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

Animal Science

Institution: University of Thessaly

Date: 20 May 2023



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



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation of **Animal Science** 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 **Animal Science** of the **University of Thessaly** comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

- 1. Professor Constantin Vamvakas (Chair)**
f. Academic Counsellor, University of Ghent, Belgium

- 2. Professor Ioannis Tzanetakis**
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, U.S.A.

- 3. Professor Emeritus Ioannis Vlahos**
Hellenic Mediterranean University, Heraklion, Greece

- 4. Mr Dimitrios Sotiriadis**
Geotechnical Chamber of Greece, Serres, Greece

- 5. Mr Konstantinos Ioannou**
Student of Animal Science, Agricultural University of Athens, Athens, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) initiated the accreditation review process for the undergraduate program (UGP) of the Department of Animal Sciences (DAS) of the University of Thessaly (UTh). The External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel (EEAP) arrived in Larissa on May 14, 2023. Meetings and visits took place on Monday, May 15th, and Tuesday, May 16th. The EEAP left Larissa on Wednesday, May 17th, and the drafting of the Accreditation report and subsequent meetings of the EEAP took place via teleconference. Scheduled briefings and meetings were conducted efficiently without any technical difficulties.

Before the meetings, the EEAP received the Proposal for Accreditation and other relevant materials. Prior to commencing the meetings with DAS, the members of the EEAP convened to discuss the strategy and the issues to consider during the discussions. They also assigned different tasks to each EEAP member. Additional information was obtained from the DAS staff on-site and later during the report drafting phase.

The accreditation review began on May 15th, as per the schedule prepared by HAEE. The EEAP first met with the Vice-Rector, Prof. Ioannis Theodorakis, and the Department Head, Prof. Dimitrios Kantas. The Vice Rector also serves as the President of the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). The EEAP was provided with a PowerPoint presentation on the history and academic profile of UTh. The Department Head delivered a presentation about DAS profile, its policy on quality assurance, and other matters related to the study program. In the subsequent meeting, the EEAP met with representatives of the DAS Quality Assurance Policy (MODIP), including Associate Prof. Eleni Ntovolou, Head of the Internal Evaluation Unit (OMEA), Associate Prof. Eleni Malissiova, Assistant Prof. Andreas Foskolos (OMEA members), Mrs. Elena Tsironi, MODIP Director, Prof. Nikolaos Tsiropoulos, and Prof. Ioannis Papadopoulos (MODIP members), as well as Mrs. Eytihia Delizisi and Mr. Alexandros Rouvolis (MODIP staff). The EEAP discussed with these representatives the compliance of the undergraduate program (UGP) with the standards for quality accreditation, as well as other issues concerning student assignments, theses, and examination materials.

In the following meeting, the EEAP engaged with the teaching staff members, including Prof. Vasiliki Spyrou, Prof. Panagiotis Plageras, Assistant Prof. Themistoklis Giannoulis, Assistant Prof. Natalia Vasiliou, Assistant Prof. Dimitrios Galamatis, Lecturer Pavlos Tzimas, Lecturer Vasiliki Peristeri, and Mrs. Stamatia Hounta, the Laboratory Teaching Personnel (EDIP). The main points of discussion encompassed professional development opportunities, mobility, workload, student evaluations, the competence and adequacy of the teaching staff to ensure learning outcomes, the link between teaching and research, teaching staff's involvement in applied research, projects, and research activities directly related to the program, as well as potential areas of weakness.

On May 16th, the EEAP initiated its meetings with ten students, including one student from the 1st semester, two from the 4th, three from the 6th, and four students from the 8th. The discussions primarily focused on their satisfaction with the study experience and the facilities of the DAS/UTh, their involvement in quality assurance, their interactions with the teaching personnel, and any issues related to student life and welfare. This meeting was followed by a visit to the classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, computer rooms, and the farm. During the visit, the EEAP also had the opportunity to engage with students from the 2nd semester attending Biochemistry. The EEAP was guided during the visit by Mr. Dimitrios Tsirkas

(Secretary in charge), Ms. Maria Alexandraki (EDIP), Irini Alexiou (EDIP), Lecturer Pavlos Tzimas, and Assistant Prof. Andreas Foskolos.

The next meeting involved seven employers and social partners: Mr. Vasilios Tremmas (Dairy farmer), Mr. Evangelos Panagiotou (Farmers' Cooperative of Thessaly "THESgi"), Mr. George Christou (Secretary of the "New Federation of Pig Producers Associations of Greece"), Ms. Catherina Rokkou (Municipality of Elassona) in person, and Ms. M. Tzala (Hellenic Dairies), Ms. Kiriaki Nanou (Papageorgiou Food Service), and Dr. Anouar Belaid (R&D Department KEMIN-Barcelona, Spain) via teleconference. All emphasized the excellent collaboration with DAS and the mutually beneficial relationship with its members.

The last two meetings involved representatives from OMEA and MODIP, the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, and the Department President. During these meetings, the members of the EEAP provided a brief debriefing to reflect on the discussions' impressions and key findings. From May 17th to 20th, the EEAP worked on the accreditation report via teleconference. All parties involved conducted themselves professionally, and the process was smooth, effective, and efficient.

Important note: The five-year undergraduate program has only completed its first four years, with two of those occurring during the COVID pandemic. Therefore, the EEAP conducted the evaluation and drew conclusions based on the experiences of the program already completed, the documents provided regarding its strategic planning and study programs, and the discussions held during the meetings.

III. New Undergraduate Study Program in operation Profile

DAS is a constituent part of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at UTh. It plays a crucial role in primary agricultural production and is categorized internationally under the UNESCO education classification (ISCED 2013) as Field 08 Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary, specifically Subfield 081 Agriculture, and further described in subclass 0811 Crop and livestock production.

