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

Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design
Institution: University of Thessaly

Date: 9 July 2022

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design** 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 the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design of the University of Thessaly comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, following Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. Prof. Stavros Avramidis (Chair)

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

2. Dr. Demetrios Gatziolis

USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon, USA

3. Prof. Filippos Tsikalas

University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

4. Dr. Rigas Giannopoulos

Geotechnical Chamber of Greece, Thessaloniki, Greece

5. Ms. Aphrodite Lioliou

Student of Agriculture, International Hellenic University, Thessaloniki, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

In response to the continued issues with the COVID pandemic and the general measures designed to limit the spread of the virus, the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) decided to implement the accreditation review process for the undergraduate study program of the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design (DFWSD) of the University of Thessaly (UoTh) via teleconferencing.

Scheduled briefings and meetings were conducted efficiently and within the allocated time frame using the ZOOM platform without technical difficulties. Replacing on-site visits with virtual meetings was a challenge for all participating parties. Lack of face-to-face contact and the physical presence of the panel members at the DFWSD premises partially inhibited an in-depth evaluation of the departmental infrastructure.

On Wednesday, June 29, 2022, a two-hour orientation meeting was held with the HAHE's Director-General Dr. Christina Besta, via ZOOM for all External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) members. Ms. Lioliou joined the meeting. Drs. Avramidis, Gatziolis, Giannopoulos, and Tsikalas were unable to attend. Dr. Besta presented the Quality Assurance standards for Quality Accreditation of Undergraduate Programmes and Accreditation Guidelines, addressed attendee questions, and conveyed to the EEAP the final teleconferencing timetable. All related files regarding the evaluation process and the ones prepared by the DFWSD were forwarded to the committee members by HAHE in advance.

The accreditation review commenced on Monday, July 4, 2022, at 17:00 Athens time. The EEAP members held a private meeting to discuss the relevant documents submitted by the DFWSD, assign action items, and consolidate discussion points for the e-visit. Prof. Avramidis assumed the task of EEAP Chair. After that, a teleconference was held with Prof. Ioannis Theodorakis, Vice-Rector and President of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP) of UoTh, and Prof. Ioannis Papadopoulos, Head of DFWSD. Prof. Theodorakis provided an overview of the University and the organizational changes that happened in the last three years due to the absorption of the former TEI departments of the region into its structure. After that, Prof. Papadopoulos presented a comprehensive overview of the Undergraduate Programme (UP) that included the history, academic profile, and the Department's current status, as well as its strengths and possible areas of concern. He further elaborated on the departmental profile, its policies on quality assurance, and other issues of the program. References focused on the curriculum's suitability and structure, laboratory equipment, Department infrastructures and their overall utilization, and the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications, in agreement with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

The teleconference meeting continued with seven members of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG/OMEA), three of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP), the President, and two of MODIP staff. Prof. Georgios Aspridis represented the QAU, and after that, a variety of issues were discussed, focusing mainly on the Undergraduate Programme's compliance with quality

accreditation standards, curriculum revisions, the students' progression, assignments, Theses, exam papers, and examinations material. The IEG/OMEA expressed their support for and commitment to implementing a comprehensive quality policy that will promote the academic profile and more focused programme orientation. After that, the EEAP members had a private debriefing teleconference to discuss their impressions further and prepare for the second day of the online review.

The teleconference continued on Tuesday, July 5, 2022, with ten faculty members who elaborated on their professional development opportunities in the DFWS, mobility opportunities and experiences, workload, and student evaluations. Other important topics discussed were their competence and adequacy in support of positive learning outcomes, the strategies used to promote synergies and bridge teaching and research processes, and their involvement in applied research. To this end, faculty were asked to briefly present their projects and research activities and define how they relate to the programme. Finally, the EEAP pondered potential weaknesses, with the faculty presenting their views. After this meeting, the EEAP met with a group of ten students of different years, but primarily third, of study and learned about their satisfaction levels from their experience with Department functions and institution facilities. The students commented on their input in the quality assurance procedure. Issues concerning students' life and welfare were also highlighted. The teleconference continued with an online tour of classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, and other facilities of the DFWS attended by various faculty and staff members who did a quick tour and hardware/software description and shared their experience with facility utilization, including the laboratories, library, students' accommodations and other features (e.g., studying room, computer room). A discussion with the previous faculty members followed the facilities tour and discussed the positives and shortcomings of the infrastructure in space and equipment. During the closing teleconference of the second day, the EEAP held a private debriefing meeting to reflect on the impressions of the teleconferences and make the necessary preparations for the fourth day of the online review.

On the third and last day, Wednesday, July 6, 2022, the teleconference meeting hosted ten key stakeholders from the private and the public sector, including social partners and employers. The EEAP discussed their contacts, links to the DFWS, and their experiences with graduates and departmental staff. After that, the EEAP members had a short private debriefing teleconference to discuss their impressions further and prepare for the following stages of the online review. The meetings continued with a teleconference with OMEA and MODIP representatives that clarified preliminary impressions and findings. The day and the online evaluation ended with a joint teleconference meeting with the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, the Head of the Department, OMEA, and MODIP representatives and staff. During this meeting, the EEAP proceeded with an informal presentation of key findings.

Although such programme evaluations via teleconferencing fall short of onsite experiences, the EEAP members felt that they had the opportunity to experience the vivid spirit of cooperation shown by the staff and their devotion and strong support to the University's Quality Assurance policy at all levels and commitment to enhancing the DFWS quality standards. The EEAP members are confident that the process of accreditation review via teleconference was objective, sufficient, efficient, and transparent, as all attendees had the opportunity to voice their views.

On Thursday 7, Friday 8, and Saturday, July 9, the EEAP members worked as a team on their assigned tasks regarding the Accreditation Report. The teamwork was accomplished via teleconferencing organized by the Chair.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This new undergraduate programme is five years long and has only completed its first three years. Two of these three years were completed during the COVID pandemic. Therefore, the EEAP conducted the evaluation and drew conclusions based on the experiences of the three-fifths of the programme already completed, the documents provided regarding its strategic planning and studies programme, and the discussions during the first three days of online meetings. Consequently, a few sub-sections referring to issues that require full completion of the programme that are part of the standard evaluations could not be commented upon by the EEAP.

III. New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation Profile

The Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design (DFWSD) at the University of Thessaly is a new *bona fide* Department within the existing academic State of affairs of Greece created in 2019 as part of the University of Thessaly system according to state decision 4589/2019. Its uniqueness stems from the fact that besides the traditional "forestry" related education that other departments offer in Greece, it allows students to pursue an in-depth specialization in wood science and product design. This makes it attractive and a unique source of highly educated persons highly sought by Greece's primary and secondary wood products industry.

The vision of the DFWSD, according to its 18/4-3-2020 (item 2) collective decision, is: "To make it an island of excellence within the country's higher education system, with a substantial contribution to research, knowledge production and education, as well as a fundamental link of dynamic interconnection with the value chain of forests and their infrastructure, the natural environment, the wood-furniture industry, and society, for sustainable development and social well-being." This vision is to be reached by following the thirteen basic principles that govern the operation of the DFWSD according to the 18/4-3-2020 (topic 2) decision collective decision, which is: Integrity, Respect, Cooperation, Academic freedom, Extroversion, Justice, Innovation, Excellence, Service and connection to society, Merit, Impartiality, Transparency and Democracy, and Preserving the prestige of the academic status.

The Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Affairs determine the number of incoming students yearly. The total number of registered undergraduate students for the academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 was 227 and 239, respectively. It is worth noting that for 2021-2022, the Department fully succeeded in covering all the offered positions that have been set by the Ministry (230 students). Based on the above data, it is estimated that admissions will fluctuate around the same levels in the coming years unless the Ministry accepts the proposal for an admissions cap of 80-100 students each academic year. About 42% of its new students declared DFWSD their first choice.

