ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Accreditation Report
for the New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation of:

Digital Systems

Institution: University of Thessaly

Date: 8 October 2022

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation of **Digital Systems** of the **University of Thessaly** for the purposes of granting accreditation

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PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I.   The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the new undergraduate study programme in operation of **Digital Systems** of the **University of Thessaly** comprised the following four (4) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. **Dr Vasilis Friderikos (Chair)**
   King's College London, UK

2. **Professor Costas S. Iliopoulos**
   King's College London, UK

3. **Professor Sotirios Skevoulis**
   Pace University, USA

4. **Mr Michail Voskakis**
   Hellenic Mediterranean University, Greece

II.   Review Procedure and Documentation

The External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel (EEAP) visited in a virtual manner through teleconferencing the Digital Systems Department of the University of Thessaly, which is located in the outskirts of the city of Larissa, on the third and the fourth of October 2022. The panel committee has been warmly welcomed to the virtual event by the Head of the Department, Professor Vasilis Gerogiannis, and the Vice-Rector of the University of Thessaly Professor Ioannis Theodorakis.

Following the brief welcome note, the committee attended a presentation from the Head of the Department where he provided details on the current trajectory of the Department, the history, the academic profile and most importantly the current status and various details both of qualitative and quantitative nature about the undergraduate programme which is offered from the Department. It has to be noted that special attention has been placed on the envisioned future path and vision of the Department, an aspect that strongly links with the overall sustainability aspects of the unit. Furthermore, the Vice-Rector delivered a presentation regarding the rationale of our series of meetings and details about the required compliance of the programme to the quality standards which is the basis for the accreditation. It is worth pointing out that this session was very lively and interactive with numerous discussions triggered by the presentations on all different aspects of the academic life in the Department.

Later on, during the first day, the committee met with the OMEA & MODIP representatives (no apologies have been received) and session attendees introduced themself and briefly mentioned their role in the unit. The core part of the meeting was a detailed presentation about teaching delivery in the Department and a quantitative analysis of various performance aspects including entrance requirements for the first-year students and various statistics. The aim during that session was to explore the modus operandi of teaching delivery, the different methods used for teaching and the overall ethos of the Department in teaching delivery.

The second day of the e-visit the committee met with members of academic staff in the department. A wide set of aspects have been discussed ranging from personal development to research activities and how those retrofit back to teaching and typical/nominal workload for a member of staff in the Department. The follow-up e-session involved a meeting with a set of pre-selected students from the Department. The students have been asked various questions about their academic life (including extracurriculars) and students given ample chances to express themselves and detail their overall experiences and the interactions that they have with the members of staff and professional administration staff. Then the committee had an on-line tour of the Department and of the campus. This has been done via two YouTube based videos that have been pre-recorded. They allowed members of the committee to acquire an in-depth understanding of the classrooms used for teaching, the lecture halls, the laboratories, and other facilities offered within the campus. A lively and interactive discussion about what has been presented in the videos have been held with members of staff during that session. The following teleconferencing session involved a

meeting with social partners, including a representation from the municipality of Larissa, showcasing a rich variety of professional connections with the undergraduate programme offered from the Unit. During the meeting the social partners elaborated on their relation to the Unit and the valuable contribution stemming both from the members of staff as well as from the students to their organizations. It is worth pointing out that there are no graduates yet, hence experiences from students are mainly due to secondments.

The final meeting of the day and final session for the evaluation was with OMEA and MODIP representatives as well as with the Head of Department and Vice-Rector attended this meeting as well. During the meeting key findings of the committee have been relayed to the attendees and plenty of time for discussion has been allocated triggered by the general feedback. Overall, the committee is gratified by the overall organization of the meetings and the willingness from all involved to provide further clarifications. Also, the committee applauded the overall enthusiasm expressed by members of staff and their willingness to go the extra mile via increased contact time with the students in order to increase their overall experience. Finally, it is worth noting that during that concluding meeting also the Rector of the University of Thessaly Professor Zissis Mamouris joined us. The report presented in the sequel represents the collective findings of the committee that has been shaped in private discussions during and after the above-mentioned series of meetings.

III.   New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation Profile

The Undergraduate programme (UG) offered by the Department of Digital Systems is a four (4) year degree, comprising eight (8) semesters that correspond to 240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. The UG programme awards its graduates with a Bachelor of Sciences (BSc) degree. The UG programme covers a wide range of knowledge in the area of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), with strong emphasis in the development of digital systems such as for example systems that are required for digital transformation and/or Internet of Things (IoT) applications that can be applied across a wide range of different vertical markets. More specifically, in each semester of the first 2 years, the program of study includes 6 compulsory courses. Labs are offered only during the first 2 years of study. The study program can be deemed as a flexible one since during the 3rd and 4th year of study the students are allowed to choose from a variety of courses, which allows them to create a more focused course of study, based on their own interests and professional interest. Furthermore, via a set of specific modules graduates of the Department are able to acquire the required professional qualifications for a career in secondary education as IT teachers. The UG programme is accepting approximately 300 students each year and the Department has 14 full time faculty members, 3 laboratory/teaching staff, 3 lab technicians and supported by 3 professional administrators. The Department offers an orientation meeting with all new students in October every year. The UG programme was founded in the year 2019 together with the Department.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Strategic Planning, Feasibility and Sustainability of the Academic Unit

Institutions must have developed an appropriate strategy for the establishment and operation of new academic units and the provision of new undergraduate study programmes. This strategy should be documented by specific feasibility and sustainability studies.

By decision of the institutional Senate, the Institutions should address in their strategy issues related to their academic structure in academic units and study programmes, which support the profile, the vision, the mission, and the strategic goal setting of the Institution, within a specific time frame. The strategy of the Institution should articulate the potential benefits, weaknesses, opportunities or risks from the operation of new academic units and study programmes, and plan all the necessary actions towards the achievement of their goals.

The strategy of their academic structure should be documented by specific feasibility and sustainability studies, especially for new academic units and new study programmes.

More specifically, the feasibility study of the new undergraduate study programmes should be accompanied by a four-year business plan to meet specific needs in infrastructure, services, human resources, procedures, financial resources, and management systems.

