ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ
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HELLENIC REPUBLIC

H Q A

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

Accreditation Report
for the Internal Quality Assurance System
(IQAS)

Institution Name: University of Thessaly
Date: 28/9/2019

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Report of the Panel appointed by the HQA to undertake the review of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) 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 Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) of the Higher Education Institution named **University of Thessaly** is comprised of the following five (5) members, drawn from the HQA Register, in accordance with the Law 4009/2011:

1. Prof. Emeritus Spyros Economides (Chair)
    California State University, East Bay, USA

2. Prf. Anthimos Georgiadis
    Leuphana University, Luneburg, Germany

3. Prof. Georgios Giannakis
    University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA

4. Prof. Emeritus Ioannis Vlahos
    Hellenic Mediterranean University, Heraklion, Greece

5. Dr. Fivos Andritsos
     European Commission, Joint Research Center, Ispra, Italy

II.   Review Procedure and Documentation

The Accreditation Panel (AP) reviewed the material provided by ADIP well in advance of its arrival and briefing. Additional information and further documentation regarding the HQA mission, standards and guidelines for the accreditation process were provided during the briefing that took place at the HQA headquarters on September 23, 2019. The Panel arrived in Volos in the evening of the same day and started its visit at the University of Thessaly (UTH) the following morning (24/09/2019) meeting the Rector Professor Zissis Mamuris, who gave a short overview of the Institution, its history, vision, mission and academic profile. Particular emphasis was given to the recent merging of two former TEIs in the UTH structure. According to the Rector, the procedures followed for the incorporation of the TEIs of Larissa and Lamia were exemplary. However, this incoproration absorbed a great deal of energy and resources, from the academic and administrative staff, including MODIP. The final results of this process will be assessed during the next 4-year evaluation/accreditation cycle.

Subsequently, the Panel met with the Rector and the four Deputy Rectors at the UTH Research Committee (ELKE) premises. Further presentations and documentation, in printed and digital format, provided usefull information about UTH current status, strengths and possible areas of concern. A good part of the discussion was devoted to the incorporation of the two TEIs and their potential impact on the teaching and research activities.

In the subsequent meeting with the members and staff of the Quality Assurance Unit (QUA/MODIP) the Panel investigated the degree of compliance of the Internal Quality Assurance System to the Standards for Quality Accreditation. Again, a good part of the discussion evolved around the effects that the incorporation of the two TEIs had (or may have in the future) on the QA procedures of UTH along with other issues dealing with students, teaching and the university QA policy.

The last meeting of the first day was with Deans, Heads of Departments and members / representatives of the Internal Evaluation Groups (IEG/OMEA). The discussion evolved mainly around their perception of the usefulness and the effectiveness of the UTH QA procedures.

The second day of the Panel's UTH visit started with a meeting with students representing a few UTH activity clubs. The interesting presentations were followed by discussions focused on the relations / interaction of the students and clubs with the UTH and their participation to the QA procedures. Then the program proceeded with a discussion with some post graduate students of UTH including doctoral and post-doctoral students from Greece and abroad.

The next meeting was with the chief administration officers from various University units (ELKE, Library, Public relations, IT, and Academic affairs). After that, the Panel met with UTH alumni.

Subsequently, the Panel met external stakeholders represented by the Governor of the Region and other local and regional authorities of Volos, Karditsa and Larissa. The discussion focused on the relations and interaction of the UTH with the local communities and the regional authorities. The next meeting was with the QAU/MODIP members to further discuss / clarify eventual issues / points, as required, by the Panel or MODIP.

The Panel's on-site meetings concluded with a short meeting with the UTH Rector and the QAU/MODIP president. The Panel wishes to express its full satisfaction regarding the material provided and the explanations given by the UTH staff during its visit as well as for the warm hospitality received.

The Panel notes that the visit schedule was quite tight and that it would have been better if an additional half day on-site would have been allocated.

## III.	Institution Profile

The University of Thessaly (UTH) was founded in 1984 and has elected the first Rectorate Board in 1998. Its administrative and academic center is in the city of Volos. In order to serve the needs of the region of Thessaly, its first Departments were based on agricultural, educational and technological sciences. In its initial phase of organization and operation there have been eight Departments, seven of them in Volos and one, the School of Medicine, in Larissa. Since 1984 and onward the University of Thessaly has been gradually growing with new Departments in the four biggest cities of the region of Thessaly, Volos, Larissa, Trikala and Karditsa. The recent decision of the Greek Government to incorporate the Technological Educational Establishments (TEI) into the existing University structures resulted in the incorporation of the TEIs of Larissa and Lamia into the UTH's structure with a substantial increase in the number of students, staff and facilities. Despite the exemplary incorporation process followed in UTH, this process, still ongoing, represents a major challenge for the academic and the administrative services.