The undergraduate students of the DFWSD follow an innovative study programme lasting five years, which upon completion leads to a Forestry degree with two specializations or concentrations: (1) management of the natural environment and (2) wood sciences and product design. All students take a standard core programme during the first three years, split into two concentrations mentioned above in years four and five. The programme provides vertically integrated knowledge from the sustainable management of the natural environment to the utilization of its main products, emphasizing wood and its uses and product design. This hierarchical knowledge structure is an essential competitive advantage in a labour market that requires scientists with the best academic background to acquire valuable skills and comprehensive thinking. Furthermore, the programme provides its students, in addition to the compulsory courses, a wide variety of electives aimed at affording advanced knowledge in specific subjects of forestry and the natural environment in general, the utilization of wood,

furniture design, and other subjects such as administration, corporation, economy and the introduction of modern technology in companies and businesses.

In order to receive the degree, the student must successfully pass 52 courses, complete a graduating thesis, a 4-month mandatory internship and accumulate a total of 300 ECTS. The programme is currently delivered by a group of faculty and staff members comprised of ten Professors, three Associate Professors, three Assistant Professors, three teaching staff, three specialized technical staff, and three administration staff.

Classroom and laboratory education, as well as research and service to private and public sectors, are carried out under the auspices of nine institutionalized laboratories:

1. Wood Science and Technology
2. Technology and Quality Control of Furniture and Wood Structures
3. Product Design and Industrial Production
4. Forest Economy, Marketing, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship
5. Applied Information and Digital Technologies
6. Grazing and Management of Protected Areas
7. Wildlife Management
8. Forest Botany and Silviculture
9. Forest Roads and Works

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 placed 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

a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit

The existence of a Strategic Plan, an integrated Organizational Chart, and an Organizational Plan create, together with the Internal Regulations, a solid and effective shield for the academic autonomy, prestige, quality, and dynamic development of each University. In addition, strategic planning comes today to strengthen the cohesion and Organization of the university community so that it can safely go through the unstable period created by the constant institutional interventions and financial pressures of the State on the Universities.

More specifically, the DFWS is a new pilot academic unit in the Greek realm, created in 2019 according to the Greek legislation (N. 4589/2019). The Department's undergraduate students follow an innovative Undergraduate Study Program (USP) of a duration of 5 years, which upon completion, leads to the awarding of a degree in the specialty of Forester, Wood Scientist & Product Designer. USP provides vertically integrated knowledge from sustainable management of the natural environment to the utilization of forest primary products, with an emphasis on wood and its uses as well as the innovation and design of products. This hierarchical knowledge structure is a competitive advantage in the labour market that requires scientists with high academic backgrounds, valuable skills, and comprehensive thinking.

Conclusion: The University of Thessaly clearly presented to EEAP its academic profile and its orientation.

b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development

The University of Thessaly seeks to preserve and enrich the social good of knowledge, ensuring the right of access of the new generation to it, but at the same time, the possibility for the country to choose a new model of development which will systematically and effectively utilize knowledge for the benefit of society. To support the creative forces and the new generation, to transmit ideas and good practices, to produce new knowledge through research, to create networks and positive examples of the utilization of knowledge in the modern environment, composing a new web that connects it with the needs of the country and public policies. The greatest challenge of the University of Thessaly for the period 2022-2025 is to complete the image of one of the largest Universities in the country and to improve its international position (Protocol Number 168/21-10-2021 of Rector's Council Decision).

The implementation of the vision for the development of the University requires the strategy and goal-setting to take into account a series of steps affecting educational and research functions, including its academic units, and are analysed according to PEST and SWOT assessments provided to the EEAP:

A. Political component:

1. Continuous change of the educational institutional framework: The continuous change of the educational policy by the administration of each Ministry of Education brings instability to the educational system, with direct effects on the strategic planning of the Institutions.

2. Public funding: Institutions' dependence on public funding for Higher Education is high, and often its distribution is based on irrational criteria, which leads to difficulties.
3. Number of undergraduate students: The policy of the Ministry in recent years with a continuous increase in the number of undergraduate students in Higher Education Institutes, ignoring rational criteria (i.e., infrastructure, teacher/student ratio, funding according to the number of students, etc.), creates problems in operation.

B. Economic component

1. Economic Recession: The economic recession observed in the country for many years affects decision-making both at the macro-economic level (e.g., funding of Higher Education) as well as at the microeconomic level (e.g., family budget, which has an impact on students' choice of Faculty of study).
2. Labour market: The connection of studies with the labour market is a strong motivation for choosing the field of education of the students and a dominant goal of the Institutions. Achieving this connection and in the parallel achievement of economic growth to level up the employability in Greece will be a strong career prospect compared to overseas markets and will keep graduates in the country.

C. Social component

1. Obtaining a Higher Education degree is considered an essential tool for success in the modern world and a key component of social advancement in the Greek culture. Private colleges are also awarded higher education degrees, followed by equivalent professional degrees, which may increase citizens' interest in these colleges. This fact constitutes a threat to public Higher Education Institutions.
2. Professional qualifications: Being increasingly recognized by the big business may reduce interest in post-graduate studies.

D. Technological component

1. Existence of alternatives: The quality of online education resources is improving rapidly, especially in a post-COVID era, and is frequently free. This prompts many high school graduates to skip further education to pursue online learning, dramatically affecting Greece and Europe's traditional higher education sector. Institutions should adapt in the best possible way to the new conditions and improve the provided online services and education solutions to attract students.
2. Extensive use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to improve the educational process: The development of ICT is vital for Europe's competitiveness in today's increasingly digital global economy. The use of new technologies supports the educational process for lectures and informative material in targeted fields of interest of the students/stakeholders.
3. New and emerging technologies: There is a rapid development of new technologies and technological applications for industrial and other users such as Industry 4.0, 3D printing,

augmented reality technologies VR, Internet of Things (IoT), CAD systems -CAM, remote sensing technologies using drones, sensors, etc. Academic units should adapt to their operation to achieve the best result in the learning process.

The SWOT Analysis of the University of Thessaly is as follows:

Strengths

- The significant size and spatial development in five cities make it the largest University in Central Greece
- The scope of the cognitive objects, with an orientation in applied sciences
- Certification in 18 study programmes
- The growing number of high-quality scientific personnel
- The solid academic identity and distinct physiognomy through the long-term evolution of the scientific work of the teaching and research staff
- The ability to provide high-level education and research from programmes and studies that are/have been implemented to a large extent
- The rise in the international rankings
- Good research performance with a positive outlook in the bibliometric databases of the published work and the reports of the teaching and research staff
- Synergies and collaborations with other institutions in Greece and abroad in research, teaching, and interconnection with the labour market
- Code of Ethics and establishment of a Protection Code for "Harassment and Intimidation" issues

Opportunities

- Utilization of the geomorphological position of the Thessalian plain and surrounding mountains with a remarkable comparative advantage
- Harmonization of the University's operation towards the goals for sustainable development – efforts to mitigate its environmental footprint, systems implementation for the effective resource utilization
- Use of European and national resource opportunities to strengthen research, teaching, and infrastructure
- Expansion of international collaborations with institutions and attracting valuable scientific potential
- Utilization of funding for the reopening of the Liaison Office

Weaknesses

- Lack of modern, flexible, and interoperable administrative Organization - need for reform
- Inadequate number of teachers - disproportionality of students/teachers (common characteristic in Greek Higher Education Institutes)
- Disproportionate percentage between men and women

- Inadequacy of student housing infrastructure-need for student accommodation and sports infrastructure
- Lack of infrastructure of classrooms, laboratories, administration areas, offices
- Lack of graduates' monitoring structure
- The increase in the number of students exceeding n+2 year of study after the transition/absorption of former Technological Educational Institutes
- Low graduation rates
- Shortage of specialized administrative staff in central administration services
- Limited cooperation and synergies with local society

Threats

- The growing intervention of the State in the operation of Higher Educational Institutes
- The decreasing public funding when the student population is increasing
- The continuous institutional changes in the legislative framework within which the Organization is required to operate economically - socially - technologically provoke difficulties in acting independently
- Need for a modern institutional framework
- The loss of valuable scientific personnel
- The acceleration of the pace of changes at the scientific, economic, technological, and social levels forms new demands regarding the students' education and scientific research
- The development of digital technology that changed and affected higher education worldwide/effects on conducting research
- Notable competition to attract students

Following the above analyses, the University's strategy aims the development of the following sectors:

Educational Capacity

The training of young scientists, the cultivation of skills and erudition, the promotion of human-ecumenical values , and the progress of society are highlighted by university education's high-level teaching work. The specializations offered to meet both the needs of modern Greek and global society, as well as the expectations of its students for studies of high scientific value, combined with very good prospects for professional development.

