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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ  
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

# Accreditation Report for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

**Primary Education**

**Institution: University of Thessaly**

**Date: 3 November 2019**

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**Επιχειρησιακό Πρόγραμμα  
Ανάπτυξη Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού,  
Εκπαίδευση και Διά Βίου Μάθηση**  
Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Report of the Panel appointed by the HQA to undertake the review of the  
Undergraduate Study Programme of Primary Education of the University of  
Thessaly for the purposes of granting accreditation

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Part A: Background and Context of the Review.....</b>	<b>4</b>
I. The Accreditation Panel.....	4
II. Review Procedure and Documentation.....	5
III. Study Programme Profile.....	7
<b>Part B: Compliance with the Principles .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance .....	9
Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes.....	12
Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment .....	12
Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification.....	17
Principle 5: Teaching Staff .....	19
Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support .....	21
Principle 7: Information Management .....	23
Principle 8: Public Information .....	25
Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes.....	26
Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes.....	29
<b>Part C: Conclusions .....</b>	<b>31</b>
I. Features of Good Practice .....	31
II. Areas of Weakness.....	31
III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions .....	31
IV. Summary & Overall Assessment.....	31

## **PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW**

### **I. The Accreditation Panel**

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of Primary Education of the University of Thessaly was comprised of the following four (4) members, drawn from the HQA Register, in accordance with the Law 4009/2011:

1. Professor John Spiridakis (Chair)  
St. John's University, New York, United States of America
2. Associate Professor Gina Ioannitou  
Le Mans Université, Le Mans, France
3. Associate Professor Helene Papadoudi-Ros  
Université de Lorraine, Nancy, France.
4. Paul Zachos, Director of Research and Evaluation  
Association for the Cooperative Advancement of Science and Education  
New York, United States of America

## **II. Review Procedure and Documentation**

### **The External Evaluation Procedure**

The Accreditation Panel (AP) attended an orientation on Tuesday 30 October held by the HQA leadership in Athens. The AP was given the documents and guidelines needed to conduct the accreditation evaluation. The AP members had received in advance of their meetings in Greece the relevant documents from HQA related to the accreditation evaluation.

The AP met in Athens on Tuesday 30 October and travelled to Volos, Thessaly. The next morning (Wednesday 31 October) began with an extensive presentation and overview of the University of Thessaly (UTH) and MODIP functions and essential data related to the accreditation at hand provided by the Vice-Rector Prof. Theodorakis (also President of MODIP), and the Chair the Department of Primary Education (DPE) Prof. Paparousi. The next meeting was held with the seven members of OMEA, including the Dean of the School, Prof. Politis, the Chair, Prof. Paparousi and several core faculty members representing different academic disciplines and research interests and serving as research laboratory personnel.

In the early afternoon, the AP members met with members of the teaching staff (faculty members) who gave presentations to amplify their Accreditation Proposal. AP members probed the claims made in the various documents with an eye on verifying compliance with the HQA Principles for Accreditation. In the afternoon the AP members met with a large group of current students. Because of the large number who attended, the AP split up the attendees into smaller groups of students. This procedure enabled intensive questioning of and feedback from the students regarding their experience with the DPE Program of study, quality assurance measures, faculty engagement, course delivery, assessment procedures, evaluation of courses and overall satisfaction. Later in the afternoon, the AP met with a large number of graduates (alumni) and questioned them regarding their current career paths, experience with the DPE program and their overall satisfaction in hindsight. The final meeting of the day involved meeting with external stakeholders including principals (heads) of practicum school sites and schools employing DPA graduates, community agency directors, and other volunteer community partners.

On the following morning October 31 2019 the AP members visited classrooms, research laboratories and the secretaries' resource center. The head of each laboratory presented the laboratory resources and how these materials were applied in practice. The AP had an opportunity to converse with students who worked and conducted research in the laboratories. The AP visited the research laboratories for "Mathematics Education and Didactics of Natural Sciences", "Study, Education and Promotion of the Greek Language", "Educational History", "Physics", "Intercultural Education" and Education Technology". The laboratory faculty help students understand and apply concepts learned in their teaching experiences.

The AP finally met with the Vice-Rector and the DPE Chair to present brief initial, informal findings of the AP. The AP Chair also made a presentation of the AP's initial observations to the members of the OMEA, including the Dean of the School and the DPE Chair. Members of the AP had the opportunity to discuss areas for clarification with all parties.

AP members posed probing questions to each group based on 10 HQA Principles, the OMEA Accreditation Proposal (May 2019) and supporting documents, data and appendices, other presentation material submitted by the DPE or requested by the AP. These included examples of student theses, the Final report of the External Evaluation Committee (2013) and the responses of DPE to that Report.

The AP members held another "debriefing" session after the meeting and then departed the UTH for meetings in Athens.

