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

Environmental Sciences

Department of Environmental Sciences
University of Thessaly

22 April 2025

Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης
ΕΣΠΑ 2021-2027
Πρόγραμμα
Ανθρώπινο Δυναμικό και Κοινωνική Συνοχή
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Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation of **Environmental Sciences** of the **University of Thessaly** for the purposes of granting accreditation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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 **Environmental Sciences** 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. **Prof. Emeritus Spyros G. Pavlostathis (Chair)**
   Georgia Institute of Technology, USA

2. **Prof. Emeritus Stavros Constantinou**
   The Ohio State University, USA

3. **Prof. Emeritus Nikolaos Katopodes**
   University of Michigan, USA

4. **Prof. Thomas Panagopoulos**
   Universidade do Algarve, Portugal

5. **Mr. Marios Daskalakis**
   Student Representative, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

In preparation for the review and assessment of the new undergraduate study programme (USP) in operation of Environmental Sciences of the University of Thessaly, the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) reviewed a multitude of materials provided by the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education (HAHE), which included background information and guidance on the review and accreditation process, as well as detailed material and data related to the programme under evaluation, such as the programme accreditation proposal and associated appendices provided by the new USP through the HAHE.

The programme review was conducted via teleconference, organized, and coordinated by HAHE and the University of Thessaly (UTH). The schedule and agenda of the review were as stated below.

Monday 14/04/2025:

a) Preliminary private meeting of the EEAP. Discussion of the programme under review; assignment of writing sections of the draft accreditation report to the EEAP members.

b) Welcome meeting and a brief overview of the new USP with the Vice Rector of the University of Thessaly and President of MODIP Prof. I. Anagnostopoulos and the Head of the Department of Environmental Sciences Prof. E. Anastasopoulos. Brief presentation of the Department of Environmental Sciences history and accomplishments; presentation of the structure, strengths & weaknesses, and other futures of the new USP.

c) Meeting with the Department Internal Evaluation Group (IEG/OMEA) members and the University Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP). OMEA members: Profs. D. Papanastasiou, E. Papadopoulou, D. Christodoulou, and K. Kakavas. QAC/MODIP members: Profs. N. Tsiropoulos and Th. Metaxas. QAU/MODIP representatives: Mrs. E. Tsironi, MODIP Coordinator and Mrs. D. Manou, MODIP staff. Discussion of quality standards and degree of compliance of the USP to these standards consistent with the University standards and targets as well as those set by the HAHE.

d) EEAP meeting. Discussion of the programme under review, impressions of the first day, coordination, and preparation for the remaining review and evaluation process.

Tuesday 15/04/2025:

a) Meeting with USP teaching staff members, Profs. Z. Kyriakopoulou, E. Providas, D. Kasiteropoulou, M. Sykiotis, V. Kapralou, Lecturer and I. Faraslis, Special Teaching Staff: Discussion of teaching involvement, learning resources and other features of the new PSP, professional development, research activities, as well as link between teaching and research.

b) Meeting and discussion with ten (10) current USP students.

c) Meeting with USP administrative staff member Mrs. A. Tsitsiva, Deputy Head of Secretariat, and teaching staff members: On-line (video) tour of facilities, discussion of facilities,

equipment, laboratory safety policy, learning resources, as well as current needs for building upgrade and maintenance and acquisition of new research equipment.
d) Meeting and discussion with employers and USP social partners: Mr. V. Moraitis, Member of the Association of Industries of Thessaly and Central Greece; Mr. D. Peirounakis, President of the Union of Environmental Scientists of Greece; Mr. K. Tsipis, Directorate of Environment and Spatial Planning, Department of Environment, Region of Thessaly; Mr. Ch. Giakouvis, President of the Chamber of Larissa.
e) Private debriefing meeting (EEAP members only): Discussion of the outcomes and findings of the USP virtual visit; preparation of oral report.
f) Closure meeting with Vice Rector and President of MODIP, Department Head, OMEA and QAC members, and MODIP Coordinator: Informal, oral presentation of the EEAP USP key findings, discussion, and clarifications.

Wednesday 16/04/2025 to Saturday 19/04/2025:
Draft report writing. EEAP virtual meeting. Review and finalization of the draft report.

Throughout the review and evaluation process, the EEAP was in close communication with the Department administration and MODIP staff, who were very accommodating in providing additional information requested by the EEAP. The EEAP found that the Department administration and MODIP staff, as well as the faculty, current USP students, staff, and stakeholders interviewed were eager and helpful in our discussions, providing valuable additional information.

III. New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation Profile

The Department of Environmental Sciences, and thus the USP Environmental Sciences, were established in 2019 within the new School of Technology of the University of Thessaly which absorbed the Technological Education Institute (TEI) of Thessaly and TEI of Central Greece (Government Gazette No. 4589-13/29-01-2019). The USP Environmental Sciences began operation with the academic year 2019-2020.

The mission of the programme is the complete education of students in theoretical and applied topics of Environmental Sciences, and the securing of the best prospects for future careers in the current employment market. According to the classification of UNESCO (ISCED 2013), the academic field of the USP belongs to the general areas «05 Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics» and specifically the subfield «0521 Environmental Sciences».

The USP is a four-year study resulting in a Diploma in Environmental Sciences. The curriculum includes eight (8) semesters of study, each lasting 13 weeks. To obtain a diploma, the student must have successfully passed forty-nine (49) courses and completed a diploma thesis. Of the 49 courses, 44 are required, and 5 are elective courses. Alternatively, a student may take a combination of 3 elective courses and an internship. In either case, the complete programme study corresponds to 240 ECTS, 10 of which are attributed to the thesis.

The Department of Environmental Sciences has 13 faculty members (4 Professors, 3 Associate Professors, 5 Assistant Professors, 1 Lecturer), three members of EDIP (one with a Ph.D.), one member of ETEP, one academic scholar on scholarship, one instructor with a special contract, and two administrative office employees. The Department appointed a new faculty member for the next academic year.

USP graduates are trained in interdisciplinary research with abilities and skills to study and solve critical national and global environmental problems within the framework of a sustainable and circular economy. Graduates are prepared for careers in both the private and public sectors of the economy, capable of staffing national or international research or administrative organizations, as well as continuing with doctoral studies. There are strong links to society, which is a key priority of the USP, the Department of Environmental Sciences, and the Institution.

The Department of Environmental Sciences has a postgraduate studies programme Environmental Management and supports doctoral studies.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme
The feasibility of the operation of the new department should be justified based on:

- *the needs of the national and regional economy (economic sectors, employment, supply-demand, expected academic and professional qualifications)*
- *comparison with other national and international study programmes of the same scientific field*
- *the state-of-the-art developments*
- *the existing academic map; the differentiation of the proposed department from the already existing ones needs to be analysed, in addition to the implications of the current image of the academic map in the specific scientific field.*

d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department

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

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

e. The structure of studies

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

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

f. The number of admitted students

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

g. Postgraduate studies and research

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

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

The Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Thessaly, on the campus of Geopolis near the city of Larissa, was established in 2019 based on Law 4589 (ΦΕΚ 13/29-01-

2019) dictating the annexation of the TEI of Thessaly and the incorporation of its faculty. The department of Environmental Sciences did not exist before this merging, and its establishment was primarily intended to address the need in environmental studies in Greece and secondarily to house some faculty members of the TEI of Thessaly who had worked in areas that could support the broad field of Environmental Sciences. To that end, three (3) new hires were made at the Assistant Professor level, targeting areas at the core of Environmental Sciences. These, together with nine (9) members of the former TEI of Thessaly and one (1) new member of the University of Athens, comprise currently the faculty of the Department of Environmental Sciences. Two (2) additional positions will be filled in the Fall semester of 2025; one offer has been made and accepted.

