ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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

Forest and Natural Environment Sciences

Institution: International Hellenic University
Date: 19 November 2022

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Forest and Natural Environment Sciences, International Hellenic University** for the purposes of granting accreditation

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PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I.   The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the new undergraduate study programme in operation of **Forest and Natural Environment Sciences** of the **International Hellenic University** comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, following Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. **Dr. Demetrios Gatziolis (Chair)**
   USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon, USA

2. **Prof. Stavros Avramidis**
   University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

3. **Prof. Filippos Tsikalas**
   University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

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

5. **Mr. Ioannis Praskidis Alympakis**
   Hellenic Mediterranean University, Department of Agriculture, 3rd year Undergraduate Student, Heraklion, Crete, Greece

II.   Review Procedure and Documentation

In response to the continued issues with the COVID pandemic and the general measures designed to limit the spread of the virus, the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) decided to extend the accreditation review process for the undergraduate study program of the Department of Forestry and Natural Environment Sciences (DFNES) of the University of International Hellenic University (IHU) via teleconferencing.

Scheduled briefings and meetings were carried out most efficiently and within the allocated time frame using the ZOOM platform and without significant technical difficulties. Replacing onsite visits with virtual meetings is still challenging for all participating parties. The lack of face-to-face contact and the physical presence of the panel members at the DFNES premises partially inhibited an in-depth evaluation of the departmental infrastructure.

On Monday, November 14, 2022 (18:00 Greek time), a one-hour private meeting was held among the five External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) members via ZOOM. Drs. Avramidis, Gatziolis, Tsikalas and Merss. Sotiriadis and Preskidis were present. The EEAP discussed the assigned action items, reporting allocations among them, and the DFNES internal evaluation and other related material already forwarded to the committee by HAHE. Upon consensus, Dr. Gatziolis assumed the task of EEAP Chair.

The accreditation review commenced on the same day at 19:15, and a teleconference was held with Dr. Kalliopi Makridou, Vice-President / President of MODIP, and Dr. Antonios Papadopoulos, Head of DFNES/ Erasmus Coordinator. Dr. Makridou provided an overview of IHU and of the organizational changes induced by the consolidation of former Technological Educational Institute (TEI) departments of the Central and East Macedonia region into its structure. A unique IHU challenge was its unconventional structure as a small international university offering post-graduate programs located at the outskirts of Thessaloniki. That created major problems due to lack of proper organization that significantly delayed the full integration of the Department and the smooth operation of the newly established university. This issue was not encountered by any of the other TEI Departments because they were transferred to well-established institutions. After that, Dr. Papadopoulos gave a quick overview of the Undergraduate Programme (UGP) and the Department's current status, as well as its strengths and possible areas of concern. He further elaborated on the departmental profile, its policies on quality assurance, and other issues of the programme. References focused on curriculum suitability and structure, laboratory equipment, Department infrastructure and utilization, and the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications, in agreement with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The panel members had the opportunity to ask general questions, and a cordial discussion concluded at about 20:00.

The teleconference meeting continued at 20:00 with four OMEA & MODIP representatives. Various issues were discussed, focusing mainly on the Undergraduate Programme's compliance with quality accreditation standards, curriculum revisions, the student's progression, assignments, theses, exam papers, and examination material. The IEG/OMEA

expressed their support for and commitment to implementing a comprehensive quality policy that will promote the academic profile and a more focused program orientation.

Thereafter, the EEAP members had a private debriefing teleconference to discuss their impressions further and prepare for the second day of the online review. It was acknowledged that the Department did not provide the EEAP with a summary PowerPoint presentation, probably the result of miscommunication. The oversight was remedied shortly, and the panel members received the information by email.

The teleconference resumed on Tuesday, November 15, 2022, at 18:00, with seven faculty members who elaborated on their professional development opportunities in the DFNES, mobility opportunities and experiences, workload, and student evaluations. Other important topics discussed were their competence and adequacy in support of positive learning outcomes, the strategies used to promote synergies and bridge teaching and research processes, and their involvement in applied research. To this end, faculty briefly presented their projects and research activities and defined how they relate to the programme. Finally, the EEAP pondered potential weaknesses, with the faculty presenting their views. The meeting was very informative, and many questions by panel members were answered honestly by the faculty group. Specific problems related to the newness of the IHU became clearer, such as the difficulty of summer camp practice and professional registration, all stemming from the lengthy integration process, as will be explained in detail further in this report. The meeting concluded at 19:00.

Subsequently, the EEAP met with a group of seven students from different years of study and from the old and new programmes. The consensus was that students were quite satisfied with their experience with Department functions and facilities, with a note about the possibility of more modern lab instruments. The students commented on their input in the quality assurance procedure. Issues concerning students' life and welfare were also highlighted. Major points here included the lack of on-campus facilities such as dormitories and food outlets, the high risk involved in transporting by foot or bike to and from the city, and the lack of security at night.

The teleconference continued at 20:00 with a meeting with various staff members and a relevant discussion accompanied by a video tour of classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, and other DFNES facilities prepared and sent to the panel members in advance. The panel was informed about the positives and shortcomings of the infrastructure in space and equipment.

At 21:15, the EEAP met with eleven key stakeholders from the private and public sector, including social partners and employers. The EEAP discussed their contacts, links to the DFNES, and experiences with graduates and departmental staff. The meeting concluded at 22:30.

During the closing teleconference of the second day, the EEAP held a private debriefing to reflect on the impressions of the specific meetings and make the necessary preparations for the fourth day of the online review.

On the third and last day, Wednesday, November 16, 2022, the teleconference meeting hosted the OMEA, and MODIP representatives, which clarified preliminary impressions and findings. The day and the online evaluation ended with a joint teleconference meeting with the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, the Head of the Department, OMEA, and MODIP representatives and staff. During this meeting, the EEAP proceeded with an informal presentation of key findings.

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

For the next few days, the EEAP members worked as a team on their assigned tasks regarding the Accreditation Report. The teamwork was accomplished via teleconferencing organized by the Chair.

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

III.   New Undergraduate Study Programme in operation Profile

The Department of Forestry and Natural Environment Sciences at the International Hellenic University (IHU) is a new bona fide Department within the existing academic State of affairs of Greece created in 2019 as part of the IHU system according to state decision article 2, 4610/2019 (ΦΕΚ Α 70/07.05.2019). Because the IHU was also formed at the same time by transitioning from a small institution offering few post-graduate programmes to a traditional university with no fully-developed modus operandi like with the rest of the universities in Greece, unique problems arose that hindered the smooth transition we had encountered in similar other ex-TEI Departments.