Its present[1] academic structure consists of 8 Faculties incorporating 37 Departments and 155 laboratories, serving more than 42,000 undergraduate, 4,250 postgraduate and 1,480 PhD students with 635 faculty members (ΔΕΠ), 112 temporary teaching staff (ΕΔΙΠ), 422 administrative and 102 special technical laboratory staff (ΕΤΕΠ). The Agri-food Technology Park in Larissa and the JASON Research & Innovation Center in Volos are also part of UTH.

The main mission of the University of Thessaly is the promotion of scientific knowledge through research and the contribution to the cultural and economic development of the local community and wider society. Emphasis is given on the bond between the University and the local society, supported also by the operation of the University Hospital of Larissa that covers the medical needs of the whole region of Thessaly[2].

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[1]	UTH Rector's presentation on 25/09/2019, including the recent TEI incorporation; significantly higher from those in the UTH webpages as on 26/09/2019

[2]	UTH webpages as on 26/09/2019

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Institution Policy for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND ADJUSTED ACCORDING TO THE INSTITUTIONS' AREAS OF ACTIVITY. IT SHOULD ALSO BE MADE PUBLIC AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL PARTIES INVOLVED.

The quality assurance policy is the guiding document which sets the operating principles of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), the principles for the continuous improvement of the Institution, as well as the Institution's obligation for public accountability. It supports the development of quality culture, according to which, all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance. This policy has a formal status and is publicly available.

The policy for quality is implemented through:
- *the commitment for compliance with the laws and regulations that govern the Institution;*
- *the establishment, review, redesign and redefinition of quality assurance objectives, that are fully in line with the institutional strategy.*

This policy mainly supports:
- *the organisation of the internal quality assurance system;*
- *the Institution's leadership, departments and other organisational units, individual staff members and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance;*
- *the integrity of academic principles and ethics, guarding against discriminations, and encouragement of external stakeholders to be involved in quality assurance;*
- *the continuous improvement of learning and teaching, research and innovation;*
- *the quality assurance of the programmes and their alignment with the relevant HQA Standards;*
- *the effective organisation of services and the development and maintenance of infrastructure;*
- *the allocation and effective management of the necessary resources for the operation of the Institution;*
- *the development and rational allocation of human resources.*

The way in which this policy is designed, approved, implemented, monitored and revised constitutes one of the processes of the internal quality assurance system.

Institution compliance

The Institution fully complies with the QA spirit and the operating principles as per the ADIP guidelines, the UTH Internal QA System (ΕΣΔΠ) manual and the University Strategic Planning. Moreover, it appears that, despite the strains and the additional QA related challenges due to the on-going TEI incorporation, QAU/MODIP functions quite well. There is a good representation of all UTH departments and staff categories, the recent Institution external evaluation recommendations are being taken into account and, most importantly, a QA culture gradually propagates across all UTH activities. This was reflected also in the effort and the

resources committed for the current accreditation procedure and the quality, timely delivery of the necessary documentation.

The Institution's strategic plan breaks-down to specific, measurable goals as per the ADIP guidelines. It is noteworthy that there is a consistent effort to monitor in real-time all major data that contribute to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) necessary to assess the UTH's performance relative to the above mentioned set of goals so that a continuous improvement of UTH activities, including the QA processes, can be ensured.

Panel judgement

Principle 1: Institution policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Principle 2: Provision and Management of the Necessary Resources

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE APPROPRIATE FUNDING FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES, RESEARCH, AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES IN GENERAL. RELEVANT REGULATIONS SHOULD BE IN PLACE TO ASSURE THAT ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ARE AVAILABLE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE (E.G. CLASSROOMS, LABORATORIES, LIBRARIES, IT INFRASRTUCTURE, PROVISION OF FREE MEALS, DORMITORIES, CAREER GUIDANCE AND SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES, ETC.).

Funding
The Institution ensures adequate funding to cover not only the overhead and operational costs (regular budget and public investment budget) but also costs related to research, innovation and development (Special Account for Research Funds, Property Development and Management Company). The financial planning and the operation of an effective financial management system constitute necessary tools for the full exploitation of the resources.

Infrastructure
Based on the requirements and needs arising during its operation, the Institution has determined ways to define, allocate and maintain all the necessary resources to ensure its smooth and proper functioning, i.e. teaching, research and auxiliary facilities, equipment and software, support facilities (cleaning, transportation, communication) etc. The scope of the IQAS should include a suitable managing and monitoring system to safeguard the infrastructure. Compliance to the internal regulations is also necessary.