The mission of the programme is the complete education of students in theoretical and applied topics of Environmental Sciences, and the securing of the best prospects for future careers in the current employment market. According to the classification of UNESCO (ISCED 2013), the academic field of the USP belongs to the general areas «05 Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics» and specifically the subfield «0521 Environmental Sciences».

b. *The strategy of the Institution for its academic development*

The University of Thessaly realized that the annexation of the TEI of Thessaly presented a unique opportunity to enter the area of Environmental Science. Only one other University programme in Environmental Sciences existed in 2019, that of the University of the Aegean, located on the Island of Lesvos. Thus, the new USP would be the only such programme in continental Greece, positioned halfway between its two largest urban centers. The decision for the creation of the programme was ideally timed, as climate change, sustainability, green development, and extreme weather events threaten the natural environment at an alarming rate. The overall strategic plan was documented in the proposal of the USP and was described in detail during the presentation by the Department head and the Department Internal Evaluation Group (IEG/OMEA).

Because of the annexation of several other satellite campuses in 2019, the University of Thessaly has become the third-largest University in Greece. The strategic plan of the University of Thessaly is to become a premier institution in the Nation and to be recognized for its academic excellence. This also translates to the programme in Environmental Sciences, which has great opportunities in educating new environmental scientists and equipping them with skills that will be of value to society.

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

The documentation of the feasibility of the Department is good. A significant effort has been made to collect all the relevant information and prepare the relevant documents. The region of Thessaly is ideal for applications of environmental studies, as it is exposed to significant pollution from agricultural runoff and associated industries. It is also subjected to extreme droughts and flooding, overuse of groundwater resources, and unregulated energy production and consumption. All these factors present an opportunity for the USP to become a leader both in the region and nationally.

The Department of Environmental Sciences is housed in three (3) buildings covering approximately 3.200 square meters on the campus of Geopolis near the City of Larisa. There are three (3) classrooms with 35-60 seats, and three (3) auditoria with 70-200 seats. These are all equipped with modern tools for instructions. The Department also has ten (10) laboratories covering a broad spectrum of subjects in Environmental Sciences. Several, but not all of these, are equipped with state-of-the-art instruments.

d. *The documentation of the sustainability of the new department*

The USP has a well-functioning number of classrooms, laboratories, computer facilities, and a library. The laboratories and equipment are sufficient and adequate for the instructional needs of the students. The faculty also indicated that the equipment is constantly updated and supplemented, thus there is no issue with carrying out the ongoing research projects or applying for new grants. There is access to adequate computing resources and to High Performance Computing nodes at other Departments or institutions.

The Department has thirteen (13) full-time faculty members, eleven (11) of whom have a doctorate. Several have published work in the general field of Environmental Sciences. The expected new hires in the next academic year will also increase the programme's strength in the area of Environmental Sciences. However, there is no guarantee that future retirements will lead automatically to new hires, as the process of allocating positions to Departments by the University and the Government is neither transparent nor consistent.

The faculty is supported by one (1) lecturer, three (3) members of EDIP (one with a Ph.D.), and one (1) laboratory technician. Additionally, 5-6 adjunct instructors are employed each semester to cover the needs of required or elective courses. Finally, the USP is supported by two (2) administrative employees.

Several, but not all, faculty members carry externally funded research projects directly related to the environment. Funding of research projects is obtained from local and national sources as well as Industry. The size of the grants is relatively small, and there is no evidence of institutional support for identifying funding sources or mentoring early career faculty with regard to seeking external research funding.

e. *The structure of studies*

The undergraduate programme is a four-year study resulting in a Diploma in Environmental Sciences. The curriculum includes eight (8) semesters of study, each lasting 13 weeks. To obtain a diploma, the student must have successfully passed forty-nine (49) courses and completed a diploma thesis. Of the 49 courses, 44 are required, and 5 are elective courses. Alternatively, a student may take a combination of 3 elective courses and an internship. In either case, the complete programme study corresponds to 240 ECTS, 10 of which are attributed to the thesis.

Each course is associated with specific learning outcomes, and the syllabi indicate the links between teaching and research, and the integration of technology to improve the learning processes. Several published internal regulations exist for all aspects of course and laboratory delivery, examination, grading, laboratory exercises, preparation of diploma thesis, etc. Modes

of teaching include theory, practice exercises, laboratory exercises, homework, and individual or group study assignments. The students' performance and grading are a combination of end-of-semester examinations and other assignments. Practical training is achieved through elective internships.

The participation of students in course/instructor evaluations is below 10%. The results are good, but only averages for the entire Department are reported; there is no evidence of a formal process for the use of these evaluations for the improvement of the study programme and individual courses.

f. *The number of admitted students*

The number of enrolled students has varied significantly over the five years of operation of the programme. During the first two years, the number of admitted students was 176 and 172, respectively. For the following two years, admissions dropped to 32 and 39 students, respectively. Finally, for the academic year 2023-2024, the number of admitted students increased to 89. The abrupt drop in enrolment is attributed to the application of a minimum level in the grade achieved during the national matriculation examination. To overcome the drop in enrolment, from the academic year 2023-2024, the Department joined the 4th scientific field, in addition to the 2nd and 3rd scientific fields for the national matriculation examination. Regardless of these fluctuations in the number of admitted students, the Department believes that a desirable number of new students should be approximately 80, which will be reflected in the proposal that the USP submits to the Ministry of Education.

g. *Postgraduate studies and research*

The Department operates a postgraduate studies programme entitled MSc in Environmental Management. The PSP was created in the academic year 2022-2023, in which 13 students enrolled. During the academic year 2023-2024, the enrollment increased to 19. The PSP offers advanced coursework and practical training at level 7 according to the European Framework of Higher Education. The programme's goals are to provide its graduates with specialization in advanced multi-disciplinary knowledge and professional credentials for the management and mitigation of environmental problems.

There are currently 17 doctoral candidates and 2 post-doctoral researchers in the Department, conducting research on various environmental topics. There are currently 19 funded research projects in the programme. The total number of publications by the faculty as of October 2023 is 318.

II. Analysis

The documents provided to the EEAP for the evaluation of the USP in Environmental Sciences show an excellent and meticulous preparation by the ISG/OMEA, and a serious commitment by the faculty and the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP) of the University of Thessaly. The oral presentations and interviews projected an image of synergy and coordination that is worthy of praise. In particular, the students and stakeholders of the Department painted a glowing image of the programme and the faculty.

The goal of the USP is to provide a programme that teaches current and emerging issues for the natural environment and produce graduates who will promote modern practices for the protection of the environment in Greece. The long-term vision of the USP is to become the leading department of Environmental Sciences in Greece and to be recognized internationally for its research. There is no doubt that all faculty work hard towards the goals of the programme.