The DFNES is the evolution of its former Department of Forestry and Natural Environment Management School of Agricultural Technology and Food and Nutrition Technology of the former Eastern Technical University Macedonia and Thrace. The scientific field is among the internationally established scientific fields according to the ISCED-2013 classification and belongs to the wider scientific area of 08 Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary Science, subfield 0082 Forestry, 0821 Forestry.

The Department is planning to focus its strategic planning during the next four years on the following areas:

• Continuous assurance and improvement of the quality of education oriented to market needs as they emerge through cooperation with agencies, student internships, and summer camp practices, and the questionnaires from graduates of the Department regarding their professional development.
• Strengthening research, increasing competitiveness through collaborations, and implementing high-level research in forest science and the natural environment.
• Becoming more extrovert and international by expanding related partnerships with other academic units and organizations, participating in academic networks, strengthening collaborations with various agencies, increasing mobility and internationalization of the educational process, attracting students and high-level faculty from Greece and abroad.
• Upgrading academics with continuous improvement of infrastructure, improving administrative and educational services, and the Department's digital infrastructure

The number of incoming undergraduate students that may register yearly is determined by the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Affairs. The total number of registered undergraduate students for the academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 was 186, 336, 372, and 378, respectively. The M.Sc. students were 70, 158, 201, and 107 for the same academic years divided into two programs. The Department accepted its first Ph.D. students in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. Their numbers are 14 and 17, respectively.

The undergraduate students of the DFNES follow a five-year study programme, which upon completion leads to a Forestry degree with three specializations or concentrations: (1) Ecology and Conservation of Biodiversity, (2) Natural Resources Management & Climate Change, and (3) Landscape Architecture & Land Restoration. The last minor is unique among the five Forestry Departments in Greece as is regarded by the DFNES as a distinguishing feature. All

students pursue a standard core programme in the first two years and split into the three concentrations mentioned above in years three, four, and five.

The program aims to provide students with specialized knowledge and skills that guarantee good scientific and professional training in general Forestry and specializations. Upon completion, the education package intends to produce specialists who have acquired scientific knowledge in basic and specialized fields of Forestry and can:

- collect, analyse, and interpret scientific data required for the performance of their work using the necessary technologies,

- identify, classify, and utilize forest genetic material,

- prepare environmental reports, create intervention plans for control and suppression of meteorological disasters, implement forestry road construction studies, design studies cost-benefit of forestry projects and investments, prepare and manage forest management studies, and prepare forest maps/forest cadastre,

- plan measures for the monitoring and conservation of ecosystems, implement studies on ecotourism development and forest recreation,

- prepare environmental impact statements and remediation studies, manage risks from floods and hydrological disasters, propose projects to improve and protect the natural urban and built environment,

- provide advice on environmental matters, assessment of the forest products sector, forestry and forest tourism farms, forest legislation,

- educate the public as part of environmental education programs, develop innovative ideas and produce solutions to critical scientific challenges,

- supervise, as scientific officers, scientific programs, forestry projects, projects sustainable development.

Upon successful completion of the requirements of the programme, the graduate is in position to:

- know the rules of scientific and professional ethics in their scientific work field,

- demonstrate critical and creative thinking and develop it with constant practice in order to collect information, analyse, scientifically document, and offer solutions to complex problems of the scientific field, and

- collaborate effectively with other scientific groups and demonstrate a spirit of cooperation, taking the initiative and autonomy within the team and respecting diversity.

In addition to the compulsory courses, the programme provides its students with a wide variety of specialization courses aimed at affording advanced knowledge in specific subjects of forestry and the natural environment along the lines of the three minors offered. There are no free electives in topics outside the realm of the programme.

To graduate, the student must successfully pass 57 courses, of which 47 are mandatory and the remaining 10 compulsory electives, complete a graduating thesis and a summer camp practice/internship, thus accumulating the required 300 ECTS. The programme is currently implemented by 13 permanent faculty, 3 teaching/technical staff members, 12 temporary 407 hires, and 2 administrative employees.

Classroom and laboratory education, as well as research and service to private and public sectors, are carried out under the auspices of two sections, namely:

1. Ecology and Landscape Restoration, and

2. Management and Protection of Natural Resources.

Each section comprises seven laboratories listed in the Studies Manual. On top of the fourteen laboratories, there are also two specialized research ones:

1. Laboratory of Analysis and Management of Natural Disasters and Technological risks (ASSIST), and
2. Laboratory Renewable Natural Resources Management and Bioeconomy Laboratory (NRM-BIO-Lab).

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

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

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

More specifically, the DFNES is a new pilot academic unit in the Greek realm, created in 2019 according to Greek legislation (article 2, 4610/2019). The Department's undergraduate students follow a 5-year long Undergraduate Program (UGP). Upon programme completion the ungraduated student of the DFNES obtains a Forestry degree with three specializations or concentrations: (1) Ecology and Conservation of Biodiversity, (2) Natural Resources Management & Climate Change, and (3) Landscape Architecture & Land Restoration. The UGP provides vertically integrated knowledge from sustainable management of the natural environment to the utilization of primary forest products, emphasizing ecology, conservation, natural resources, and landscape architecture and restoration. This hierarchical knowledge structure is a competitive advantage in the labour market that requires scientists with high academic backgrounds, valuable skills, and comprehensive thinking.

Conclusion: The DFNES unambiguously documented for the EEAP its academic profile and orientation.

b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development

The IHU-DFNES seeks to preserve and enrich the social good of knowledge, ensuring the right of access of the new generation to it, but at the same time, the possibility for the country to choose a new model of development which will systematically and effectively utilize knowledge for the benefit of society. To support the creative forces and the new generation, to transmit ideas and good practices, to produce new knowledge through research, to create networks and positive examples of the utilization of knowledge in the modern environment, composing a new web that connects it with the needs of the country and public policies. The greatest challenge of the IHU-DFNES is to complete the formulation and structure due to its upgrade from a small university offering few postgraduate programs to a traditional one and to improve its national and international position. This challenge can emerge as an opportunity that will help the DFNES get a steady direction and a framework of operation that, in turn, will significantly benefit its growth.

