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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
HQA
HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

**Accreditation Report
for the Undergraduate Study Programme
(Integrated Master) of:**

**Agriculture Crop Production and Rural Environment
Institution: University of Thessaly
Date: 14/12/2019**

ΑΡΙΣΤΕΙΔΟΥ 1 & ΕΥΡΥΠΙΔΟΥ, 105 59 ΑΘΗΝΑ
Τηλ.: +30 210 9220944, FAX: +30 210 9220

Ηλ. Ταχ.: adipsecretariat@hqa.gr, Ιστότοπος: <http://www.hqa.gr>

1, ARISTIDOU ST., 105 59 ATHENS, GREECE

Tel.: +30 210 9220944, Fax: +30 210 9220143

Email: adipsecretariat@hqa.gr, Website: www.hqa.gr



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



Report of the Panel appointed by the HQA to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme (Integrated Master) of **Agriculture Crop Production and Rural Environment** of the **University of Thessaly** for the purposes of granting accreditation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A: Background and Context of the Review	4
I. The Accreditation Panel	4
II. Review Procedure and Documentation	5
III. Study Programme Profile.....	6
Part B: Compliance with the Principles	7
Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance	7
Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes.....	10
Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment	13
Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification.....	16
Principle 5: Teaching Staff.....	18
Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support.....	19
Principle 7: Information Management.....	23
Principle 8: Public Information.....	25
Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes.....	27
Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes	29
Part C: Conclusions	31
I. Features of Good Practice.....	31
II. Areas of Weakness.....	31
III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions	31
IV. Summary & Overall Assessment.....	32

PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I. The Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the Undergraduate Study Programme (Integrated Master) of Agriculture Crop Production and Rural Environment of **the University of Thessaly** comprised the following five (4) members, drawn from the HQA Register, in accordance with the Law 4009/2011:

- 1. Prof. Emeritus Ioannis Vlahos (Chair)**
Hellenic Mediterranean University, Heraklion, Greece
- 2. Prof. Sophia Kathariou**
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA
- 3. Prof. Ioannis Tzanetakis**
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA
- 4. Mr. Anestis Delepoglou**
Geotechnical Chamber of Greece, Thessaloniki, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

Three members of the Accreditation Panel (AP), Professors I.Vlahos, S.Kathariou and I. Tzanetakis convened on Monday 9th December 2019 at the “Royal Olympic Hotel” in Athens for a briefing meeting. The AP was briefed by the President and the General Director of HQA on the Quality Assurance (QA) standards for Quality Accreditation of Undergraduate Programmes and Accreditation Guidelines. During the briefing, the Panel received the final timetable for the site visit at the Department of Agriculture, Crop Production and Rural Environment (ACPRE). The fourth member, Mr. Delepoglou, did not participate in person, and joined the meetings via teleconference. Prior to the site visit the AP received the Proposal for Accreditation of the ACPRE, the External Evaluation Report of 2010 and other relevant material. Additional supporting documentation was provided by the ACPRE staff during the on-site visit and presentations. Subsequently, the AP met and discussed the strategy and issues to be considered during the site visit. In the afternoon of the same day, the three members of the AP travelled to Volos and were joined by Mr. Delepoglou.

On Tuesday 10th December 2019, the AP initially met with the University Vice Rector Professor I. Theodorakis and the Department Head, Professor N. Tsiropoulos. The Vice Rector also serves as the President of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU). The AP was briefed on the history and academic profile of the UTH; the Department Head presented the Department’s current profile, its strengths and areas for improvement. Later, the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG), together with representatives of QAU joined the meeting. Discussions were held related to the compliance of the Undergraduate Programme to the standards for quality accreditation and other issues including student questionnaires and assignments. Later on, the AP met teaching staff to discuss the undergraduate study programme; links between teaching and research, professional development opportunities, mobility, faculty workload and evaluation by students. Following that, the AP met with undergraduates and alumni, stakeholders from the private and public sectors, through both physical and videoconference. During these meetings various issues related to student satisfaction with teaching and research, facilities, career paths and relations with stakeholders were discussed. At the end of the day, the AP had a short internal debriefing meeting to reflect on the impressions of the first day and prepare for the second day of the visit.