The USP makes a valiant effort to deliver a complete educational programme; however, at the present time the Department is understaffed, and relies on adjunct instructors to cover several of the required and elective courses. The members of the faculty who belonged to the former TEI of Thessaly teach many of the service courses in mathematics, statistics, chemistry and biology; however, they do not genuinely belong to the new academic profile of the Department, and cannot contribute to research in the field of Environmental Sciences. The newly hired faculty are well prepared, have the necessary knowledge base, and once they get more experience, they should be able to deliver a first-class education to their students. Presently, however, they are limited to working on their own without any formal mentoring, opportunities for sabbaticals, and very little support from the University administration.

The location of the new USP is ideal for studies in Environmental Sciences. The campus is located in the heart of the largest agricultural region of Greece, which has been adversely impacted by pollution, natural resource miss-management, extreme weather events, and climate change. The accessibility of the campus by students in the largest urban centers in Greece, and the affordability of the city of Larissa, make the USP attractive to students who wish to study Environmental Sciences.

The future of the new USP seems to be very bright, assuming that the Ministry of Education and the University of Thessaly provide the necessary support. The challenges will be to increase the visibility of the programme, sensitize high-school graduates to environmental issues, convince the Government to invest in the construction of modern laboratories, an upscale dormitory on the Geopolis campus, and fund scholarships targeted specifically at environmental studies.

Many of the current students are transfers from the other two Environmental Sciences Programmes in Greece. This increases the number of enrolled students beyond the level proposed by the programme. Therefore, the main challenge of this USP lies in the continuous replacement of the retiring faculty from the former TEI by a new faculty with strong background and research profiles in the field of Environmental Sciences. The creation of the Department was indeed founded on this belief, and half of the faculty are currently genuine environmental scientists. The programme will succeed when this transformation is completed.

The sustainability of the programme is directly dependent on the number and quality of its students and the student-to-faculty ratio. Since matriculation and admission of students are controlled by the Ministry of Education, the Department can only affect the number of admissions indirectly. Compared to the other two programmes in Environmental Sciences, the USP at the University of Thessaly has the advantage of location, accessibility, and affordability. If the wish of the USP for admission of 80 students per academic year is granted, an increase in the number of faculty will be necessary. Over a five-year period, this number translates to 400 students, and a student to faculty ratio of over 25, which is too high. Because the USP

must develop and promote its research activity, this ratio will prohibit achieving the programme's own goals.

The curriculum is well planned, and the description of each course is given with sufficient detail.
As is the case for most Greek Universities, there are no prerequisites stated. This results in difficulties delivering the course material at the appropriate level and frustrates the students who are well prepared for university work. The enlargement of the admission pool to students from Economics and Informatics (Scientific field 4) will further exacerbate this problem.

The participation of the students in course/instructor evaluations is disappointing. The Department must find ways to increase the input and utilize the results of student evaluations as a unit. This may include returning to paper evaluations during class or laboratory sessions, restructuring the questions to convince the students that the answers will lead to study programme improvement, conducting mid-term evaluations to allow the students to experience the influence of their opinions in the present term, and organizing seminars to explain the value of student input to the success and prestige of the programme.

III. Conclusions

The strategic plan of the Department is feasible and sustainable, if certain conditions are met because the USP in Environmental Sciences at the University of Thessaly is still undergoing a transition. The first five years of the programme's existence have been promising. The hiring of new, research driven faculty has been very successful; however, hiring must be continued. The number of doctoral students in the programme is impressive, and the productivity of the new faculty is very good. The student to faculty ratio is high and must be lowered to allow for increase in research funding, faculty sabbaticals, and collaboration with other Departments and Universities. Participation of students to course/instructor evaluations must be improved. The students and stakeholders should be formally engaged in the planning and revision of the USP curriculum.

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	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the department and the study programme	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new department	
Fully compliant	
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	
Substantially compliant	**X**
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

R1.1 Continue with the hiring of early career faculty in the core of Environmental Sciences.

R1.2 Improve student participation in course/instructor evaluations.

R1.3 Engage students and stakeholders in the revision of the USP curriculum.

R1.4 Provide formal mentoring of early career faculty.

R1.5 Improve the student to faculty ratio.

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

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

Based on the documentation provided to the EEAP and the presentations by the Department Head and ISG/OMEA, the University of Thessaly has compiled an impressive list of goals and activities for implementing the quality assurance of the new USP. These cover teaching, research, connection to society, internationalization, the Institution's climate, and internal administration. Several independent committees oversee the quality assurance activities involving students, faculty, and departmental stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on increasing the level of research activity according to social and market needs, recognition of students and faculty members for high achievement, and enhancing the visibility of the Department at the national and international level.

The EEAP met with members of QAU/MODIP and discussed its methods for quality assurance and the enforcement of its plans. It is evident that the QAU/MODIP collects detailed data related to each academic programme, including the number of students registered, student evaluations, research activities, and student support services. The data is processed, and the results of a variety of statistical analyses are made available to the Departmental administration and its faculty. There is a commitment to repeat the internal evaluation process on an annual basis.

The course/instructor evaluation questionnaires are straightforward and cover most aspects of the courses in the programme of study. There is a well-designed process for the timing and completion of the evaluations; however, the student participation rates are low. Yet, the evaluation results reveal strong agreement that the teaching faculty is genuinely dedicated to a high quality of education. The accessibility of the faculty is recognized, and the response to student concerns is satisfactory. It is clear that the students respect the instructors, and that the approach to teaching and learning has created a strong bond between instructors and students. During the meeting of the EEAP with the students, it was evident that they were very satisfied by the quality of the education they receive.

II. Analysis

The plans for quality assurance of the new USP are comprehensive, well-articulated and impressive for their breadth and depth, consistent with those of the Institution. As this is a new programme with many of its goals in transition, it is important to maintain the present quality standards in teaching. Considering the relatively small number of tenured and tenure-track faculty in the Department, this may be a challenging issue. The current quality of the programme is achieved by a major effort and exceptional dedication of the faculty. However, the teaching of specialized courses will require hiring new faculty and relying on external instructors. These factors introduce elements of uncertainty in the quality of teaching, accessibility of the faculty by the students, and quality control.

The Quality Assurance Policy of the USP includes numerous references to its commitment for continuous improvement. The specifics are documented in the decision of the general assembly of the Department dated 16-11-2021 and its update of 06-10-2023. Based on the data presented to the EEAP, the targets are paired with suitable key performance indicators (KPIs). They are continuously monitored and updated according to the Quality Assurance Policy established by the University and the Department of Environmental Sciences. It is worth to mention that most of the measured KPIs meet or exceed the corresponding target values, however, several of them are set to low initial values.

III. Conclusions

The EEAP has found an outstanding effort and documentation regarding quality assurance. Its implementation in practice will have to be safeguarded against possible vulnerabilities in the transition to the new programme.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R2.1 Introduce measures to increase student participation in course/instructor evaluations. They may include a return to paper evaluations in class, mid-term evaluations, so the students can see the impact of their opinion on the current term, and seminars to explain to the students the value of evaluation to the programme and their own careers.

R2.2 Establish a formal mentoring process for early career faculty and temporary instructors to ensure continuity and stability of quality standards.