The implementation of the vision for the development of the University requires the strategy and goal setting to take into account a series of steps affecting educational and research

functions, including its academic units, and are analysed according to the PEST and SWOT assessments provided to the EEAP:

a) Political considerations

a.1. Continuous change of the educational institutional framework: The continuous change of the educational policy by the administration of each Ministry of Education (MoE), presently Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Affairs, brings instability to the educational system, with direct effects on the strategic planning of the Institutions.

a.2. Public funding: Institutions' dependence on public funding for Higher Education is high, and often its distribution is based on irrational or ephemeral criteria, which leads to difficulties.

a.3. Number of undergraduate students: The policy of the MoE in recent years with substantial fluctuations in the number of undergraduate students in Higher Education Institutes, ignoring rational criteria (i.e., infrastructure, teacher/student ratio, funding according to the number of students, etc.), creates problems in operation.

b) Economic considerations

b.1. The economic recession observed in the country for many years affects decision-making both at the macro-economic level (e.g., funding of Higher Education) and at the microeconomic level (e.g., family budget, which impacts students' choice of Faculty of study). This problem was further exacerbated by the recent pandemic and political/energy abnormalities on a global scale.

b.2. The connection of studies with the labour market is a strong motivation for choosing the field of education of the students and a dominant goal of the Institutions. Achieving this connection and levelling up employability in Greece will be a strong career prospect compared to overseas markets and keep graduates in the country.

c) Social considerations

c.1. Receiving a Higher Education degree is considered an essential tool for success in the modern world and a key component of social advancement in Greek culture. Private colleges are also awarded higher education degrees, followed by equivalent professional degrees, which may increase citizens' interest in these colleges. This fact constitutes a threat to public Higher Education Institutions.

c.2. Professional qualifications that are being increasingly recognized by prominent businesses may reduce interest in postgraduate studies.

d) Technological considerations

d.1. The quality of online education resources is improving rapidly, especially in a post-COVID era, and is frequently free. This prompts many high school graduates to skip further education to pursue online learning, dramatically affecting Greece and Europe's traditional higher education sector. Institutions should adapt in the best possible way to the new conditions and improve the provided online services and education solutions to attract students.

d.2. The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is vital for Europe's competitiveness in today's increasingly digital global economy. The use of new technologies supports the educational process for lectures and informative material in targeted fields of interest of the students/stakeholders.

d.3. There is a rapid development of new technologies and technological applications for industrial and other users such as Industry 4.0, 3D printing, augmented reality technologies VR, Internet of Things (IoT), CAD systems -CAM, remote sensing technologies using drones, sensors, etc. Academic units should adapt to their operation to achieve the best result in the learning process.

The SWOT Analysis of the IHU-DFNES is as follows:

Strengths

- The growing number of high-quality scientific personnel.

- The ability to provide high-level education and research from programmes and studies that have been offered only to some extent.

- Potential for good research performance with a positive outlook in the bibliometric databases of the published work and the reports of the teaching and research staff.

- Synergies and collaborations with other institutions in Greece and abroad in research, teaching, and interconnection with the labour market.

- Code of Ethics and establishment of a Protection Code for "Harassment and Intimidation" issues.

Opportunities

- The geomorphological position of the Drama area and surrounding mountains allows access to practice and research fields.

- Harmonization of the University's operation towards the goals for sustainable development – efforts to mitigate its environmental footprint, systems implementation for the effective resource utilization.

- Use national and European resource opportunities to strengthen research, teaching, and infrastructure.

- Expansion of international collaborations with institutions and attracting valuable scientific potential.

Weaknesses

- The lack of solid academic identity and distinct physiognomy through the long-term evolution of the scientific work of the teaching and research staff due to its novelty.

- Owing to its unique prior status, the IHU is yet to be fully developed. Most of its Departments have been recently upgraded from TEI to AEI with ensuing challenges in functionality and organization.

- Lack of modern, flexible, and interoperable administrative organization - the need for reform.

- Inadequate number of teaching staff - disproportionality of students/teachers (a common characteristic in Greek Higher Education Institutes).

- Disproportionate percentage between men and women – only one female faculty member.

- Inadequacy of student housing infrastructure – the high need for student accommodations, eating facilities, and sports infrastructure within the DFNES surrounding area. Identified high degree of potential injury and possible death for students walking between their learning facilities and the city of Drama.

- Lack of graduates' (alumni) monitoring structure.

- Potentially low graduation rates.

- Potential future shortage of specialized administrative staff in central administration services.

- Not fully developed cooperation and synergies with local society.

Threats

- The growing intervention of the State in the operation of Higher Educational Institutes.

- The decreasing public funding when the student population is increasing.

- The continuous institutional changes in the legislative framework within which the DFNES is required to operate thriftily cause difficulties in acting independently.

- Need for a modern institutional framework—possible difficulties operating under the umbrella of an inexperienced central administration.

- The loss of valuable scientific personnel due to retirements and the Landscape Architecture Department moving to another city further away.

- The accelerated pace of changes at the scientific, economic, technological, and social levels forms new demands regarding students' education and scientific research.

- The development of digital technology changed and affected higher education worldwide – significant effects on conducting research as well.

- Competition from other similar Departments to attract students.

Following the above analysis, the IHU strategy aims to the development of the following sectors:

Educational Capacity

The IHU high-quality teaching work highlights the training of young scientists, skills cultivation and scholarship, the promotion of human values, and the progress of society. The

specializations offered to meet both the needs of modern Greek and global society, as well as the expectations of its students for studies of high scientific value, combined with good prospects for professional development.

Research

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

Financing

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

Administrative Support

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

Students / Graduates

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

Infrastructure

The fostering of a proper academic environment with adequate infrastructure favours work, supports teaching and research, and enhances the creativity of all its human resources and the competitive potential of the University. Environmental upgrade of all facilities, with modern studies to create a favourable microclimate, save energy and water, and scoping to create an attractive workplace. Student facilities on campus must become a top priority.

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

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

Forests have long played a critical role in our economy and society, as they contribute to creating jobs and are a source of food, medicine, materials, clean water, and many other

goods. Despite this imperative, European forests are under increasing pressure, partly due to natural processes and increased human activity and pressures.

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

- Supporting the socio-economic functions of forests for prosperous rural areas and enhancing the forest bioeconomy within the limits of sustainability. Forests are a natural ally for adapting to climate change, securing livelihoods in rural areas and beyond, and supporting a sustainable forest bioeconomy, ensuring the availability of timber, ensuring that the amount of timber we use remains within sustainability limits.

- Promoting sustainable forest bioeconomy for long-life wood products.

- Ensuring the sustainable use of wood-based resources for bioenergy. Wood-based bioenergy is currently the primary source of renewable energy,

- Promotion of the non-timber-based forest bioeconomy, including ecotourism.

- Protecting, restoring, and expanding EU forests to combat climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and ensure resilient and multifunctional forest ecosystems.

- A strong research and innovation agenda to improve our knowledge of forests.

- Developing skills and empowering citizens for a sustainable forest bioeconomy.

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

Based on the above, the value of the Greek forestry sector largely depends on diversification, a prerequisite for adopting to environmental and socio-economic challenges, alignment to the directions set by the strategic European forestry strategies, and expectations for sustainable development and improvement of social welfare nationally. Networking, synergies, and win-win relationships with other economic and scientific branches should define the educational and research portfolio of the DFNES.

The DFNES of the IHU undergraduate programme delivers the expected modern academic and professional qualifications required to fully use the diverse potential of the country's forests and woodlands.