Research

Basic and applied scientific research of international scope is carried out by all the Departments and the scientific staff of the University, which is utilized at the international, national, regional, and local levels through various publications, conferences, and projects (applied research, developmental interventions, etc.).

Financing

The increase in overall funding, the rationalization of funding allocation, and the contribution of new funding sources are primary conditions for achieving the University's goals. The dramatic cuts in the already meagre (pre-crisis) state subsidy make it an imperative priority to take care of the financial survival of the University by limiting expenses and securing additional financial resources.

Administrative Support

The administration's goal is to create an attractive and friendly environment for life, work, and performance, with stable working status and decent wages. The administrative, technical, and other supporting staff can contribute to upgrading the University's services with consistency, responsibility, continuous improvement of efficiency, and close cooperation with teaching staff.

Students / Graduates

All the development strategies of the institution are student-oriented. The University focuses on the creative integration of students into the academic community, on their responsible participation in its actions so that they contribute positively, and on establishing an environment that encourages learning and research.

Infrastructure

The creation of an academic environment with adequate infrastructure favours work supports teaching and research, and enhances the creativity of all its human resources and the competitive potential of the University. The management aims to seek funding through a) strengthening and utilizing the available infrastructure and b) submitting a proposal to NSRF funds 2014-2020 for the promotion of the building program with priority in the implementation of all mature housing projects of the Department.

Green University

Environmental upgrade of all facilities, with modern studies to create a favourable microclimate, save energy and water, scoping to create an attractive workplace.

Conclusion: The University's goals and targets for its academic development were clearly presented to the EAAP through the strategic analysis provided.

c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme

Forests have long played a critical role in our economy and society, as they contribute to creating jobs and are a source of food, medicine, materials, clean water, and many other goods. Despite this imperative, European forests are under increasing pressure, partly due to natural processes and increased human activity and pressures.

More specifically, based on the EU strategy for forests by 2030, the importance of forests and the developments of science around the protection, management, exploitation, restoration of forests and the entire value chain that concerns them highlights the feasibility of operating the new Department based on the needs of the economy at a national and international level, the following apply:

- Supporting the socio-economic functions of forests for prosperous rural areas and enhancing the forest bioeconomy within the limits of sustainability. Forests are a natural ally for adapting to climate change, secure livelihoods in rural areas and beyond, and support a sustainable forest bioeconomy, ensuring the availability of timber, ensuring that the amount of timber we use remains within sustainability limits
- Promoting sustainable forest bioeconomy for long-life wood products
- Ensuring the sustainable use of wood-based resources for bioenergy. Wood-based bioenergy is currently the primary source of renewable energy,
- Promotion of the non-timber-based forest bioeconomy, including ecotourism.
- Protecting, restoring, and expanding EU forests to combat climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and ensure resilient and multifunctional forest ecosystems
- A strong research and innovation agenda to improve our knowledge of forests
- Developing skills and empowering citizens for a sustainable forest bioeconomy

In Greece, the forestry sector employs about 0.1% of the country's total workforce. More specifically, in Full Employment Units, in 2016, the forestry sector in Greece listed 20,000 units, of which 3,000 in primary forest production, 11,000 in the wood industry, and 6,000 in the paper industry (Eurostat, 2016). In addition, according to the Ministry of the Environment and Energy data, the Forest Service employs approximately 3,500 people, while the total annual revenue is approximately €20,000,000. Also, according to the Ministry, the annual wood production is approximately 6.5 million m³. Important sectors of the Greek economy are directly linked to the development and exploitation of the forest environment. Indicatively and regarding the use of wood, the essential branches of the Construction industry are related to Wood, Furniture, Frames, Wood Packaging, and Parquet, and branches related to securing energy, such as the Biomass/Pellets sector. At the same time, critical professional groups are connected with the exploitation of the forest (e.g., forest workers, resin collectors), which significantly supports the Greek countryside by preventing it from desertification.

Based on the above, essential sectors emerge for the diversification of Greek forestry, the wood industry, and in general, the entire value chain of Greek forests, in order to adapt to the environmental and socio-economic challenges internationally but also to the directions - requirements set by the European forestry strategy as well as the scientific and technological developments in the forestry sector, as well as the requirements to adopt a new production model for the country based on sustainable development and the rise of social welfare. Some of the many sub-points that education and research should focus on are the following:

- New and innovative forestry and value-added products while enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of forest industries, bioenergy, and the broader green economy and markets are both European and national policy objectives.

- Development and assurance of the supply chain of raw materials with available quantities of timber from the Greek forests and facilitating the increase of sustainable timber traffic.
- Networking, synergies, and win-win relationships with other economic and scientific branches e.g., in the energy sector, tourism, or the bioeconomy sector more broadly, local communities and self-government, etc.

The undergraduate study program of the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design of the University of Thessaly fully covers the expected modern academic and professional qualifications required in order to make full use of the diverse potential of the country's forests and woodlands. The graduated foresters - wood scientists & designers of the Department, will practice their professional activities in the following areas:

- In the administration, management, exploitation, protection, utilization, and development of forests, forest lands in general, and other lands governed by forestry legislation.
- In hunting, hunting economy, zoos and parks, wildlife sanctuaries, habitat improvement, fish farming, and fishing in mountainous and semi-mountainous waters, except in cases related to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of wild animals and fish.
- In the administration, management, exploitation, and exploitation of mountainous and semi-mountainous pastures and grasslands.
- In forest transport facilities, handling, processing, quality control, and general marketing of forest and forest products.
- In activities related to protecting, utilizing, and maintaining the balance of the natural environment and restoring damages caused to it.
- In any soil and land improvement works of forestry interest and the arrangement of mountain basins of streams and torrential streams, including snow management.
- In the establishment and operation of nurseries for the production of any kind of plant material that has forestry or ornamental value, in the general marketing of this material, as well as in the production and marketing of seeds and planting material of forestry and ornamental species.
- In construction projects serving agricultural and forestry purposes, in horticultural projects for the management, development, and aesthetic upgrading of greenery inside and outside the cities, as well as in the horticultural restoration of slopes (roads, railway lines), natural formations (rivers, streams) and irrigation networks of these.
- In forest holdings, industries of production, processing, and utilization of forest products, companies, banks, programs, and in natural or legal persons related to the forest and its products or the natural environment.
- In the production, standardization, sub-packaging, marketing, and distribution of pesticides, fertilizers, forest machinery, tools and utensils, forestry interest, as well as the use of pesticides to combat insects in forest species of trees and shrubs.
- In managing and protecting national forests, wetlands, and any other protected terrestrial natural ecosystem, as well as in the tourist or other use of peri-urban and aesthetic forests.
- In producing, standardizing, and marketing aromatic plants and their products and forest fruits (wild strawberries, blackberries).
- In the preparation, implementation, and control of development studies and programs of prefectures, regions, and valuable areas of forests or forest areas, in the preparation of

studies for investments of forest nature, such as reforestation, industries of production, processing, and exploitation of forest products, forest nurseries, as well as in checking and evaluating them.

- In preparing forest maps, photo interpretation, and remote sensing studies, using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to characterize, manage, and utilize areas of forest interest for scientific, administrative, judicial, cadastral, or other areas purposes.
- In education (secondary – tertiary), research, technological development, quality control, and standardization organizations related to terrestrial natural ecosystems and products produced from forests, in local and regional development companies, cadastre organizations, and companies, as well as in local government organizations of all levels.