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

Institutions should design the new undergraduate programmes following a defined written process, which will involve the participants, information sources and the approval committees for the programme. The objectives, the expected learning outcomes, the intended professional qualifications and the ways to achieve them are set out in the programme design. The above details, as well as information on the programme's structure, are published in the Student Guide.

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Thessaly (UTH) was established in the context of the annexation of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Thessaly

and the TEI of Central Greece with the UTH per Law 4589 (Government Gazette 13A, 29/01/2019) in January 2019. It is located in Larissa and is part of the School of Technology of the UTH. It is the most recent of three Departments of Environmental Sciences in Greece; the other two are at the Ionian University in the island of Zakynthos and the University of the Aegean in the island Lesvos. The Department offers education in the field of Environmental Sciences, broadly defined.

According to UNESCO's international categorization of scientific fields in education, the Department of Environmental Sciences falls under the "05 Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Statistics" category, specifically encompassing the subcategory "0521 Environmental Sciences."

The Department of Environmental Sciences is fully aligned with the strategic goals of UTH. The USP identifies four fundamental strategic objectives: (1) Continuous improvement of the educational process; (2) Production of high-level research based on international standards and the integration of research and innovation with industry and the labour market; (3) Promotion of interdisciplinarity; and (4) Adaptability to the needs of students.

During the initial design and subsequent improvements of the USP, the Department of Environmental Sciences conducted a comparative evaluation with other domestic and international University departments. The University Environmental Impact Assessment Committee played a key role in establishing a comprehensive Environmental Assessment Committee. It aimed to develop a USP programme equivalent to the oldest Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of the Aegean.

The programme comprises mandatory core and specialization courses. Students take the mandatory core courses during the first four semesters. The specialization courses are offered in the last four semesters and include both mandatory and elective courses. Overall, the programme, through course offerings and the adoption of paperless strategies, encourages developing digital skills. Attendance of laboratory exercises is required.

At the start of each academic year, the Department of Environmental Sciences hosts a reception for first-year students. During this event, the curriculum, courses, and expectations are presented. Additionally, the Academic Advisor assists students in transitioning smoothly through the various stages of their studies.

The programme's structure at the Department of Environmental Sciences requires a student to attend 8 semesters and complete at least 240 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The distribution of the ECTS credits is even over the eight semesters of the USP (i.e., 30 ECTS per semester).

The USP provides opportunities for students to gain work experience in one of two ways: (a) to prepare a diploma thesis that may be part of a research programme or in collaboration with a local or regional public office, research institution or industry; and (b) to participate in an internship in a company, a public or private research center, and in a local or regional public

office. The above options aim at acquiring work experience by the student in a subject determined under the responsibility of the supervising professor.

Faculty encourage students to participate in research projects, summer school programmes, scientific conferences, and lectures by invited researchers or professionals in fields related to the Department's research areas.

There is a procedure in place for periodic revisions of the programme curriculum. The Department analyzes the results of students' course/instructor evaluations. The Department Assembly has established 10 committees which, when necessary, propose action steps for reforming the curriculum's contents and objectives that lead to improving the quality of the education provided.

The Student Guide is well-written and comprehensive and provides a detailed outline of the courses, including but not limited to expected learning outcomes, how students will be evaluated, a bibliography for each course, and other relevant issues.

II. Analysis

The programme is well-designed and conforms with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Level 6. It provides students ample opportunities for work experience, practice, internships, field trips, and teaching and research links.

Having more detailed information on the goals and functions of the 10 committees responsible for monitoring the programme's quality would be helpful. In addition, it is crucial to understand how consultation with stakeholders, external experts, students, and graduates is implemented in curriculum revision.

Although the Department of Environmental Sciences at UTH carefully modelled itself on the University of the Aegean programme, it has not yet achieved equivalent professional rights, which limits the degree's value because it creates employment issues for its graduates. However, during the meeting with the USP stakeholders, the President of the Union of Environmental Scientists of Greece mentioned that a committee is currently composed to meet with the administration of the Department of Environmental Sciences to coordinate efforts for securing professional rights. It is noteworthy that since the academic 2023, no transfer of students has been permitted from the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of the Aegean to the Department of Environmental Sciences at the UTH.

III. Conclusions

The programme's strengths are detailed in the findings and analysis sections above. The provided documents and presentations by the Department administration and IEG/OMEA demonstrates to the EEAP that the USP has made substantial effort in designing the programme. However, there is no substantial difference from the two existing undergraduate programmes in Greece.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R3.1 Redesign the programme to differentiate from the other two Environmental Sciences programmes by focussing on environmental issues of continental Greece.

R3.2. Consider using the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the general framework for the programme curriculum, wherever possible.

R3.3 Establish a formal process for students' active participation in the USP curriculum development.

R3.4 Consider expanding the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) courses, given the demand in the private and public sectors of the economy.

R3.5 Develop action steps to achieve professional rights of the USP graduates.

R3.6 Consider the formation of an External Advisory Board consisting of USP graduates, employers, and social partners to help the programme meet the local demands in environmental protection, industry, and public sectors of the economy.

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

The academic unit should ensure that the new undergraduate programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process. The assessment methods should reflect this approach.

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

- ✓ *respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths*
- ✓ *considers and uses different modes of delivery where appropriate*
- ✓ *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods*
- ✓ *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and application of pedagogical methods aiming at improvement*
- ✓ *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys*
- ✓ *reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff*
- ✓ *promotes mutual respect in the student-teacher relationship*
- ✓ *applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints*

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

On matters of student-centred learning, teaching and assessment of students, the Department utilizes many and diverse means of teaching, be it the traditional lectures or using computers, organizing outdoor activities and visits or meetings and seminars on matters related to the environment. The Department also uses evaluation forms to assess the USP. Specifically, the faculty encourage students to fill out questionnaires for assessment of the quality and effectiveness of teaching for each subject and instructor in the programme individually. On that, the teaching staff informed the EEAP that they take these questionnaires, suggestions, and complaints very seriously and always aim for the betterment of the USP. In addition, the Department assigns about thirty-five students to each member of the faculty and appoints the latter as the students' academic advisor. The academic advisors help and guide students through their studies and courses and answer any question they might have. They also give information on a wide variety of paths or options or decisions the students might face and in general lead them through their academic years of study. Lastly, according to the student interviews, the relationship between students and teaching staff is exemplary.

II. Analysis

The Department of Environmental Sciences of the University of Thessaly utilizes very flexible and diverse means of teaching and modes of delivery in order to make the programme overall

more advanced, interesting and at the same time exciting and fun for every type of student. Using traditional lectures, modern laboratories or workshops and individual or team assignments, students easily understand and get used to the reality of university studies, cooperation with their fellow students and research. In addition, students have access to online tools, websites, forums, media, etc. in order to get familiar with modern equipment and start mastering the nowadays mandatory digital skills. The Department has also adopted many different extracurricular activities, be it outdoor trips or pedagogical visits to private or public sector that are crucial or play an important role in the protection and conservation of the Environment, Climate Change, Sustainability, Recourse Recovery, etc. giving students the chance to get in touch with national and international sectors and companies/associations which might give them ideas, broaden their horizons or make them decide what they want to do in the future. The Department organizes meetings and seminars in which external speakers give speeches in subjects related to Environmental Sciences by which students get motivated and start shaping their career paths.