Established in 2019, DAS aims to contribute to the education and research in Animal Production Science in Greece, with a particular focus on the Thessaly region. It is located within the Gaiopolis complex of the UTh in Larissa.

The scientific field of the Department focuses on the development and application of modern methods in animal physiology, nutrition, genetic improvement, and reproduction, as well as the production of high-quality animal-derived food. DAS provides students with the opportunity to acquire and apply knowledge related to animal breeding, environmental considerations, feed technology, biotechnology applications, integrated animal production systems management, and the production of quality animal and livestock products, while also considering animal welfare requirements.

The vision of the DAS aligns with the general principles of the UTh, which include:

- a) Developing as one of the most productive institutions in the country and gaining international recognition by improving the quality indicators of all administrative units, teaching, research, and social work.
- b) Training young scientists, fostering skills and erudition, promoting human-ecumenical values, and contributing to the progress of society through high-level university education.
- c) Conducting research based on international trends, enhancing existing research capabilities, attracting new research potential, improving performance in production, achieving international recognition for research projects, and increasing research funding.

The number of incoming students each year is determined by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Since its establishment, the DAS has registered a total of 258 undergraduate students over the course of four years (31 for the academic year 2022-2023). Additionally, there are 11 PhD candidates.

The DAS utilizes the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and adheres to the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The program follows a student-centred education system and offers a degree spanning ten semesters (five years), requiring a total of 300 ECTS.

The DAS currently offers a post-graduate program: Animal Production and Environmental Management.

At present, the Department consists of 13 Faculty members (DEP), 3 EDIP members, 2 special technical laboratory personnel (ETEP), and 2 administrative staff members. Additionally, there are 10 external teaching members. The student-to-professor ratio stands at 24:1.

The DAS possesses four classrooms with a combined seating capacity of 400. There are ten registered research laboratories, six of which are currently in use. DAS has various facilities within the Gaiopolis area, including a library, an amphitheatre, student residence halls, a restaurant, a gym, and a 1200-acre farm. The farm comprises modern livestock units (for cows, pigs, sheep, and poultry) and several facilities dedicated to teaching and research.

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

I. Findings

- Members of the EEAP have actively engaged in accreditation reviews, during which institutions have presented comprehensive analyses of their strategic plans. These analyses encompass detailed SWOT analyses, as well as institutional feasibility and sustainability studies, specifically focused on the establishment and operation of new departments. Typically, strategic plans encompass goals that are supported by objectives, action items, inputs,

outputs, and outcomes, alongside a well-defined timetable for implementation. However, the EEAP has noticed that the Weaknesses and Threats section of the SWOT analysis tends to be rather generic. It is possible that all universities in Greece could end up using the same points.

- The strategic plan of UTh, evaluated through documents B2 and B3, incorporates metrics that pertain to the plan's input. However, it falls short in terms of measurable outputs and outcomes, thereby allowing for subjective interpretations of success.
- The strategic plan of DAS (as evaluated through documents B1, B4, and B5) adopts a similar approach to that of UTh, encompassing the aforementioned challenges. DAS effectively outlines the scientific domain of the department.
- DAS communicates its academic profile, mission, and vision.
- UTh and DAS have clearly defined goals.
- The EEAP determined that the 4-year business plan and feasibility/sustainability analyses is acceptable.
- DAS being in its 8th semester of existence, the EEAP encountered challenges in fully assessing the structure of the studies. Nevertheless, DAS supplied data that were utilized in the current evaluation.
- The DAS curriculum of the first eight semesters has been well received by the students. However, there is a limitation on the number of elective courses.
- DAS has implemented a strategy to regulate the number of admitted students with the aim of ensuring a high-quality education. However, it is important to note that this strategy is subject to the directives set by the Ministry.
- Through discussions with stakeholders, it became evident that there is a substantial demand for scientists/technologists with the profile offered by DAS.
- DAS currently lacks a functional graduate program. The number of doctoral students aligns appropriately with the department's current size.
- DAS is actively pursuing extroversion, and it is evident to the EEAP that they are highly committed to this concept.

II. Analysis

- it is crucial to ensure that the SWOT analysis includes elements that are tailored to UTh and not being generic.
- The EEAP has observed that the feasibility and sustainability study (Δ in B2) is inadequate as it solely focuses on the present state without considering the future requirements for the DAS UGP. Furthermore, the EEAP would have anticipated a more thorough examination of the department's positioning within the provided text.

- There is a need for a concerted effort to ensure that the DAS academic profile, mission, and vision is conveyed clearly and comprehensibly to prospective students and stakeholders.
- There is a need for additional focus on enhancing the quality of publications. It is challenging to comprehend how the average number of publications is projected to increase from 22 to 35 by 2023, while the references will only experience a growth of less than 20%. Such an increase is expected as a natural progression resulting from the maturation of previously published articles.
- The EEAP was taken aback by the considerable number of subjects that cannot be adequately covered due to a scarcity of specialized DAS faculty available to teach those subjects (OMEA presentation slide 42).
- DAS faculty members should prioritize research endeavours to access funding opportunities that would contribute to the publication of peer-reviewed articles. This can be assessed by comparing the performance of DAS with its counterpart at the Agricultural University of Athens.
- In terms of scientific output, DAS can be characterized as a two-tier department. Some faculty members demonstrate high activity and research output, as indicated by their h-index and citation counts. On the other hand, there are others who contribute minimally to both areas.
- UTh and DAS have clearly defined goals; however, they are lacking in terms of appropriate action items and clear, detailed metrics that would enable the assessment of DAS's success.
- DAS is actively pursuing extroversion; however, the progress has been understandably hindered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, once the situation improves, this focus on extroversion will undoubtedly contribute to attracting research funding.
- The limited number of elective courses to be offered in the future reduces the flexibility of the DAS UGP.
- The final criterion for principle 1 is complex, as the mission of a TEI does not perfectly align with that of a University. In the past, TEI faculty may not have been required to publish or actively seek external funding, which are fundamental aspects of a successful university faculty career.