### III. Study Programme Profile

The Department of Primary Education of the University of Thessaly was founded in 1985 (Government Newspaper 113 / 31-5-1985) and started accepting the first students from the academic year 1988-89 (Government Newspaper 40/ 1-2-1988).

It is part of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences which has the following departments:

- Department of Primary Education
- Department of Preschool Education
- Department of Special Education
- Department of History, Archeology and Social Anthropology
- Culture, Creative Media and Industries (new)
- Language and Intercultural Studies (new)

According to the internal evaluation report of 2019 the strategy of the Department in connection with the Foundation's strategy is:

- Improving the level of studies
- Responding to epistemological and scientific developments
- Responding to education major social changes

The Structure of Curriculum of undergraduate studies follows the ECTS system. The studies are structured in 8 semesters with workload of 30 ECTS per semester.

- 26 compulsory courses 160 ECTS
- 17 "compulsory electives" courses 68 ECTS
- 4 foreign language courses 12 ECTS

Also students should complete 4 levels of School Teaching Practice, included in the compulsory courses in the last four semesters.

It is also important to mention that following a selective process some students choose to produce an undergraduate thesis instead of two electives of the 47 courses.

According to DPE the main focus of the curriculum is to:

- analyze and critically understand the educational challenges of the society
- understand how children learn and process the subjects
- know how to create, enrich and redesign learning environments
- support active, exploratory learning by children
- refine their theoretical knowledge in relation to the needs and interests of pupils
- be sufficiently versatile and develop critical analytical and synthetic ability
- understand and use technology and supervisory resources to enhance learning
- know how to plan, organize, implement and evaluate teaching

In the recent past the department went through two revisions of the curriculum:

- 2005, a revision for a more complete and systematic connection between theory and practice
- 2011-2012 assessment of the results of the first revision
- 2016-17 a major revision

Generally speaking DPE goals are implemented effectively. There is a systematic effort to combine theoretical and practical teaching methods from all people involved in the DPE.

The AP discussed professional opportunities with alumni. It has been stated that over 10.000 positions exist in the primary schools that the government fills with substitute teachers. Most of the students who cannot find teaching jobs when they graduate they work as substitute teachers or they work in “Learning Centers”.

The description of the home Department and Institution, according to the DPE’s internal evaluation report is as following for the year 2017-18:

- 15 teaching staff
- 5 EDIP staff
- 1 ETEP staff
- 2 EEP staff
- 2 administration staff

The DPE has 4 classrooms of exclusive use and 3 classrooms of shared use. The DPE has 5 laboratories.

The students for year 2017-18 are in total 712, with 187 freshmen and 158 graduates.

The AP recognizes that there have been changes since the recent publication (e.g. there are now 6 laboratories and 16 teaching staff members).



## PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

### Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

*The quality assurance policy of the academic unit is in line with the Institutional policy on quality, and is included in a published statement that is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special objectives related to the quality assurance of study programmes offered by the academic unit.*

*The quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.*

*In particular, in order to carry out this policy, the academic unit commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate:*

- a) the suitability of the structure and organization of the curriculum;*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education;*
- c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching;*
- d) the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff;*
- e) the enhancement of the quality and quantity of the research output among faculty members of the academic unit;*
- f) ways for linking teaching and research;*
- g) the level of demand for qualifications acquired by graduates, in the labour market;*
- h) the quality of support services such as the administrative services, the Library, and the student welfare office;*
- i) the conduct of an annual review and an internal audit of the quality assurance system of the undergraduate programme(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU);*

### Study Programme compliance

The Department of Primary Education (DPE) of the University of Thessaly has developed a curriculum that is aligned with both national and European curriculum standards at a high

level of expectation. The curriculum is in harmony with the European Course Credits System (E.C.T.S.). Typical intended learning outcomes have been listed above.

As part of the DPE's assurance of program integrity, there is the OMEA that is responsible for conducting the evaluation process of the department and insuring that all necessary information is submitted to the MODIP. There are also several legally prescribed committees that are charged with overseeing areas such as curriculum, student affairs, finances, ethical rules, and international education.

Quality and effectiveness of teaching are addressed and maintained through annual evaluations conducted based on faculty self-assessments, and student evaluation of each course (MODIP and OMEA). There is a notable variety of teaching methods underway across the faculty. There is an emphasis on application of information and communication technology both as instructional resources and as means for smoothing implementation of course offerings and periodic student assessment and program evaluation. The DPE encourages faculty and student participation in research programs and local and international conferences. Teaching and research are well integrated in course offerings. Faculty includes students in their research projects and provides ways for students to fulfill learning requirements through action research. This research can be conducted at schools in which they do their practicum.