According to the teaching staff and the students interviewed by the EEAP, the evaluation of the programme is one of the most important aspects. Specifically, the USP is assessed by the students filling out evaluation forms. These questionnaires are crucial for the betterment of the USP as they also contain student complaints about the subjects included in the Curriculum. Sadly, according to some related stats given to the EEAP by the Department administration and teaching staff, only about 10% of the students take part in this type of evaluation. As a result, not many apparent actions are taken by the USP Administration to address these results/complaints.

The Academic Advisors, while being an excellent way to help students familiarize themselves with the programme and the University and get advice related to careers, lack in numbers. As a result, each Advisor has to respond to requests from too many students, which in turn can lead to less time allocated helping each student and can easily complicate both parties' cooperation.

The relationship between the students and the teachers is more than friendly and both parties claim that due to the nature of this specific programme and its location, they are close to one another; the community they have formed is one to admire.

III. Conclusions

The Department has adopted and is following a strong self-centred teaching approach giving students the tools necessary to excel in almost every aspect and subject the programme offers. The students are involved in every matter concerning the Department and work together along with the teaching staff for the betterment of the USP. The relation between them is also exceptional enabling them to work on matters more coherently and effectively. These are supported by the positive comments the students gave during their interviews by the EEAP. The percentage of students who take part in the course/instructor evaluation is extremely low leading to few actions taken.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R4.1 The Department should hire more teaching staff so that the academic advisors can better manage the students they have to guide.

R4.2 Provide feedback to the students and show that their suggestions and recommendations are taken into consideration for the betterment of the programme.

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

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

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

- ✓ *the registration procedure of the admitted students and the necessary documents - according to the law - and the support of the newly admitted students*
- ✓ *student rights and obligations, and monitoring of student progression*
- ✓ *internship issues, granting of scholarships*
- ✓ *the procedures and terms for writing the thesis (diploma or degree)*
- ✓ *the procedure of award and recognition of degrees, the duration of studies, the conditions for progression and assurance of the progress of students in their studies*

as well as

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

Appropriate recognition procedures rely on relevant academic practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions in line with the principles of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. Graduation represents the culmination of the students' study period. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes, and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed (Diploma Supplement).

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

Relevant documentation

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

All information related to Student Admission, Progression, Recognition of Academic Qualifications, as well as Award of Degrees and Certificates of Competence is provided in the Student's Guide Handbook and is readily available in the Department's website. Students are admitted to this USP via the Panhellenic examination or by placement examination for those holding another degree from another University programme. The Department holds the Student's Welcome Day, during which new students get accustomed to the University. The

USP Administration, and specifically the Secretary of the Department holds all the necessary documents with every student's progression of studies which is monitored via many different types of evaluation and knowledge assessment.

The Department participates in the Erasmus+ programme which enables student mobility to and from other international institutes. The Department also takes part in various scholarship programmes like the Fullbright Institute Programme which enables mobility for the teaching staff and postgraduate students to the US in order to take part in a wide variety of seminars and the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) which provides financial aid to financially challenged students. The ECTS is applied throughout the Curriculum and dictates the progression of students towards the final goal of obtaining the diploma. The Diploma Thesis is a required core course and is required to obtain the degree. The Thesis allocation for every student and the exam/evaluation of the course is done under standard procedures by a three-membered faculty panel. Students by the end of their studies get a certificate of digital/computer knowledge and can obtain an optional certificate of pedagogical and teaching competence. The Diploma Supplement, the diploma itself and the Certificate of Competence both in Greek and English, are all issued for all graduates free of charge and without request.

II. Analysis

Enrolment to the USP is achieved through: Panhellenic examination for secondary education students; placement examination for graduates of natural sciences; transfer students from Environmental Sciences programmes. The Department, through Student's Welcome Day hosted at the start of each academic year, provides information about the courses, students' options and career paths, including possible postgraduate studies and various professions.

The progression of the students' studies towards the completion of their degree is based on the ECTS. In total students need 240 ECTS to acquire the degree and graduate. Practical training is optional, and about 30% of the students participate.

Students' progression is constantly monitored based on their lecture participation, laboratory exercises, practical projects, work assignments, and the progress and final examinations. Progression records are held by the Secretary of the Department and is readily available to the students in Greek and English should they wish to acquire a certificate of studies or competence for any external reasons. Students' mobility is possible only through the Erasmus+ programme and is strongly encouraged by the faculty. Currently there are fourteen EU inter-institutional mobility options/scholarships and three inter-institutional international mobility options/scholarships for students who wish to participate.

Students have the option to obtain the Certificate of Paedagogical and teaching competence by partaking in 5 specific courses (three electives and one core course) and practical training (elective) which will enable them to work as Environmental Studies teachers in primary and secondary education. Students by the end of their studies will have gained the certificate of

Digital/computer Knowledge by successfully passing 4 core courses. The certificate is recognized by the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection (ASEP).

The above information is readily available and easily accessible in detail on the Department Website as separate annotations and in the Student's Guide Handbook/Study Guide. The above-mentioned information was further clarified through the discussions of the EEAP with the Department administration and faculty members. Stakeholders working in the environmental area were interested in and supportive of this new programme.

III. Conclusions

Student admission, progression, recognition of academic qualifications and award of degrees and certificates are very effectively and efficiently handled. The students' progression is based on ECTS which complies with the Standard Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Union. Information on all of the above is very easily accessible on the Department Website and the Student's Guide Handbook.

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

R5.1 Consider increasing the diploma thesis ECTS.

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

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Environmental Sciences' USP has defined a process for recruiting new faculty members consistent with Greek public laws. The process is approved by the Senate of the University of Thessaly, following the suggestion of the specific scientific field and the courses of each area by the Assembly of the Department to the Senate. The Assembly of the Department has appointed a 3-member evaluation committee, and the submitted applications are evaluated according to the criteria indicated in the position notice. Relative to hiring new faculty, the EEAP acknowledges that the program operates within a set of constraints established by governmental authorities which significantly influence the faculty composition as well as the adaptation capacity of the Department.

The Department of Environmental Sciences has 13 faculty members (4 Professors, 3 Associate Professors, 5 Assistant Professors, 1 Lecturer), three members of EDIP (one with a Ph.D.), one

member of ETEP, one academic scholar on scholarship, one instructor with a special contract, and two administrative office employees. The Department appointed a new faculty member for the next academic year.

Research collaborations are encouraged and developed at national and international levels so teaching and research faculty members (DEP), Special and Laboratory Teaching Staff (EEDIP), and students can collaborate with other scientists in Greece and abroad. Teaching staff participate in conferences and scientific professional meetings, which allow invitations to collaborate with internationally recognized scientists**.** Funds are available for participation in conferences abroad and funding opportunities through European programmes.

There is an established procedure for further improvement of the teaching competence of the faculty through the University of Thessaly Teaching and Learning Support Center (https://www.uth.gr/en/university/assessment-quality/centre-teaching-and-learning).
Members of the Department are encouraged and supported in their professional development through various mobility options available under European and national programmes.

Despite the availability of active student participation in laboratories and data collection, internships, annual monetary research awards, and funds for research proposals, the Department is understaffed. The teaching workload exceeds the minimum threshold due to insufficient teaching staff relative to the number of undergraduate students.