Working environment
The Institution ensures -as far as possible- that the working environment has a positive effect on the performance of all members of the academic community (students and staff). Factors that are taken into consideration towards the creation of such a favorable environment are, among others, the sanitary facilities, the lighting/heating/ventilation system, the cleanliness and the overall appearance of the premises, etc. The scope of the IQAS should include an appropriate managing and monitoring system to promote a favorable working environment and to ensure compliance with the existing provisions.

Human resources
The Institution and the academic units are responsible for the human resources development.
The subject areas, as well as the competences and tasks of the staff members are defined by the corresponding job descriptions that are established within the operation scope of each academic or administrative unit. These posts are filled following the requirements set by the law, on the basis of transparent, fair and published processes. The continuous training and evaluation of the staff is considered necessary for the enhancement of the performance, which is recorded and monitored as provided in the context of the IQAS.
The Institution should acknowledge and provide the necessary resources for the implementation of the IQAS, its enhancement and the provision of services that assist the satisfaction of the quality assurance requirements. Moreover, the Institution (Quality Assurance Unit-QAU) should properly organise the administrative structure and staffing of the IQAS, with a clear allocation of competences and tasks to its staff members.

Institution compliance

Funding

The University of Thessaly (UTH) has put in place an effective and transparent system of allocation of its funds that come from the Government, the Public Investment Funds, the EU, the Industry, the Special Accounts for Research (ELKE), as well as from the Property Development and Management Company of the University. The distribution and management of these funds is quite effective and is supported adequately by the IT unit. Cooperation among the Rectorate, the Academic Units and the Administration officials of the University ensures the development of a realistic annual operating budget. The recently introduced FILIPPOS application has facilitated the electronic management of services and goods.

ELKE is well structured with adequate staff and functions in an efficient way to support the research and development policy of the University. ELKE funds are used for the utilization and dissemination of the research conducted by the Institution in a variety of ways, such as providing scholarships for PhD candidates, supporting participation in scientific conferences, exhibitions, workshops, publications, public relations. UTH has been successful in securing EU funds, ranking among the top 10 Greek Institutions in the Horizon 2020 program. In the face of the austerity measures implemented in recent years by the government, UTH administration has taken measures so that the quality in teaching was not greatly affected.

Infrastructure

The UTH following the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) procedures has put in place a satisfactory system for allocating the funds that are required for the operation of teaching rooms, laboratories, auditoriums, and other facilities. These facilities are well equipped for using innovative teaching and research methods.

Faculty members and students acknowledged the problem of shortage of space in some laboratory facilities, due to the high number of incoming students imposed by the Government each year, which is far higher than that proposed by the University. The Administration is taking measures to face these problems, has put in place new work plans and has applied for funding in order to acquire new land and old buildings (e.g., the `Yellow Warehouse') for the renovation and construction of facilities that will cover the current and future needs.

It should be mentioned that after the recent acquisition of the former TEIs of Thessaly and of Central Greece in Larissa, Karditsa, Trikala and Lamia the Administration is faced with greater challenges and opportunities as well. These establishments have their own campuses which also need the same attention and care for their maintenance and good operation. These establishments require further development and there are plans to deal with these needs (e.g., TEFAA in Trikala). Despite the challenges and obligations, this merging provides excellent opportunities for the expansion and development of a greater University.

Maintenance of campus buildings and facilities (teaching rooms, labs and offices) is undertaken by the Technical Services of the University through a regular maintenance program. The above procedures are described in the submitted proposal for Accreditation and the AP found these services to work efficiently in the UTH areas visited.

The high cost of energy is a concern for the Administration, so they are taking measures to lower the costs of electricity and are considering further plans towards a "Green University". The use of natural gas in the campuses of Karditsa, Trikala and Lamia is under way.

Working Environment

On account of the tight schedule of the visit, the AP did not have the opportunity to visit many parts of the UTH due the dispersion of buildings in the city of Volos as well as in the other four cities. The only areas visited were the central administration and the Tsalapata complex where all meetings were held. The facilities and the overall appearance of these premises are in very good and clean condition. Heating and air conditioning are functioning well, and sanitary facilities are clean. The Finance, ELKE and other administration offices were well equipped and pleasant to work in. Students mentioned that in some cases classrooms and laboratories are not sufficiently large to fit all students assigned.

Human resources

UTH is adequately staffed in both administrative and academic personnel. Human resources are enhanced by enough positions given to the University by the Government that replace staff that has retired. Additional staffing needs of the University are fulfilled by term appointments of PhD candidates across all departments.

Students interviewed, stated that they were satisfied with their Programs of Study, faculty and administrative services.

The MODIP staff coordinate well all processes that contribute to the IQAS. The AP was able to verify that administrative staff have ample opportunities for development and training. The University has in place appropriate processes for monitoring these opportunities for various training workshops in Greece and abroad through the Erasmus+ staff training programs.