On the following day, Wednesday 11th December 2019, the AP visited the ACPRE premises and facilities. The AP toured research and teaching laboratories of Entomology, Phytopathology, Pomology, Genetics and Plant Breeding, Agricultural Construction and Environmental Control. The AP also visited the Agricultural Farm and Greenhouses in Velestino. During the visit of the premises, the AP selected randomly two classes and discussed with undergraduate students in the absence of instructors, in order to receive a broader feedback on the programme and student life. Later on, the AP had a short debriefing meeting with the Vice Rector, IEG and QAU, and presented the site visit outcomes.

The AP acknowledges the warm welcome by the ACPRE staff during the visit and their spirit of cooperation. All parties involved conducted themselves professionally and the process was smooth, effective and efficient. During the afternoon, the AP travelled back to Athens.

From Thursday 12th to Saturday 14th December 2019, the AP worked on the Accreditation Report.

III. Study Programme Profile

The Department of Agriculture Crop Production and Rural Environment (ACPRE) was founded in 1984 under the name Department of Agriculture, Crop and Animal Science and the first students enrolled in the academic year 1988-1989. The Department's premises and buildings are located at Fytoko, Nea Ionia, Volos. The Department has also a farm in Velestino covering an area of 150.000 m².

The Department is an independent, self-administered institution run by the Head, Vice-Head and the Department Assembly (consisting of academic staff, as well as representatives of technical and teaching staff and students). ACPRE cooperates closely with Universities and Institutions in Greece and abroad, by encouraging the exchange of academic staff and students, and by organizing joint meetings and research projects.

Today, the Department comprises twenty three (23) Faculty members, ten (10) Laboratory Teaching Staff members, five (5) Special Technical Laboratory Staff, four (4) Administrative Staff, teaching personnel under the P.D. 407/80 and post graduate fellows.

The ACPRE includes 20 research laboratories, 17 of which are officially established.

The number of incoming students is determined by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The total number of incoming students for the academic year 2018-2019 was 162. The total number of undergraduate students today is 743 and ~ 80% of the students graduate within 7 years with an average GPA 7.01. The total number of graduates since 1984 is 705 in addition to 124 MSc and 73 PhD students.

Recently, the programme started offering an Integrated MSc degree within 10 semesters (5 years) requiring a total of 300 ECTS. Each student must complete successfully 55 courses (48 mandatory and 7 electives), a mandatory thesis (30 ECTS). In addition, a 2-month internship during summertime, is considered and assessed as a mandatory course (20 ECTS).

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit is in line with the Institutional policy on quality, and is included in a published statement that is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special objectives related to the quality assurance of study programmes offered by the academic unit.

The quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

In particular, in order to carry out this policy, the academic unit commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate:

- a) the suitability of the structure and organization of the curriculum;*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education;*
- c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching;*
- d) the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff;*
- e) the enhancement of the quality and quantity of the research output among faculty members of the academic unit;*
- f) ways for linking teaching and research;*
- g) the level of demand for qualifications acquired by graduates, in the labour market;*
- h) the quality of support services such as the administrative services, the Library, and the student welfare office;*
- i) the conduct of an annual review and an internal audit of the quality assurance system of the undergraduate programme(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU);*

Study Programme compliance

The University of Thessaly has established an appropriate Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) that has clearly defined the review processes, the programme's continuous improvement, and Key Performance Indicators for all its Departments. The QAU continuously monitors and enforces the Quality Assurance Policy. The ACPRE Internal Evaluation Group (IEG/OMEA) enforces the policy and comprises five (5) Faculty members, each representing a different study area within OMEA. The ACPRE Chair and members of IEG prepared and provided an extensive and thorough presentation of the Department and issues related to the principles for accreditation.

It is noted that, students have not participated in any of the relevant procedures, committees and units, following a decision of UTH students' council. However, students reassured the AP that in the upcoming academic year they will participate in ACPRE governance.

The Department has set specific goals for its undergraduate study programme and will revise and update the curriculum for the next five (5) years. The AP found the academic unit's quality assurance policy to be well-structured, including also a quality policy statement in line with HQA and QAU guidelines.

The annual reports of IEG are quite extensive and with detailed metrics and diagrams describing the actual progress of the Department. However, these reports do not extend after the 2012-2013 academic year. In addition, the submitted Accreditation Proposal was well written, providing relevant information and in full compliance with the HQA guidelines. Yet, the progress in the specific target areas of the 2010 External Evaluation was not explicitly presented.

Although the Department IEG has uploaded the Quality Assurance Policy (QAP) on-line (Greek version) the English version lacks all relative information. The Department needs to update and upload all this information in English as well, and explore additional ways to disseminate the Quality Assurance Policy.