Students actively participate in research activities, including publications, either through the laboratories or through data collection in the context of preparing their diploma thesis. Students are also afforded off-site internships to enhance their research skills.

The Department of Environmental Sciences encourages initiatives of individual and collective research activity of its members in the context of the personal development of their scientific and research activity in the fields of their scientific interest and expertise. The members of the Department are also active in the institutionalized research laboratories. In addition, the Department organizes lectures by researchers and faculty members of Greek and foreign universities on issues related to environmental studies.

II. Analysis

For hiring new faculty, the only eligibility criterion available for review is the requirement for a Ph.D. in the respective scientific area. Although "criteria indicated in the notice" are referenced, these criteria are not available for review.

The teaching staff are provided with professional development opportunities to attend conferences and professional meetings in Greece and abroad. However, the Department notes that because of lack of funds to cover teaching responsibilities, the current legislative framework restricts extensive mobility, limiting it to the scientific and educational leaves required for research activities. Mobility will create more demand for scarce resources needed to cover the teaching gaps that will have to be covered by additional teaching staff.

Despite the vision of the Department for teaching staff and students to engage in research and laboratory work, the excessive teaching workload imposed upon teaching staff seriously limits the achievement of this vision.

Off-site internship opportunities for students significantly enhance their emerging research skills, particularly in Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Despite the Department's implementation of an electronic evaluation process for student feedback on instruction and teaching staff, the results have been problematic due to a very low response rate (10%). While the students who engaged with the EEAP provided positive feedback about their instructors and courses, more data is needed from the remaining 90% who did not participate.

III. Conclusions

The set of eligibility criteria for teaching staff who participate in the programme are not readily available for review, even though they are referenced in the USP Proposal (Section 6.5).

The understaffing of the Department in teaching faculty and support personnel interferes significantly with the goals of engagement in research activities and professional development for teaching staff and students. This development also interferes with the encouragement of staff mobility.

The student evaluations of teaching staff through surveys merit additional attention due to the poor rate of responsiveness of students to the evaluation survey process.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R6.1. Develop clearly accessible eligibility criteria for recruiting new USP teaching staff.

R6.2. Focus on recruiting and hiring new faculty members with a strong publication record and demonstrate significant potential for future contributions.

R6.3. Implement a comprehensive mentoring programme to nurture new faculty in teaching and research, ensuring their professional growth and success.

R6.4. Consider establishing a sabbatical programme for teaching staff to provide dedicated time for research and collaboration with national and international scientists.

R6.5 Create and promote a cultural shift, so students recognize the critical importance of participating in evaluating instruction and teaching staff.

R6.6. Provide opportunities for a midterm diagnostic survey so that teaching faculty can incorporate student feedback in real-time, demonstrating that the students' feedback is valued.

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

Institutions should have adequate funding to meet the needs for the operation of the academic unit and the new study programme as well as the means to cover all their teaching and learning needs. They should -on the one hand- provide satisfactory infrastructure and services for learning and student support and -on the other hand- facilitate direct access to them by establishing internal rules to this end (e.g., lecture rooms, laboratories, libraries, networks, boarding, career and social policy services, etc.).

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient resources, on a planned and long-term basis, to support learning and academic activity in general, in order to offer students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as, the necessary general and specific libraries and possibilities for access to electronic databases, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communication services, support and counselling services. When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed students, students with disabilities), in addition to the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. Students should be informed about all available services. In delivering support services, the role of support and administration staff is crucial and therefore this segment of staff needs to be qualified and have opportunities to develop its competences.

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Environmental Sciences comprises 13 faculty members (4 Professors, 3 Associate Professors, 5 Assistant Professors, 1 Lecturer), three members of EDIP (one with a Ph.D.), one member of ETEP, one academic scholar on scholarship, one instructor with a special contract, and two administrative office employees. The Department appointed a new faculty member for the next academic year.

The faculty teaches various courses, including biological, physical, chemical, and biochemical processes, ecology, ecosystem management and restoration, waste management, climate change, and economic and sociological approaches to environmental science and digital skills. In addition, the USP includes courses on techniques and methods of spatial analysis and solutions to environmental problems using cutting-edge technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and environmental applications with drone

systems, etc. The Department provided the EEAP with a list of theses that covered a broad range of issues.

The Department of Environmental Sciences is located in the buildings of the former TEI of Thessaly, abolished by the Ministry of Education in 2019. The Department occupies three buildings, with three lecture halls, ten laboratories, and offices for the faculty.

Students of the USP of the Department of Environmental Sciences have access to all services provided by the Department and the University of Thessaly. They are initially informed about them at the reception event for first-year students and during their studies from the Department's website. The students have access to a broad range of services, either face-to-face or online, through the following: Office of the Department, Academic Identity Card, Library services, Liaison Office, Internship Office, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit (MOKE), ACCESS (support structure for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs), Center for Counselling and Psychological Support for Students of the UTH, Computer and Networks Center, eClass platform, Erasmus+, Student Welfare Office, and Physical Education Office.

II. Analysis

Although of variable quality, the Department of Environmental Sciences has adequate infrastructure to support the wide range of courses offered by the USP. Problems exist in the physical plant with heating issues. There is a need for building renovation and infrastructure improvement.

The most critical area is the low number of faculty and understaffing in administrative and technical support areas. Beginning in the academic year 2022-2023, all eight semesters of the USP and the two teaching semesters of the Postgraduate Study Programme will be operational. Therefore, addressing these understaffing deficiencies is crucial.

The Department of Environmental Sciences ensures students are aware of all available services for their success and well-being. These services foster a more supportive and efficient educational environment.

The UTH has developed several positive initiatives to meet all students' needs, including the ACCESS services for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs and the Center for Counselling and Psychological Support. These programmes address the diverse needs of students appropriately.

Student-centered learning is significantly enhanced through thesis writing. During the EEAP meeting, students expressed a preference for a thesis worth 10 ECTS.

There is a need to increase the number of administrative office staff and technicians available to support the laboratories. Currently, teaching staff perform the role of technicians for the laboratories, taking time away from teaching and research.

III. Conclusions

The Department provides a solid student infrastructure, including an adequate physical plant, classrooms, amphitheatres, computer rooms, and 10 laboratories. Specific issues, such as building heating and renovation, have been identified. The Department needs to secure funding to increase the number of support staff in clerical and laboratory functions to release teaching staff from filling in for gaps in these roles.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R7.1 Address building heating and renovation issues identified by the teaching faculty during the EEAP review.

R7.2 Obtain funding for additional clerical staff and special laboratory technical personnel.

R7.3 Consider developing student dormitories to accommodate the anticipated higher number of enrolled undergraduates and the increase in cost of living to make the USP even more attractive.

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

The goal of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP), as defined by legislation 4957/2022, is to continuously enhance the quality of education and research in compliance with global practise, notably those of the European Higher Education Area and the HAHE recommendations. The EEAP was provided with two internal evaluation reports for the 2021-2023 academic years. The Department of Environmental Sciences maintains an integrated information system, in collaboration with QAU, for the collection and analysis of internal and external evaluation data. The Department annually collects data related to the research activity of faculty, available funds, student mobility, academic records and students' satisfaction. Staff satisfaction surveys are not conducted.