There are 16 internal and 7 external faculty members. The selection and development of faculty is carried out in a transparent process based on merit. The DPE is able to attract academic and professional specialists of a high caliber through its transparent, friendly, cooperative climate characterized by collaborative interactions between all categories of staff, teaching and administration.

Diversity in the scientific fields and specialties of DPE staff is one of the key features of faculty productivity. Always focused on education issues, the DPE's research expertise covers a wide array of pedagogy such as: language teaching, intercultural education, educational psychology, mathematics and natural sciences, literature teaching, history of education, instructional design, program types, education administration, and professional development of teachers.

With its research laboratories, some of which play a leading role in their subject areas in Greece, the DPE is a thriving center of research and its applications to educational practice, with significant and qualitative research and educational results.

Noteworthy is the research productivity of the DPE's teaching and research staff, as recorded in the annual submissions to the OMEA and MODIP.

The AP finds it notable that the DPE program includes a course, 'Educational research methodology'.

The DPE is active in conducting seminars, workshops and conferences related to the various subjects taught. These rich activities involve a significant number of students.

Undergraduate Studies Regulations define the conditions for the preparation of the bachelor's degree thesis – which is optional - and ways of ensuring transparency in its examination.

Attention is paid by the DPE to the level of demand in the labor market for qualifications to be acquired by graduates. There is an extensive outreach and integration with public and private primary schools, kindergartens, youth centers, childcare centers, cultural organizations; children's camps, children's libraries, museums, media, and educational material producers.

Quality of support services is maintained through various means including the UTH eLearning Platform, the integrated eLearning Management System, the Department website and the Online Services (StudentsWeb) and (ClassWeb). Individualized information and counseling

services for students are supported through the institution of academic advisors assigned to each student and the best interests of students overseen by a Student Affairs Committee.

OMEA takes responsibility for conducting the evaluation process of the DPE and ensuring that all the data necessary for the preparation and submission of the quality assurance reports included.

The AP was positively impressed by the transparency in the design and realization of Department Policy.

The DPE has prepared a clear academic policy for quality assurance that is delineated in its Accreditation Proposal (May 2019) and supporting documents. Responses from employers, community leaders and graduates themselves indicate that that DPE graduates are being prepared with the knowledge and skills needed for successful employment in the field of education and for successful post graduate studies.

The AP verified that the DPE have set goals for December 2020.

- creation of a committee to make program revision/ up to date
- revision of the evaluation feed back
- prerequisites for certain courses
- integration of doctoral students to help teaching, mentoring and research
- increase students' responses in the evaluation surveys and improve the procedure of data collection and analysis
- creation of a committee to enhance international collaborations
- expand collaborations among laboratories and other departments
- increase postgraduate participation in advisor teams
- institutionalization of the practicum schools network
- creation of a committee for events (symposiums, publications, etc.)

### Panel judgement

Principle 1: Institution Policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The AP has no specific recommendations

## Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING A DEFINED WRITTEN PROCESS WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE PARTICIPANTS, INFORMATION SOURCES AND THE APPROVAL COMMITTEES FOR THE PROGRAMME. THE OBJECTIVES, THE EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES, THE INTENDED PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND THE WAYS TO ACHIEVE THEM ARE SET OUT IN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN. THE ABOVE DETAILS AS WELL AS INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME'S STRUCTURE ARE PUBLISHED IN THE STUDENT GUIDE.**

*Academic units develop their programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the objectives, the subject areas, the structure and organisation, the expected learning outcomes and the intended professional qualifications according to the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. The approval or revision process for programmes includes a check of compliance with the basic requirements described in the Standards, on behalf of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

*Furthermore, the programme design should take into consideration the following:*

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labor market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
- *the option to provide work experience to the students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution.*

### Study Programme compliance

The DPE follows a well-defined procedure for implementing the university mission. All objectives of the DPE curriculum are in accordance with the General Assembly whereby, in accordance with the Code of the University's Ethics (2009), the participation of all staff members is compulsory.

The features that are incorporated in the DPE program compliance procedures include student orientation, subject area objectives, expected learning outcomes, expected professional qualifications for faculty, and program approval. The DPE procedure for compliance is also carried out in accord with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The DPE procedure is periodically reviewed and revised.

A high premium is placed on the smooth progression of students through the program and after graduation. A clear path for student progression is presented in the Student Guide which incorporates the philosophy and delivery methods of the curriculum, including assessment methods and alignment with the European Course Credits System (E.C.T.S.)

A careful approach is taken by DPE in ensuring that the design and approval of their programs includes fidelity not only to the university mission but also too to pedagogy and practice that is based on up to date research. The DPE considers the needs of the students, and the realities of the labor market. It also locates practicum school sites where students may have the best

opportunities to develop the capabilities that will make them employable in the future. The DPE laboratories function effectively to promote exemplary practices related to the latest research and theory.