During the evaluation of the Institutions and their individual academic units in terms of meeting the criteria for the organisation of undergraduate study programmes, particular attention must be place upon:

a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit
The profile and mission of the department should be specified. The scientific field of the department should be included in the internationally established scientific fields of Higher Education, as they are designated by the international categorisation of scientific fields in education, by UNESCO (ISCED 2013).

b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development
The academic development strategy for the operation of the department and the new study programme should be set out. This strategy should result from the investigation of the factors that influence the studies and the research in the scientific field, the investigation of the institutional, economic, developmental, and social parameters that apply in the external environment of the Institution, as well as the possibilities and capabilities that exist within the internal environment (as reflected in a SWOT Analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). This specific analysis should demonstrate the reason for selecting the scientific field of the new department.

c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme
The feasibility of the operation of the new department should be justified based on:
- *the needs of the national and regional economy (economic sectors, employment, supply-demand, expected academic and professional qualifications)*
- *comparison with other national and international study programmes of the same scientific field*
- *the state-of-the-art developments*

- the existing academic map; the differentiation of the proposed department from the already existing ones needs to be analysed, in addition to the implications of the current image of the academic map in the specific scientific field.

d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department

Mention must be made to the infrastructure, human resources, funding perspective, services, and all other available resources in terms of:

- *educational and research facilities (buildings, rooms, laboratories, equipment, etc.)*
- *staff (existing and new, by category, specialty, rank and laboratory). A distinct five-year plan is required, documenting the commitment of the School and of the Institution for filling in the necessary faculty positions to cover at least the entire pre-defined core curriculum*
- *funding (funding possibility from public or non-public sources)*
- *services (central, departmental / student support, digital, administrative, etc.)*

e. The structure of studies

The structure of the studies should be briefly presented, namely:

- **The organisation of studies:** *The courses and the categories to which they belong; the distribution of the courses into semesters; the alignment of the courses with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).*
- **Learning process:** *Documentation must be provided as to how the student-centered approach is ensured (modes of teaching and evaluation of students beyond the traditional methods).*
- **Learning outcomes:** *Knowledge, skills and competences acquired by graduates, as well as the professional rights awarded must be mentioned.*

f. The number of admitted students

- *The proposed number of admitted students over a five-year period should be specified.*
- *Any similar departments in other HEIs with the possibility of student transfers from / to the proposed department should be mentioned.*

g. Postgraduate studies and research

- *It is necessary to indicate research priorities in the scientific field, the opportunities for interdisciplinary research, the challenges towards new knowledge, possible research collaborations, etc.*
- *In addition, the postgraduate and doctoral programmes offered by the academic unit, the research projects performed, and the research performance of the faculty members should be mentioned.*

Relevant documentation

- *Introductory Report by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) addressing the above points with the necessary documentation*
- *Updated Strategic Plan of the Institution that will include its proposed academic reconstruction, in view of the planned operation of new department(s) (incl. updated SWOT analysis at institutional level)*
- *Feasibility and sustainability studies for the establishment and operation of the new academic unit and the new study programme*
- *Four-year business plan*

Study Programme Compliance

<u>Findings</u>

The Digital System Department was established in the year 2019. The department accepts approximately 300 students each academic year. According to the provided documentation and as verified during the discussions the initial proposal of the Department was for 150 undergraduates each academic year. The Department also offers specialization via two postgraduate taught courses, the first one is entitled 'Software Engineering for Internet & Mobile Applications' and the second one 'Modern Communication Systems & Internet of Things'. Currently there are also 17 doctoral and 2 post-doctoral researchers hosted in the Department. The overarching mission of the unit is to provide specialization within the emerging area of digital transformation, that incorporates aspects related to Internet of Things, Industry 4.0, big data analysis and artificial intelligence. The programme offers 71 modules to the students and 42 modules are required for graduation. The study programme is also suitable and inline to the Department's strategic goals and mission. There is a clear strategy and development plan for the Department and feasibility as well as sustainability of the unit is robust due to the increased preference for undergraduate studies in the Department and a clear departmental plan for expansion up to year 2026. For every taught module and in both semesters the Department conducts electronic faculty evaluations using questionnaires that are distributed to the students. The questionnaire covers a wide range of questions (19 criteria with ratings range from 1 to 5) and allows students to provide feedback in a large number of aspects related to the quality of the teaching. It has been brought to the attention of the committee that the Quality Assurance Policy is well communicated to all relevant bodies and information is available on the Greek version of the Departmental website. Members of staff of the Department are easily approachable by the students. This has been confirmed by the students as well. Academics seem to be fully available for face-to-face meetings. The students seem to be actively engaged in Departmental activities and spend a significant amount of their time within the Department and the campus in general.

<u>Analysis</u>

The key operational aspects of the Department, as pertain to the aspects of feasibility and sustainability, are well documented and analysed. The student intake is very healthy even though well beyond the initial recommendation that has been done internally from the Department regarding the ideal size of the first year. Members of academic staff and supporting professional administration staff depict a high degree of professionalism and dedication to the success of the Department. Having said that, strong mitigation plans should be in place as the expansion brings together with the opportunities some risks. The offered modules are well-thought as well as their distribution in each academic year and semester and those courses align with the European Credit Transfer System. The number of offered modules could be considered on the high side for such specialized degree (compared to for example Electrical or Electronic Engineering degrees). Some internal procedures are needed to assess desirability of different offered (optional) modules and decision making about their continuation. High number of modules where some of them have low number of students affect overall working load, admin load and have spillover effects to research activities.

Conclusion

The committee is fully satisfied that the Digital Systems Department of the University of Thessaly has developed and is currently implementing a concrete strategic plan towards the sustainability of the Department as well as its path towards excellence in all aspects of academic life and experiences for their students.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Strategic planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit	
a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
e. The structure of studies	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
f. The number of admitted students	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

g. Postgraduate studies	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Principle 1: Strategic planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit (overall)	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Continuous review of offered modules and procedures for altering modules and/or deferring from offering them.

- Increased levels of hands-on experimental components (complementing simulation / emulation) in taught modules beyond the 2nd year of studies and introduction of hardware-based labs during the first 2 years of study. This will help to increase the overall knowledge, skills, and competence of the students.

Principle 2: Quality Assurance Policy of the Institution and the Academic Unit

The Institution should have in place an accredited Internal Quality Assurance System, and should formulate and apply a Quality Assurance Policy, which is part of its strategy, specialises in the operation of the new academic units and the new study programmes, and is accompanied by annual quality assurance goals for the continuous development and improvement of the academic units and the study programmes.

