, and contribute to the quality of the College's provision.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
It is recommended that the College continue to explore approaches to peer observation and staff appraisal which are appropriate to its needs, in particular with a view to enhancement and improvement, and that some formalisation and recording of these procedures is introduced in the medium term.	L

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	