III. Conclusions

- DAS is a newly established department with faculty that is enthusiastic about teaching, serving, and conducting research. However, there are evident shortcomings primarily attributed to the department's rapid formation, resulting in the lack of a detailed strategic planning, a deficit in faculty positions, and insufficient previous experience to align the program with stakeholders' needs. It is worth noting that the UGP was developed by individuals who are not part of DAS which is clearly contradictory. The current faculty did not have a significant say in determining the courses included in the program.

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	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study program	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
e. The structure of studies	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
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	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- UTh and DAS have presented a SWOT analysis that is somewhat lacking in specificity. The EEAP acknowledges that perfection is not expected, particularly for a recently established department. However, the EEAP believes there are areas for improvement, including:
 - a. Developing a more detailed strategic plan.
 - b. Conducting feasibility/sustainability studies with clearly defined metrics.
 - c. Addressing the need for increased output from certain faculty members that does not align with the expectations of a university faculty member.
- DAS, being a newly established department, has witnessed considerable efforts from the faculty to ensure its success. However, in order to thrive and deliver high-quality education and impactful research addressing critical issues in animal production in Thessaly and beyond, it is imperative to recruit a minimum of six new faculty members. This necessity arises from the current lack of expertise to effectively teach a significant number of courses at DAS. Areas of science that are clearly missing:
 - a. Bioinformatics/Biostatistics
 - b. Waste management
 - c. Operations management/Agricultural Economy
 - d. Environmental management
 - e. Animal welfare
 - f. Milk/meat technology
- While the mission and vision of DAS are clear, there is room for improvement in terms of making them more marketable by transforming them into concise statements. As an example, the EEAP provides the following prepared statements for a sister unit:

Vision:

To become a global leader in promoting environmental sustainability and food security, positioning the Department as an influential force in the field.

Mission:

The Department is dedicated to advancing science and serving society through the discovery, translation, and dissemination of knowledge and resources. Its mission is to actively contribute to environmental sustainability and food security.

Core Values:

- Foster interdisciplinary and synergistic collaboration to tackle complex challenges.
- Champion a supportive, diverse, and inclusive environment that nurtures innovation and creativity.
- Uphold a commitment to excellence and foster an environment conducive to continuous improvement.
- Ensure scientific integrity in all its endeavours.
- Engage with and serve our stakeholders by addressing their needs and contributing to their success.
- By refining the mission, vision, and core values in a more marketable manner, DAS can better communicate its goals and aspirations to stakeholders and potential partners.

- DAS faculty members should actively seize opportunities for interdisciplinary research and the advancement of science by fostering collaborations with other disciplines. For instance, they can explore collaborative ventures such as precision agriculture with the Institute for Bio-Economy and Agri-Technology (iBO - Volos) or the UTh Department of Agronomy-Agrotechnology in Gaiopolis. By engaging in these collaborative efforts, faculty can enhance the scope and impact of their research while fostering cross-disciplinary synergy.
- UTh and DAS should establish clear standards for faculty promotion, such as minimum requirements for the h-index and citations. By implementing these standards, the department can ensure a transparent and objective evaluation process that promotes excellence and incentivizes faculty members to actively engage in impactful research and scholarly activities.

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 Program Compliance

I. Findings

- DAS has implemented an adequate QA policy and procedures. UTh has a well-established MODIP that effectively defines the review processes, oversees improvements, and monitors the KPIs and functions of the Department's OMEA.
- DAS is relatively new, with students currently in their fourth year of study and thus the EEAP panel is unable to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the study program at this time.
- DAS has set measurable goals for the new UGP, including realistic timetables, demonstrating a genuine commitment to implementing a quality policy that promises a quality academic profile and orientation. DAS evaluates each course, and the academic staff delivers them using questionnaires provided to students. However, student participation in these procedures is low (20%). While the evaluation questionnaires are common to all UTh departments, slight alterations could be considered to better fit the specific character of DAS if necessary. EEAP was not provided with any completed questionnaires as samples.

- There were interviews with students; those selected by the administration for programmed meetings and others questioned without prior notice in the classroom. All expressed satisfaction with the courses offered, particularly highlighting the availability and openness of the academic staff and the services provided by UTh, such as dormitories and restaurant food. Some concerns were raised by students who lacked a background in biochemistry, but DAS has addressed this by offering a tutoring course to support those students.
- Since the department was established in 2019, there were no alumni available for interview, as is typically done in other accreditation evaluations. However, it may be appropriate to invite alumni from the former TEI program to provide feedback on the careers of successful alumni working in related fields, offering valuable insights to the EEAP. The curriculum of UGP has been developed after considering similar programs at the Agricultural University of Athens and overseas institutions, aiming to meet national standards of quality.
- The research conducted by DAS staff is limited, partly due to a lack of staff. Still, there is a commendable effort to link research with teaching, as acknowledged by both staff and students. This practice is considered vital and beneficial for future graduates in finding good job placements. The DAS program aligns with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in terms of learning outcomes and qualifications.
- The academic staff is considered qualified but needs to be increased by hiring staff with degrees in Animal Sciences, specifically matching the character of the department. The average research output is low and should be improved through the addition of new faculty members.