The quality assurance policy of the Institution must be formulated in the form of a published statement, which is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special annual quality goals related to the quality assurance of the new study programme offered by the academic unit. In order to implement this policy, the Institution, among others, commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate: the adequacy and quality of the academic unit's resources; the suitability of the structure and organisation of the curriculum; the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff; the quality of support services of the academic unit and its staffing with appropriate administrative personnel. The Institution also commits itself to conduct an annual internal evaluation of the new undergraduate programme (UGP), realised by the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of the Institution.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement quality procedures that will demonstrate: a) the adequacy of the structure and organisation of the curriculum, b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of the teaching work, d) the adequacy of the qualifications of the teaching staff, e) the promotion of the quality and quantity of the research work of the members of the academic unit, f) the ways of linking teaching with research, g) the level of demand for graduates' qualifications in the labour market, h) the quality of support services, such as administration, libraries and student care, i) the implementation of an annual review and audit of the quality assurance system of the UGP through the cooperation of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of the Institution.

Relevant documentation
▪ *Revised Quality Assurance Policy of the Institution*
▪ *Quality Assurance Policy of the academic unit*
▪ *Quality target setting of the Institution and the academic unit (utilising the S.M.A.R.T. methodology)*

Study Programme Compliance

<u>Findings</u>

The overall quality assurance framework is well defined, and the required mechanisms are in place to ensure that the offered programme meet national (as well as EU) standards for quality and academic standards. There are solid procedures in place for approving and/or altering modules in the Department. This aspect has been discussed during the meeting and the overall actual procedures have been identified and fleshed out during the discussions. Student feedback has a central role in the operation. Data are collected, analysed and discussed in the Department, and this is in line with good practise in any actions are orchestrated by the Head of Department (HoD). Feedback from students is used together with any useful information

received from social partners together with good practise in other similar Departments nationally. At the same time all the above are considered under the overall framework of the ACM/IEEE curricula recommendations.

Student feedback, as an important component of the quality assurance framework, is well implemented, albeit the low take up percentage among students. The analysis of the available results as documented and presented to the members of the committee depict an excellent (overall) performance in terms of teaching quality. To close the loop and enhance student centered approach to teaching the results of the feedback are propagated back to the students. At the same time the aggregated results are discussed at the Departmental meetings. There are no graduates yet from the Department, no graduations as well from the postgraduate offered courses and finally none of the PhD researchers has graduated.

Analysis

As part of the quality assurance policies statistics on progression trends are kept. In overall the defined set of procedures provide a sufficient framework for the effective monitoring and implementation of corrective actions in ensuring a high-quality undergraduate programme. The current progression rate is approximately 80% and this requires the identification of any concerns, the implication to the programme and any action that needs to be taken. Offering a large number of modules (71 modules are offered to the students) creates risks on the quality of teaching and the creation of research groups in specific areas with critical mass. Analysis of the data should be highly prescriptive to provide as much information as possible as to what has been resolved. There is a solid framework to deal with any concerns raised by students related to academic or non-academic issues (such as bullying for example). However, some more emphasis should be placed on procedures related to academic misconduct as a means to protect academic integrity. This issue has not been fleshed out sufficiently in the provided documentation. Some effort should be placed in order to align any foreign students joining the Department (via Erasmus for example) to the same learning outcomes and assessment with the main cohort of the students.

Conclusions

The committee is satisfied that the Digital Systems Department of the University of Thessaly has developed and is implementing an appropriate Quality Assurance Policy, as part of its strategic management. Overall, the department is very well organized with respect to quality assessment of all aspects of the mission of the Department.

Panel Judgement

Principle 2: Quality assurance policy of the Institution and the academic unit	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The committee recommends a rationalization is needed on how KPIs are defined (i.e., they need to be descriptive in terms of their formulation). This should be in tandem with a clear path of mitigation when those are not achieved.

- As part of the quality assurance framework expectations regarding research outputs should not only be quantitative across a defined period but also (and maybe more importantly) qualitative.

- Clear procedures should be in place as with respect to issues revolving around academic integrity.

Principle 3: Design, Approval and Monitoring of the Quality of the New Undergraduate Programmes

Institutions should design the new 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.

The Institutions develop their new undergraduate study programmes, following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile, the identity 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 European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. An important new element in the structure of the programmes is the introduction of courses for the acquisition of digital skills. The above components should be taken into consideration and constitute the subject of the programme design, which, among other things, should include: elements of the Institution's strategy, labour market data and employment prospects of graduates, smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme, the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the option of providing work experience to the students, the linking of teaching and research, the international experience in study programmes of similar disciplines, the relevant regulatory framework, and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution.

The procedure of approval or revision of the programmes provides for the verification of compliance with the basic requirements of the Standards by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Relevant documentation

▪ *Senate decision for the establishment of the UGP*
▪ *Curriculum structure: courses, course categories (including courses for the acquisition of digital skills), ECTS awarded, expected learning outcomes according to the EQF, internship, mobility opportunities.*
▪ *Labour market data regarding the employment of graduates, international experience in a related scientific field.*
▪ *Student Guide*
▪ *Course outlines*
▪ *Teaching staff (list of areas of specialisation, its relation to the courses taught, employment relationship)*
▪ *QAU minutes for the internal evaluation of the new study programme and its compliance with the Standards*

Study Programme Compliance

<u>Findings</u>

The undergraduate programme in the Department of Digital Systems has well defined objectives and follows best national and international practices. The structure of the programme is adequate. It comprises various categories of courses in terms of level (introductory and advanced for a total of 71 courses). It allows students to have a common core curriculum at the beginning and later, develop their own interests, within the structure of the programme. Overall Programme's framework and content is broadly in line with established Digital Systems programmes in Europe and North America. There is a sufficient balance of core and elective courses, with appropriate depth and coverage of current and emerging themes.

The learning objectives, expected outcomes, and sources of information are thoroughly outlined in the Study Guide of the Programme (Οδηγός Σπουδών) and have been presented in the presentations during the on-line visit. The Study Guide is clearly structured, comprehensive, and informative. The undergraduate programme is informally advised by employers, the local municipalities (Larissa, Trikala, Volos) and other external stakeholders in terms of the quality of its graduates and its learning outcomes.

<u>Analysis</u>

The program is compatible with the European standards through the thorough application of the ECTS system. Because of the Erasmus programmes and several bilateral agreements (40 MOUs) between the Department and Universities abroad, the students have opportunities to take courses abroad. However, the number of students who take advantage of these opportunities remains small partly due to the recent pandemic.

The institutional strategy articulated and applied in the workings of the department is clearly reflected in the programme. It appears to be working well, given the context and framework and the overall difficulties of higher education in Greece.

Student interviews indicated a strong student interest for closer interaction with industry and further opportunities to prepare themselves for the labour market, (e.g., opportunities to prepare their CVs for their job search). They also suggested the introduction of more "hands-on" experience in the classrooms and labs.