Study Programme of the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design

The academic map of Greece does not include any Department precisely the same as the DFWS. The Department has important particularities which arise from its physiognomy

“Its students follow an innovative 5-year study program which, upon completion, leads to the awarding of a single and indivisible master's degree in the specialty of Forester, Wood Scientist & Product Designer. This program provides vertically integrated knowledge from the sustainable management of the natural environment to the exploitation of its main products, emphasizing wood and its uses and product design. It is precisely this level of knowledge that we believe is an essential competitive advantage in a job market that requires graduates with the best academic background, acquisition of valuable skills, and integrated thinking” [<https://fwsd.uth.gr/fysiognwmia/>]

The Department offers two concentrations/specializations of studies starting from the 7th semester (Management of Natural Environment and Wood Sciences & Design of products). The pre-graduate program of studies offers the DFWS students, besides the mandatory courses, a great variety of optional courses, aiming to provide contemporary knowledge in specialized fields of the natural environment, wood utilization, furniture, and other wood-based products design, management, administration, economics and the introduction of contemporary technology in businesses and organizations, which finds an immediate implementation in the labour market. Simultaneously, the Department offers postgraduate and doctoral studies programs.

More specifically, the first six semesters include six compulsory courses per semester, common to all students. In each of the two concentrations/specializations, four compulsory courses are included for the 7th, 8th, and 3 for the 9th semester, while in the 9th and 10th semesters, the students carry out their thesis and their two-month compulsory internship. In addition, the compulsory internship takes place in both the 6th and 8th semesters (one month each time). Each of the two directions includes five elective courses for 7th, 8th & 9th semesters. During the semesters of his specialization, the student must attend five courses in the 7th and 9th semesters and six in the 8th semester. The student has the possibility of his/her elective courses coming either from the direction he has declared or from the other direction, and he has the right to change direction during his/her studies up to the 8th semester.

In order to obtain the degree from the DFWS, it is mandatory to prepare a Research Thesis under the guidance of a Supervising Professor, a member of the Department's academic staff. The thesis provides 30 ECTS to the total 300 required for the degree.

On the other hand, the internship is an integral part of Higher Education, as it is a way of connecting theory with practice and actively contributes both to the better utilization of the knowledge and skills acquired by students during their studies and to the more accessible and more beneficial integration of graduates into the labour market. The Internship Program aims to consolidate the cooperation between the Academic Departments and the Services and the business environment through students' employment in institutions, organizations, and businesses.

Conclusion: The DFWS fully complies with the feasibility of operations based on its orientation and the scheduled study programme.

d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department

The FWSD has an infrastructure and building facilities (3 halls, 20 classrooms, and laboratories, 45 offices) of more than 4.000 m², which are developed at over 10.000m². The laboratories and research equipment are state-of-the-art, assuring the complete pioneering knowledge transfer of its scientific fields. Furthermore, the students acquire related training in the context of their practical training in the private and public sectors.

The Department's teaching staff possesses a high-level research profile, holding significant publications in scientific journals and conferences and participating in and supervising national and international competitive research projects.

The Department is located in Karditsa, a city close enough to major Greek cities, in the geographic centre of Greece. The student population is over 2.000 active students. Due to the long experience of the students' hospitality, the city of Karditsa has developed infrastructure for student life, i.e., an extensive cycling network and free municipal bicycle mobility.

Karditsa's campus offers dormitories, with two autonomous buildings, facilitating 102 students of University, a student restaurant, library and information centre, an office for administrative support, internship office, laboratory, and research equipment (unique in some cases in the whole Balkan area). The DFWSD comprises nine different laboratories.

The sixteen faculty members of the Department have a good research profile, with notable publications in journals and conferences and supervision and participation in dozens of national and internationally competitive research programmes. In order to fill all the required organizational positions for the DFWSD to operate exclusively with permanent faculty members, it is planned to fill another seven positions shortly since the Department is in its 3rd year of its lifecycle.

As per FWSD Department's funding possibilities by public and private resources, it has managed to attract funding, from external sources beyond the regular budget of the Faculty of Science, through national, European, and international funding programmes and the

provision of research and other services to businesses in the wood and furniture industries with a budget of over €1,000,000 during 2019 - 2021. The annual funding from ELKE for its operational costs amounts to €9,000-12,000 annually.

Conclusion: The sustainability of the DFWSO is deemed satisfactory.

e. The structure of studies

The undergraduate study programme comprises a wide range of classes which in detail can be found at:

https://fwsd.uth.gr/wpcontent/uploads/2022/06/PROGRAMMA_SPOUDON_ENG.pdf

It was assessed as quite innovative. However, local community stakeholders emphasized the need to offer deep expertise in the needs of the market and modern businesses. In this regard, recording their opinion should be considered in the curriculum's next revision.

Conclusion: The DFWSO offers a wide range of classes that may be further fine-tuned or even become more specialized according to today's industry needs.

f. The number of admitted students

According to the official data of the Hellenic Ministry of Education, the admitted students of the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences and Design during the last three academic years of its operation were 227, 239 and 240 in 2019-2022, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, respectively.

It should be noted that during the academic year 2021-2022, the first year the Minimum Entry Base was set into force by the Ministry of Education, the DFWSO succeeded in filling out all offered positions. For the new academic year 2022-2023, it is estimated that around 230 students will be admitted.

Admitted students via qualifying exams

University graduates have the chance to enter the DFWSO without national-scale entry exams. Graduates must submit an application and pertinent documents to the Secretariat in early November. The DFWSO welcomed six students during its first academic year 2019-2020, three students from 2020-2021, and six from 2021-2022.

Conclusion: The number of admitted students is deemed satisfactory.

g. Postgraduate studies

FWSD Department runs two MSc programme studies:

- MSc in Advanced Design, Technology & Management of Wooden Products offers three (3) specializations: a) Design of Products, b) Technology and Constructions, and c) Management and Marketing

It was founded according to the Official Government Gazette 2903/19.7.2018 τ'Β. It has operated since the academic year 2015-2016 with its initial title "Advanced Methods of Wood Products Construction." It is a unique post-graduate program that operates in Greek Higher Education, specializing in the fields of wood-based construction, innovative materials, contemporary design methods, CAD-CAM systems, intelligent systems, marketing, accounting, management, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the wood and furniture sectors, gaining the impressions and recognition from its first years of operation.

- MSc in Multifunctional Management of Natural Ecosystems and Bio-economy

It was founded according to the Government Gazette 3685/3.9.2020 τ'Β.

Based on the developments and requirements of science, market, as well as the National Strategy for Forests (Y.A. 170195/758, Government Gazette 5351/B/28-11-2018), the subjects covered by this MSc study programme are internationally recognized and refer to a) Multifunctional Management of Forest Ecosystems, and b) Bioeconomy.

Conclusion: The number and quality of offered post-graduate studies are deemed satisfactory.

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	X
Substantially compliant	

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	
Substantially compliant	X
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

- As stated above in section (e), the local community stakeholders' opinion should be taken into serious account in the next revision of the study programme.

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

The Department has established a quality assurance policy that fully complies with this Principle. The University has established an entity known as the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) to define review processes clearly, oversee improvement efforts, and calculate Key Performance Indicators. The MODIP monitors and enforces the Quality Assurance Policy DFWSO members (OMEA). The DFWSO has set specific, measurable, and timely goals for its undergraduate study programme. The OMEA is in line with MODIP for the improvement of the study programme. Overall, the EEAP noted the academic unit's well-structured quality

assurance policy. The Department is fully committed to implementing a quality policy that promotes the academic profile and orientation of the DFWS undergraduate programme.

The study programme has been created entirely from scratch following the new EU 2030 forest resources strategic targets. The outcome of this process is a study programme that has become more relevant to contemporary forestry principles, wood science, and relevant products and technological innovations, provides more scientific depth, a greater experiential learning experience, and allows the students to spend more educational time on the topics covered. The current programme is deemed appropriate and of the quality expected at the national and international levels.

The Department has set goals, monitored and measured by set parameters and key performance indicators, which are suitably publicized to the broader stakeholders. The linkage between education and research is a vital component of the programme. It gives the students an excellent chance to create a strong bond with the many opportunities they may pursue after graduation. Furthermore, the students and future graduates acquire experience(s) to help them find jobs and a smooth transition into the private sector.