Panel judgement

Principle 2: Provision & Management of the Necessary Resources	
2.1 Funding	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
2.2 Infrastructure	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
2.3 Working Environment	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	

Non-compliant	
2.4 Human Resources	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Principle 2: Provision & Management of the Necessary Resources (overall)	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R2.1: The development of a well-organized plan to improve the facilities which need expansion or better utilization for the benefit of students and staff in all campuses with emphasis in the newly acquired infrastructure if the former TEIs.

Principle 3: Establishing Goals for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE CLEAR AND EXPLICIT GOALS REGARDING THE ASSURANCE AND CONTINUOUS UPGRADE OF THE QUALITY OF THE OFFERED PROGRAMMES, THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTIVITIES, AS WELL AS THE SCIENTIFIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES. THESE GOALS MAY BE QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE AND REFLECT THE INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY.

The Institution's strategy on quality assurance should be translated into time-specific, qualitative and quantitative goals which are regularly monitored, measured and reviewed in the context of the IQAS operation, and following an appropriate procedure.

Examples of quality goals:
- *rise of the average annual graduation rate of the Institution's Undergraduate Programmes to x%;*
- *upgrade of the learning environment through the introduction of digital applications on ……….;*
- *improvement of the ratio of scientific publications to teaching staff members to …….;*
- *rise of the total research funding to y%*

The goals are accompanied by a specific action plan for their achievement, and entail the participation of all stakeholders.

Institution compliance

UTH has established adequate goals for its QA involving the newly acquired departments, which are in-line with the strategy of the organization. The institution defines clearly the goals, presenting regulations before the new situation (integration of the additional departments, previous TEI) and after it.

UTH announces this plan as an official roadmap with the specified goals being associated with relevant KPIs and are accompanied by an action plan that paves the way of their feasible implementation. The IQAS has established procedures for the monitoring of the KPIs and goals.

In reference to some of the examples cited above,

- The rise of the average annual graduation rate of the Institution's Undergraduate Programmes has increased from 28 to 30 %; (end 2019)
- The on-going planning phase, with the support of the local government of Thessaly, will result in a significant upgrade of the learning environment through the construction of new buildings.
- There has been improvement of the communication between the different campuses located at in the same or at different cities by purchasing 2 new busses. (2019)
- Introduction of digital applications throughout all campuses has improved the communication channels throughout the University. (2019)

The AP feels found that the procedures and the goals are not clearly communicated to all stakeholders (internal and external). Moreover, there is evidence of existing differences of procedures relative to the implementation of IQAS between the different departments.

Panel judgement

Principle 3: Establishing Goals for Quality Assurance	
3.1 Study Programmes/ education activities	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
3.2 Research & Innovation	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
3.3 Administration (funding, human resources, infrastructure management)	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
3.4 Resources (funding, human resources, infrastructure)	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Principle 3: Establishing Goals for Quality Assurance (overall)	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R3.1: UTH should develop clear procedures for the sustainable and continuous engagement of stakeholders with respect to the QA and improvement.

R3.2: The institution should establish a procedure to ensure all departments of the UTH follow the same procedures as they relate to the IQAS.

Principle 4: Structure, Organisation and Operation of the IQAS

INSTITUTIONS SET UP AND ESTABLISH AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM, WHICH INCLUDES PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES COVERING ALL AREAS OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND FUNCTIONS. SPECIAL FOCUS IS GIVEN ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING, INCLUDING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND GOVERNANCE.

The key goal of the internal quality assurance system (IQAS) is the development, effective operation and continuous improvement of the whole range of the Institution's activities, and particularly, of teaching, research, innovation, governance and relevant services, according to the international practices - especially those of the European Higher Education Area - and the HQA principles and guidelines described in these Standards.

Structure and organisation

In each Institution, the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) holds the responsibility for the administration and management of the IQAS. The QAU is set up according to the existing legislative framework and is responsible for:

- *the development of specialised policy, strategy and relevant processes towards the continuous improvement of the quality of the Institution's work and provisions;*
- *the organisation, operation and continuous improvement of the Institution's internal quality assurance system;*
- *the coordination and support of the evaluation process of the Institution's academic units and other services, and;*
- *the support of the external evaluation and accreditation process of the Institution's programmes and internal quality assurance system in the context of the HQA principles and guidelines.*

The Institution's IQAS and its implementation processes are determined by the decisions of the competent bodies, as provided by the law, and are published in the Government Gazette, as well as on the Institution's website. The above are reviewed every six years, at the latest.

To achieve the above goals, the QAU collaborates with HQA, develops and maintains a management information system to store the evaluation data, which are periodically submitted to HQA, according to the latter's instructions. The QAU is responsible for the systematic monitoring of the evaluation process and for the publication of evaluation-related procedures and their results on the Institution's website.