<u>Conclusions</u>

The program is fully compliant with the principles, suggestions, and regulations regarding the processes of design, approval, and monitoring of the curriculum. The department must take steps to involve various stakeholders more actively into the review and evaluation process (e.g., by distributing questionnaires to them on the needs of the changing market). The consultation of representatives from non-academic public and private institutions can be a valuable source of experience and inspiration for the programme.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Design, approval and monitoring of the quality of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The department should consider the establishment of an Alumni Association. It should formalise its alumni network and strengthen its relations with alumni. Clearly, the Department's graduates pursue successful careers in industry. These alumni could be great ambassadors for its curriculum and research activity. Alumni can help the Department improve its profile, create stronger professional networks and channels, and promote the Department in relevant fora

Principle 4: Student-centred Approach in Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

The academic unit should ensure that the new 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.

In the implementation of student-centered learning and teaching, the academic unit:

- ✔ *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 application of 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*

Relevant documentation

- ▪ *Questionnaires for assessment by the students*
- ▪ *Regulation for dealing with students' complaints and appeals*
- ▪ *Regulation for the function of the academic advisor*
- ▪ *Reference to the planned teaching modes and assessment methods*

Study Programme Compliance

 Findings

The newly established Department of Digital Systems at the University of Thessaly has flexible pedagogical methods of teaching and assessment. Lectures are presented in the lecture halls mainly in the form of presentations. Exercises are carried out in the computer laboratories. The use of the asynchronous tele-education platform https://eclass.uth.gr is presented in a flexible way. Provide students with multimedia material. In particular, they do not adopt interactive approaches to the presentation of educational material. They fully operate the Living lab (experiential learning) and have combined examination methods (written exams, oral exams, assignments, and e-class exercises (multiple choice). The curriculum promotes mutual respect, having 2 years of pandemic experience with distance learning. Therefore, young students succeed when what they learn matters to them. In student-centered learning, student interest drives modern education. student-centered learning gives those involved the opportunity to decide two things: what material they learn and how they learn it.

The Department conducts a semesterly evaluation of the courses and faculty. The student receives in his/her institutional e-mail a unique code for participation in the online platform

for completing a questionnaire for each taught course. The evaluation form, which is submitted anonymously, includes 5 subject areas. A) The course with questions on the syllabus, objectives, teaching material, methodological framework, etc. B) Assignments during data processing, implementation, and implementation in terms of delivery time. C) The lecturer whether they were consistent in organizing, achieving, and analysing well the presentation of the material in the individual lectures, while providing encouragement during their studies. D) Labs whether they are adequate in practical exercises and with the use of new technologies E) Students whether they are consistent in their obligations such as attending lectures, solving exercises, etc.

There is a course regulation on the department's site as it includes the role and responsibilities for each course introduced in detail, in order to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences contributing significantly to the digital transformation of primary production and the economy.

The department has a specific procedure for handling complaints and objections from students during their studies. For examination and grading issues, the student is referred to the course lecturer as well as having the right to a board examination after 3 failures. In addition, a signed complaint can be made and through the secretariat it can be forwarded to the President and by extension to the General Assembly or the Legal Department of the department. In addition, there is a separate procedure for dealing with incidents of harassment-bullying by a dedicated Complaints Handling Committee.

 Analysis

There was a constructive 2-day conversation with faculty, students and other staff of the Department and local officials.

Statistical analysis was presented with 75% of incoming students choosing this department within their top three choices for continuing their studies. They also stated that they were aware of the flexible curriculum, several professors from their scientific research and the special location among other universities nationwide from the beginning.

The 1st contact was important as the department provided dialogue and exploration of the university with the assistance of the curriculum advisor. An academic advisor was immediately assigned for personal student empowerment and follow up with the student for any problem they face during their studies. COVID-19 (2 years) deprived two academic series of students at basic high school knowledge resulting in new students joining the university with several deficiencies. Therefore, all first semester teachers emphasized on the 1st lectures to make up for learning deficiencies from the 3rd grade in order to be ready at the university level.

The University has skilled and experienced teachers who can use student-centred learning in their classrooms to increase student motivation, help students take ownership of their learning and build strong relationships.

The department did not fully operate the course evaluation system during the pandemic, as evidenced by the low participation rate of about 10% in the current era. However, according

to the strategic plan the department will implement online assessment of students at the end of the semester within the auditorium using mobile phones to attract a higher percentage.

A problem arose with a professor of the department, who categorically refused in a large auditorium to open a microphone system for lectures, so that many students far from the front seats could not be able to attend the semester's classes with reverence. It was immediately recorded in the evaluation on behalf of the students and was taken up by the Department to resolve it.

Conclusions

The Department of Digital Systems ensures its undergraduate programme is delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process therefore regard to Principle 4 is Fully Compliant.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student-centred approach in learning, teaching and assessment of students	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

▪ Students must design their own investigation, propose a solution, communicate their ideas to professors and community members, and evaluate their own progress as they go. The teachers in turn help guide this process, but the content, timing and motivation belong to the students themselves.

▪ Individual learning plans can also be a way of making learners' aware of the options available to them in terms of learning and progression. Students exploring for themselves is at the very core of learning. Making discoveries from a task the professor sets that they are genuinely interested in and find challenging, and the feeling they gain from self-direction, is wonderfully rewarding for learners as well as an incredible life tool.

- Assessment is an essential part of education. Robust assessment processes are critical for a rigorous evaluation of the level of student learning. Beyond judgement, the modes of assessment we select will shape not just what, but how students learn. Empowering and engaging learners through assessment design and providing opportunities for dialogic feedback is central to learning and the student experience.

- Modes of assessment are evolving, encompassing assessment for, of and as learning, allowing the evaluation of a broader range of professional and subject-specific competencies, providing greater student choice and opportunities for students to showcase their talents.

- The academic Tutor ensures departmental compliance with university policies, ensures the accuracy of student records and monitoring, and serves on departmental and university committees.

- Appeals should be considered within a reasonable period and immediately before the end of the academic semester.

- Three ways to think about the role of professor in student-centered learning are: resources (professor serve as experts and key sources of knowledge, and students share responsibility for accessing that knowledge), mentors (Strong relationships with trusted adults give students the confidence and motivation they need to take leadership in their learning), and guides (professor provide the structure and guidance that enables students to overcome challenges and see how their classwork connects to larger interests and goals).