II. Analysis

- The Department fulfils most of the HAHE QA requirements concerning the evaluation of courses, labs, and faculty. While all necessary mechanisms and procedures are in place, there is room for improvement due to the limited number of staff and the need to acquire new laboratory equipment. All QA procedures are well-documented and effectively communicated to staff, students, and relevant stakeholders. The goals set by DAS for the new undergraduate program are relevant, measurable, and aligned with aspects of teaching, as evidenced by student satisfaction.
- Certain factors related to the effectiveness of procedures and measures, particularly those regarding program revision, cannot be fully assessed due to the short period of DAS operation. Since there are no graduates to track and evaluate, conclusive results on effectiveness can only be drawn after the completion of the five-year cycle.

III. Conclusions

- While basic required measures, metrics, and procedures are in place, there is room for improvement. It is concluded that reliable and factual results regarding the effectiveness of the QAP can only be obtained after the completion of the five-year cycle.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- DAS should implement measures to enhance student participation in the evaluation of courses and staff. This will yield valuable data for the administration to improve the Department's operations.
- Efforts should be undertaken to acquire ISO accreditation for the DAS laboratories. This accreditation will enable DAS to offer services to stakeholders and other organizations, fostering closer connections with social partners and facilitating collaboration with the agricultural industry, particularly in the domain of animal husbandry.
- DAS should strive to inspire incoming students to become highly educated and responsible professionals in the field of animal production, which is in great demand in the country.

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

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

I. Findings

- DAS was established in 2019 (ΦΕΚ 13/29.01.2019, vol. A) and commenced its educational operations during the 2019-2020 academic year. However, it was established without a feasibility study. DAS is located in the Gaiopolis complex of UTh in Larissa. It utilizes the infrastructure (laboratories, classrooms, livestock facilities, etc.) of the former Department of Animal Production, School of Agricultural Technologists of TEI Thessaly. The Department aims to provide graduates with the necessary academic education and specialized knowledge to

pursue employment in Animal Production. The curriculum was designed considering the educational and professional orientation of the department and the current needs in higher education and regional development in the predominantly rural area of Thessaly.

- The core of the curriculum consists of courses related to animal husbandry, feed technology, biotechnology applications, integrated animal production systems, and the marketing of livestock products while considering animal welfare requirements. The UGP includes basic and translational knowledge, internships, and the preparation of a diploma research study. DAS also offers doctoral degrees. The minimum duration of study required to obtain a degree is ten (10) semesters.
- DAS currently has 13 faculty members, 3 EDIP, 2 ETEP, and 2 administrative employees. It has 10 laboratories that serve educational and research needs, and it participates in various European and national research projects.
- The Department of Animal Production Science aligns with the strategic goals of the University of Thessaly, focusing on promoting Animal Production science, adapting to the needs of the labour market, and addressing the needs of students. The only other dedicated Department of Animal Science in Greece is at the Agricultural University of Athens, whereas there are several Agronomy departments around Greece that offer Animal Production as a specialization.
- The curriculum includes core courses that provide fundamental knowledge and are compulsory for all students. There are a total of sixty (60) courses, including fifteen (15) elective courses that students can choose from. To obtain a degree, students must successfully complete and be examined in at least nine (9) elective courses. In the 8th and 10th semesters, students undertake internships in companies and organizations related to their studies. The UGP concludes with the preparation of a thesis.
- The curriculum undergoes evaluation every academic year, starting in April, or whenever deemed necessary by the departmental assembly. The proposed changes are reviewed and approved by the Department of Academic Affairs of UTh and the Senate of the University. However, the consultation on curriculum revision does not involve external bodies, students, and graduates.

II. Analysis

- The Study Guide is comprehensive and includes relevant information about infrastructure, administration, academic staff and their expertise, student opportunities (ERASMUS), responsibilities (including internships and thesis), and course descriptions.

III. Conclusions

- The design of the UGP is complete and has been approved by MODIP. Quality monitoring procedures have been defined. The program structure is rational and clearly formulated. However, there is no provision for students to acquire digital skills. The review of the program is scheduled to begin after the completion of the five-year cycle. A well-developed Study Guide is available to students and the public.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- It is recommended to include thematic modules and provide quantitative comparisons with similar study programs from reputable domestic and foreign universities in both the study guide and the curriculum. This will help meet modern demands for excellence and enhance the department's reputation.
- The development and registration of software should be prioritized to equip students with modern digital skills that are relevant to their courses.
- Future curriculum changes should involve consultation with key stakeholders and external partners to ensure their input and perspectives are considered.

Principle 4: Student-centered 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

I. Findings

- During discussions between the EEAP and the student body, it was determined that the instructional personnel met the educational objectives and performed satisfactorily in both the classroom and laboratory. DAS possesses adequate equipment extensively used for educational and research purposes.
- There are office hours for students, yet they displayed a strong preference for seeking guidance outside of the designated hours, regardless of whether the faculty member is their assigned academic mentor.
- A notable portion of the curriculum utilizes books authored by faculty members themselves.
- Grades fluctuates between 6 - 8, which is considered a better than average grade. These grades reflect the availability and guidance of faculty during pre-exam academic preparation, facilitating progress in exams and laboratory projects.

II. Analysis

- The structured nature of the evaluation questionnaire is commendable. However, the participation rate was notably low at 20%. Students attributed this discrepancy to insufficient communication by teachers regarding the importance of completing the questionnaire, despite receiving multiple notifications.

- Faculty actively provide relevant information about the examination process, required materials, and grading criteria to students in preparation for upcoming evaluations. This equips students with necessary resources to optimize their study efforts and time management.
- Lecture slides are available on the online platform e-class, yet students who are unable to attend classes do not have access to recorded lectures. This may disadvantage students who need a refresher or wish to catch up at a later time. It is suggested that students who have missed class sessions should seek assistance from faculty members to bridge knowledge gaps.
- There is a mutual respect between instructional faculty and the student body, ensuring that potential issues will be addressed with respect within the academic institution.
- Laboratory exercises and projects assigned to students have proven beneficial for their learning outcomes, instilling confidence in applying acquired knowledge in practical settings. However, the UGP should better address data analysis and programming, as faculty members have observed an increasing interest in these areas, leading to peer motivation and inspiration.