#### **Panel judgment**

<b>Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes</b>	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The AP has no specific recommendations

## Principle 3: Student- centered Learning, Teaching and Assessment

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES ARE DELIVERED IN A WAY THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CREATING THE LEARNING PROCESS. THE ASSESSMENT METHODS SHOULD REFLECT THIS APPROACH.**

- *Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. The above entail continuous consideration of the programme's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.*
- *The student-centred learning and teaching process*
- *respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;*
- *considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;*
- *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;*
- *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement*
- *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys;*
- *reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff;*
- *promotes mutual respect in the student - teacher relationship;*
- *applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.*
- 
- *In addition :*
- *the academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;*
- *the assessment criteria and methods are published in advance;*
- *the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. St*
- *udents are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process;*
- *student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible;*
- *the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances*
- *assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;*
- *a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*

### Study Programme compliance

The DPE leadership and faculty demonstrated their commitment and success in delivering an authentic and robust student-centered program of study. The AP members found the DPE Accreditation Proposal (May 2019), including the Program of Study, Course Outlines (syllabi), Study Guide, and related documents to be replete with evidence of course objectives, activities, readings and resources calculated to engender a “reflective student” who has the capacity to “learn how to learn”. The presentations by the OMEA and other faculty members to the AP, as well as our follow-up questions, revealed a remarkable, concerted effort on the part of all DPE faculty members (there were two or three on leave) to provide students the tools associated with “action research” as a driving force for helping students relate pedagogical theory and conceptual learning to actual classroom practice. Research plays a critical role in the DPE both in terms of analyzing research on the subjects taught and also learning HOW to conduct qualitative and quantitative research.

Classroom teaching readiness of graduates has been the “Achilles Heel” of many education programs around the world. The challenge of preparing students to feel competent and confident is endemic. In the case of DPE, a model approach was evident; student preparation

was carried out with great organization and rigor. During our exhaustive interviews of the current students and alumni, the consensus was that the DPE curriculum and the faculty had, since the last external DPE evaluation, created a program highly responsive to the HQA principles for pedagogy; the students we interviewed exhibited critical thinking and research skills as well as creativity.

A wide variety of ways for delivering and receiving instruction are available to students including electronically based resources. Interviews with faculty and students indicate there is a great deal of latitude for students to accommodate assignments to their areas of interest including an option for preparing a research thesis as an alternative to conventional classwork and testing. All indications are of a program that exploits the best of Greek curriculum “multi-disciplinarily” interested in addressing individual student needs and interests. Also importantly, the DPE has continued to include in its curriculum ample and authentic opportunities for students to receive a global perspective that includes opportunities for international research, conferences, lectures and seminars. Students are part and parcel of much of the planning and execution of course activities and they are responsible for and take ownership of the course outcomes.

Ample evidence was found that through theoretical and practicum instruction, an innovative approach has been implemented for addressing the problem of mathematics phobia that afflicts primary school education worldwide. Notably, the DPE recognized a major issue of inadequate “academic literacy” that redounds across the globe regarding new undergraduates. The DPE created a special course to assist students cultivate their academic Greek proficiency.

Students are given opportunities and support to develop personal as well as academic skills.

The student satisfaction surveys are administered regularly in every course and are perceived and welcomed, in the eyes of both faculty and students, as opportunity to bring about improvements in the program.

The courses contain clear guidelines for the students in terms of goals and expectations and assessment procedures. The extent to which results of assessment of the attainment of intended learning outcomes are reported to student varies by size of class and subject matter. For example members of a class with 50 students will receive formative evaluations of their work and specific information on the attainment of learning goals less frequently. In music classes such feedback may even be given on a daily basis.

DPE faculty members utilize cooperative learning technics that enhance active and creative participation of students in the learning process. Students are encouraged to work in small groups and to design and present their own lessons.

Understanding the changing demographics of the community, the DPE faculty is sensitive and aware of diversity among the student body as well as in the community. For example DPE faculty members collaborate with external partners such as the Refugee Agency in Volos to enable students to volunteer helping refugee children and parents learn the Greek language. Research on refugee education and other education aspect are taken up by students with the help of faculty members.

There is a formal procedure in place in the event that students want to contest a grade or make a complaint. The highly pronounced respect for students and their autonomy by the DPE faculty and administration was also borne out during interviews with faculty, current students, alumni and the principals and directors of partner school practicum sites, and schools that employ full-time or part-time graduates of DPE. The sequence of coursework preparation described at the outset of this section included four semesters of intensive “clinically-rich” activities. The coursework addressed pedagogy and practice, the research laboratory faculty provided explicit techniques and hands-on materials for teaching, ample classroom time was provided with faculty and laboratory personnel and classroom teachers to support and mentor the DPE students throughout their practical training.