The research activity of the faculty members affects the quality of the student Thesis research project, a prerequisite for the Integrated Masters degree awarded by ACPRE.

Panel judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The AP acknowledges the quality assurance procedures, and recommends continuing efforts to ensure students' participation and involvement in IEG.
- The AP recommends that annual progress reports by the IEG should be performed regularly every year (if done it should be posted on the website), enriched with updated quantitative measures and figures reflecting the current profile of the Department relevant to the undergraduate study programme.
- All information on the Department's website should be in English as it is in the Greek version.
- There is a number of faculty members with anaemic research and funding activity. We recommend ACPRE implements standards for faculty members to increase the quality and number of peer-reviewed publications which should, in turn, increase the probability of funding and vice-versa.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR 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.

Academic units develop their programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile 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 National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. The approval or revision process for programmes includes a check of compliance with the basic requirements described in the Standards, on behalf of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Furthermore, the programme design should take into consideration the following:

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
- *the option to provide work experience to the students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution.*

Study Programme compliance

The Study Programme is deemed sufficient and effective by the AP. The Department's curriculum aims at training agronomists in the science and technology of plant production and rural environment, covering a broad and important area in biological sciences, relevant to agricultural engineering, agronomy, horticulture, plant protection, landscape ecology and management and agricultural economics and policy.

The Study Programme is clearly depicting the provision of work experience to the students through internships and the linking of teaching and research, considering that most courses include laboratory exercises and the research orientation of the Theses. ACPRE studies are divided into three parts. The first part of the studies includes a general introduction to the concepts of biological, technological, financial and social elements of agriculture. The second part, offers courses leading towards student specialization. The third part, consist of optional courses which are specialized and the student can choose according to his/her fields of interest. The students carry out a two-month summer internship, and they also submit a research Thesis.

Overall, the structure of the curriculum allows the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of their studies. This was also evident through fruitful discussions with undergraduate students, programme graduates and stakeholders.

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) that visited the Department in 2010, indicated the need to reshape the Study Programme and the Department largely complied. The AP has been informed that the Department is planning to proceed with amendments and revision of the Programme to go into effect for the following 5 years. It is suggested that this procedure should also encompass feedback from students, programme graduates and stakeholders.

The Department might consider reducing the mandatory courses offered, and introduce additional elective courses during the 4th year and not solely in the 5th as it is practiced today. Additional electives could be also offered on topics not covered sufficiently today, for example: Research methodology, Scientific Writing, Scientific Communications (Seminar) and/or similar related courses. Furthermore a course in General Microbiology must be introduced in the new revised curriculum.

The academic staff links research with teaching in the undergraduate programme, mainly through the Theses and the research conducted in their laboratories. The AP positively views that most undergraduate Thesis topics are primarily research projects with data collection and analysis, and not literature reviews. The AP suggests that an effort be made to improve the quality of the Theses and be presented in conferences and potentially be published in peer-reviewed journals. Currently, a limited number of undergraduate Theses is presented in scientific congresses or get published as scientific articles.

The ACPRE undergraduate curriculum is generally well-articulated and comprehensive, however the student workload compliant with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) needs to be restructured so that it reflects the actual work load required for each course offered.

The Department responded partially to the 2010 External Evaluation implementing fully 60% of the suggested changes and the rest to a lesser degree. However, the AP did not see a point-by-point response to the recommendations of that report.

Students expressed the need and wish for additional hands-on laboratory training, since some exercises are based mainly on demonstrations. It is understood that this is mainly due to the increased number of incoming students in recent years. A lack of funds for consumables and equipment maintenance is also an issue that needs to be addressed by the University administration.

The teaching load of faculty seems to be relatively high, considering the extra load for the supervision of Theses (3-8/staff/year). The AP suggests coordination with the neighbouring Department of Ichthyology and Aquatic Environment in offering common courses. The AP understands the difficulty of implementation due to the lack of available classroom/ laboratory space. Nevertheless, it should be considered as a practical solution to relieve the teaching load.

The annual revision of the study programme as well as the one which is planned for the next years should be in consultation with stakeholders, external experts, students and programme graduates in an organized way. All stakeholders interviewed expressed a positive view on the programmes' graduates, and showed an interest in expanding their cooperation with ACPRE.