III. Conclusions

- There is a need to enhance the curriculum to equip students with the skills and knowledge required by the market. Increasing the number of highly qualified teaching staff is crucial to ensure the quality of the education provided. Emphasizing the importance of assessment questionnaires to students and encouraging their active participation in the evaluation process is also essential.

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

- To optimize educational outcomes, it is recommended to record and upload instructional sessions to a digital platform, enabling students to access the material at their convenience and promote inclusivity. Implementing a hybrid instructional approach that combines synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods can enhance student motivation and improve academic performance.
- To address the issue of low participation rates in the assessment process, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of questionnaires to students. While students were aware of the assessments, the significance of completing them was not adequately communicated. Alternatively, it may be beneficial to establish specific circumstances for administering assessments, such as allocating a predetermined time during class or on a designated day (as determined by the instructor), while still maintaining the voluntary nature of the evaluation.

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

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

I. Findings

- EEAP has concluded that despite the large number of academic subjects, including mandatory laboratory exercises, and the substantial attendance of students, who are often divided into groups of 10 to 15 individuals, the laboratory conditions are adequate. However, the students have confirmed that they have effectively utilized the equipment and familiarized themselves with laboratory practices. As a result, they feel confident in applying the knowledge learned in practical or professional settings.

II. Analysis

- Due to the disproportionate ratio of students to teaching personnel, there may be challenges in effectively supervising degree and doctoral theses, as well as handling other administrative responsibilities in the future.
- DAS follows the ECTS credit system, which is applied throughout the course curriculum and supports students' recognition and certification, facilitating possible mobility. However, the allocation of ECTS units/course was not assigned by DAS faculty. Therefore, it is recommended that the allocation of the 30 ECTS/semester must be implemented in the next curriculum revision.
- Although students are aware of the ERASMUS program, the number of participating students in this program is currently very low, primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this, the DAS should aim to host ERASMUS students in the future, as several courses can be delivered in English.
- DAS should increase its collaboration with EU universities. Apart from the ERASMUS program, there are other similar programs in which the Department participates, enabling student mobility. A Diploma Supplement has been drafted and will be provided to graduating students in both Greek and English.

III. Conclusions

- DAS teaching staff had not informed their students properly as far as the importance of the ERASMUS programme and their ability to participate in it through their teachers help and guidance. It has also been made clear that the ECTS distribution in some semesters was not done properly and must be redone in the near future.

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

- DAS should ensure a smooth transition of students from high school to university education by developing a curriculum that aligns with the requisites of a university.
- In the future, UTh should track and monitor the progress and growth of graduates, preparing them for their future endeavours, whether in advanced academic pursuits or integration into the workforce. By maintaining affiliations with companies and research institutions, as well as establishing new partnerships, the institution can enhance its reputation and attract funding for further research initiatives.
- To promote academic drive and perseverance among students and recognize significant contributions to UTh and DAS, it is advisable for the Department to continue awarding scholarships to doctoral candidates. Additionally, the department should establish a system of accolades and distinctions for individuals who demonstrate exceptional aptitude and proficiency.
- The students must be informed of the importance of the ERASMUS programme.
- ECTS of each subject must be reviewed.

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

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

I. Findings

- DAS currently employs 13 academics, including full professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers. In addition, there are 3 teaching staff members under the EDIP program, 2 technicians under the ETEP program, and 2 administrators. The department is responsible for an UGP and a graduate (MSc) program, as well as conducting and supervising PhD research projects.
- The teaching workload for the faculty members ranges from 6 to 12 hours per week, with an average of 8 hours per week. The student-to-teacher ratio is approximately 1 to 24 on average.
- The faculty is supported by new scientists, contract workers, and academic scholars. These individuals hold PhDs and are responsible for teaching curriculum courses not covered by permanent staff. According to interviews with students, the quality of teaching is very good, and the faculty members are committed and responsible in fulfilling their duties.

- Although DAS is not autonomous in terms of hiring due to Greek government legislation, it aims to recruit competent and specialized staff members to fill vacancies. Over the next four years, it is expected that 6 to 8 new academics will be added to the staff, primarily through the retirement of existing staff members. This provides opportunities for hiring new staff members.
- DAS faculty is involved in several research projects funded by European funding bodies, national agencies, and private funds. Currently, there are 11 PhD candidates, 2 graduate students, and 15 undergraduate students working on various research activities under the supervision of staff members. While some faculty members have notable research activity and publications, others have a lower record in this regard.
- The total number of citations for all staff members is 1662 (Scopus) and 2331 (Google Scholar). On average, each faculty member publishes 3.0 peer-reviewed journal articles per year (Scopus), and their combined number of citations per year is 171.18 (Scopus). The mean faculty h-index for the period of 2021-2022 is 8.0, although this value varies significantly among individuals, ranging from 5 to 22. It should be noted that this h-index value is lower compared to other institutions.
- Most of the research projects undertaken by the department have a low budget, with less than 50K allocated, with four projects exceeding 200K.
- UTh supports the continuing education and professional development of its academic staff. Funds from the Erasmus+ program are available for student and staff mobility, and support is provided for sabbaticals and participation in scientific conferences. However, staff mobility is currently low, and there is a need to further encourage participation in congresses.
- Both the faculty and student bodies of the department exhibit excellent gender equality.