Examples of professional activities for the graduates of the Department, among others, are:

- In the administration, management, exploitation, protection, utilization, and development of forests, forest lands in general, and other lands governed by forestry legislation.

- In hunting, hunting economy, zoos and parks, wildlife sanctuaries, habitat suitability assessments and improvements, fish farming, and fishing in mountainous or rural areas.

- In the administration, management, exploitation, and exploitation of mountainous and semi-mountainous pastures and grasslands.

- In forest transport facilities, handling, processing, quality control, and general marketing of forest and forest products.

- In activities related to protecting, utilizing, and maintaining the balance of the natural environment and restoring damages caused to it.

- In the establishment and operation of nurseries for the production of any kind of plant material that has forestry or ornamental value.

- In construction projects serving agricultural and forestry purposes, in horticultural projects for the management, development, and aesthetic upgrading of greenery inside and outside the cities, as well as in the horticultural restoration of slopes (roads, railway lines), natural formations (rivers, streams) and irrigation networks of these.

- Restoration of landscapes subjected to mining activity, freeway construction, etc.

- In forest holdings, industries of production, processing, and utilization of forest products, companies, banks, programs, and in natural or legal persons related to the forest and its products or the natural environment.

- In the production, standardization, sub-packaging, marketing, and distribution of pesticides, fertilizers, forest machinery, and tools.

- In managing and protecting national forests, wetlands, and any other protected terrestrial natural ecosystem, as well as in the tourist or other use of peri-urban and aesthetic forests.

- In producing, standardizing, and marketing aromatic plants and their products and forest fruits (wild strawberries, blackberries).

- In using remote sensing to prepare periodic and ultimately annual maps of essential forest inventory parameters such as biomass, sequestered carbon, species distribution, stand age and structure, stem density, land use, landcover, and disturbance regimes using passive (satellite) and active (e.g., Light Detection and Range – LiDAR) remote sensing in support of strategic and tactical management and administrative needs.

- In support of education (secondary – tertiary), research, technological development, and organizations operating in terrestrial ecosystems.

Study Programme of the IHU Department of Forestry and Natural Environment Sciences

The DFNES students follow a 5-year study program which, upon completion, leads to the awarding of an integrated master's degree (first degrees will be awarded at the end of the 2024-2025 academic year) in the general designation of Forester. This program provides vertically integrated knowledge from the sustainable management of the natural environment to the exploitation of its main products, emphasizing biodiversity, sustainability, and land restoration. It is this level of knowledge that we believe is an essential advantage in a job market that requires graduates with the best academic background, valuable skills, and integrated thinking.

The undergraduate students of the DFNES can choose among three specializations or concentrations: (1) Ecology and Conservation of Biodiversity, (2) Natural Resources Management & Climate Change, and (3) Landscape Architecture & Land Restoration. The last minor is unique among the five Forestry Departments in Greece, which makes this one stand apart from the others. All students take a standard core program during the first two years and split into the three concentrations mentioned above in years three, four, and five. To receive the degree from the DFNES, a compulsory Graduating Thesis under the guidance of a Supervising Professor, a member of the Department's academic staff. The thesis provides 30 ECTS to the total 300 required for the degree.

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

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

d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new Department

The DFNES has its own building about 2 kilometres south of the City of Drama. Teaching facilities, laboratories, and research equipment are of good quality and size to support the current program assuring the complete pioneering knowledge transfer of its scientific fields. Furthermore, the students of the new program will acquire related training in the context of their practical training in the private and public sectors. However, practical training is still under development. The DFNES has now secured the proper facilities; however, there is a great need for the IHU to expedite the process of completing infrastructure works so that the students can derive full benefits from it during the summer of 2023.

The Department's campus does not offer dormitory and eating facilities, and that is a significant problem. Students have to use facilities in the city of Drama, which results in substantial loss of time. Furthermore, there is no safe walking and biking venue between the city and the Department, a significant problem that encompasses many risks. Priority to resolve these issues is deemed necessary for the University and the Municipality.

The DFNES comprises two sections, each with seven laboratories.

The faculty members of the Department have an emerging research profile. The EEAP believes that to fully deliver its expanded UGP, the Department must reduce dependency on sessional (407) staff.

As per the Department's funding possibilities by public and private resources, it has managed to attract funding, from external sources beyond its regular budget, through national and European funding programs. Unfortunately, due to circumstances, there is no private-sector funding to speak of yet. Regardless, the EEAP can see a good amount of potential improvement in the future and in the area of research funding once the dust regarding the Department's upgrade settles.

Conclusion: The sustainability of the DFNES is deemed satisfactory.

e. The structure of studies

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

http://www.for.ihu.gr/pdf/Odigos_Spoudwn_2022-2023.pdf

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

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

f. The number of admitted students

The admitted students in the Department during the last three academic years of its operation were as presented in the following:

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Enrolled	186	176	44	28
Undergraduate Students (Active)	186	336	372	378
Graduates	-	5	4	-
Postgraduate Students (MSc)	70	158	201	107
Doctorate Students (PhD)	-	-	14	17