Panel judgement

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

The Accreditation Panel agrees that this Programme leads to a Level 7 Qualification according to the National & European Qualifications Network (Integrated Master)	YES	NO*
	X	

**In case of negative judgement, please justify*

Panel Recommendations

- Improve the quality of Theses so that they truly reflect the Masters level.
- Additional hands-on laboratory and field training should be pursued.
- The introduction of elective courses from the fourth year of studies could be introduced.
- Efforts should be made towards collaboration in common courses with the neighbouring Department of Ichthyology and Aquatic Environment.
- The upcoming revision of the study programme should involve stakeholders, external experts, graduates and students.

Principle 3: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE 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.

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. The above entail continuous consideration of the programme's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.

The student-centred learning and teaching process

- *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 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.*

In addition :

- *the academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;*
- *the assessment criteria and methods are published in advance;*
- *the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process;*
- *student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible;*
- *the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;*
- *assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;*
- *a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*

Study Programme compliance

The ACPRE faculty and administration appear fully aware of the fact that students come with diverse academic preparation and backgrounds. The AP was informed of the presence of a small number of students with special needs, and of the fact that special accommodations are made in regard to examination procedures for those individuals. The building was handicapped-accessible.

The ACPRE proposal indicates that a special committee exists to counsel students on a one-to-one basis in cases of academic or personal needs. However, a faculty advisor within the Department is not yet available.

Course assessment for the students relies largely (70-100%) on a single final examination. Interviews with students indicated overwhelming support for more than one examination in the course of the semester.

The course objectives, the skills expected to be acquired, associated bibliography /textbook, student assessment system and partitioning of class effort on the part of the instructor (“Instructional Organization”) are clearly identified for each course in the Study Guide. Lecture materials are generally not made available to students prior to lectures or laboratory exercises.

Student assessment criteria for each class are made available in advance via e-class. Assessment is carried out only by the individual instructor. Evidence of independent student assessment by multiple examiners was not provided.

There are no policies to deal with courses with unusually high failure rates.

Since 2010, the ACPRE has utilized an electronic course evaluation system, and has been taking active measures to increase student participation. The percentage of evaluations has markedly increased in comparison to previous years. The findings from the course assessments are made known to the instructors. However, such data do not result in any specific actions, i.e., special recognition for those excelling or special monitoring and appropriate guidance and support for those with poor ratings. It is also not clear whether the ACPRE is currently evaluating novel pedagogical methods or tools.

Student interviews reflected strong mutual respect between teaching faculty and students. However, a specific policy to deal with possible student grievances or appeals is not yet in place.

Panel judgement

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Teaching faculty should consider multiple tools for student assessment, including mid-term examinations.
- Courses that have unusually high failure rates should be reevaluated and revamped as needed.
- The teaching faculty are encouraged to implement a regular evaluation of pedagogical tools and approaches.

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP AND APPLY PUBLISHED REGULATIONS COVERING ALL ASPECTS AND PHASES OF STUDIES (ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION).

Institutions and academic units need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, manage and act on information regarding student progression.

Procedures concerning the award and recognition of higher education degrees, the duration of studies, rules ensuring students progression, terms and conditions for student mobility should be based on the institutional study regulations. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

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).

Study Programme compliance

The ACPRE organizes welcoming and orientation sessions for new students as well as two regularly-scheduled informational sessions in the following semesters, one with focus on the Diploma thesis and one related to the internship. There are also orientation sessions organized by the University and the ACPRE related to the Erasmus programme. Currently, ACPRE uses University-acquired metrics to monitor student progress and time-to-completion for the degree. A system that involves an Academic Advisor is not in place.

ACPRE has established procedures for student mobility through the Erasmus programme however there is substantial room for improvement in this area. There appears to be strong need for assistance and guidance by the staff members in identifying and approving suitable courses students should follow during the Erasmus semester. Assistance is also needed in finding places for internships and in identifying potential Erasmus partner Institutions.

The Diploma Supplement, a document explaining the qualification gained, the learning outcomes, the content and status of the studies that were pursued, is provided to graduating students electronically.

Panel judgement

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Student mobility should be further encouraged and facilitated.
- Students should be encouraged to do their internship at laboratory research and technology programmes in accredited international academic institutions and regional agricultural settings.
- Students are satisfied with the program other than the internship component. It does not satisfy their needs for knowledge and integration in the job market. ACPRE should address the problem with student internships, including the possibility of extending the duration to four or six months.
- ACPRE should also further explore the potential for students to do their Practical Exercise in regional agricultural settings and at research laboratories in accredited international academic institutions abroad that may offer attractive stipends to the student participants.