It bears noting that the outsized dedication of the faculty gives new meaning to the concept of flexibility in delivering course work and respect for students. Many faculty members create separate sections to achieve reduced class size in order to better focus their attention on the cognitive, academic and affective needs of their students. The faculty donates extra time outside of their contractual duties in their mission to assist their students to gain a world-class education.

#### **Panel judgement**

<b>Principle 3: Student- centered Learning, Teaching an Assessment</b>	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

#### **Panel Recommendations**

The AP recommends that adequate classroom space be provided to enable proper faculty-student engagement and instruction. We recognize that this is a State matter, but we note it here because of its importance.



## Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP AND APPLY PUBLISHED REGULATIONS COVERING ALL ASPECTS AND PHASES OF STUDIES (ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION).**

*Institutions and academic units need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, manage and act on information regarding student progression.*

*Procedures concerning the award and recognition of higher education degrees, the duration of studies, rules ensuring students progression, terms and conditions for student mobility should be based on the institutional study regulations. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.*

*Graduation represents the culmination of the students' study period. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed (Diploma Supplement).*

### Study Programme compliance

The AP found clear evidence that the students are supported throughout their journey from admission to graduation by the Department's faculty and staff. Examples of this support include the detailed Bylaws posted on the Department's website, the mentoring of incoming students and the institution of the Academic Council.

Teacher/students collaboration seems to be present all year long. Students and graduates affirmed the willingness of faculty and staff to support them. They also said that they are satisfied with the feedback they receive for their progress.

The AP noted that student mobility is encouraged and practiced using available programs, such as Erasmus and practical training – during the duration of studies, but also after graduation (Erasmus training program). The AP also found that the Department has effectively addressed the goal (reported by the previous AP) to increase the outgoing number of Erasmus students — (50 outgoing students for the last 4 years). In order to do so, they have increased the Erasmus contracts - the Department has actually signed contracts with more than 15 Universities in Europe and Turkey.

The *Thesis Handbook* is available on line. The AP reviewed several theses and found them to be of substantial quality. This reflects positively on the faculty advisors who guide and assist students throughout the process.

The Department applies the ECTS system across the curriculum. The Diploma Supplement is given automatically once the students have successfully completed all the compulsory courses, the required number of elective compulsory and free selection courses and have accumulated a total number of 240 ECTS.

The AP was impressed by the scope and quality of the *practicum* — the school teaching practice. It starts at year three and lasts for four semesters. The faculty members teaching the

course supervise students in the school teaching practice, which takes place in different schools of the district. Schools are also sometimes included in research program directed by the department. A warm collaborative atmosphere appears to exist between faculty members, school directors, teachers and students that should have a salutary effect on successful school teaching practice. Further evidence of the devotion of the faculty to the school teaching practice is the fact that those involved, visit the schools and observe their students approximately 1- 2 hours per week outside their normal service hours without being paid overtime. Students and faculty members also volunteer for other causes, such as literacy of migrants' children and parents, artistic presentations (theater, music, etc.) and archive research of the city's history.

The DPE has set goals to increase the number of student choosing to prepare an undergraduate thesis and to create a seminar on methodology for preparing scientific publications.

### Panel judgement

<b>Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification</b>	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The AP has no specific recommendations

## Principle 5: Teaching Staff

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCE OF THE TEACHING STAFF. THEY SHOULD APPLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING STAFF.**

*The Institutions and their academic units have a major responsibility as to the standard of their teaching staff providing them with a supportive environment that promotes the advancement of their scientific work. In particular, the academic unit should:*

- *set up and follow clear, transparent and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff and offer them conditions of employment that recognize the importance of teaching and research;*
- *offer opportunities and promote the professional development of the teaching staff;*
- *encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;*
- *encourage innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies;*
- *promote the increase of the volume and quality of the research output within the academic unit*
- *follow quality assurance processes for all staff members (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training etc.);*
- *develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff;*

### Study Programme compliance

The DPE has a disciplined and transparent approach to recruitment, hiring of faculty based on merit, and community support for new faculty. While staff mobility is highly regarded and encouraged it is limited by lack of financial resources to support such activity.

The formal teaching workload of faculty is appropriate but, out of commitment and necessity (in part because of the large numbers of students being served), most faculty devote considerable additional time to accomplishing what they perceive as the proper fulfillment of their duties. Faculty advisement is well structured and contributes to student progress.

There is as high degree of integration of teaching with research. Undergraduate students are given considerable opportunity and encouraged to participate in research initiatives as part of both the theoretical and practicum aspects of their courses.

Student evaluations of faculty through surveys are regular and highly prized as an instrument for program improvement by both students and faculty.

The research strategy is particularly rich in its focus on investigating and addressing social, cultural and pedagogic issues that are of significance and likely to have a positive impact on the immediate and larger region as well as meeting scientific standards of quality.