Principle 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Award of Degrees and Certificates of Competence of the New Study Programmes

Academic units should develop and apply published regulations addressing all aspects and phases of studies of the programme (admission, progression, recognition and degree award).

All the issues from the beginning to the end of studies should be governed by the internal regulations of the academic units. Indicatively:

- ✓ *the registration procedure of the admitted students and the necessary documents - according to the law - and the support of the newly admitted students*

- ✓ *student rights and obligations, and monitoring of student progression*

- ✓ *internship issues, granting of scholarships*

- ✓ *the procedures and terms for writing the thesis (diploma or degree)*

- ✓ *the procedure of award and recognition of degrees, the duration of studies, the conditions for progression and assurance of the progress of students in their studies*

as well as

- ✓ *the terms and conditions for enhancing student mobility*

Appropriate recognition procedures rely on relevant academic practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions in line with the principles of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. 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).

All the above must be made public within the context of the Student Guide.

Relevant documentation

- ▪ *Internal regulation for the operation of the new study programme*
- ▪ *Regulation of studies, internship, mobility and student assignments*
- ▪ *Printed Diploma Supplement*

Certificate from the President of the academic unit that the diploma supplement is awarded to all graduates without exception together with the degree or the certificate of completion of studies

Study Programme Compliance

<u>Findings</u>

The newly established Department of Digital Systems at the University of Thessaly has an active role with the Student Advisor, informing first-year incoming students and providing advisory services for their smooth integration and progression in higher education. They provide from the 1st day of admission of students' full information about the functioning of

the Institution. In addition, there is the possibility of supporting students with disabilities or students who have difficulties in successfully completing their studies.

The information system of the University's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) has been actively monitoring the progress of students' studies since the initial academic session 2019-2020; 135 out of 250 (54%) students continued to register for courses until the 3rd year. Over time, approximately 80% of students participate in the final examinations. The 56%-75% pass rate is included in the September exam, and the average student grade point average is 6.00 to 7.00.

The university has an International Relations Office, has 40 bilateral partnerships for formal Erasmus mobility, 5 bilateral partnerships for international mobility (non-EU) with Belarusian State University (Belarus), American University of Beirut (Lebanon) Mundiapolis University of Casablanca (Morocco) and Al-Hussein Bin Talal University (Jordan) Vietnam National University - International School (Vietnam). However, the mobility of the department over the years is unfortunately negligible, with only 10 incoming foreign students and unfortunately no outgoing domestic students from the University of Thessaly.

Throughout the curriculum which is posted the ECTS course weighting is fully applied. The Diploma Supplement issued after completion of all obligations is in Greek and English.

In the university the Degree Thesis Committee is fully operational with the corresponding regulation for the preparation and writing of degree theses being available on the official site. The procedure is implemented after the announcement of topics in eclass, which is compulsory during the 4th year of study (30 ECTS, 2 semesters). There is student notification by the professors and the corresponding assignment. After the assignment there is continuous monitoring of student progress with a final examination by a three-member committee. Finally, the posting of the final form of the thesis on the Department's website and its forwarding to the University Library is maintained.

The Internship for students is considered as an elective course after the 5th semester with a prerequisite of 75% of the ECTS of the 1st and 2nd year. The duration is 2 months (and from now on 6 months with the new law) and in the months of July-August subsidized by PA (Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework). In addition, it takes place at any point in time (non-Erasmus+ funded). It covers 5 ECTS, which are not considered in the degree grade but are indicated in the diploma annex. There is a specific Regulation with procedures, a scientific academic officer, a committee for the evaluation of applications, an Internship Office/ATLAS and cooperation with large Greek companies, where 2 students were hired before getting a degree.

 Analysis

There was a constructive 2-day conversation with Professors, students, and other staff of the Department as well as with local officials.

The students from day 1 were fully briefed on how the university community works, regulations and obligations throughout their studies. They received appropriate information about the culture of the city of Thessaly and how to get around the campus facilities and halls.

The mobility of students abroad is zero without proper emphasis by the departmental administration. In fact, only a few students have so far come from abroad and joined classes along with Greek students. However, it is noticed that there is a special treatment to foreign students by successfully completing the course with only one semester project and thus easily transferring the corresponding ECTS of the course to their own university abroad.

Internships in Greek companies are at an advanced stage in contrast to the possibility and incentives that the department gives students to be employed abroad (Erasmus).

Conclusions

The Department of Digital Systems ensures that develop and apply published regulations addressing all aspects and phases of studies of the programme (admission, progression, recognition and degree award) therefore regard to Principle 5 is Fully Compliant.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Student admission, progression, recognition of academic qualifications, and award of degrees and certificates of competence of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

▪ Transitioning to university-style learning can be a big change for some students. Whether they are coming directly from high school, transferring from another university, or getting back to academics after some time off, studying in university may be different from previous experiences of students. The university should offer online Academic Supports and Services. There are many academic supports and services to help in your transition to your new university learning environment. Comprehensive university services should refer to: Female and male student talking, Support for Online Learning, TriAGe: Preparation for University Calculus, GOAL: Golden Hawks Guide to Accessible Learning, Academic Preparation Certificate, Student Success Services, First Year Coaching, Career Development Certificate.

▪ To deepen the role of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) with the goal of improving the quality of educational and research work. In addition, to emphasize the quality of the institution's processes and services primarily to students, but also to staff, faculty members and administrative staff to create a high-quality academic community.

- The objective of students' mobility is to contribute to establishing a European Education Area with a global outreach and to strengthen the link between education and research. The university of Thessaly should give the information/opportunity to the students with the aim to expose students to different views, knowledge, teaching, and research methods as well as work practices in their study field in the European and international context and develop their transversal skills such as communication skills, language skills, critical thinking, problem solving, inter-cultural skills and research skills.

- ECTS also makes it possible to blend different learning styles, such as university and work-based learning, within the same Program of study or through lifelong learning, so the University of Thessaly should implement full ECTS equivalence in courses to support student mobility between higher education institutions with which it has signed bilateral agreements.

- The Europass Diploma Supplement is designed to assist and support the recognition of academic qualifications. It is a document attached to the official higher education title of studies and provides additional information on the degree making it easier for employers or educational institutions to understand your qualification. It is issued by the University of Thessaly that also awarded the original diploma or degree. The Law stipulates that the Diploma Supplement: will be issued automatically and free of charge in Greek and English, it will be issued upon completion of the studies and the Diploma Supplement basic content will be uniform for all higher education institutions.