The QAU structure has been approved by the Institution's competent bodies, as provided by the law, while all competences and tasks accruing from this structure are clearly defined.

Operation

The Institution takes action for the design, establishment, implementation, audit and maintenance of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), taking into account the Standards' requirements, while making any necessary amendments to ensure fitness to achieve its aims.

The above actions include:

- o *provision of all necessary processes and procedures for the successful operation of the IQAS, as well as implementation of the above processes and procedures on all of the Institution's parties involved ;the Institution's areas of activity can constitute the IQAS processes, e.g. teaching, research and innovation, governance, services etc. An IQAS process is an area of activity including data input, data processing and outputs. A procedure defines the way an action is implemented and includes a course of stages or steps, e.g. the curriculum design procedure;*
- o *determination of how the IQAS procedures / processes are audited, measured and assessed, and how they interact;*
- o *provision of all necessary resources to enable the IQAS function.*

> *Documentation*
>
> *The IQAS documentation includes, among other things, a series of key documents demonstrating its structure and organisation, such as the Quality Manual, which describes how the Standards' requirements are met.*
>
> *The Annexes of the Quality Manual include:*
> - *the Quality Policy and the Quality Assurance Objectives;*
> - *the necessary written Procedures, along with the entailed forms;*
> - *the necessary Guides, External Documents (e.g. pertinent legislation), as well as any other supporting data;*
> - *the standing organisational structure of the QAU, with a detailed description of the competences, the required qualifications and the goals for each post. The organisational chart is structured in a manner that ensures that the IQAS organisational requirements are fully and properly met.*

Institution compliance

The Quality Assurance Unit of the University (QAU/MODIP) is in line with the existing legislative framework. The relevant decisions of competent bodies of the university before the integration of TEIs are published in the Government Gazette 2018, which determines the implementation process of the Institution's IQAS. The UTH has initiated the same process for the integrated institutions.

The Institution's website provides a clear description on the structure, membership and operation of MODIP. The University has developed and maintained a management information system that facilitates the proper operation of the internal QA system. Although the Internal and External Evaluation Reports of UTH are available on the university website, the evaluations of individual courses are not not made public for reasons of privacy and personal data protection.

MODIP collaborates closely with HQA, towards the development and maintainance of the management information system that stores, processes and evaluates data, which is periodically submitted to HQA. Furthermore, MODIP has successfully fulfilled its responsibilities in:

- the development of the policy, strategy and relevant processes towards the continuous improvement of the quality of the Institution's work and provisions;
- the organisation, operation and continuous improvement of the Institution's internal quality assurance system;
- the coordination and support of the evaluation process of the Institution's academic units and other services, and;
- the support of the external evaluation and accreditation process of the Institution's programmes and IQAS.

Following the recent incorporation of the TEIs, UTH established a structure to integrate the new departments, their staff and study programs into the existing QA system.

The university has developed a quality manual that includes all the appropriate actions needed to ensure effective planning, implementation and control of the UTH QA processes. The quality manual includes all the methods to achieve the quality objectives set out in the quality policy

and describes how the requirements are met. It provides the necessary guides, pertinent legislation, and other supporting data. The UTH organizational chart, as presented to the panel and appears on the website, is structured in a manner that ensures that the IQAS organizational requirements are properly met. The UTH provides adequate human resources and infrastructure to the QAU. However, the institution needs to improve the documentation of the degree for fulfilment of the processes carried out as planned.

Panel judgement

Principle 4: Structure, Organization and Operation of the IQAS	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R4.1: The institution should improve the procedure for collecting information for the fulfilment of the quality assurance processes.

Principle 5: Self-Assessment

THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM COMPRISES PROCEDURES PROVIDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE INSTITUTION'S ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, ADDRESSING AREAS OF OVERSIGHTS OR SHORTCOMINGS, AND DEFINING REMEDIAL ACTIONS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SET GOALS, AND EVENTUAL IMPROVEMENT.

The QAU conducts, on an annual basis, a self-assessment of the IQAS, following the written procedure provided for each area of activity, which is implemented by a certain academic or administrative unit, as appropriate. The procedure determines the timing, the participants, the data under consideration, and the expected outcomes. The self-assessment aims at a final estimation of the suitability of the IQAS in force, as well as at basing decisions concerning the necessary remedial or precautionary actions for improvement.