The programme fully complies up to this point in the delivery and by design in its entirety with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education regarding learning outcomes and qualifications. It has taken valuable initiatives regarding the quality and effectiveness of the teaching/learning process.

The academic staff is highly qualified, enthusiastic, and motivated. Research output is adequate, especially considering the location of the Department and its distance from other relative units within the DUTh system. The students overwhelmingly stated that the teaching staff are thoroughly qualified and knowledgeable in their expertise and provide substantial and unwavering support.

In general, the Department demonstrated through the proposal of academic accreditation of the undergraduate programme, through the presentations made by the groups, and through the content available on its website that it has a vigorous process in place that allows fine-tuning as needed to ensure that it meets the set quality goals.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Maintain the high-quality level of programme monitoring and find ways to encourage students and student representatives for active involvement.
- Keep in close contact with the alumni, stakeholders, and social partners. Implement regular meetings, possibly biannual, where the studies programme is analysed, and possibly minor changes are introduced.
- The EEAP noted that Department alumni and private and public sector stakeholders are eager to support the programme. The Department should continue cultivating and further expanding this trend by involving them in guest lecturing whenever possible.
- Modern trends in forestry, such as decarbonization, big data analytics, entrepreneurship, conservation, climate change, land use, urban forestry, etc., should become more pronounced in future programme updates.
- Current and past Internal Evaluation Reports by OMEA should be published on the Department's website, thus promoting transparency and assisting with future improvements.

The EEAP was impressed by the thoroughness and effectiveness of the procedures and processes to ensure quality assurance. It can only recommend that they continue and evolve per the standards specified by HAHE/MODIP/OMEA.

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

The DFWSO undergraduate study programme curriculum is well-articulated and comprehensive. The Department offers a 5-year programme of undergraduate studies that includes two specializations/concentrations. For the first three years, students follow a shared study, and during the last two years, they elect specialization to be taken in the final two years. The current undergraduate programme has been in effect from 2019-2020. The ECTS system is applied across the curriculum, and one ECTS corresponds to 25 hours of student involvement. The strengths of the DFWSO undergraduate programme lie on the spectrum of fields covered in teaching and research, as well as on the integration of fieldwork and practical training. Links between research and teaching in the undergraduate program do exist. These will become more obvious as the programme matures, and the Department should maintain all efforts to further strengthen these links by regularly updating the course contents and providing additional experiential learning and critical thinking skills to students. Students expressed their desire and need for additional field training within the framework of the offered courses.

The description of a few of the learning outcomes within the course frameworks (syllabi) need some further homogenization as they divert in the amount of information conveyed (e.g., KM451/ΔΠΕ891/ΔΠΥ921 versus ΞΣΥ711/ΔΠΕ941/KM431: just indicative of courses with short/extensive text range descriptions on the learning outcomes).

The EEAP found that a targeted comparison of the design and curriculum of the DFWSO undergraduate study programme with high-quality/renowned European and international programmes and universities is lacking in the provided documentation and that such comparison would have been beneficial and would strengthen even more the gravity of the undergraduate study programme.

Overall, students actively participate in the pedagogical process through laboratory and hands-on exercises in several courses that provide valuable lessons to be used in the workplace. Summertime practicums in the forest and public or private organizations and enterprises add to the total experience. The workload seems quite aligned with other European universities' equivalent workloads. Lastly, and beyond courses, the faculty makes a genuine effort to offer additional research exposure to students participating in running research projects.

The high number of admitted students with diverse, often non-overlapping backgrounds curtails the student progress potential and, indirectly, the quality of the study programme. The EEAP foresees that potentially the high number of admitted students will end up in a few years in a high number of enrolled students past the 5th year of study and that this would tax the existing teaching and laboratory facilities and infrastructure.

Following efforts by the University and the DFWSO during the last years, a substantially comprehensive undergraduate programme has been introduced during the academic year 2019-2020. Although the programme is still in its maturation phase, the EEAP notes that the Department maintains a monitoring committee responsible for the undergraduate programme (Επιτροπή Προγράμματος Σπουδών) that in collaboration with the other formal authorities oversee the implementation, progress and potential future needs for flexible

adjustment/modification in the undergraduate study programme. The EEAP was informed that stakeholders were somewhat also consulted when the programme was constructed; however, the procedure of future study programme revisions should also foresee a more formal and comprehensive consultation with stakeholders, external experts, students, and future graduates. An advisory/consultation panel comprised of alumni and external stakeholders may be considered.

All stakeholders expressed their positive views on the programmes' graduate knowledge and acquired abilities, stating the need for a more in-depth specialization. They commented on the dedication of faculty and staff to their success and attested that the programme meets the expectations set by the Geotechnical Chamber of Greece.

The DFWSD undergraduate programme provides the opportunity to attain certified pedagogics education/sufficiency (Πιστοποιητικό Παιδαγωγικής και Διδακτικής Κατάρτισης) that leads to adequate professional rights for the DFWDS graduates in teaching in the secondary education system in Greece. In this context, the DFWDS should lobby and enhance all efforts for its graduates to retain all current teaching professional rights.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Although established links between research and teaching in the undergraduate programme will become more evident as the programme matures, the DFWSD should maintain all efforts to further strengthen these links by regularly updating the course contents and providing an additional experiential learning experience to students.
- The DFWSD should make efforts to increase fieldwork training within the framework of the offered courses.
- The DFWSD should make efforts towards fully standardized descriptions in all courses of the learning outcomes within the course frameworks (syllabi).

- The DFWSD undergraduate study programme should offer direct, quantitative comparisons to similar curricula in renowned European and global programmes and universities to meet self-imposed requirements for excellence and enhance its reputation and status.
- The number of incoming students should be reduced.
- The stakeholders and external experts of the public and private sectors should be formally consulted for revisions and future planning of the study programme. We propose the development of an external advisory board to engage with the Department.

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

The DFWS D undergraduate programme is organised in a positive, student-centered learning environment that allows for variability in modes of delivery and offers flexible learning paths. Students receive a well-rounded education centered around their preferred domain of study and are offered a suite of electives to broaden their educational experience. Domain classes usually have a laboratory/field experience, which is essential for experiential learning. Continuous and diligent effort is needed to integrate and evolve different ways to improve attendance levels. The EEAP observed (following also discussions with the students) that besides the written exams and laboratory assignments, other student assessment methods (e.g., πρόοδος partial performance/mid-term examinations, homework assignments, group projects) are also utilised in the curriculum and objectively weighted towards the final course grade. The DFWS D should maintain the above assessment methods and integrate them explicitly and entirely within the study programme. Most course frameworks (syllabi) describe the contents and currently utilised assessment criteria methods in detail.

The EEAP noted the moderate to low participation of students in the course evaluations despite the efforts of the Department. The EEAP acknowledges that the low percentage is biased as participation in actively enrolled students is considerably higher. The EEAP expects

the active student involvement in course evaluations and through their representatives will increase as soon as students note changes induced by this process.

Although there is an open-door policy of faculty toward students, the latter are not fully aware of the essential role and services offered by the Academic Advisor and how they can be benefited from such a resource.

The EEAP notes the efforts implemented by the DFWSU to tackle the imposed teaching and research challenges during the current Covid-19 pandemic. The DFWSU has handled the situation very well. Supported by University infrastructure and resources, made noteworthy progress in digital engagements and expanded the availability of e-learning material. This resulting dowry can be developed further towards supporting the curriculum's theoretical, laboratory, and fieldwork components.

The undergraduate study programme also offers students a Digital Skills Certificate; the EEAP finds this very positive. There is an office dedicated to supporting students, responding to their concerns, and providing mental health support.

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

- Maintain and even increase the number of courses that use enriched student assessment methods using multiple examination measurements with class expectations and grading communicated clearly in the curriculum.
- The DFWSU should implement strategies to increase students' participation and confidence in the course evaluations.
- The DFWSU should find ways to strengthen the participation and involvement of students and student representatives in the internal evaluation and continuous improvement of the study programme.
- The role and responsibilities of the Academic Advisor should be further promoted to the students and adapted to the department's specific needs. The students should be further encouraged to contact frequently the Academic Advisor. A formal assessment of Academic Advisors by students should be considered.