- The purpose of the general evaluation criteria of the Faculty is to specify the evaluation criteria and their connections to the grade given for the thesis. For students, the criteria indicate what types of things should be taken into consideration when writing the thesis. Common criteria ratified by the Faculty are perforce general in nature and can be specified further through detailed criteria approved by schools or subjects.

- Practical training is an essential part of a degree from a university of applied sciences. For the student, practical training is goal-oriented and diverse work that develops competence in relation to the professional field and working life. Practical training offers students opportunities to participate in recognizing and analysing the development needs of the field. Furthermore, helps develop a professional identity and for students to learn the key work tasks in one's own field, how to use various work tools and methods, how to evaluate one's own learning and development needs, how to combine theory and practice, general working-life skills, how to create working-life contacts and network. On the other hand, all students of all disciplines are entitled to financial support for practical training done abroad. The financial support for practical training granted by the faculty can be paid as a grant. The eligibility criteria for the grant include not receiving any other financial support (e.g., Erasmus, CIMO, etc.) and not having done practical training supported by the university before.

Principle 6: Ensuring the Competence and High Quality of the Teaching Staff of the New Undergraduate Study Programmes

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence, the level of knowledge and skills of the teaching staff of the academic units, and apply fair and transparent processes for their recruitment, training and further development.

> *The Institution should attend to the adequacy of the teaching staff of the academic unit, the appropriate staff-student ratio, the suitable categories of staff, the appropriate subject areas and specialisations, the fair and objective recruitment process, the high research performance, the training – development, the staff development policy (including participation in mobility schemes, conferences and educational leaves- as mandated by law).*
>
> *More specifically, 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 recognise 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.*

Relevant documentation

- *Procedures and criteria for teaching staff recruitment*
- *Regulations or employment contracts, and obligations of the teaching staff*
- *Policy for staff recruitment, support and development*
- *Performance of the teaching staff in scientific-research and teaching work, also based on internationally recognised systems of scientific evaluation (e.g., Google Scholar, Scopus, etc.)*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

In recruiting and employing new academic staff members, the Department follows the processes established by the Ministry of Education in a transparent manner. Policies for attracting highly educated academic personnel are similar to those found at other Greek universities.

Saying this, the department hired only one member from the open market. The vast majority of the teaching staff came from the amalgamation of TEI Lamias (1 member of staff) and TEI Larissas, transfers for the University of Thessalia (12 with one vacancy). Overall, they have 13 permanent members of staff, 12 Adjunct teaching staff, 3 members of ADIP staff and 3 members of the technical staff.

All faculty members are appropriately qualified to teach the programme modules. The professors and department appreciate the value of teaching and research. The EEAP saw a

substantial effort on the part of the teaching faculty to incorporate some research into undergraduate lectures.

There are regular course and staff evaluation reviews as well as peer review processes among its teaching members. Furthermore, the only options for teaching staff mobility are Erasmus and sabbatical breaks; such mechanisms should be in place and available for academic staff.

Analysis

Members of the teaching staff are reviewed by their students on a regular basis (every semester). It should be noted that only a very small proportion (approximately 10%) of students engage in these evaluations. Every semester, the established method of evaluating the teaching staff is carried out by requesting students to complete electronic questionnaires/surveys using an electronic system. This is totally adequate and uses in-house developed software. However, the issue is the low student participation, which renders the process's outcomes essentially ineffectual and the teacher assessment unachievable. EEAP realises that this issue is hard to correct, but the Department should boost efforts to encourage and motivate students to engage in the process, since this is directly related to teacher assessment and professional growth.

Conclusions

The department has a group of dedicated, high-quality faculty (DEP) and special teaching staff members (EDIP). They uphold very good standards in their teaching and research responsibilities; their research should come in line with AEI standards as the department transforms from TEI to AEI. The department's teaching faculty is selected and promoted in accordance with well-established methods stipulated by Greek legislation and followed by all Greek institutions. Although it is a new department, the procedures are followed and implemented sufficiently.

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Ensuring the competence and high quality of the teaching staff of the new undergraduate study programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Increase the number of students that participate in the evaluations

- Improve the research level of the academic staff to AEI level

- Enhance the incorporation of research into teaching

Principle 7: Learning Resources and Student Support of the New Undergraduate Programmes

Institutions should have adequate funding to meet the needs for the operation of the academic unit and the new study programme as well as the means to cover all their 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 resources, on a planned and long-term basis, to support learning and academic activity in general, in order to offer students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as, the necessary general and specific libraries and possibilities for access to electronic databases, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communication services, support and counselling 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 students, students with disabilities), in addition to 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. Students should be informed about all available services. In delivering support services, the role of support and administration staff is crucial and therefore this segment of staff needs to be qualified and have opportunities to develop its competences.

Relevant documentation

- *Detailed description of the infrastructure and services made available by the Institution to the academic unit to support learning and academic activity (human resources, infrastructure, services, etc.) and the corresponding specific commitment of the Institution to financially cover these infrastructure-services from state or other resources*
- *Administrative support staff of the new undergraduate programme (job descriptions, qualifications and responsibilities)*
- *Informative / promotional material given to students with reference to the available services*

Study Programme Compliance

<u>Findings</u>

The Department is located in Gaiopolis, just outside Larissa. The Department is split between two buildings. There are 2 amphitheatres, classrooms, 11 labs as well as offices for academic and technical staff. There is a planning committee that, in the beginning of each academic year, organizes the timetable, matching student numbers per course and classroom capacity.

Academic staff is in charge of pastoral care. Every student is allocated a tutor (Advisor professor), who will assist them throughout their studies, addressing any academic or personal concerns that may occur. There are meetings for advising students to select optional courses.

There are sporting facilities (Gym etc) as well as social activities (AI social group, Quantum social group etc). There is a student club (λέσχη) and student accommodation. Also, the

department has taken several steps to accommodate students and staff with mobility problems, providing easy access.

Analysis

Overall, the facilities at the Department are excellent. The lecture halls are well-designed and well-maintained. The structures are tidy and in good condition. Overall, it is a first-rate teaching and research environment.

The laboratories are very well-equipped. The equipment is modern and up to date. The software is frequently updated and maintained. Overall, the laboratories are well-managed and run efficiently for the benefit of the students.

Housing and eating facilities are adequate. The restaurant and the accommodation seem to be well managed. There is a WIFI network that allows the students to work everywhere on the campus.

The administration is run on modern computer systems, and it is effective and well organized. It offers adequate support to the academic staff and students.