The presentation of publications received and reviewed by the AP was extensive and clear. Statistics presented documented an extensive number of books, chapters and research articles that have been accepted by peer review in national and international sources. The research and publications of participants of the laboratories have resulted in awards and grants as well

as local, national and international recognition and appreciation. It is part of the ethos of the PDE faculty to be active in conferences, workshops, scientific meetings, seminars, etc. outside and within the University of Thessaly with the aim of professional development as well as the promulgation of their work.

The DPE also stays on a cutting edge of new technologies and innovative teaching methods that help faculty deliver courses that engage students and enhance the learning process.

### Panel judgement

Principle 5: Teaching Staff	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The AP recommends that the faculty staff receive adequate financial resources to conduct research and make conference presentations, national and international. The AP also recommends course release time for faculty who are engaged in administrative, grants, and research projects.

Attention should be given to reducing faculty student ratio.

We recommend expanded professional development center opportunities for ongoing professional development targeted to faculty areas of need.

## Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER TEACHING AND LEARNING NEEDS. THEY SHOULD –ON THE ONE HAND- PROVIDE SATISFACTORY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT AND–ON THE OTHER HAND- FACILITATE DIRECT ACCESS TO THEM BY ESTABLISHING INTERNAL RULES TO THIS END (E.G. LECTURE ROOMS, LABORATORIES, LIBRARIES, NETWORKS, BOARDING, CAREER AND SOCIAL POLICY SERVICES ETC.).**

*Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counseling services.*

*When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities) and the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.*

*In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.*

### Study Programme compliance

The department's headquarters are in an architecturally imaginative building on the waterfront with fine views of the sea and the Volos town center. Existing staff office sizes are suitable but modest. Existing classroom space is insufficient for the current size of the student body. The AP believes that as far as buildings and infrastructure are concerned, there is a visible need for more classrooms. The teaching staff in order to maintain educational quality, and permit greater interaction with and between students, breaks courses up into smaller classes that will fit into existing classroom space. The cost is in the extra uncompensated time that faculty must put into teaching in order to adequately serve students.

The department has 6 laboratories/workshops that provide students with opportunities for research and practice within their classrooms as well as highly organized faculty advisement of students.

The school has implemented an advanced electronic platform for registration, teaching, scoring, announcements, and on-line services that were recommended in the former EEC report (2013). These services- StudentsWeb, ClassWeb - are supported by dedicated staff for teaching and administrative purposes. During our visit we found that there is a good rapport between the teaching and the departmental staff who are very helpful; aspects of counseling, welfare, placements and careers are well managed. More specifically we learned that administration sends email to alumni to inform them of position openings. The University offers sports, cultural and boarding facilities to its students.

The department provides support to students with special needs or disabilities. Discussion with students suggested that more attention is needed for handicap access (for example, elevators are difficult to open).

The DPE has set goals to create an undergraduate thesis fund and a fund to support students' production of software and videos. Another goal is to create an alumni professional integration network to follow up on the job status of graduates.

#### **Panel judgement**

<b>Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support</b>	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

#### **Panel Recommendations**

Although it appears that learning resources and student support are optimal there is a need to investigate improvement of access for handicapped students.

## Principle 7: Information Management

**INSTITUTIONS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING INFORMATION, AIMED AT THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AND RELATED ACTIVITIES, IN AN INTEGRATED, EFFECTIVE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE WAY.**

*Institutions are expected to establish and operate an information system for the management and monitoring of data concerning students, teaching staff, course structure and organisation, teaching and provision of services to students as well as to the academic community.*

*Reliable data is essential for accurate information and for decision making, as well as for identifying areas of smooth operation and areas for improvement. Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on study programmes and other activities feed data into the internal system of quality assurance.*

*The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the Institution. The following are of interest:*

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

*A number of methods may be used for collecting information. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analyzing information and planning follow-up activities.*

### Study Programme compliance

It is axiomatic that reliable and transparent information must be made available in order for a university and department to identify and attend to areas of need. We have determined that the DPE has made substantial and laudatory efforts to develop and operate an information system that supports the MODIP Unit for ensuring that the critical information is collected, analyzed and promulgated in an effective and expeditious manner. We have verified that the DPE and OMEA have worked closely with MODIP during the past several years since the 2013 EEC report. The Dean and Chair of the department have worked with the OMEA and all faculty to ensure that the information management plan reflects the goals of MODIP and UTH's Strategic Development Plan. OMEA is composed of research-oriented faculty. This effort is led by the current Dean who was past DPE chair and an individual with expertise in Informatics. Specifically, we determined through an examination of the published documents that were available, as hard copies and online, that the OMEA has collected from faculty the following significant items for analysis: Undergraduate Curriculum Courses with detailed syllabi; faculty expertise including research interests, publications, including designations of peer-reviewed or not, conferences, lectures, etc.; student evaluations of coursework; enrollment figures with several relevant categories such as gender, admission test scores.