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

The EEAP acknowledges the hard work of the faculty to create an inclusive environment for the students. Faculty and staff are dedicated to the program's success, demonstrated throughout the review and confirmed by the stakeholders. Faculty's compassion, open-door policy, and one-on-one mentoring have been critical to students' success. We want to acknowledge the faculty's progress and dedication to the program's success, and we

recommend that they continue their mission to inspire, educate and train a diverse and inclusive next-generation workforce.

Incoming students are primarily admitted via state examinations, and the DFWDS has no control over the number of admitted undergraduate students. Once on campus, the Department offers incoming student orientation sessions that include information on the Department, faculty, staff, curriculum, expectations, and an overview of facilities, resources, and services available to students. The students' progression is appropriately monitored. The Department website provides an overview of the programme, specializations, step-by-step instructions on admissions, expectations for graduation, and information about the facilities.

A proper Thesis Handbook has been prepared by DFWS and is available, clearly defining the quality requirements for the implementation of the mandatory undergraduate thesis (Πτυχιακή Εργασία). The final examination committee achieves quality control for the thesis.

The student mobility and participation in professional development opportunities at the DFWS are low as expected since only three years of the new programme have matured. Only a small number of students take advantage of the ERASMUS+ programme, although there is a well-documented and transparent ECTS equivalence between DFWS and foreign institutions. The EEAP expects that through the further maturation of the study programme, more students will seek ERASMUS+ programme opportunities abroad, which was clearly expressed during discussions with students.

One of the strengths of the DFWS is that the attained knowledge is integrated into the mandatory fieldwork/summer practical training that is offered as individual courses with corresponding ECTS workload; several other multi-day field courses are part of the curriculum. The students widely accept fieldwork training and students have requested additional fieldwork training.

Stakeholders pointed out that the program needs to include additional practical specialization, soft skills training, and greater experiential learning experiences. Improvements can be made to engage with local stakeholders. Professional development activities are critical for student success, and the webpage and direct engagement opportunities can serve as a conduit for those.

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

- Student global engagement and participation in professional development activities need to be actively encouraged and opportunities provided, even if the ERASMUS+ programme provides limited funding. The person(s) responsible for student mobility and the teaching staff, should find additional and alternative ways (e.g., dedicated lectures, active website promotion etc.) to inform students about the benefits of participating in the ERASMUS+ network programme.
- The undergraduate study programme needs to include more soft skills training and greater experiential learning experiences. Increase research experience through projects/grants/contracts and expose students to new technologies. This is critical moving forward for the long-term success and relevance of the programme. Practical training to private and public stakeholders is an excellent way to achieve this.
- The Greek State should increase the funds and the compensation for the practical training.
- Create a stakeholder advisory committee that engages with the Department, staff, and students.
- Increase research expenditures through projects/grants/contracts and expose students to new technologies. This is critical moving forward for the long-term success and relevance of the study programme.
- Recognize and highlight faculty and student successes and maintain/create press releases on the Department's website.

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

The present composition of faculty members was primarily established with the inception of the Department a few years ago. More than 80% of the faculty had corresponding appointments to the prior Technical Educational Institutes (TEI) and transferred to the current positions. Post Department inception appointments and hiring processes are too few to serve as the basis for an objective evaluation of associated procedures.

All faculty members carry qualifying doctoral degrees. The hiring process is reportedly based on applicant merit and credentials and is administered by the Department. These are nominal provisions; the Panel did not attempt to, nor was interested in corroboration as such an effort would be well outside its main objectives. The State controls the number of faculty. The Department does not have hiring autonomy. Hiring opportunities for permanent or tenure-track positions are infrequent. The efforts of the faculty are aided by temporary hires, known as '407 plan' appointments. Most, but not all, of the 407 appointees also carry a doctoral degree.

Of the 16 faculty members, 12 (75%) originated from a former local TEI Department specializing in Wood Technology. The subject matter for the remaining four faculty is more closely affiliated with 'traditional' forestry. As is also the case in the other four forestry University Departments in the country, and contrary to norms observed in central and northern Europe and North America, there is no formal distribution of tasks and obligations for each faculty member. There is no explicit guidance or suggestions on how time and efforts should be distributed between teaching and research.

The mean, Scopus-based h-index of faculty is 6.19, and the standard deviation is 3.98. The mean is well-below index values observed in forestry-affiliated Departments and Colleges internationally and roughly equivalent to the h-index of a senior graduate student. The mean Google Scholar h-index is substantially higher. Note that Google Scholar also indexes publication references outside formal scientific journals. The magnitude of the difference between the two versions of the h-index indicates that most faculty members have been primarily pursuing applied research instead of fundamental one.

The faculty/student ratio is dangerously low. In each of the three academic years since the inception of the Department, the number of admitted undergraduate students exceeded 200. By the end of the 5th year, with a full range of classes and laboratory engagement active, the number of enrolled students will approach or exceed 1,000. Faculty are formally obliged to teach 8 hours per week. Given shortages in teaching personnel and their desire for excellence, faculty spend way more time in student instruction and training.

Representatives of public authorities, industry specialists, and entrepreneurs have enthusiastically endorsed the contributions made by the Department to the national economy and its positive influence on the local communities. It has been repeatedly mentioned that Department faculty members are clear leaders in their respective specializations and are confident the Department will continue to provide invaluable services to them.

The imbalance in the number of faculty in each of the two main concentration/specialization areas of the Department, 12 in Wood Technology and Design vs. 4 in 'traditional' forestry, can be misleading. It could be deemed concerning if it remained unchanged in the long run. Informal evaluations of student specialization intentions suggest balanced preferences. If these indications materialize, we expect to see an equal balance in the number of faculty supporting the two specializations. Hence, the onus would be on the Department, the University, and the Ministry to determine if such a balance is desirable and/or be pursued. Desirable in the sense of alignment to the preferences of prospective undergraduate students, the national needs of forestry and wood technology sectors, and competitiveness against or synergies with fellow Departments in other Universities, both domestically and internationally. The EEAP noted that the Department's focus on applied research, strong affiliations with industries, and legacy in wood science and technology excellence had been met with an overwhelming endorsement by student applicants. The endorsement is proven by the fact that the total number of students admitted by the Department in the last academic year was higher than the collective admissions by the other four forestry-affiliated University Departments.

The low mean h-index value can also be misleading. The current value is strongly influenced by scientific outputs generated prior to the inception of the Department. Most of the faculty were then operating in an environment focused on applied research, communication of existing knowledge and skills, and much less on generating and disseminating new knowledge in scientific papers. Besides, an increasing amount of scientific output requires student support. As students transition to senior Programme years, it is expected to support faculty-led research efforts. Anticipated increases in the number of graduate students will also enhance research capacities.

Considering the linear increase in teaching loads as more students are admitted every year, and no graduations are expected before another two years, participation in sabbaticals or alternative professional development activities is unrealistic for the faculty.

The faculty's skills, collaborative spirit, industry affiliations, and leadership sets a strong foundation for future excellence. The fact that the Department and undergraduate Programme is new and evolving offers unique and potentially exciting opportunities. To ensure that the faculty maintain a leading role in the forestry sector while Programme semester workloads increase until a steady state is reached in two years, the Department must be supported with adequate resources. To date, the faculty demonstrated that they have an ambitious vision for the future and are well prepared to meet challenges. In an era of rapid technological breakthroughs in wood technology and continuous innovations in forest resource assessment and management techniques, faculty members should continuously evaluate their undergraduate Programme and make prompt adjustments where needed. Government and educational institutions should support those efforts in tangible ways.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The Ministry should immediately approve additional tenure-track positions for the Department. The temporary, 407-type appointments should not become permanent practice because, with rare exceptions, they are incompatible with the support of research

initiatives and Programmes. Sixteen (16) faculty members would be grossly inadequate when classes for all ten semesters must be offered.