The mobility of students is well coordinated. Students take advantage of the opportunities of ERASMUS+ to broaden their knowledge and expose themselves to new ideas and approaches. The Department has ensured that there are many agreements in place, increasing the choice of places to visit and topics to be studied.

Conclusion

A very well-organized Department with excellent planning strategies. Everything seems to be running smoothly.

Panel Judgement

Principle 7: Learning resources and student support of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

Principle 8: Collection, Analysis and Use of Information for the Organisation and Operation of New Undergraduate Programmes

The Institutions and their academic units 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.

Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on the operation of Institutions, academic units and study programmes feed data into the internal quality assurance system. The following data is of interest: key performance indicators for the student body profile, student progression, success and drop-out rates, student satisfaction with the programme, availability of learning resources and student support. The completion of the fields of National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA) should be correct and complete with the exception of the fields that concern graduates in which a null value is registered.

Relevant documentation

▪ *Report from the National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA) at the level of the Institution, the department and the new UGP*
▪ *Operation of an information management system for the collection of administrative data for the implementation of the programme (Students' Record)*
▪ *Other tools and procedures designed to collect data on the academic and administrative functions of the academic unit and the study programme*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The student information is handled by a centralized university system; the software used is a commercial one, unlike the standard system used by many Greek Universities.

MODIP computer systems (build in house) play central role in the information processing of the department: they interact and share information with (i) the central University system, (ii) Staff research analysis system, (iii) Course evaluation system, (iv) Advisory professor system, (v) Administration systems, as well as (vi) HAHE.

Students are given the opportunity to evaluate academic staff and courses via anonymous surveys. The student participation rates are rather low. Student satisfaction surveys are conducted regularly, with student participation 10-12%. The department uses its own web-based software for the submission of the student satisfaction surveys. There is a formal internal process for analysing and acting based on the evaluation. The EEAP panel understands that the matter is discussed at the General assembly of the Department.

It has demonstrated that the department can produce key performance indicators (KPIs) such as student retention/progression, academic success, research quality, etc. The Department's still in transition and the programme is delivered only in the last three years, indicators like career paths, completion rates etc will become available in a few years' time.

<u>Analysis</u>

The departmental information management is developed, and well organized.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The Department is fully compliant with Principle 8. The EEAP assessed that Departmental information management is developed, and well organized.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Collection, analysis and use of information for the organisation and operation of new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

Principle 9: Public Information Concerning the New Undergraduate Programmes

Institutions and academic units should publish information about their teaching and academic activities in a direct and readily accessible way. The relevant information should be up-to-date, clear and objective.

Information on the Institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units must provide information about their activities, including the new undergraduate programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the degrees awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students. Information is also provided, to the extent possible, on graduate employment perspectives.

Relevant documentation
- *Dedicated segment on the website of the department for the promotion of the new study programme*
- *Bilingual version of the website of the academic unit with complete, clear and objective information*
- *Provision for website maintenance and updating*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

On the official website of the department, we find appropriate information about the university, the academic unit, the curriculum (i.e., the structure, the way of attendance, the evaluation criteria, the Diploma Supplement, the biographies of the teaching staff and other useful information) both in Greek and in English (up-to-date, clear, and easily accessible).

All course outlines of the curriculum are visible and available on the official website of the institution in both Greek and English. In addition, there is information regarding access to the university both in Greek and English (up-to-date, clear, and easily accessible).

The academic unit Policy for Quality Assurance available online. The systematic monitoring of the overall work of the institution through the Quality Assurance Unit contributes to the achievement of the objectives concerning: the appropriateness of the structure and organization of the institution, the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications, the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching, the appropriateness of the qualifications of teaching staff, the promotion of the quality and quantity of research work, new ways of linking teaching and research, the level of demand for the acquired qualifications, the quality of teaching and research, the quality of teaching and research, the quality of teaching and research, and the quality and quantity of research.

Analysis

There was a constructive 2-day conversation with Professors, students, and other staff of the Department as well as with local officials.

The CV in English of 2 professors Mr. Nikolaos Liolios and Mr. Petros Lampsa are not visible on the official website of the department. The department should give online additional information about the nearest airport, sightseeing, metropolitan map of Larissa and accommodation in the surrounding area.

 Conclusions

The Department of Digital Systems ensures that they publish information about their teaching and academic activities in a direct and readily accessible way. The relevant information is up-to-date, clear and objective therefore regard to Principle 9 is Fully Compliant.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: Public information concerning the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Quality assurance involves the systematic review of educational provision to maintain and improve its quality, equity, and efficiency. It encompasses school self-evaluation, external evaluation (including inspection), the evaluation of teachers and school leaders, and student assessments. Developing strong quality assurance systems is crucial to support high-quality, inclusive education across a European Education Area. Furthermore, quality assurance is vital to create the conditions for facilitating student mobility across Europe, in particular through enhanced transparency and trust. Quality assurance also plays a key role in supporting the mutual recognition of upper secondary qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.

Principle 10: Periodic Internal Review of the New Study Programmes

Institutions and academic units should have in place an internal quality assurance system, for the audit and annual internal review of their new 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 the new study programmes aim at maintaining the level of educational provision and creating 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.

Relevant documentation

- *Procedure for the re-evaluation, redefinition and updating of the curriculum*
- *Procedure for mitigating weaknesses and upgrading the structure of the UGP and the learning process*
- *Feedback processes on strategy implementation and quality targeting of the new UGP and relevant decision-making processes (students, external stakeholders)*
- *Results of the annual internal evaluation of the study programme by the QAU and the relevant minutes*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The programme of study was designed and established in accordance with the relevant policies of the institution. The Internal Quality Assurance System encourages the accomplishment of a high-level of quality in the operation of University of Thessaly and the department of Digital Systems. It also aims to demonstrate the continuous improvement of its educational practices, as well as the high quality and efficiency of its services, in accordance with the international practices and the principles and guidelines of HAHE.

Analysis

The department has established an Internal Evaluation Committee (OMEA) composed of DEP/Student members and MODIP staff. Its function is to collect, analyse and present on an annual basis all data relating with the undergraduate program. As part of these policies, the institution's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) oversees the process of internal and external evaluation of the University's academic Departments and their programmes. The EEAP is

satisfied with the stated level of periodic review compliance in relation to the Department's devotion to Quality Assurance policies and standards, as required by HAHE's code of practice.

 Conclusions

There are numerous aspects of the Department of Digital Systems and its work that validate a very good practice. Department's commitment to the spirit and the processes of Quality Assurance is evident in all principles and aspects. Both faculty and staff are passionate about the self-assessment of the program and its courses and display a great team spirit. Both groups work very hard to support the program and the students both academically and personally.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Periodic internal review of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The department is strongly encouraged to continue to carry on internal quality assurance procedures for audit, annual internal review of programs of studies to achieve objectives through monitoring and revisions for continuous improvement.