As a result of the methods of collecting and disseminating key information, DPE students are helped to experience a smooth progression through their program of study and learn of opportunities for research, conferences, mobility, and resources. Finally, faculty received important data related to the student population, student progress, achievement, student satisfaction, etc.

### Panel judgement

Principle 7: Information Management	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The panel recommends continuing to maintain research scholars and those with expertise in informatics as members of the OMEA.



## Principle 8: Public Information

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH IS CLEAR, ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE.**

*Information on Institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public.*

*Therefore, institutions and their academic units provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students, as well as graduate employment information.*

### Study Programme compliance

The DPE has continued to make substantial strides in making available the information crucial to the smooth functioning of the department since the findings of prior AP Report in 2013. We have determined through interviews with the Associate Rector, Dean, Chair, members of the OMEA, faculty, students, alumni and external partners, including school principals, a review of the UTH DPE web pages and documents published online and in reports submitted to us that there is a high degree of transparency and clarity in the online public resources. The following areas are some examples of critical information available online: Study Guide with specific curricula, list of courses, and information on ECTS credits to complete, etc. Also published online are the objectives, syllabi, and textbooks for all courses.

There is an electronic registry that informs students as well as secretaries and faculty about scores, ETCS credits, etc. as noted in the OMEA Accreditation Proposal (May, 2019).

Research activities of faculty and students, opportunities for public and private sector funding, lectures, conferences and community activities are promulgated on the site.

Online students have the opportunity to choose their textbooks easily and for faculty to contact publishers and secretaries to collect information for the textbook distribution center.

Social media sites such as Facebook enable up-to-date posting and sharing of professional development activities, lectures, conferences, professional opportunities and community activities by, and for, faculty, staff, current students, alumni and external stakeholders. A dedicated formal international and alumni network page could also prove valuable.

### Panel judgement

Principle 8: Public Information	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

No recommendation for improvement.

## Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRAMMES, SO AS TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET FOR THEM, THROUGH MONITORING AND AMENDMENTS, WITH A VIEW TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. ANY ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED.**

*Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to maintain the level of educational provision and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.*

*The above comprise the evaluation of:*

- *the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;*
- *the changing needs of society*
- *the students' workload, progression and completion;*
- *the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students*
- *the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;*
- *the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme*

*Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.*

### Study Programme compliance

There is in place as noted in section one of this report a model system of self-evaluation and quality assurance in the Department that has, apparently, enabled the smooth functioning of the department's critical functions. The leadership at UTH and for the DPE has developed with the DPE faculty an extraordinary culture of collaboration and conviviality that makes the process of internal evaluation highly productive. There is continuous monitoring and assessment of the programs, student progress, faculty achievements, etc. The quality assurance measures put into place emanate from the mission of UTH and the standards set forth by MODIP. The close connection between MODIP and OMEA help ensure the effective transmission of information that can be transposed into data for analysis and consequent action. The OMEA meets on a bi-monthly basis to process up-to-date information to share with MODIP and the faculty as appropriate. The close and open communication channels result in faculty and students being informed about the most current opportunities in areas such as grants and research funding.

The focus of all quality assurance efforts has been on ensuring the best academic and practical experiences of the students and their overall welfare at UTH. Our interviews with the faculty, students, alumni especially made clear that there was a very high degree of satisfaction with the program as implemented, but also with the resilience of the faculty in attending to needs of students as they arise and also in being cognizant and sensitive to the social dynamics and changing demographics of the community.

We verified the outstanding changes to the curriculum regarding the "clinically-rich" four semesters of classroom practice. The practicum offered to students beginning the third year of undergraduate study and continuing until the last semester of the fourth and final year of

study is improved through ongoing feedback collected by the involved faculty and students. It's no secret that teachers need to be well-prepared for "day one" in their new classroom. The faculty of DPE increased the duration of teaching opportunities and put into place a "clinically-rich" system of mentoring and observing the students in classroom practice situations. The trajectory of the practicum begins with observation, then to initial supervised practice, then to self-initiated and creative classroom activities. The "clinically-rich" system involves preparing the students for their initial semester and continuing semesters with practical experiences assisted by "research laboratory" faculty or mentors. Faculty and mentors first make sure that the students have the pedagogical and practical knowledge to teach, including but not limited to, "hands-on" materials and techniques for the subject area to be taught. For the actual classroom experiences, faculty, mentors, peers and the sponsoring classroom teacher conduct observations and provide time for feedback and reflection using an "Action Research" approach.