Principle 5: Teaching Staff

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCE OF THE TEACHING STAFF. THEY SHOULD APPLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING STAFF.

The Institutions and their academic units have a major responsibility as to the standard of their teaching staff providing them with a supportive environment that promotes the advancement of their scientific work. In particular, 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 recognize 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.*

Study Programme compliance

The ΑΠΕΛΛΑ system is followed in recruiting new teaching staff.

The AP was informed that student evaluations are considered during the voting for career advancements. Quality assurance procedures to assess the performance of teaching staff outside of career advancement-related deliberations is not in place.

The AP's meetings with ACPRE indicated strong awareness of the links between education and research. A successfully-completed research-based Diploma Thesis is required for all students.

Analysis of the publication and research award records for the teaching faculty indicates pronounced heterogeneity, with only a relatively small number of the faculty being productive. This raises concerns that a relatively small number of teaching staff may be undertaking a large portion of the responsibility to guide students in the design and performance of a Thesis. At the same time, several teaching staff may need special support to overcome challenges that may compromise their research productivity.

The mobility of teaching staff seems rather modest. Specially-designed day-long events / symposia provide opportunities for visits by individuals from other institutions. In the recent past such events appear to have been highly successful but were relatively infrequent.

The AP was told by students that in basic courses such as Biology each laboratory session only lasted approx. 30 minutes, which may reflect the difficulty to design and implement longer protocols considering the large number of students.

Panel judgement

Principle 5: Teaching Staff	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- A working plan should be prepared by the faculty and reviewed by the ACPRE president at regular intervals determined by the Department administration.
- The AC recommends that ACPRE implements procedures to recognize academic and research excellence.
- Staff and researchers should enhance networking opportunities with their counterparts elsewhere through seminar series implemented by the ACPRE.
- It is recommended that the ACPRE implements procedures to assess and strengthen the links between teaching and research.

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER 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 funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or 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 or international students, students with disabilities) and 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. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

Study Programme compliance

ACPRE is housed jointly with the Department of Ichthyology and Aquatic Environment in a spacious building with all the necessary facilities (classrooms, laboratories, greenhouses, IT infrastructure and library). The AP was pleased with the absence of graffiti in the buildings. The outside premises of the building though are largely neglected.

Amphitheatres, lecture rooms and research or teaching laboratories are well equipped with the necessary audiovisual tools. Amphitheatres and lecture rooms are clean and well maintained and appreciated by the students. All laboratories have satisfactory safety standards. Teaching laboratories have the necessary equipment yet some appear outdated. Undergraduates are encouraged to use the research laboratories and greenhouses according to their Thesis needs. The automated equipment, laboratory supplies appear to be fully operational.

The new greenhouse facilities in Velestino were state-of-the-art providing opportunities for high quality training and research.

The IT Department consists of two individuals and appear to provide adequate support

concerning the accessibility of students at the module and e-class material, grades and other documents.

Students are encouraged to communicate with their instructors who are generally readily accessible. However, an Academic Advisor is not assigned to students.

The Administrative staff is composed of four individuals and a sole individual is assigned to the undergraduate students. Students interviewed expressed the need for better accessibility and assistance by the administrative staff.

Apart from the central library in the city centre, the Department maintains its own library at its premises. Even though many journals are available online and students have easy access to scientific material. The library hours are limited (08:00 to 15:00) from Monday to Friday. There is only one person responsible for the library. The space is poorly equipped without computer stations and not particularly inviting to students. The Department library hours are limited and inadequate for the student numbers. Therefore, students indicated that learning resources and support is lacking given the library closes at 3pm, long before the end of courses and laboratory exercises. It is noticed however, that the Department has a special room equipped with computers available to students all day long and in which they can access all library information needed for their studies and theses.

Students also indicated that there is a sole individual able to work with electronic documents, making administrative processing rather cumbersome and lengthy.

There is a restaurant in the city which serves students but there are no facilities in the ACPRE building. Service is available for a limited number of students and only by provision at the ACPRE premises. Public transportation to/from the city centre to the campus was considered satisfactory by students.

Housing is offered only to first year students based on financial status. The dormitory capacity for all University students is limited to thirty seven (37).