- Develop effective means to increase the student participation in filling questionnaires so that to ensure statistically robust results

Principle 11: Regular External Evaluation and Accreditation of the New Undergraduate Programmes

The new undergraduate study programmes should regularly undergo evaluation by panels of external experts set by HAHE, aiming at accreditation. The results of the external evaluation and accreditation are used for the continuous improvement of the Institutions, academic units and study programmes. The term of validity of the accreditation is determined by HAHE.

HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure and implemented by a panel of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, based on the Reports submitted by the panels, 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 Standards, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees. Both academic units and institutions must consistently consider the conclusions and the recommendations submitted by the panels of experts for the continuous improvement of the programme.

Relevant documentation

▪ *Progress report on the results from the utilisation of the recommendations of the external evaluation of the Institution and of the IQAS Accreditation Report.*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

Having been established in 2019 the program has not yet undergone another external accreditation process. Therefore, the EEAP's judgement on Principle 11 is based on the thorough and well-presented documentation provided by the department.

Analysis

The EEAP finds that the current accreditation appears to follow the Greek law and has benefited from the effective interaction among various agencies and committees including OMEA, MODIP and HAHE. The OMEA has a continuous and positive collaboration with MODIP. All staff members have contributed to the review processes, and they appreciate the importance of both the professional accreditation and HAHE's peer review.

Conclusions

The Department should offer more regular and frequent networking events between students and employers (career/employment days). These opportunities would not only benefit students but also help employers to get acquainted with the Departmental curriculum and research activities. The Department should continue to consider the further improvement of the interaction opportunities between the students (and staff) with external bodies. External stakeholders should be viewed as informed partners in future external evaluations of the

program. The already established excellent relations with external bodies will provide a more extrovert profile for the department and the University overall.

Panel Judgement

Principle 11: Regular external evaluation and accreditation of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

▪ When and if the Greek law permits, appoint and activate an External Advisory Board of Alumni, Municipal and Industrial Stakeholders.

▪ Develop a formal mechanism for getting input from stakeholders and former graduates.

Principle 12: Monitoring the Transition from Previous Undergraduate Study Programmes to the New Ones

Institutions and academic units apply procedures for the transition from previously existing undergraduate study programmes to new ones, in order to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Standards.

Applies in cases where the department implements, in addition to the new UGPs, any pre-existing UGPs from departments of former Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) or from departments that were merged / renamed / abolished.

Institutions should implement procedures for the transition from former UGPs to new ones, in order to ensure their compliance with the requirements of the Standards. More specifically, the institution and the academic unit must have a) the necessary learning resources, b) appropriate teaching staff, c) structured curriculum (courses, ECTS, learning outcomes), d) study regulations, award of diploma and diploma supplement, and e) system of data collection and use, with particular reference to the data of the graduates of the pre-existing UGP. In this context, the Institutions and the academic units prepare a plan for the foreseen transition period of the existing UGP until its completion, the costs caused to the Institution by its operation as well as possible measures and proposals for its smooth delivery and termination. This planning includes data on the transition and subsequent progression of students in the respective new UGP of the academic unit, as well as the specific graduation forecast for students enrolled under the previous status.

Relevant documentation

▪ *The planning of the Institution for the foreseen transition period, the operating costs and the specific measures or proposals for the smooth implementation and completion of the programme*
▪ *The study regulations, template for the degree and the diploma supplement*
▪ *Name list of teaching staff, status, subject and the course they teach / examine*
▪ *Report of Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) on the progress of the transition and the degree of completion of the programme. In the case of UGP of a former Technological Educational Institution (TEI), the report must include a specific reference to how the internship was implemented*

Study Programme Compliance

<u>Findings</u>

The Department has developed a robust administration system for students during this transition period. The Department also offers the students the possibility to upgrade their studies and receive a Diploma from the Digital Systems Department. More specifically, 182 ECTS credits are transferable, and 60 more credits are required with a predefined set of modules across different semesters and years of study. Based on the discussions during the meeting the whole process and the sunset of the previous departments (TEI) runs without any problems and/or concerns.

<u>Analysis</u>

The current modus operandi for the sunset of the previous offered degree and graduating the remaining students enrolled in that programme seems to be robust and working efficiently.

Opportunities have been given to those students to continue their studies in the new undergraduate programme. This opportunity seems to have been communicated efficiently to the students and a small number of students continued to the new undergraduate programme.

Conclusions

The Department implemented and provided the required procedures to ensure a smooth graduation of those students enrolled in the previous programme which has been terminated.

Panel Judgement

Principle 12: Monitoring the transition from previous undergraduate study programmes to the new ones	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- The Department seems to be a healthy environment for both students and faculty to pursue their academic endeavours.
- There appears to exist a significant satisfaction among employers and other social partners regarding the quality and the training of the Department's students.
- The website of the Department is well designed and contains all the necessary information for students in an easy-to-access way.

II. Areas of Weakness

- Despite the fact that it has been evident that students are nurtured to value fairness and respect as part of an academic community some more effort is needed in creating clear policies as with respect to poor academic practice, collusion, plagiarism and cheating.
- The low number of students participating in course evaluation is a problem that has to be addressed.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Inform students of the importance of their course evaluations and incentivize them for an increased participation in the evaluation process. Those incentives could be i.e., "the student who completes the course evaluation will have lunch with the Chair/Dean/Rector" etc.
- It is often the case that web-sites are initially well built but the challenge is on frequent updates of their content to provide an up-to-date view on the Department. This is clearly a daunting task for a single academic and a supporting framework should be considered so that the website is updated in a regular manner
- Create a clear vision of the research profile and vision so that high calibre academics can be attracted during the expansion period.
- Improve the research level of the academic staff to AEI level and enhance the incorporation of research into teaching
- Introduce annual Faculty Activity Reports where each faculty member will present his/her current teaching, research and service activities and have a self-evaluation document for their own continuous improvement.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **2, 6, and 11.**

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: **None.**

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: **None.**

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname   **Signature**

1. **Dr Vasilis Friderikos (Chair)**
   King's College London, UK

2. **Professor Costas S. Iliopoulos**
   King's College London, UK

3. **Professor Sotirios Skevoulis**
   Pace University, USA

4. **Mr Michail Voskakis**
   Hellenic Mediterranean University, Greece