Chart: Student statistics by category for academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 (y-axis scale 0 to 400). Categories: Enrolled, Undergraduate Students (Active), Graduates, Postgraduate Students (MSc), Doctorate Students (PhD).
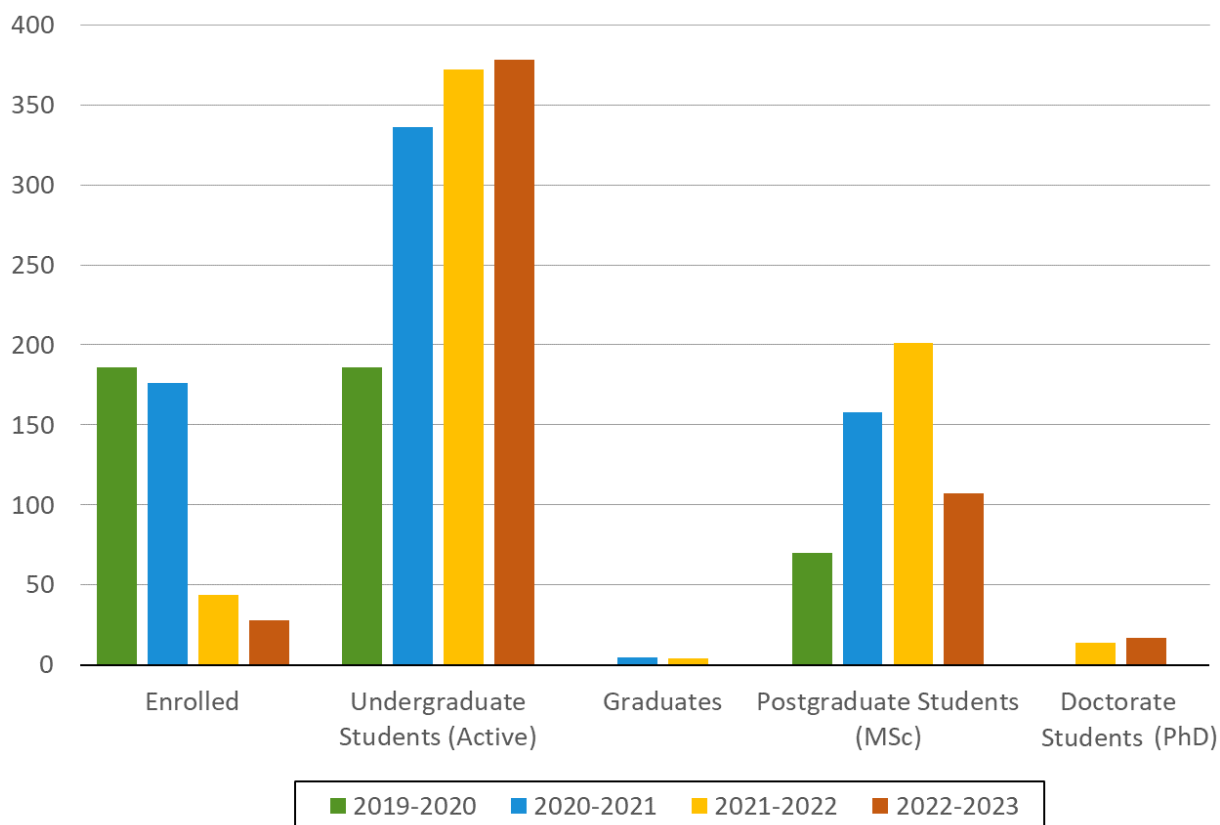
It should be noted that during the academic year 2021-2022, the Minimum Entry Base was implemented by the MoE, and that, plus the pandemic-related issues, did affect the new student uptake numbers.

Conclusion: The number of admitted students is deemed satisfactory.

g. Postgraduate studies

The DFNES runs two M.Sc. programme studies with currently 107 students in 2022-2023 (see table above). Furthermore, it now has 17 active Ph.D. students. Given the recency of those programmes and the little relevant information contributed from the Department's representatives or pursued by the evaluation committee (given that the report is for the Undergraduate Study Programme), an objective evaluation cannot be offered at this time.

Conclusion: There was no information conducive to an evaluation of the offered postgraduate study programmes. In good faith the EEAP accepts that they meet nominal standards.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Strategic planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit	
a. The academic profile and the mission of the academic unit	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
b. The strategy of the Institution for its academic development	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
c. The documentation of the feasibility of the operation of the Department and the study programme	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
d. The documentation of the sustainability of the new Department	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
e. The structure of studies	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
f. The number of admitted students	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	
g. Postgraduate studies	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Principle 1: Strategic planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit (overall)	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Develop a modern, flexible, and interoperable administrative organization.

- Increase the number of permanent teaching staff and reduce dependence on sessional.

- Strive to hire more female faculty members.

- Develop student housing infrastructure – need for student accommodations, eating facilities, and sports infrastructure within the area surrounding the DFNES.

- Establish an alumni liaison office.

- Fully developed cooperation and synergies with local community stakeholders and relevant organizations. They should be taken into consideration during curriculum modifications.

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

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

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

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The establishment of DFNES as a university Department in 2019 presented with a question of its identity. The primary challenge has been how to compete in attracting new students and securing resources with the two pre-existing, university Forestry Departments in the Aristotle University and Democritus University of Thrace, as well as with the two new university Departments in the University of Thessaly (Karditsa) and Agricultural University of Athens (Karpenisi). The challenge was accentuated by the lack of meaningful support by its own University (IHU) that had just been reconfigured. To meet this challenge, the DFNES undertook a calculated risk approach manifested primarily in its specialization areas. The first

specialization focuses on biodiversity. The last (3rd) deals with Landscape Architecture and Land Restoration from natural and anthropogenic disturbances. Neither is mainstream, yet both are of potential to becoming brand names for the Department. The 3rd is unique among all Forestry Departments in the country. Parsimony in the number of offered specializations was accompanied by continuous attention to teaching excellence that ensures graduates have sound theoretical background and technical skills. The EEAP found that the UGP is aligned with the new EU 2030 forest resource strategic targets. The current programme is deemed appropriate and of the quality expected at the national and international levels.

The Department has formed an Internal Evaluation Unit (OMEA) consisting of faculty member tasked with ensuring that the UGP is proven worthy of expectations and that it matures without complications. The OMEA members frequently interact with the rest of the faculty and staff to encourage efforts that promote course and instructor evaluations by the students, discuss the tabular results provided by the MODIP, present findings to the Department's Assembly, and are receptive to offered ideas for improvements. The information provided by students has already resulted in concrete actions adopted by the Department. The Department plans to consult future graduates regularly to obtain an objective assessment of alignment between the UGP, the employment market, and the needs and expectation of private and public sector employers. Feedback should also be requested from local, regional, and national stakeholders.

The IHU is mandated to maintain a Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) which, in principle, advocates and offers standards for the monitoring and assessment of processes undertaken by its Departments for academic reviews and performance activities. MODIP is expected to 1. assist the Departments with standardised quantitative performance indicators that facilitate assessment of periodic changes in knowledge and skills conveyed to student and research outcomes, and 2. Enforce the Quality Assurance Policy. The IHU MODIP, however, is still adapting to the IHU transition from a small, post-graduate study only university to a conventional one and it is seriously understaffed. Presently, it can provide only basic support to the needs of the DFNES (e.g., host the electronic questionnaires for course and instructor performance students are filling and compile the data into simple reports).

Documentation on the various UGP quality control measures and procedures and relevant indicators to the website is, at best, nominal. Detailed updates should be posted regularly in Greek and English with emphasis on the outcomes of any adopted amendments.

The linkage between education and research should be vital component of the programme. It improves student opportunities to familiarize themselves with post-graduation expectations and assists them in finding a smooth transition into the workforce. This is facilitated by an enthusiastic and motivated academic staff but is impeded by lack of essential resources (e.g., Department owned and administered Forest with adequate infrastructure). The focus on technical skills inherited from the former TEI Department should shift to include emphasis on generation and dissemination of knowledge. This paradigm shift is inhibited by an inadequate number of graduate students and the presence of temporary teaching hires. The EEAP finds the slow increase in graduate students and research developments encouraging, and advocates that the processes be accelerated but foresees the Department's progress will be

handicapped compared to other Forestry Departments while the temporary hiring of teaching staff policy remains effective.