- The Department should establish and publish formal procedures and communications explicating the hiring process, faculty performance reports and recognitions, promotion, and tenure requirements. Elements of these needs are already in place but are either not comprehensive or obscure. Internationally, promotions as a function of seniority are incompatible with modern university expectations. The government should facilitate these activities.
- Encourage and support regular professional development activities of the faculty.
- Encourage and support more science publications to ensure a balance between basic and applied research. Faculty *curricula vitae* enhanced with research papers of sufficient quantity and quality promote the status of the Department and facilitate access to substantial research grants that, in turn, support internal Department development and operations.
- Consider annual teaching and research awards for excellence based on transparent and objective criteria.

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

The EEAP noted the good quality of an adequate number of facilities dedicated to supporting the study program and its students. Teaching equipment in the classrooms and laboratories is of good variety and quality. Auxiliary facilities (i.e., EDUROAM, VPN, IT Systems and learning platforms, academic publishing houses' databases, etc.) are also available and accessible to students when needed. Students are well informed of the different support services available and confidently expressed that they have good access to them.

The DFWSO comprises three buildings (A, B, and C). Apart from 3 lecture rooms, the campus hosts the library of the Department, nine institutionalized laboratories, and the teaching staff offices, a feature that favours concentration and communication between students and their teachers daily. Under the curation of the Department, the Research Institute of wood-furniture and wooden packaging is operating.

During the virtual tour and the discussions with faculty, teaching staff, and students, it was revealed that laboratories satisfactorily cover the learning needs.

The Department administrative staff is housed in a standalone building within the campus, close to student residents. It appears to be sufficiently staffed, well equipped and organized in order to offer support to students and staff in an efficient manner.

All lecture rooms and labs are equipped with Internet and audio-visual facilities.

The EEAP observed a lack of emergency response procedures/training and emergency drill for the buildings where the DFWS is placed, a liability that concerns the entire university.

The Department and the University institutionally provide counselling/advocating/ complaint and objection management services to students, whether newcomers or in an advanced year of study. To help students make progress with their studies and reduce drop-out rates from the study programs, teachers adopted the "open-door" approach.

No meeting was arranged with the administrative staff. In line with the sentiments of the teaching staff, interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the efficiency of the Secretariat in robust terms.

The Department's website is bilingual (Greek/English), well structured, user-friendly, and up-to-date, allowing students to be informed about all available services and regulations. Upon welcoming first-year students, the Department organizes an informative day on all supporting services and procedures available.

In conclusion, the Panel has found that the DFWS fully complies with the Principle.

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

- The Department, working closely with the University authorities, should maintain the generous levels of infrastructure available and ensure the continuous upkeep of the facilities, which all the students and staff very much enjoy.
- The DFWSD/UoTh should implement an emergency response procedure and frequent emergency drills.
- The Department should consider the enhancement of extracurricular activities wherever possible.

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

The departmental statistics reside on information management systems involved in the gathering, analysing, and utilizing data and information relative to the Undergraduate Program of Study, including:

- The University wide-based MODIP system
- The Departmental information management system
- The ERASMUS program management system
- The Career Office management system

This information network is utilized to serve the academic and administrative needs of the Department as well as to be used for Program Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement, for which the Departmental Unit for Quality Assurance (OMEA) and the University Unit for Quality Assurance (MODIP) are responsible. OMEA, the internal evaluation group, analyses the student data and uses this information to improve the performance of students and all teaching personnel. OMEA gathers and inputs data and information in the departmental information system on an ongoing basis about a variety of categories relevant to the Program of Study, such as:

- The instructional and research activities of the faculty members
- The departmental teaching support facilities

- The administrative staff support
- Data on course evaluations by the students
- Student profiles
- Student academic progress
- Based on personal discussions with Faculty and the President of the Department, information from stakeholders.

Easy access to the departmental system is provided to the faculty, students, and staff, all of whom are involved in the submission of data, which eventually is quantified in the form of KPIs that can be easily interpreted and used for measurement and assessment purposes.

Students are presented with the opportunity to evaluate the faculty and support personnel via anonymous surveys. Still, the EEAP found that student participation in course evaluations is low, about 12% for registered students.

Employability and career paths of graduates are not available because no graduates exist from the current New Undergraduate Study Programme of the DFWSD.

In conclusion, the Panel has found that the FWSD fully complies with the Principle.

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

- Encourage students to complete surveys for all semester classes, if possible. A possible solution would be to link the completion of the survey to the release of class marks.
- The university alumni/career office is encouraged to prepare methodology and procedures to collect employment data and provide info on career paths and employability of graduates.

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

All essential information regarding the Department, undergraduate studies, announcements, activities, conferences/symposia, and contact information is available in separate tabs both in Greek and English and easily accessible on the website.

The undergraduate studies information is unambiguously laid out and detailed, describing the tripartite: knowledge, skills, and abilities.

In a separate section, information about the teaching faculty members and staff with their contact details, a brief description of research interests, a link to their CV and the current courses each staff member teaches is also available.

There is a dedicated segment on the Department website's front page for the promotion of the new study program, aiming to promote its attractiveness, according to:

- An explanatory text by the administration entitled "15 reasons for choosing the department of forestry, wood sciences and design" describes the Undergraduate Programme, the infrastructure of the Department, the Postgraduate / Doctoral / Postdoctoral Studies, the research, and the life in Karditsa city briefly
- Video with the curation of a career counsellor entitled: "Why should I study in the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences & Design at the University of Thessaly" with a duration of 5:30 minutes (English subtitles offered)

- Video with the curation of the state television channel (ET3) entitled: "Why should I study in the Department of Forestry, Wood Sciences & Design at the University of Thessaly" with a duration of 24:00 minutes (narration in Greek)

Also available is the program of studies, the current year's study guide, which is downloadable, information on registration for the course with a link to the electronic registration webpage, a brief description of the assistance offered by academic advisors together with a form that can be filled in and submitted.

The Department also has a strong presence on popular social media, i.e., Facebook and Instagram.

It should be noted that some sections are available only in Greek (e.g. section news and announcements).

Connection with the following services is easily made through relevant links from the front page of the website, facilitating the students' needs with direct access to:

- Virtual private network (VPN)
- E-classes
- Eydoxos portal (distribution management of scientific publications and books)
- E-secretariat
- Academic webmail
- Erasmus exchange programme
- Academic id
- Student care
- Counselling and psychological support of students
- Accessibility issues
- Library and information centre
- Student advocate support

It is worth noting that EEAP advised the Department that the virtual presence of the Library should become more prevalent, and the advice was immediately implemented by updating a relevant post the next day (<https://fwsd.uth.gr/?s=βιβλιοθήκη&lang=el>).

No information exists on the graduates of the Department since its maturity lies in the third (3rd) year of the study program, a current deficiency that will surely be rectified in 2024.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

The website could deliver relevant information with environmental, social and economic responsibility contributions addressing local stakeholders and the general public since students contribute to the urban design (the Municipality appreciated their designs, and they decorated in mass production different spots of the city of Karditsa).

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

The Department reviews aspects of its undergraduate study Programme regularly. It requests feedback from the student body via an electronic questionnaire circulated during each semester's 9th or 10th week. The content and format of the questionnaire are based on a template established by the Quality Assurance Unit of the University. The questionnaire asks the students to provide quantitative, on a 1 to 5 scale, and qualitative (text descriptions) evaluations of teaching staff performance. The quantitative indicators are compiled by the Quality Assurance Unit and are returned to the Department. This process enables comparisons of student opinions through time, thereby supporting an assessment of efficacy, appreciation, and impact of established teaching and learning practices and policies.

The Department receives feedback from the public and private sector, usually through verbal exchanges with faculty. Both types of information, from the students and external, are discussed by the faculty annually and influence appropriate remediation or adjustment

activities. Feedback is communicated to the students annually. Ensuring transparency is appreciated by the students and encourages future participation in questionnaires.