Other support services, such as sport facilities, student clubs and extracurricular activities are mainly offered by UTH, and are located far from the ACPRE campus, mostly in the city centre.

Panel judgement

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The premises of any academic department, especially one that is heavily vested in plant research, should convey to students, visitors and stakeholders a positive picture. The ACPRE surroundings should be better maintained and could provide an incentive for students interested in floriculture and landscaping.
- Some laboratories are aging and should be renovated. Crucial lab equipment should be renewed.
- Improve environment in common areas and the library.
- Administrative staff should be supported in participating in seminars or vocational training programs. There may be a need for reallocation of responsibilities and/or personnel.
- There is an urgent need for additional housing and University administration should address the issue promptly.

Principle 7: Information Management

INSTITUTIONS 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.

Institutions are expected to establish and operate an information system for the management and monitoring of data concerning students, teaching staff, course structure and organisation, teaching and provision of services to students as well as to the academic community.

Reliable data is essential for accurate information and for decision making, as well as for identifying areas of smooth operation and areas for improvement. Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on study programmes and other activities feed data into the internal system of quality assurance.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the Institution. The following are of interest:

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

A number of methods may be used for collecting information. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analyzing information and planning follow-up activities.

Study Programme compliance

The student profiles/progression, success and drop-out rates have been collected and effectively presented to the Panel. Face-to-face meetings with the students indicated that there was a general satisfaction with the program. Participation in course assessment questionnaires has been moderate yet the Department has applied a new approach to collect data and for the past year those numbers have improved substantially. The AP commends this effort.

The Department monitors sufficiently the career paths of its graduates.

Panel judgement

Principle 7: Information Management	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- ACPRE should update both GR/EN website updating/adding missing information such as teaching staff evaluations, internal evaluations etc.
- ACPRE should continue to provide regular training in new technologies for the administrative staff so as to accommodate student needs.

Principle 8: Public Information

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH IS CLEAR, ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE.

Information on Institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions and their academic units provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students, as well as graduate employment information.

Study Programme compliance

Activities such as meetings, conferences, social engagement (cooperation with the city food bank) and connectivity to stakeholders are well documented online but also through the local press.

The websites (in both languages) need to be updated and revamped to become appealing to new and most importantly perspective students. There is urgent need for consistency in content, especially in research programs. The English version lacks a significant amount of information.

Additionally, the internal evaluation documents after 2013 are posted in the Greek website whereas they are totally absent in the English site. Teaching staff evaluations, a significant resource for students are absent in both sites.

There is complete lack of social media links in the ACPRE website. Current and perspective students would be more inclined to follow those links rather than the departmental website.

Navigating course curriculum is cumbersome as they are all presented as one document in the study guide. The course outlines of several courses is Spartan.

Panel judgement

Principle 8: Public Information	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	X
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The websites needs to be fully populated (Greek and English version should have the same information) and appeal to the new generation of students. As examples the AP recommends <https://plantpath.wsu.edu/> and <https://foodscience.cals.cornell.edu/>, although there are several other high quality website around the globe.
- The department should use social media platforms with links on the departmental website to connect with past, current and prospective students and increase visibility of ACPRE in both academia and other stakeholders.
- Faculty are encouraged to obtain a consistent identifier such as the Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID), globally used to claim publications and other scholarly works.
- Several course outlines need more detailed information so students have a better understanding of the courses; this is especially important for the elective ones.
- On the website, the course outlines should be provided either individually or as a cohort for each year.

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR 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 study programmes aim to maintain the level of educational provision and to create 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. Revised programme specifications are published.

Study Programme compliance

Faculty are aware of the importance of monitoring and updating the curriculum with discussion of minor changes taking place every April and major revamping every five years. This is based on student needs and changes in science, technology and the work environment. There are data collected for all major metrics. Those metrics are not readily available to the students or other stakeholders as the website does not include information past 2013.

There is connection between ACPRE, alumni and stakeholders and thus the Department has a pulse of the needs of the society.

Students indicate that there is significant work load and about 80% obtain their degree within seven years. Graduation percentages have increased in recent years.

Participation in course assessment questionnaires has been moderate yet due to a new departmental approach, numbers have improved substantially. The AP commends this effort.

The learning environment has two aspects; human communication and physical appearance. Faculty and students have very good relationships, positively affecting learning. On the other hand the physical environment is not optimal with lack of quality common areas and unappealing library study areas.