The data considered in the context of the self-assessment of a programme may, for example, include:

- *students performance;*
- *feedback from students / teaching staff;*
- *assessment of learning outcomes;*
- *graduation rates;*
- *feedback from the evaluation of the facilities / learning environment;*
- *report of any remedial or precautionary actions undertaken;*
- *suggestions for improvement.*

The outcomes of the self-assessment are recorded in internal reports drawn up by the QAU. The reports identify any areas of deviation or non-compliance with the Standards, and are communicated to the interested parties (if appropriate). The Institution's resolutions concerning any modification, compliance, or enhancement of the IQAS operation might include actions related to:

- *the upgrade of the IQAS and the pertinent processes;*
- *the upgrade of the services offered to the students;*
- *the reallocation of resources;*
- *the introduction of new quality goals, etc.*

The outcomes of the self-assessment are recorded and, along with the source data, are archived as quality files.

A special procedure is followed for the compliance check of newly launched programmes (of all three cycles), or programmes that are to be reviewed shortly, prior to the institutional approval of the programme.

Institution compliance

In compliance with the HQA Accreditation directive to conduct a self-assessment of its QA System annually under the guidance of MODIP and submit an Internal Evaluation Report, the Institution made available all self-assessment documents for each department separately as well as for the institution, for the period of 2015-2018, following the institution's External Evaluation conducted in 2014. The AP based its Accreditation review on the 2018-2019 Internal Evaluation document submitted on 10-5-2019 as well as on information gathered from its interaction, discussions and observations with UTH personnel during the two-day on-site visit on September 24th and 25th, 2019. For the purpose of Accreditation, the Committee's task was to examine and evaluate the institution's degree of compliance to the eight specific Principles dictated by HQA. The implementation and compliance of these Principles within the IQAS of the institution, as discussed in the Proposal for Accreditation, the result of a Self-Assessment

Process, were the focus of evaluation and discussion by the AP. These Principles relate to a wide range of quality issues of interest such as:

- The structure, organization and operation of the Internal QA System that is in place to ensure quality and continuous improvement. That includes the assessment and evaluation of the composition, responsibilities and work effort of MODIP.
- The implementation of the adopted IQAS incorporating the HQA dictated set of goals, accompanied by the procedures and metrics required for their evaluation, possible modifications and improvements.
- Academic issues, pertaining to student performance, student evaluations of courses, student graduation data, evaluation of learning outcomes associated with Programs of Study, accompanied by procedures for periodic review of the Programs and possible modifications. Also, faculty research activity, career progress and accomplishments, tasks and performance of administrative personnel, effectiveness of administrative systems and procedures.
- Infrastructure issues, pertaining to operational building facilities, student facilities, instructional equipment and support.
- Student support services including but not limited to administrative support for students, student counseling, student activity facilities, financial and career advising support.
- Financial and Budgeting issues to ensure comprehensive, fair and effective allocation of funds that are available from the various source categories.
- Activities relating to information disseminated to the community of the institution and the public in general, including via the institutional web site or other publicity channels.

MODIP is supported by a centralized computer information system that interfaces with a wide network of other information systems which serve the departmental and other service area needs in order to extract and process data for the development of the institutional annual Internal Evaluation Report. The information is available to MODIP in a streamlined, easily accessible manner and includes many calculated KPIs as required by HQA to assess and evaluate the degree of achievement relative to institutional goals.

In the submitted Proposal for Accreditation, MODIP also specifies the processes utilized for the modification or corrective actions taken in the cases where the annual Self-Assessment process has identified deficiencies such as deviation from predefined goals, need for updating, modification or adaptation to new developments or requirements dealing with any of the above issues. For example, the document includes two tables, one is an Action Plan Table displaying identified goals for improvement, such as the relations and involvement of alumni and stakeholders with the institution and the other is a Progress Follow Up Table for this goal. There are numerous goals included in these two tables and obviously more can be added, if identified as candidates for improvement and follow up.

Overall, the submitted Proposal for Accreditation, a result of the Self-Assessment Process, complies with HQA's guidelines, reflects a good and diligent effort and is well organized. However, the AP feels that the Proposal for Accreditation, as it pertains to goal setting and management would be enhanced if goals and associated KPIs could be included related to the

unique strengths / features of this institution that could constitute a competitive advantage and provide added value to its branding.

Panel judgement

Principle 5: Self-Assessment	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R5.1: The AP recommends that the Institution sets goals related to the unique features of UTH that would constitute a competitive advantage and provide added value to its branding.

R5.2: More effort should be made to integrate the students in the UTH QA process through dedicated QA feedback sessions, publicity of specific measures or changes resulting from the evaluations etc.

Principle 6: Collection of Quality Data: Measuring, Analysis and Improvement

INSTITUTIONS ARE FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE OF INFORMATION IN AN INTEGRATED, FUNCTIONAL AND READILY ACCESSIBLE MANNER, AIMING AT THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE QUALITY DATA RELATED TO TEACHING, RESEARCH AND OTHER ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES, AS WELL AS OF THOSE RELATED TO THE ADMINISTRATION.