II. Analysis

Annual reports of several student quality indexes are composed by the departmental Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) and forwarded to QAU/MODIP for each academic year. The report includes extensive information for the academic body, each study cycle along with analysed data of student satisfaction surveys drawn from each academic term's questionnaires. The Department could cooperate with QAU/MODIP to create their own customised questionnaire where students answer anonymously online questions for each course and provide feedback on both the course content and the instructor. The student satisfaction surveys are processed by QAU/MODIP, which forwards the results to IQAS, the deputy head of the Department and the instructor of each course. For comparison analysis,

instructors are provided with department average scores in addition to their individual ones. IQAS members have access to QAU online data from prior evaluations.

Provisions have been made for the collection of graduates' data, but Alumni information is not systematic. Currently the USP has 81 graduates that can be registered at the Union of Environmental Scientists of Greece.

Participation of students in satisfaction surveys is very low (below 10%).

III. Conclusions

The Department uses an integrated system of data collection that aligns with the quality assurance policy, informs the faculty assembly, the IQAS and QAU/MODIP making a substantial contribution to strategic planning.

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

R8.1 Increase student participation in the satisfaction surveys to gather more accurate information

R8.2 Apply a midterm student satisfaction evaluation. The results could provide information about features of good practices and areas of improvement that faculty could enact them in the upcoming lectures of the semester.

R8.3 Conduct staff satisfaction surveys and forward them to QAU/MODIP to document the needs of faculty and other staff.

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

Vital information about the Department and the USP are available online. General information can be found on the website of the University of Thessaly, which has a link to a dedicated website of the Department of Environmental Sciences. The departmental website is organised in 7 categories. The main tabs consist of the following: Department; Studies; Research; Student issues; Alumni and career development; News and events; Contact. The website is comprehensive, providing in-depth information about the Department, its staff, academic programmes, student support services, and details on events, research news and services. It also serves as a hub for announcements from the Department's Secretariat, regularly updated with information about programmes, activities, news, and other relevant content. Active YouTube and Facebook profiles for the Institution and a Facebook profile of the Department have been set up, raising visibility of events, lectures, and accomplishments of students and staff. Website content is available both in Greek and English.

II. Analysis

The information on the Department's website is current, clear, and easily accessible. Additional content such as past projects, student works, events, international conferences, and alumni achievements, creates a dynamic and engaging overview of previous successes and opportunities effectively showcase the programme. Interviews with students and alumni are posted on YouTube, which is a good practice to promote the programme. External evaluations on the departmental website have a separate tab. Student e-services information is included on a separate tab. Faculty information includes Curriculum Vitae in both Greek and English and sometimes Google Sholar links are provided. The release of all information is subject to a quality control of IQAS, being responsible for the curation of the material.

III. Conclusions

The Department operates a comprehensive website and a dedicated course platform that disseminates public information to students and the wider community, in Greek and in English.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R9.1 Include ORCID and/or Scopus ID in each staff member's CV.

Principle 10: Periodic Internal Review of the New Study Programmes

Institutions and academic units should have in place an internal quality assurance system, for the audit and annual internal review of their new programmes, so as to achieve the objectives set for them, through monitoring and amendments, with a view to continuous improvement. Any actions taken in the above context, should be communicated to all parties concerned.

Regular monitoring, review and revision of the new study programmes aim at maintaining the level of educational provision and creating a supportive and effective learning environment for students. The above comprise the evaluation of: the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date; the changing needs of society; the students' workload, progression and completion; the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students; the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme; the learning environment, support services, and their fitness for purpose for the programme. Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date.

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The self-assessment of the programme is based on monitoring and continuous improvement of the level of educational offerings along with supporting learning environment ensuring the current character of the programme, and strategic goals of the Institution. Factors considered for the assessment include the workload, progress through the degree process, expectations, needs, and students' assessment, scientific/technological developments, societal and job market needs, and national, European, and international policies on the environment.

The IQAS collects information from the delivery of the programme through each semester. Using the student course/instructor evaluations along with scientific, technological, business, and societal developments a proposal for programme improvement is submitted to the Faculty Assembly. Then, the annual report is composed by the IQAS and submitted to the QAU/MODIP for review. Recommendations for improvement of the study programme are shared with the General Assembly of the Department. Decisions are made at the end of the academic year and are implemented at the beginning of the following academic year.

The first self-assessment started with data collection in 2020-2021 and the first self-assessment report was delivered for 2021-2022. The second self-assessment report included graduates from 2022-2023. The first revised study programme was applied in 2023. The most recent annual internal evaluation of the study programme by the QAU/MODIP was recorded in 11-3-2024; the minutes included 8 recommendations for improvement.

II. Analysis

Through the process of internal review and continuous improvement plan the positive aspects of the programme are reinforced, such as the addition of new courses based on scientific developments, and the promotion of student participation in research. For the mitigation of programme weaknesses, the Academic Advisor assists the students and provides guidance in terms of study, career, and professional opportunities.

There is a consideration for the improvement of courses using the course evaluations by the students. However, less than 10% of the students participate in the evaluations. A student representative should participate in the General Assembly of the Department, but he/she does not participate currently There is an involvement of external stakeholders in the revision of the programme, but the procedure is not systematic. Documentation related to external stakeholders' input in the programme design and revision was not made available to the EEAP.

III. Conclusions

The self-assessment procedure of the programme is scheduled to take place annually. The outcomes of the self-assessment are properly recorded and submitted to the QAU/MODIP of the Institution. The findings of the self-assessment are shared within the academic unit in the Faculty Assembly meeting. The self-assessments result is action plans through continuous improvement process. However, the students' participation is very low and the input of external stakeholders, if any, is not documented.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R10.1 Enhance the involvement of external stakeholders and students' participation in the undergraduate study programme revisions.

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

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

HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure and implemented by a panel of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, based on the Reports submitted by the panels, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the Standards, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees. Both academic units and institutions must consistently consider the conclusions and the recommendations submitted by the panels of experts for the continuous improvement of the programme.

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Environmental Sciences, and thus the USP Environmental Sciences, were established in 2019 within the new School of Technology of the University of Thessaly which absorbed the Technological Education Institute (TEI) of Thessaly and TEI of Central Greece (Government Gazette No. 4589-13/29-01-2019). The USP Environmental Sciences began operation with the academic year 2019-2020. As a new USP, it has not been externally evaluated before. However, the University of Thessaly was externally evaluated in 2015 (External Evaluation Report) and in 2019 (Internal Quality Assurance System-IQAS-Accreditation Report), both conducted by external experts appointed by the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (ADIP), a pre-runner of HAHE. Therefore, the foregoing analysis with respect to Principle 11 is based on the above mentioned two reports and actions taken by the University and by extension the Department of Environmental Sciences.

II. Analysis

Relative to Principle 11, the self-evaluation proposal submitted to HAHE by the University of Thessaly for this external evaluation stated that as a new Department had not been externally evaluated before and that preparation for this external evaluation was based on recommendations by internal evaluation committees, without providing any details as to what these recommendations were. However, during the meeting with the Department and University administration, the EEAP requested and received the above mentioned two external evaluation reports along with a new document, prepared in response to the EEAP's request,

in which several prior external recommendations and actions taken are summarized, as follows.