The DNFE demonstrated through the proposal of academic accreditation of the undergraduate programme and through the presentations made by the groups that is committed to fine-tuning the UGP as needed to ensure that it meets the set quality goals.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Continue rigorous monitoring of the UGP and update courses according to international forest science developments.

- Build close ties with and solicit feedback from future alumni and stakeholders, and social partners. Consider regular (virtual or in person) meetings with them to evaluate the UGP.

- Improve the mechanisms you are using to improve student learning performance. Consider providing incentives for participation in course and instructor evaluations by the students. Circulate all findings and post them to the Department's website at least annually.

- Request quantitative assessment of student feedback by the MODIP performed by qualified personnel (survey analysts) and ensure MODIP continues to work closely with the OMEA.

- Publicize focus on Landscape architecture and disaster mitigation. Communicate progress and research findings to stakeholders and authorities.

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

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

The DFNES undergraduate study programme encompasses a broad spectrum of fields in teaching and research within the frame of the offered courses. The curriculum is articulated

and comprehensive. The Department offers a 5-year programme of undergraduate studies that includes three specializations/concentrations. For the first two years (semesters 1-4), students follow a shared programme, and during the 5th semester they elect specialization (allowed to be altered until the 7th semester) for the rest of the studies. The current undergraduate programme has been in effect from 2019-2020. The ECTS system is applied across the curriculum, and one ECTS corresponds to 25 hours of student involvement. Links between research and teaching in the undergraduate program do exist. These will become more obvious as the programme matures and faculty members adapt to the transition from TEI to AEI. The Department should maintain all efforts to further strengthen the links between research and teaching by regularly updating the course contents, providing additional experiential learning and critical thinking skills to students, and maintaining close contacts with stakeholders/external experts.

The description of several of the learning outcomes within the course frameworks (syllabi) need further homogenization as they divert in the amount of information conveyed (e.g., A.Y.5/B.Y.2/D.Y.4/E.Y.4/OPT.13/G.Y.1 versus A.Y.4/B.Y.1/D.Y.1/OPT.4/G.Y.2: just indicative of courses with very short versus verbose text descriptions on the learning outcomes).

The EEAP found that a targeted comparison of the design and curriculum of the DFNES undergraduate study programme with high-quality/renowned European and international programmes and universities is lacking in the provided documentation. Such comparison would have been beneficial and would strengthen even more the gravity of the undergraduate study programme. In addition, such comparison and alignment efforts may also increase students' desire for mobility abroad.

Overall, the undergraduate programme is organised in a positive student-centred learning environment that allows for different modes of delivery and offers flexible learning paths and mutual respect. Continuous attempts are needed to integrate and evolve different ways to improve attendance. Students actively participate in the pedagogical process through laboratory and hands-on exercises in several courses that provide valuable lessons to be used in the workplace. The workload is aligned with other European universities' equivalent workloads. Lastly, and beyond courses, the faculty make a genuine effort to offer additional research exposure to students participating in active research projects.

Following efforts by the University and the DFNES during the last years, a comprehensive undergraduate programme has been introduced during the academic year 2019-2020. The programme is still in its maturation phase. The Department and University oversee the implementation, progress, and potential future programme needs for periodic adjustments. The EEAP encourages efforts that would increase the participation of student representatives in these processes.

All stakeholders expressed their positive views on the knowledge and acquired abilities of graduates from the TEI programme and confidence that those skills will also characterize the UGP graduates. They underlined the need for a more in-depth specialization. They commented on the dedication of faculty and staff and attested that the programme meets the expectations set by the Geotechnical Chamber of Greece. The EEAP noted that the expeditious formulation

of the UGP (transition from TEI to AEI) excluded stakeholders from participating in its drafting. Future UGP revisions should be subject to formal and comprehensive consultation with stakeholders, external experts, students, and future graduates. An advisory/consultation panel of alumni and external stakeholders may be considered.

The undergraduate study programme also offers students a Digital Skills Certificate; the EEAP finds this very positive and indicates that fluency in at least one high-level programming language would undoubtedly increase the competitiveness of the graduates. Furthermore, the EEAP noted that in contrast to similar-field study programmes elsewhere in Greece, the DFNES undergraduate programme does not provide to students certified pedagogics education / sufficiency (Πιστοποιητικό Παιδαγωγικής και Διδακτικής Κατάρτισης) conducive to professional rights for teaching in the secondary education system in Greece. In this context, the DFNES should first investigate feasibility and subsequently lobby professional teaching rights or its graduates.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Although established links between research and teaching in the undergraduate programme will become more evident as the programme matures, the DFNES should maintain all efforts to further strengthen these links by regularly updating the course contents and enhance experiential learning opportunities to students, as well as maintaining close contacts with stakeholders/external experts.

- The DFNES should enforce fully standardized descriptions in all courses of the learning outcomes within the course frameworks (syllabi).

- The DFNES undergraduate study programme should offer direct, quantitative comparisons to similar curricula in renowned European and global programmes and universities to meet self-imposed requirements for excellence and enhance its reputation and status.

- The stakeholders and external experts of the public and private sectors should be formally consulted for revisions and future planning of the study programme. We propose the development of an external advisory board to engage with the Department.

- The DFNES should consider including at least one high-level programming language as part of the curriculum, offer a Digital Skills Certificate, as well as investigate feasibility to formalize certified pedagogics education/sufficiency (Πιστοποιητικό Παιδαγωγικής και Διδακτικής Κατάρτισης) with a certificate that enables teaching in public sector secondary education institutions.

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-centred learning and teaching, the academic unit:

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

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

The EEAP noted the moderate to low participation of students in the course evaluations despite the efforts of the Department. The EEAP expects the active student involvement in

course evaluations and through their representatives will increase as soon as students note changes induced by this process.

The DFNES appoints one faculty member to act as Academic Advisor for students within the same academic year of studies (in total 5 faculty members per year). Although there is an open-door policy of faculty toward students, the latter are not fully aware of the essential role and services offered by the Academic Advisor and how they can be benefited from such a resource.

The EEAP notes the efforts implemented by the DFNES to tackle the imposed teaching and research challenges during the covid-19 pandemic. The DFNES has handled the situation very well. Supported by University infrastructure and resources, made noteworthy progress in digital engagements and expanded the availability of e-learning material. In post-COVID times, however, the DFNES needs to develop a clear plan and vision of how to optimally integrate and develop further this legacy towards supporting the curriculum's theoretical, laboratory, and fieldwork components.

Both the University and the DFNES have developed and operate the appropriate infrastructure/offices dedicated to supporting students and responding to their concerns.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Maintain and even increase the number of courses that use enriched student assessment methods using multiple examination measurements with class expectations and grading communicated clearly in the curriculum.

- Implement strategies to increase student participation and confidence in course evaluations.