Owing primarily to impediments emerging from the pandemic onset, student participation in the questionnaires is very low, consistently below 20 percent. This raises questions about whether the information received is representative of the student population. It was suggested that the switch from a paper questionnaire circulated in classrooms and laboratories to electronic forms has touched upon deeply rooted concerns about privacy. Participation in these surveys is expected to return and hopefully exceed levels observed before the pandemic and the use of electronic means.

The EEAP acknowledges the need for standardization in the template that is used by the Quality Assurance Unit of the University of Thessaly. For certain types of information, the template supports a comprehensive assessment of the learning environment fostered by the Department. However, strict standardization, the same across University Department with very different subject matters and student populations, may inhibit the collection of technical information of importance to the functions of the Department.

In collaboration with the University Quality Assurance Unit and externally oriented efforts towards the public sector and industry, the Department collects and considers feedback related to its operations. Associated processes are critical to a Department aspiring to offer a modern, student-oriented, tertiary learning and research environment reflective of the needs and expectations of the region and the country.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- In collaboration with the University Quality Assurance Unit, the Department should explore opportunities for customized questionnaires circulated to students and ways to disseminate the feedback received. It is recommended that compiled summaries, figures,

and graphs documenting elements of the information received are posted to a portal accessible by both the student body and external audiences.

- Consider mechanisms targeting increased participation in the student surveys. Those efforts must be persistent; beliefs and attitudes often change only gradually.
- Continue to reach out to the public sector and industry for information conducive to assessing expectations and trends and take measures to accommodate them.
- In collaboration with the Department, the University Quality Assurance Unit should consider an in-depth, multivariate statistical analysis of all information embedded in the questionnaires to potentially identify previously unknown associations and synergies between the students, the faculty, and the Programme.

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

Owing to the Programme's recency and the Department's establishment, Principle 11 cannot be properly and thoroughly evaluated; however, HAHE instructed the EEAP to provide an evaluation/consideration for the principle. Given the provided material and documentation submitted by the DFWD and the experiences drawn during the current accreditation, the EEAP expects that the DFWD is in a position to endure a renewed external evaluation in the near future successfully. Throughout the evaluation process, EEAP found out that the faculty of DFWD were fully aware of the importance of the external review and its contribution to improvement. At the same time, all stakeholders of the academic unit were actively engaged in the external review and appeared eager to involve in the entailed follow-up actions. In this aspect, a detailed action plan and a concrete roadmap for implementing the recommendations made in the current report should be constructed and reinforced by the DFWD. We expect that the DFWD will properly comply with the above.

The EEAP evaluates the principle as "fully compliant," given the above considerations.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

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

The DFWS is a newly founded Department with a novel curriculum. It is independent of Programme studies that existed in the old TEI system.

In response to EEAP's questions:

- As seen from the presentation, the Department has the appropriate, modern laboratory equipment that meets current needs.
- Permanent staff and visiting professors meet the needs imposed by the Programme.
- The Programme meets ECTS unit standards established by European standards for an accredited, university-level Department of Forestry.

Successful completion of the Department's Programme grants the Environmental Forester degree, in alignment with skills and qualifications detailed in PD 344/2000. The knowledge

base and specialization acquired by the graduate meet the demands of the Forester profession. However, the Programme could be more flexible, with in-depth, rather than often superficial, course and laboratory work.

The Department supports students of the former Technological University Department of Forestry and Natural Environment Management and the Department of Wood and Furniture Design and Technology to attend a supplemental credit programme that grants them a university-level degree. However, no student has successfully attended and passed the fifteen to nineteen additional courses required by the supplemental programme.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Provide more time to former TEI students to complete the extra coursework to be awarded an AEI degree.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- This is the only University Department whose graduates can work, supervise, and manage production units, design new products, and start new businesses in the primary and secondary wood products sector. That is primarily accomplished through specialization provided by a unique and well-developed curriculum of European calibre in the last two years of the study programme. The EAAP is impressed by that.
- Plans to disseminate the 'learn before study' campaign are commendable and strongly supported by the EAAP.
- Strong ties of the Department with the stakeholders in the private and public sectors. Strong presence within and appreciation by the local community.
- Readiness to cooperate, self-reflect, and improve.
- Excellent cooperation between the Department and MODIP.
- Collaborative spirit and support among faculty and staff.

II. Areas of Weakness

- Student advising beyond the first year is *ad hoc*
- Incomplete communication and dissemination of information process
- Undeveloped career placement services due to the short life of the Department
- The absence of data about former students' professional careers is due to the Department's short life. The DFWSD should institute an office that will track graduates' professional careers.
- Modern information management theory and technology (spatial analysis, utilization of information in cloud environment) is virtually absent from the current curriculum. Graduates without fluency in at least one high-level programming language would seriously hinder competitiveness.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Increase student participation in the governance and internal evaluation process. Make students the internal stakeholders of the academic experience.
- Consider mechanisms targeting increased participation in the student surveys. Those efforts must be persistent; beliefs and attitudes often change only gradually.
- The Department may wish to clarify how course evaluation results are processed by the Department and should regularly publicize aggregate data regarding student evaluations.
- In collaboration with the University Quality Assurance Unit, the Department should explore opportunities for customized questionnaires circulated to students and ways to disseminate the feedback received. It is recommended that compiled summaries, figures, and graphs documenting elements of the information received are posted to a portal accessible by both the student body and external audiences.

- Relations with key stakeholders and alumni should be advanced, possibly forming an advisory board that meets annually.
- Continue to reach out to the public sector and industry for information conducive to assessing expectations and trends and take measures to accommodate them.
- The DFWSO should institute an office that will provide career placement to graduates and monitor their professional careers.
- The website could deliver relevant information with environmental, social, and economic responsibility contributions addressing local stakeholders and the general public.
- Notwithstanding legislative constraints, the Department is encouraged to continue its proactive pursuit of improvement and identify areas of weakness in teaching and research that will further enhance its value. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate a series of concrete recommendations into its overall operations, above and beyond the next round of external evaluation/accreditation.
- Reduce the number of courses and exams. Enhance comprehensiveness of the remaining ones. Introduce modern electronic infrastructure in all aspects of the Programme, on campus, in University forests, and in practical training.
- Keep up the excellent work by providing high-quality Wood Sciences and Design specialization.
- The DFWSO should strive to substantially improve research dissemination in scientific outlets (peer-reviewed journals). Currently, its presence is anaemic.
- Provide more time to former TEI students to complete the extra coursework to be awarded an AEI degree.
- The DFWSO should make efforts to increase fieldwork training within the framework of the offered courses.
- The stakeholders and external experts of the public and private sectors should be formally consulted for revisions and future planning of the study programme. We propose the development of an external advisory board to engage with the Department.
- The DFWSO should make efforts towards fully standardized descriptions in all courses of the learning outcomes within the course frameworks (syllabi).
- The DFWSO undergraduate study programme should offer direct, quantitative comparisons to similar curricula in renowned European and global programmes and universities to meet self-imposed requirements for excellence and enhance its reputation and status.
- Although established links between research and teaching in the undergraduate programme will become more evident as the programme matures, the DFWSO should maintain all efforts to further strengthen these links by regularly updating the course contents and providing an additional experiential learning experience to students.
- The number of incoming students should be reduced.

Addressed to the University of Thessaly

- The University should provide the funds to fill the Design position as soon as possible.
- The University alumni/career office is encouraged to prepare methodology and procedures to collect employment data and provide info on career paths and employability of graduates.

- The Department, working closely with the University authorities, should maintain the generous levels of infrastructure available and ensure the continuous upkeep of the facilities, which all the students and staff very much enjoy.
- The DFWSD/UoTh should implement an emergency response procedure and frequent emergency drills.

Addressed to the State Authorities

- Reduce the number of incoming students to increase the quality of the study programme further.
- Increase student funding for practical training.
- Increase funding to attract and support external/guest lecturers.
- This program's "Wood Sciences & Design" specialization is unique and very important for Greece, for it is designed to produce highly qualified persons that will support the national primary and secondary wood products industry. The State (and University) should enhance its support and continue providing the resources needed for its successful delivery and growth.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **3 and 12.**

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

The Principles where a 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. Prof. Stavros Avramidis (Chair)**
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