II. Analysis

- I. DAS is the only department in Greece other than the sister department housed at the Agricultural University of Athens, that offers comprehensive education in Animal Science. This uniqueness presents substantial potential for growth and development.
- II. Currently, DAS is understaffed in its fourth year of operation. Equipment and facilities inherited from the former TEI are outdated and in need of renewal and improvement, as stated by both MODIP and OMEA. However, newer equipment has been acquired since the establishment of the department. DAS demonstrates a dynamic attitude towards achieving its goals.
- III. The academic staff show a genuine desire and dedication to provide high-quality education, which is reflected in the positive response from students. Stakeholders also express satisfaction with their cooperation with the department and faculty.

- IV. UTh should support the DAS by allocating additional academic posts in the next few years. These new faculty members should possess expertise and specialization in areas that are currently lacking but are deemed essential for a suitable curriculum for the DAS.

III. Conclusions

- Some faculty members have a strong research activity with numerous scientific publications and citations, while others have low research record.
- Several faculty members have international contacts and collaborations in education and research, contributing to the internationalization of DAS.
- Stakeholders endorse the contributions of the DAS to the local community and recognize its positive influence on local industries.
- Some faculty members actively participate in interdisciplinary research teams, obtain funding, and provide resources and services to stakeholders.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- UTh and the Ministry should approve a minimum of 6 to 8 new faculty positions for DAS by 2026. It is recommended to minimize appointments by contract since, in most cases, these affiliations do not fully support research initiatives and programs.
- The newly hired faculty should have expertise in multiple areas of research and teaching, with specialization in Animal Husbandry and other areas that are currently lacking within the existing faculty.
- It is important to enhance support for professional development activities for both faculty and staff, especially once their numbers are sufficient to adequately support the program.
- Efforts should be made to secure higher funding for research, which will increase the productivity of peer-reviewed publications. This will contribute to enhancing the department's standing and ranking relative to its domestic and international peers.
- Consider establishing teaching and research awards to recognize the outstanding contributions of faculty and staff members.

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

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

I. Findings

- Students have access to the University Library and are well-informed about the various support services available to them. They expressed satisfaction about the ease of access to these services.
- The comprehensive educational process is further supported by the implementation of the e-class platform, an integrated electronic course management system that enables asynchronous distance learning. During discussions, it was mentioned that the laboratory and farm facilities adequately meet the learning requirements.

II. Analysis

- EEAP has documented that all classrooms are equipped with advanced surveillance technology, including projectors, computers, and microphones, which meet the teaching requirements and facilitate scientific gatherings.

- Each laboratory is equipped with adequate spaces, such as offices and research amenities, to accommodate scholarly and technical personnel, as well as research beneficiaries. The facilities and equipment satisfactorily meet the teaching and research requirements of each laboratory.

III. Conclusions

- DAS and the UTh provide professional counselling, advocacy, and complaint management services to the student population. The institution also offers medical services and residential accommodations to its students.
- Some staff members are burdened with excessive teaching obligations, resulting in them working beyond their regular hours. This situation hinders their ability to allocate sufficient attention and effort to their research pursuits.
- The Gaiopolis complex offers a variety of fitness amenities, student organizations, and additional extracurricular facilities for student use. Furthermore, various support services are conveniently located within this complex, ensuring easy accessibility for students.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- DAS should consider hiring more teaching staff in order to prevent the excessive amount of teaching obligations that previous staff members face.
- DAS should host more seminars based on the extra activities which they offer to their students, in order to make them participate in the department's extracurricular activities more.

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

I. Findings

- DAS has developed an information system in accordance with the standards set by ETHAEE. This system is used for collecting and recording data related to the overall operation of the institution. The data collection follows the methodology and tables proposed by ETHAEE, and protocols established by the MODIP and OMEA.
- All members of the academic community, including students, teaching staff, and administrative support, participate in the data collection process. Students fill in closed questionnaires as part of the periodic six-month evaluation, providing feedback on faculty and the educational process. However, the participation rate of students in the electronic evaluation questionnaires for courses is approximately 20%. The teaching staff completes individual and course censuses every six months. Administrative employees contribute by providing information in the reports prepared by the Departments and UTh.
- The collected data is accessible to OMEA and the institution's MODIP to facilitate effective supervision and control. OMEA analyses the data using statistical methods to identify areas that are working well and areas that require improvement.

II. Analysis

- DAS has implemented procedures for collecting and analysing information about its operations and study programs. However, there is room for more effective utilization of some data.
- The Department gathers and utilizes various datasets for its annual assessments, which are stored in departmental and university information management systems. The data collection protocols are established by MODIP and OMEA.

III. Conclusions

- DAS has established procedures for collecting and analysing information about its operations and study programs. However, data is not efficiently analysed and used. For example, there can be a better representation of the MODIP findings in a form of pie charts/graphics which are readily understood by students and stakeholders. Continued efforts should be made to enhance the effectiveness of data utilization for assessment purposes.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The participation rate for online course evaluation questionnaires is low. One potential solution is to encourage students to complete them during classroom sessions, as this has been shown to improve participation rates.
- It is recommended to develop methodology that allows for more accurate quantification of the various indicators being evaluated. This will help in obtaining more reliable and meaningful results.
- Additionally, it is important to establish a methodology for collecting employment data and gathering information on the career paths and employability of future graduates. This will provide valuable insights into the outcomes and success of the department's programs when there is a pool of graduates available for analysis.