It was abundantly clear that the role of many faculty members, including research laboratory faculty, provided research opportunities that also involved collaboration with external agencies such as the Agency for Refugees. This socially responsible research agenda was in response to a dire social need to educate refugee children and their families. Other research projects by undergraduate students have also resulted in publications.

Another by-product of the research-focused faculty and the research focus of many courses, both pedagogical and practical, has been the successful further education and career mobility of graduates. Many of the alumni expressed their deep gratitude for the "extra mile" faculty members took in preparing them in research methods AND analytical thinking and creative problem-solving. The student-centered curriculum focus of the DPE takes its mission quite seriously. Faculty members devote and volunteer many extra hours to attending to the needs of their students and ensuring they are well equipped for research and for classroom teaching.

The student evaluations are also a major part of the monitoring and the results are collected and analyzed and shared with the faculty member for any warranted action. Faculty members can also use their own evaluation instruments or add to the basic evaluation form used.

Important progress has been made in the years since the 2013 EEC Report to raise the number of student evaluations.

The ongoing monitoring has also resulted in the selection of exemplary school sites for practical experiences as well as a panoply of other schools for classroom experiences and, incidentally, possible teaching positions in the future.

### **Panel judgment**

<b>Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes</b>	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### **Panel Recommendations**

No recommendation for improvement.

## Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

**PROGRAMMES SHOULD REGULARLY UNDERGO EVALUATION BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HQA, AIMING AT ACCREDITATION. THE TERM OF VALIDITY OF THE ACCREDITATION IS DETERMINED BY HQA.**

*HQA is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realized as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HQA grants accreditation of programmes, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.*

*Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.*

*The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.*

### Study Program compliance

The Undergraduate program underwent an external evaluation process in 2013. The Department has addressed the recommendations made by the HQA External Evaluation Committee, except those which were beyond its control to act upon. We are impressed by the number of recommendations that have been implemented by the department: For example:

- *The recommendation that the faculty consider reducing the number of courses offered by at least two per semester, while increasing the depth in each of them.*
- *The recommendation that the department consider offering a smaller number of core but more substantial courses, not to exceed one third of the total required for graduation, and a larger number of electives that will give flexibility to the curriculum.*
- *The recommendation that the departments of Primary Education, Pre-School Education and Special education create a formal procedure of discussion and adopt common course offerings.*

The AP is aware that many of the recommendations of the previous report cannot be fulfilled by the DPE such as:

- *The recommendation that the internal development or external hiring of a “grant officer”, a local administrative expert at the University level who would monitor grant opportunities and inform faculty members with expertise and potentially increase the members of staff supporting information technologies.*
- *The request that the State accept the recommendations of the department in terms of numbers and minimum scores of enrolling students, thus taking full responsibility of its program and enabling it to achieve its educational goals. If that is not done, the*

*department should be given the opportunity to hire more faculty and allocate more appropriately equipped lecture rooms to address the bloated number of new enrolments.*

There has been no other evaluation that the AP is aware of. There is awareness of the importance of the external evaluation process by the Department faculty, students, external stakeholders, and the members of the staff.

#### **Panel judgement**

<b>Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes</b>	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

#### **Panel Recommendations**

No recommendation for improvement.

## **PART C: CONCLUSIONS**

### **I. Features of Good Practice**

The collaboration and open, vibrant communication channels among the UTH headships, MODIP, OMEA, faculty, staff members and students has generated an effective, exemplary quality assurance approach that can generate positive outcomes for student achievement and success .

Faculty dedication to fostering the most effective student learning includes collaboration and commitment to provide students excellent learning opportunities.

The high degree of enthusiasm, satisfaction and support for the DPE on the part of the students, graduates, and external stakeholders, is a testament to the DPE's effectiveness and success in all major categories.

Faculty's diligent advisement time, out-sized volunteerism, e.g. delivering additional sections of courses, community service, presentations to parents and community.

The practicum model developed by the DPE is a highly exemplary aspect of program of practice. This includes intensive, clinically rich mentoring and action research approaches.

### **II. Areas of Weakness**

There is an insufficient number of classrooms for the number of the students.

Insufficient resources are available to support professional development and mobility of the faculty.

### **III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions**

Explore the improvement of handicap access in the central building used by DPE

### **IV. Summary & Overall Assessment**

Quality assurance procedures and practices have become an integral feature of the DPE's program operation and have contributed to the success of the DPA's achievements.

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: 1-10

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: N/A

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: N/A

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: N/A

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	✓
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	



**The members of the Accreditation Panel for the Undergraduate Programme  
Primary Education - University of Thessaly**

Name and Surname

Signature

- Prof John Spiridakis (Chair), St. John's University, New York, United States of America
  
- Assoc. Prof. Gina Ioannitou, Le Mans Universite, Le Mans, France
  
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- Dr. Paul Zachos Association for the Cooperative Advancement of Science & Education, New York, United States of America