- Find ways to strengthen the participation and involvement of students and student representatives in the periodic internal evaluation and continuous improvement of the study programme.

- Promote to the students the role and responsibilities of the Academic Advisor and adapt pertinent HAHE guidelines. Encourage students to contact the Academic Advisor frequently. Consider a formal assessment of Academic Advisors by students.

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

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

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

- ✓ *the registration procedure of the admitted students and the necessary documents - according to the law - and the support of the newly admitted students*

- ✓ *student rights and obligations, and monitoring of student progression*

- ✓ *internship issues, granting of scholarships*

- ✓ *the procedures and terms for writing the thesis (diploma or degree)*

- ✓ *the procedure of award and recognition of degrees, the duration of studies, the conditions for progression and assurance of the progress of students in their studies*

as well as

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP acknowledges the hard work of the faculty to create an inclusive environment for the students. Faculty and staff are dedicated to the programme's success, as demonstrated throughout the review and confirmed by the stakeholders. The faculty's interest and open-door policy have been critical to student success. The EEAP acknowledges faculty dedication to programme success, and recommends that they continue their mission to inspire, educate

and train a diverse and inclusive next-generation workforce. In this context, faculty should intensify their efforts to engage students and student representatives for active involvement in the continuous improvement of the undergraduate study programme.

Incoming students are primarily admitted via state examinations, and the DFNES has no control over the number of admitted undergraduate students. The number of incoming students has decreased dramatically during the last two academic years (2021-2022 and 2022-2023) due to the imposed minimum grade admission requirements. The DFNES should adequately evaluate the risks this requirement imposes to the existence of the Department and address it to the Authorities.

Once on campus, the Department offers incoming student orientation sessions that include information on the Department, faculty, staff, curriculum, expectations, and an overview of facilities, resources, and services available. Student progress is appropriately monitored. The Department website provides an overview of the programme, specializations, step-by-step instructions on admissions, expectations for graduation, and information about the facilities.

The DFNES provides some written guidelines for the contents and composition of the mandatory undergraduate thesis (Πτυχιακή Εργασία). The final examination committee ensures thesis quality. The Department should consider issuing a more substantial and extensive Thesis Handbook made available to students and clearly defining the requirements for thesis evaluation and structure.

The student mobility and participation in professional development opportunities at the DFNES are low. Reportedly (student feedback) to limited funding and partly since the new programme has only matured for three years. Only a small number of students take advantage of the ERASMUS+ programme, although there is a well-documented and transparent ECTS equivalence to foreign institutions. The EEAP expects that as the study programme matures, more students will seek ERASMUS+ programme opportunities abroad.

When ongoing arrangements are implemented thereby securing a proprietary University/Department Forest will be available, attained knowledge will include the mandatory fieldwork/summer practical training scheduled for the end of the 8th semester; several other single- and multi-day field courses are part of the curriculum. Fieldwork training is widely appreciated by the students.

Stakeholders pointed out that the program needs to include additional practical specialization, soft skills training, and greater experiential learning opportunities. Engagement of local stakeholders must be pursued and facilitated. Professional development activities are critical for student success, and the webpage and direct engagement opportunities can serve as a conduit for those. The DFNES needs to consider the establishment of a "Stakeholders/Industry Liaison" (both from public and private sectors) with annual membership subscriptions that can be utilised towards student grants/scholarships and Department activities within the curriculum framework. Similarly, the DFNES could also consider inviting external/guest lecturers to address topics in specialised scientific subjects and seminars.

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	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Actively encourage and provide opportunities for student engagement and participation in professional development activities, including the ERASMUS+ programme despite limitations imposes by limited funding. The person(s) responsible for student mobility and the teaching staff should find additional and alternative ways (e.g., dedicated lectures, active website promotion etc.) to inform students about the benefits of participating in the ERASMUS+ network programme.

- The undergraduate study programme needs to include more soft skills training and greater experiential learning opportunities. Increase research experience through projects/grants/contracts and expose students to new technologies. This is critical moving forward for the long-term success and relevance of the programme. Practical training with private and public stakeholders is an excellent way to achieve this.

- The Greek State should increase the funds and the compensation for practical training.

- Create a stakeholder advisory committee that engages with the Department, staff, and students. In this context, consider establishing a "Stakeholders/Industry Liaison" (both from public and private sectors) with annual membership subscriptions that may be utilised towards student grants and Department activities within the curriculum framework.

- Recognize and highlight faculty and student successes and maintain/create press releases on the Department's website.

- The DFNES should issue a more substantial and extensive Thesis Handbook that is made available to students whereby the quality requirements for implementing the thesis evaluation and structure are explicated.

- When the proprietary University/Department Forest becomes available, the DFNES should consider upgrading the mandatory fieldwork/summer practical training (Πρακτική Άσκηση Φοιτητών) as an individual course with corresponding 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

The Department of Forest and Natural Environment Sciences was established in 2019, as an upgrade of a technical tertiary education forestry school belonging to the Technical Education Institute (TEI) system. Unlike the other two former TEI Forestry Departments subjected to the same upgrade mentioned below, the Department in Drama joined a rigorously reconfigured International Hellenic University that formerly only offered graduate studies taught in English. Instead, the Forestry Departments in Karditsa and Karpenisi were assigned to the University of Thessaly and Agricultural University of Athens, respectively, institutions comprising many Departments and offering many more administrative resources. The implications of this unorthodox reconfiguration dictated by the central government in Athens are apparent and almost universally non-positive.

The Department presently has 13 faculty members, 2 fewer than those appointed at its inception 3 years ago. Two more faculty are expected to retire in the next calendar year. All faculty held corresponding appointments in the former TEI. All faculty hold qualifying doctoral

degrees. Given that no faculty was hired after the Department's establishment, the EEAP could not evaluate the hiring process. Reportedly it is based on applicant merit and credentials and is administered by the Department. The State determines position availability. No new positions were offered since the inception of the Department and the two vacancies mentioned above were not filled. The distribution of faculty across full, Associate, and Assistant Professors is nearly uniform and approximates the norm observed in most of the Departments in Greece. That is starkly different from the distribution of faculty ranks in respected academic programmes in Northern Europe and North America, where full Professors are a minority and most faculty retire without reaching the coveted full Professor title. This gives the impression that faculty advancement is based on tenure (length of service) and not accomplishments.