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

I. Findings

- DAS maintains a modern and up-to-date website (<https://as.uth.gr/>) in Greek and English with dropdown menus listed below. Each of these menus has several subcategories containing links and providing information on specific topics.
 - General information about DAS
 - Staff listings including names, email addresses of faculty members, and CVs.
 - Information about studies, including PDFs of the curriculum, course syllabi, and course reading materials.
 - Research
 - Links to useful information, including quality assurance, the departmental curriculum guide and regulations, internships, and dissertations.
 - First-year registration information
- Some menus on the Department's website are poorly populated with information. Furthermore, the English translation of the website has several shortcomings.
- The Department's website provides links to the campus library, the careers office, and the e-class e-learning platform (eclass.uth.gr). The platform is used by all lecturers, who post exercises, course materials, and lecture slides in the documents of each course. Additionally, announcements regarding course progress, cancellations, lectures, etc., are posted.
- In the Electronic Secretariat (<https://euniversity.uth.gr/unistudent/>), students can register their courses every semester, and at the same time, services are provided that every student can use, e.g., to follow the announcements of grades, etc.

- The Department has a frequently updated social media page (<https://www.facebook.com/animalscienceuth>) with a good design and attractive appearance.

II. Analysis

- DAS maintains a modern, attractive, and up-to-date website in Greek and English with dropdown menus. However, the English version of the website lacks some topics present in the Greek version and falls behind in overall content.

III. Conclusions

- DAS provides information about its activities, the learning outcomes sought, the degrees awarded, teaching, learning, and assessment procedures used, and all the services available to its students. It has international collaborations and collaborations with Greek companies, but these are not sufficiently developed.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Today, the main means of communication with students and other stakeholders are through electronic media such as websites and social media. The relevant information published by the department through the website is plentiful and easy to use but needs some improvements. Recommendations for improvement are listed below:

- Add links to the Ministry of Education, UTh, and other interesting websites that will be of interest to students.

- Enrich the English version of the website. The current version may hinder attracting Erasmus students as they may find it difficult to find the information they are looking for.

- As internships comprise a key feature of the curriculum, it could also be a valuable recruitment tool. When the internship is launched, include a list of potential employers where students have done their internships, as well as photos and testimonials of the better internship experiences.

- When there are graduates, add a page that includes profiles of successful graduates with short videos describing how their degree contributed to their success. Promote these stories on social media and local media outlets.

- Tailor the QAP to the needs of DAS and avoid using the generic policy for the UTh.

- Consider creating a student club that can promote the teaching, research, outreach, and activities of the department on social media platforms most frequented by prospective students.

Principle 10: Periodic Internal Review of the New Study Programs

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

I. Findings

- DAS conducts an annual internal evaluation, and student evaluation questionnaires have been specifically designed for each department by the UTh MODIP, which is responsible for the department's OMEA. The MODEP's information system aims to reduce costs and bureaucracy while promoting greater student participation. Teaching staff census forms are also maintained and updated annually, with students electronically submitting them near the end of the semester through the MDC website. These questionnaires are completed anonymously and cover various aspects such as courses, curriculum, evaluation criteria, exercises, educational infrastructure, teaching quality, individual study, and administrative services.
- DAS Secretariat manages the digital information system for student records and curriculum. The response rate of students completing the questionnaires is approximately 20%, which is higher than the general average of 12% of UTh. Faculty members' census sheets are important sources of information regarding their data, including research projects, research infrastructures used, and publications. DAS annual internal report provides information for the Internal Quality Assurance System, covering academic and research work, current situation mapping, and collaborations with external bodies. This report is shared with the MODIP, teaching staff members, and posted on the department's website.
- These data are collected by the OMEA, analysed, shared with faculty members, and discussed at departmental meetings. As a result, improvements have been made, such as reformulating

course syllabi to avoid duplication, incorporating more active and interactive teaching methods, conducting tutorial lectures, and organizing study visits.

II. Analysis

- DAS has conducted three self-evaluations with the new curriculum but needs to address the issue of low student participation in the evaluation process.

III. Conclusions

- The quality objectives indicators are reviewed annually through self-evaluation, but they should be more closely aligned with the DAS strategic objectives. It is strongly recommended that DAS addresses the low student participation in course evaluations and uses the generated data to identify solutions for existing problems. Additionally, the questionnaire should be enriched and regularly updated.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- To increase student participation in the assessment process and completion of questionnaires, it is recommended to establish continuous communication from the teaching staff regarding the dates, process, and importance of student participation. Open-ended questions should be added to allow students to address key aspects or raise concerns not covered elsewhere.
- When the first students graduate, design an evaluation questionnaire that gathers data on the overall curriculum, including courses, learning outcomes, exams, and internships. Also, collect feedback on faculty and departmental services provided.
- Conduct a multivariate statistical analysis of all the information collected through the questionnaires to identify correlations between the assessment results posted on the DAS website and the improvement action plans implemented.
- Design a model, incorporating questionnaires and interviews with private and public institutions in the region, to establish a stronger connection between the studies offered by DAS and the labour market. This will help ensure graduates are well-equipped for employment opportunities.

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

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 programs. 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

I. Findings

- The present external evaluation of the UGP of DAS is the first of its kind. As a newly established department based on a transition law from the former TEI structure to a university department, there has not been any previous external evaluation conducted before. Therefore, no determination can be made regarding whether the department has considered recommendations from prior evaluations.
- The lack of a previous evaluation report hinders the efficient verification of the program's continuous evolution and improvements. However, DAS has established a comprehensive process for reviewing the findings and recommendations from future external evaluations, as outlined in the provided documentation.
- Upon receiving the evaluation report, DAS in coordination with OMEA, examines and analyses the report. Subsequently, proposed actions are presented to the DAS faculty meeting, and their decision is forwarded to the MODIP of UTh to initiate necessary improvements for the UGP.

II. Analysis

- All faculty members, OMEA, the Chair, and staff of the DAS were well prepared for the arrival of the EEAP, indicating their recognition of the significance of this first external evaluation in the further development and success of the new undergraduate program. The EEAP formed a positive impression during discussions, presentations, and visits to laboratories, classrooms, lecture halls, and farm facilities.