> *The QAU should establish and operate an information system to manage the data required for the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System.*
>
> *The QAU measures and monitors the performance of the various activities of the Institution, through appropriate procedures established in the context of the IQAS structure, and assesses their level of effectiveness. The measuring and monitoring is conducted on a basis of indices and data provided by HQA in the pertinent guidelines and forms, which are part of the National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA). These measurements may concern: the size of the student body, the size of the teaching and administrative staff, the infrastructure, the structural components of the curricula, students' performance, research activity performance, financial data, feedback on student and faculty satisfaction surveys, data related to the teaching and research activity, services, infrastructure, etc.*
>
> *The QAU makes use of the figures and presents the results for consideration using statistical analysis. Outcomes are displayed through histograms and charts. This sort of information is used by the Institution for decision making, at all levels, pursuing improvement, as well as for setting, monitoring, assessing and reviewing the Institution's strategic and operational goals.*

Institution compliance

On par with HQA (ADIP) guidelines, UTH has mechanisms in place to measure, analyze, and improve quality indicators (indices), their integration, functionality and accessibility, in the prescribed categories of: i) teaching; ii) research and fund raising; iii) academic activities; and iv) administrative services as well as human resources. The overall process is led successfully by QAU (MODIP) that follows HQA mandates, and standardized forms provided by NISQA. Data are collected from various sources, academic units, service units, the library, and several databases both internal as well as external that are integrated by the IT office of the University. In addition, UTH has instituted extra indices to track the update of Programs of Studies, the number of PhD graduates per program, the funding from EU sources, and outreach activities, to name a few representative ones. The analysis of the results takes place at various levels starting from academic units, UTH-wide bodies (mainly QAU/MODIP), and likewise for the subsequent steps to improve the aforementioned indices that ultimately affect the ensuing targets set and implemented by the UTH leadership along with QAU.

Key areas of improvement include specific steps, units, timetable, and individuals responsible for data analysis; collection of data on the number of courses being evaluated per year; metrics assessing how program of study attributes correlate with learning outcomes; actual number of graduating students and its normalization relative to the expected graduating students per class; number of PhD graduates and grants per year and per faculty member; statistics regarding employment, (post)graduate education and alumni achievements; and last, efficiency indices to ascertain quality of administrative services, along with analysis steps to minimize bureaucracy.

Panel judgement

Principle 6: Collection of Data: Measuring, Analysis & Improvement	
6.1 Study Programmes / education activities	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
6.2 Research & Innovation	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
6.3 Activities related to the administration (funding, human resources, infrastructure management)	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
6.4 Human Resources	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Principle 6: Collection of Data: Measuring, Analysis & Improvement (overall)	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R6.1 Consider extra metrics on teaching effectiveness through learning outcomes; job placement of alumni; research productivity and funding amounts per faculty member; and indices quantifying Industry involvement as well as outreach activities.

R6.2 Devise quality indicators along with means of analyzing them in order to improve efficiency of administrative/technical services.

R6.3 Institute concrete mechanisms to close the loop from analysis to improved indices and establish due steps and timetable.

Principle 7: Public Information

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES IN A DIRECT AND ACCESSIBLE MANNER. ALL PERTINENT INFORMATION SHOULD BE UP-TO-DATE, CLEAR AND OBJECTIVE.

The QAU publishes data related to IQAS structure, organisation and operation. Furthermore, the QAU publishes data pertinent to the institutional quality policy and objectives, as well as information and data relevant to the Institution's internal and external evaluation. In the context of the self-assessment process, the QAU verifies that adequate information regarding the teaching activities and, particularly, the programmes' profile and the overall institutional activity is publicly available. QAU makes recommendations for improvement, where appropriate.

Institution compliance

UTH adheres to ADIP guidelines in publicizing information pertinent to teaching, research, and academic activities, including the internal quality assurance policy/system (IQAS), and its external evaluations, as well as the Program of Studies, the Study Guide, and the Timetable that are updated nominally on a yearly basis. This information is provided for the most part electronically through websites maintained by Service Units (e.g., MODIP) and Academic Units (Departments) that are also responsible for the content, indices, and regular updates. The department websites include the curricula and additional student resources, as well as biosketches, publications, and points of contact for faculty and staff. Websites are available in Greek and condensed English versions that are updated regularly (except for assessment metrics). The central Information Technology (IT) Unit strives for excellence in making the basic information available. However, research websites could benefit from more graphical information that could also improve marketability especially to Industry, and the general public. In addition to websites, public information is disseminated through Open House Days, and during the annual Welcome Event for the freshmen.