1. "Development of a plan to improve infrastructure, buildings, and spaces."
   The Department compiled a list of infrastructure needs and submitted to the Vice-Rector for Finance & Administrative Affairs (Department Assembly Minutes No. 113/27-01-2025).

2. "Development of procedures and actions to improve research funding."
   The Department has made an effort to increase both external funding and the number of publications.

3. "Collaboration with the USP graduates in order to evaluate the goals, quality, and other factors."
   The Department established an award for excellent student performance and an award for excellent university teaching (Department Assembly Minutes No. 120/11-03-2025).

4. "Promotion of collaborations and synergies within and outside the Department."
   The Department has made an effort to enhance educational and research collaborations internally, as well as collaborations with other institutions, industry, local and national bodies.

The Department acknowledged that a higher effort is needed to address several prior external recommendations, in particular a) have a unified format of all faculty members' CVs; b) increase the extent of students' participation in the evaluation process; and c) observe of course delivery by peers to identify possible improvements and good educational practices.

III. Conclusions

Although the self-evaluation report submitted to HAHE by the University of Thessaly did not address Principle 11, the Department responded positively to the EEAP's request and provided documentation related to several actions taken based on prior external recommendations. However, vital prior recommendations are still to be implemented and there is lack of concrete implementation timelines and documentation of the degree of fulfilment of recommendations for which some action has been taken.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R11.1 Develop a formalized and systematic process to address the recommendations of external evaluations along with a detailed action plan, including degree of fulfilment and implementation timelines.

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

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Environmental Sciences, and thus the USP Environmental Sciences, were established in 2019 as a new Department of the new School of Technology of the University of Thessaly which absorbed the Technological Education Institute (TEI) of Thessaly and of TEI Central Greece (Government Gazette No. 4589-13/29-01-2019). Based on paragraph 1, article 13 of the above-mentioned law, The University of Thessaly was directed to and created an Integration Council which was responsible for the completion of the first-cycle study programmes of the above-mentioned TEI, as well as to help prior TEI students to transition to the new Department, if desired, and thus obtain a university degree. The Integration Council was responsible for the completion of the curricula of the TEI Departments, the award of degrees, certificates, and attestations to the students and graduates of these Departments.

According to the above-mentioned law (Government Gazette No. 4589-13/29-01-2019), through the integration process, students of the former TEI of Thessaly had the option to join an equivalent new programme at the University of Thessaly until the academic year 2023 – 2024, after they had completed the undergraduate study programme of the former TEI of Thessaly, but before graduation.

II. Analysis

The self-evaluation proposal submitted to HAHE by the University of Thessaly for this external evaluation did not address the requirements of Principle 12 and stated that the new Department, and thus the new USP Environmental Sciences, did not result from the evolution of a previous Department or a previous USP. However, during the meeting with the Department and University administration, the EEAP requested and received documentation relative to the integration process of prior TEI programmes. Related to the integration process, the Department of Environmental Sciences developed a detailed list of courses of the former TEI which were recognized for the integration of students of former TEI programmes in the Department of Environmental Sciences of the University of Thessaly (Department of Environment Assembly, decision No. 142/05-03-2024). Based on the above integration process, one student from the Department of Civil Engineering of the former TEI Larissas joined the integration programme of the Department of Environmental Sciences and graduated in 2022. However, there is a discrepancy relative to timing between the development by the Department of the list of courses for the integration of former TEI students (2024) and the graduation of a former TEI student with the University degree (2022). What is even more important, there is no information and documentation in the self-evaluation proposal submitted to HAHE by the University of Thessaly as to what the Department of Environmental Sciences and/or the University of Thessaly did in the transition period, which started in 2019, for TEI students to complete their TEI curriculum and successfully graduate with a technologist (TE) degree. Any further information and documentation the Department submitted to the EEAP in response to EEAP's request for clarification on the above-stated issues, was received past the submission date of the EEAP's report to HAHE.

III. Conclusions

The self-evaluation proposal submitted to HAHE by the University of Thessaly completely ignored the requirements of Principle 12. The EEAP's request for documentation and explanation related to Principle 12 requirements for the TEI to University transition was answered partially, without addressing the above-mentioned lack of documentation and clarification. Additional information and documentation sent by the Department to the EEAP was received past the submission date of the EEAP's report to HAHE.

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

R12.1 The Department must develop and post detailed documentation for all actions taken necessitated by the transition from TEI to University, including a timeline from 2019 to present.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- The programme has the necessary procedures for monitoring quality assurance and continuous improvement which align with the strategic objectives of the Department and the University.
- Faculty and staff are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and dedicated to USP's mission.
- Infrastructure and other resources are adequate for the successful operation of the new USP.
- The employment potential of the new USP graduates in public and/or private positions is high.
- Stakeholders and social partners praised the USP and believe there is a clear need for such graduates.
- The programme is addressing an area of need in the Greek economy, both at local and national level.

II. Areas of Weakness

- The Department has a limited number of faculty members with expertise in Environmental Sciences, able to support the courses offered and undertake research consistent with the mission of the Department.
- The student to faculty ratio is very high, which prohibits achieving the programme's own goals.
- Modest research output for some faculty.
- Procedures and a mechanism for mentoring and professional development of early career faculty were not documented.
- There was no formal, organized involvement of students, external stakeholders, alumni, etc. in the design of the new USP.
- Students' participation in course/instructor evaluation is very low.
- Low participation of students in mobility programmes.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

1) Redesign the programme to differentiate from the other two Environmental Sciences programmes in Greece by focussing on environmental issues of continental Greece.
2) Consider increasing the Diploma Thesis ECTS.
3) Develop Department specific KPIs to set measurable goals, track outcomes, and identify areas for improvement, strengthening the overall quality and impact of the programme.
4) Enhance research activity and productivity.

5) Establish a formal mentoring process for early career faculty and temporary instructors to ensure continuity and stability of quality standards.

6) Introduce mid-term course evaluations to improve the quality of instruction in the current semester.

7) Establish a formal process for students' active participation in the USP curriculum development.

8) Introduce measures to increase student participation in course/instructor evaluations. Provide feedback to the students and show that their suggestions and recommendations are taken into consideration for the betterment of the programme.

9) Develop a formal mechanism of communication with social and industrial partners and other stakeholders to support continuous USP review, curriculum development, and programme enhancement.

10) Develop action steps to achieve professional rights of the USP graduates.

11) Encourage outgoing and incoming mobility of USP students, faculty, and staff.

12) Track the employment and career paths of USP graduates.

13) Conduct staff satisfaction surveys and forward them to QAU/MODIP to document the needs of faculty and other staff.

14) Update the USP website with current and uniform teaching and research staff CVs with ORCID and/or Scopus ID, as well as research output indicators.

15) Develop a formalized and systematic process to address the recommendations of external evaluations along with a detailed action plan, including degree of fulfilment and implementation timelines.

16) Develop and post all actions taken necessitated by the transition from TEI to University, including detailed documentation and a timeline from 2019 to present.

17) Consider creating an External Advisory Board.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: 2, 5, 7, and 9

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: 1, 3, 4, 8, and 10

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: 6, 11, 12

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: None

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname **Signature**

1. **Spyros G. Pavlostathis**

2. **Stavros Constantinou**

3. **Nikolaos Katopodes**

4. **Thomas Panagopoulos**

5. **Marios Daskalakis**