- It is worth noting the high level of interest demonstrated by the participation of senior officers from the UTh, such as the Vice Rector and Chair of MODIP, in several meetings. These observations highlight the strong collegiality that exists between the Chair, faculty, staff, and students in the DAS.

III. Conclusions

- The need for annual internal review reports has been recognized thus far, and it is essential to continue producing these reports in the same manner, ensuring even more intensive evaluations.

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

- In addition to the external evaluation report, it is crucial for the DAS to continue conducting annual internal reviews. These internal reviews play a vital role in assessing and improving the newly established program.
- It is expected that the recommendations provided by EEAP will be carefully considered. Those recommendations that are feasible and beneficial should be implemented and incorporated into the policies of DAS.

Principle 12: Monitoring the Transition from Previous Undergraduate Study Programs 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

I. Findings

- DAS, currently an autonomous department within the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at the UTh, has undergone a series of transitions since the establishment of the first department of Animal Science in KATEE in 1973. It transformed into the department of TEI Larissa in 1983 and became the TEI of Thessaly in 2013. However, under the Law 4589/2019, the TEI was abolished, and a new autonomous DAS was established.
- According to paragraph 6 of the aforementioned law, students from the TEI are allowed to continue their studies until they fulfil their obligations and receive their degree. If they wish to obtain the University's degree administered by DAS, they will be required to attend additional courses assigned by the Department. DAS should develop a detailed plan to support former TEI students, whether in graduating as technologists or completing the 5-year program of the new Department.
- During the transition period of the pre-existing 4-year undergraduate program, DAS faculty is responsible for delivering lectures, conducting examinations, and providing other provisions

to the students until the formal completion of their program, which in most cases was expected to be the academic year 2022-2023.

II. Analysis

- The analysis reveals that the OMEA report lacked a plan for the provisions that should have been made during the transition period for TEI (Technical Education Institute) students.
- During the meetings, the DAS faculty chair, OMEA, and MODIP expressed their opinion that they were not obligated to provide the required data based on the fact that DAS is now independent from the TEI department.
- However, during the discussions, the EEAP was informed that at least eight DAS faculty taught TEI students during the transition period and were expected to administer their final examinations.

III. Conclusions

- Based on the above findings and analysis, the EEAP concludes that although the Department continued to teach the transition TEI students, they failed to present any relevant data as required. Therefore, the Department is deemed partially compliant with Principle 12.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- DAS has well-defined goals.
- The 4-year business plan and feasibility/sustainability analyses are satisfactory.
- DAS is actively pursuing extroversion, and it is evident to the EEAP that they are highly dedicated to this concept.
- DAS has implemented a sufficient QA policy and procedures. UTh has a well-established MODIP that effectively outlines the review processes, oversees improvements, and monitors the KPIs and functions of the Department's OMEA.
- There is mutual respect between instructional faculty and students, ensuring that potential issues can be addressed respectfully within the academic institution.
- Based on interviews with students, the quality of teaching is excellent, and faculty are committed and responsible in fulfilling their duties.
- Stakeholders expressed satisfaction with their collaboration with DAS.
- DAS has adequate classrooms and research/educational laboratories.
- DAS maintains a modern, attractive, and up-to-date Greek version of the departmental website.

II. Areas of Weakness

- The UTh strategic plan is rather generic lacking clear metrics.
- The feasibility and sustainability study is inadequate as it focuses solely on the present state without considering the future requirements for the DAS UGP.
- There is a significant number of subjects that cannot be adequately covered due to a scarcity of specialized DAS faculty available to teach those subjects.
- The Weaknesses and Threats section of the SWOT analysis is rather generic.
- Student participation in the evaluation procedures is low (20%).
- Research conducted by DAS staff is limited because some existing faculty do not focus on research.
- The OMEA report, which provided a high-quality presentation of DAS, did not include or present a plan for the provisions made by DAS during the transition period for the TEI students.
- The English version of the DAS website needs to mirror the Greek website as in its current version lacks significant information.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

The EEAP identifies areas for improvement, including:

- Addressing the need for increased output from certain faculty members that does not align with the expectations of a university faculty member.
- The academic staff is considered qualified but needs to be increased by hiring staff with degrees in Animal Sciences, specifically matching the character of the department.
- It is imperative that UTh and the Ministry approve a minimum of 6 to 8 new faculty positions for DAS by 2026. This necessity arises from the current lack of expertise to effectively teach a significant number of courses at DAS. There are areas of science that are clearly missing.
- To address the issue of low participation rates in the assessment process, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of questionnaires to students. DAS should implement measures to enhance student participation in the evaluation of courses and staff.
- There is a need for additional focus on enhancing the quality of publications.
- DAS faculty members should prioritize research endeavours to access funding opportunities that would contribute to the publication of peer-reviewed articles.
- Efforts should be undertaken to acquire ISO accreditation for the DAS laboratories.
- Future curriculum changes should involve consultation with key stakeholders and external partners to ensure their input and perspectives are considered.
- DAS should increase its collaboration with EU universities.
- Students must be informed of the importance of the ERASMUS program.
- ECTS of each subject must be reviewed.
- Efforts should be made to secure higher funding for research, which will increase the productivity of peer-reviewed publications.
- Enhance the English version of the website.
- Consider creating a student club that can promote the teaching, research, outreach, and activities of DAS on social media platforms most frequented by prospective students.

- Design a model, incorporating questionnaires and interviews with private and public institutions in the region, to establish a stronger connection between the studies offered by DAS and the labour market.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **4, 5, and 11.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.**

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: **12.**

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

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation EEAP

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