Public information to consider incorporating, incudes: i) learning and assessment procedures, as well as pass rates on courses; ii) marketing of UTH excellence in teaching, research, points-of-pride, practical training, as well as job opportunities and placement of graduates; iii) central coordination and links of department-level OMEAs with MODIP; and, iv) a regularly updated entry for frequently asked questions (FAQ) in the central website.

Panel judgement

Principle 7: Public Information	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R7.1 In both central and department websites, include public information for local and Industry stakeholders with the target of commercializing UTH research and technology (including e.g., patents and opportunities for collaborative research and development).

R7.2 Especially with the addition of new departments, boost UTH efforts to encourage departments to update faculty research websites and regularly update CVs, in Greek and English, maximizing uniformity and graphics to facilitate dissemination to the public.

R7.3 Explore means to increase the number of student viewers of academic information such as UTH points-of-pride (e.g., (inter)national rankings), as well as notifications for timely class evaluations; but also include social media to reach the public viewers, and further enhance marketing efforts of UTH branding.

Principle 8: External Evaluation and Accreditation of the IQAS

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE PERIODICALLY EVALUATED BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HQA, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ACCREDITATION OF THEIR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS (IQAS). THE PERIODICITY OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION IS DETERMINED BY HQA.

> *External quality assurance, in the case in point external evaluation aiming at accreditation, may act as a means of verification of the effectiveness of the Institution's internal quality assurance, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives. Additionally, it can provide information with a view to public acknowledgement of the positive course of the Institution's activities.*
>
> *The Higher Education Institutions engage in periodic external quality assurance which is conducted taking into consideration any special requirements set by the legislation governing the operation of the Institutions and their academic units.*
>
> *Quality assurance, in this case accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.*

Institution compliance

The UTH has undergone an institutional external evaluation on December 2015. In addition, the newly merged TEIs have undergone similar procedures. MODIP members and the entire university staff are well-aware of their role and importance in the IQAS external review and its contribution to the quality overall. However, the AP noted that the students and alumni have yet to get seriously involved in the QA process. The UTH has submitted a follow-up report in response to the last External Evaluation of the Institution. The report mentions that the Institution has addressed the largest part of the recommendations successfully. Remaining items, such as infrastructure improvements, are in the planning phase.

This is the first QA accreditation for the University MODIP.

Panel judgement

Principle 8: External Evaluation & Accreditation of the IQAS	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R6.1: The institution should follow up and monitor the remaining recommendations (e.g. infrastructure).

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I.   Features of Good Practice

- Very active student groups supported by the university, like Centaurus (formula 1), Prosvasi/Access, Mousika Sinola.
- The establishment of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit (IEU) is to develop the entrepreneurial and innovation skills of the University of Thessaly.
- International reputation of the Department of Physical Education & Sport Science.
- Key contacts with external stakeholders and support from the local community.
- Good practices in international outreach of UTH such as Erasmus+, MoUs, International mobility and ESN activities for foreign students.
- Exemplary way of incorporating the merged TEIs in the structure and functions of the university.

II.   Areas of Weakness

- There is no formal procedure of engaging alumni and external stakeholders in the process of restructuring the curricula.
- The primary starting and ending point of the QA review loop should be the student, main beneficiary of University services. Although there exist students' questionnaires for almost all courses, despite the effort of the administration and teaching staff, the student's participation to the QA processes remains very low.
- A key factor for the evaluation of the goals and overall performance of a University has to do with the 'quality' of its alumni. The actions of UTH in monitoring its alumni remain very limited.
- The English version of the websites of some Departments and Units must be improved to incorporate most of the features and information included in the Greek version.

III.   Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- The development of a dedicated plan and related procedures for further improvement of the infrastructure relative to the exterior buildings and grounds.
- The development of procedures for the sustainable and continuous engagement of stakeholders to enable long-term funding, human resources, and infrastructure opportunities.

- The Biographies for all Faculty members should be described and identified in a uniform format. These should include degrees and institutions attended, areas of research interests, and current research work.
- A procedure should be established to ensure the same IQAS process is followed by all departments of the UTH.
- UTH should put significantly more effort to integrate the students in the UTH QA process through dedicated QA feedback sessions, publicity of specific measures or changes resulting from the evaluations etc.
- HQA should act towards the evaluation of the 'quality' of the alumni, key factor for the evaluation of the goals and overall performance of a University, establish relevant indicators and assist the Universities in extracting the necessary data from national, EU or international databases.
- UTH should provide a better working environment for all PhD candidates in all campuses as well as adequate transportation for commuting between campuses.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: 1,3,4,8

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: 2,5,6,7

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: 0

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: 0

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

The members of the Accreditation Panel for the IQAS of the University of Thessaly

Name and Surname   Signature

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