The administrative staff undergoes periodic training and these practices should be further enhanced so that the quality of student services will rise to a more satisfactory level.

Students are invited but do not participate in governance, affecting their ability to voice their opinion during reviews and revisions of the programme. Their major contribution is through their exit questionnaires upon completion of their studies; yet this only affects the future student generations. The alumni feel for the Department yet they do not have an organized association to provide feedback. The stakeholders are enthusiastic about ACPRE and the services it provides to them and the community at-large.

Panel judgement

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Metrics should be readily available at the ACPRE website.
- ACPRE should seek new approaches to engage students and make their voice heard in ACPRE governance.
- Participation of students, alumni and stakeholders should be significantly enhanced. We recommend a structured procedure for the process similar to the exit student questionnaires.
- Continue with the commitment to high standards of quality assurance.

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

PROGRAMMES SHOULD REGULARLY UNDERGO EVALUATION BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HQA, AIMING AT ACCREDITATION. THE TERM OF VALIDITY OF THE ACCREDITATION IS DETERMINED BY HQA.

HQA is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HQA grants accreditation of programmes, 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 template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.

Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.

The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Study Programme compliance

The Department is currently undergoing its first undergraduate programme accreditation review. ACPRE has made significant changes guided by the external evaluation report of 23/4/2010. Based on the documentation provided and the on-site visit the AP determined that ACPRE largely follows the recommendations of the external evaluation report.

Nevertheless, ACPRE did not address the external evaluation report point-by-point and thus there is no clarity on the steps the Department took in order to comply with the report. The Greek website includes significant amount of information, yet the English one is quite bare.

The laboratories although significantly improved, should, in some cases, upgrade their equipment to improve the exercises and offer better opportunities to staff and students conducting their Thesis projects.

Panel judgement

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	x
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- An external advisory board, composed of members from academia, alumni, external stakeholders, policy makers and ΓΕΩΤΕΕ should be involved in the formation of the undergraduate study programme and provide input for further development and growth of ACPRE.
- Budget should be reallocated to assist junior faculty to establish and promote their programmes.
- ACPRE should upgrade its facilities and equipment.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- Respect and cooperation between students and teaching staff
- Excellent research capacity of several laboratories
- Links between research and teaching for certain programs
- Good professional opportunities for graduates
- Sincere commitment of ACPRE staff to quality standards for education
- Commendable Community outreach
- Research programmes address local agriculture needs
- Improvement in time-to-completion and graduation rates

II. Areas of Weakness

- Several laboratories have modest research outputs
- Links between research and teaching are lacking for certain programs
- Lack of systematic follow-up of ACPRE graduates
- Facilities and equipment are outdated
- Neglected common spaces (hallways, library, exterior areas)
- Limited amenities for students
- Limited data availability
- Limited duration for internship

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Fully implement the relevant and still valid recommendations of the 2010 External Evaluation Committee.
- Strengthen networking opportunities with academics and stakeholders
- Use new avenues for delivery and assessment in teaching.
- Establish assignment of an Academic Advisor.
- Promote student and staff mobility through the Erasmus Program.
- Continue efforts to ensure student participation and involvement in IEG and other administrative bodies
- Involve alumni, external stakeholders and other partners in revisions of the undergraduate study programme in a structured way.
- Improve the Departmental websites
- Access and implement approaches to recognize excellence in teaching and research
- Access and implement approaches to guide and support underperforming teaching and research staff

- Amend internship and duration
- Increase mobility by providing more courses in English
- Increase number of courses that rely English language resources (i.e. books, journal articles)
- Encourage opportunities for thesis writing in English
- Continue and expand efforts to assess and ensure high quality of the awarded degree.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: Principles 2, 3, 4, 5, 7

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: Principles 1, 6, 9, 10

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: Principle 8

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: none

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

The Accreditation Panel agrees that this Programme leads to a Level 7 Qualification according to the National & European Qualifications Network (Integrated Master)	YES	NO
	X	

**The members of the Accreditation Panel for the UGP (Integrated Master) of
Agriculture Crop Production & Rural Environment of the University of Thessaly**

Name and Surname

Signature

Prof. Emeritus Ioannis Vlahos

Hellenic Mediterranean University, Heraklion, Greece

Prof. Sophia Kathariou

North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Prof. Ioannis Tzanetakis

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA

Mr. Anestis Delepoglou

Geotechnical Chamber of Greece, Thessaloniki, Greece