The Committee finds quite astounding the implicit expectation by the State insinuating that the same number of faculty supporting a 3-year, techniques-oriented programme be able to support a 5-year university programme. Most of the Department's Assistant and Associate Professors carry an unbearable teaching load that often reaches 18(!) hours per week, way beyond the 8 hours per week anticipated by pertinent regulations. This is hardly compatible with a university programme expected to convey but also generate knowledge. A large portion of the teaching load is carried by temporary hires, known as 407 plan appointments. Most of them are doctoral candidates. The Committee finds this temporary staff hiring strategy favoured by the State incompatible with the stability and longevity a University Programme needs to flourish. As with the other four forestry University Departments in the country, and contrary to international norms, there is no formal distribution of tasks and obligations for each faculty member. There is no explicit guidance or suggestions on how time and effort should be distributed between teaching and research, nor any references to administrative tasks.

The mean Scopus h index, a metric designed to quantify a researcher's performance across all faculty, is 8.8. One member has an h-index of 20, and two others are between 10 and 15. All others are below 10, often substantially. These values are not particularly encouraging considering that the length of appointment for most faculty is approaching or exceeding 20 years. The observed h values resemble those of a person that has just been awarded a Ph.D. in most of Europe and North America. The committee noted, however, that the focus of faculty during their TEI tenure was to pass knowledge and skills to the students, not to generate new knowledge through research. It is encouraging that the h-index and the number of publications in the last 3 years show signs of improvement, although it is unclear whether the observed trend is an artefact of publication inflation induced by the internationally prevalent, pay-to-publish, open-access paradigm.

The low volume of communicated research can be partially attributed to the absence or anaemic presence of graduate students. The latter is often the driver of scientific exchanges supervised but not closely attended by faculty. The Committee foresees an increase in the number of graduate students will improve the scientific output of the Department.

The student/faculty ratio is unsustainably high. It is exacerbated by the fact that the faculty must support three different study programmes: 1. the programme adopted after the

Department was formed in 2019, 2. the trailing end of the TEI programme for students that had not graduated on time or were at the first two years of the 3-year programme, and C. a hybrid, shorter programme offered to TEI graduates interested in obtaining a university degree by attending extra course work. In two years, the programme will have students in all levels, from freshmen (1st year) to seniors (5th year), while presently only has for the first 3 years. Thus, it is expected that the student/faculty ratio will deteriorate further unless the State steps in to ameliorate the situation by allowing new hires for the many faculty position openings.

Student enrolment in the years since the inception of the Department has fluctuated markedly. From 186 in the academic year 2019-2020, to 176 in 2020-2021, and 43 in 2021-2022. While the lower enrolment may be welcomed because it alleviates the issues the inflated numbers cause, it also undermines stability and long-term planning efforts.

Local public sector officials and industry representatives decried that the Programme yields knowledgeable graduates ready to address practical and theoretical challenges they are presented with. Several representatives noted that the silvicultural and managing skills of the graduates are superior to those from the other 4 forestry Departments. The Committee deduced that this belief likely applies to former TEI programme graduates since there are no university programme graduates yet. Public officials and industry representatives noted excellent relationships with faculty and a long list of collaborations and engagements.

The Committee noted that faculty are not offered half or full-year sabbaticals or alternative professional development skills. Faculty members are sceptic about pursuing such options unilaterally because, if successful, their numerous teaching responsibilities would be passed to already overwhelmed colleagues.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The State should immediately approve tenure-track positions proportional to the number of courses currently taught by temporary 407-type appointments. The present situation is unsustainable and undermines the mission and vision of the Department. Only 13 faculty cannot support the mandated 300 ECTS programme.

- The Department should establish and communicate formal procedures and quantitative criteria for faculty hiring, performance reports and recognitions, promotions, and tenure requirements. To promote transparency, all relevant information should be posted on the Department's website. Elements of these needs are already in place but are either not comprehensive or obscure.

- The state should support and encourage periodic sabbaticals and regular professional development activities for the faculty.

- The Department should explicate in its charter the need for more robust scientific outputs documented in peer-reviewed journals. The practices followed during the TEI era must be realigned to those of a university programme. The Department should strike a balance between basic and applied research and design a graduate studies programme. Faculty curricula vitae embellished with an adequate number of recent research papers in high-impact factor journals dramatically improve chances for research grants that advance the Department's image and secure laboratory infrastructure.

- Faculty should increase the number and scope of research funding proposals each submits yearly. Every member should explore opportunities with colleagues within and outside the university. The university should take necessary steps to facilitate the process.

- The Department should consider annual teaching and research awards for excellence based on transparent and objective criteria. The State should financially support efforts that improve faculty morale.

- The Department should investigate whether it could have experts and/or stakeholders deliver lectures to further connect students with the occupational markets.

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP noted the condition of infrastructure supporting the UGP and the students via virtual tours offered by the Department and an in-person visit by Mr. Sotiriadis. The Department has been housed in its present building since 2000, until 2019 under the TEI system. The building extends over a 4,500m^2 area and is located at about 1km from the outskirts of the city of Drama. The building has two floors. In addition to classrooms, it has two information technology (IT) laboratories, one fully equipped. It has a meeting room with modern video conferencing equipment that is suitable for business meetings. The main auditorium on the first-floor seats about 200 and is well-equipped. The Department has a well-organized Natural History Museum and Exhibition often visited by schools.

The Department operates fourteen (14) laboratories, half of which are furnished with modern equipment and, where applicable, appropriate software.

The building complies with accessibility standards for students with mobility problems. The EEAP noted the absence of first-aid training to the laboratory staff, as well as absence of any emergency response procedures/training and emergency drills.

The Department operates two (2) research laboratories: the Laboratory for Analysis and Management of Anthropogenic and Natural Disasters and the Laboratory for Management of Renewable Natural Resources and Bioeconomy. The laboratories cover the present educational and research needs of the Department.

The library includes a sufficient collection of books and offers a number of services, including subscriptions to journals, digital libraries, and databases. The *eClass* platform DI.PA.E. - Kavala campus offers a complete Electronic Course Management System available to the students.

The Department maintains a website with a somewhat simplified but user-friendly structure.

Students are informed electronically about matters concerning study data, courses, directions, exam information, grades, completed coursework, etc. The Department has established Study Advisors, each overseeing every student in an academic year of study. The standard international practice is for each student to have the same advisor for the length of her/his studies.

In terms of housing, there are no student dormitories in Drama, and the union building is located near the centre of the city, at a considerable distance from the Department. The Employment and Career Advisory Service, a resource that links the University to the labour market, the Student Advocate, the Internship Office, and the Erasmus+ Office are all located in Kavala.

Students selected by the Department and interviewed by the Committee expressed their satisfaction with the effectiveness of the undergraduate office and the services rendered by the faculty, even though these interactions, especially with the former, often occur virtually. Asked about involvement with the Erasmus+ programme, the students replied that participation is often out of the question for financial reasons, implying that the housing and per diem support offered by the Erasmus+ programme is grossly inadequate even in Balkan countries. The students noted that a few Erasmus students from other countries were housed into two small rooms in the Department Building, a rather curious option.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The State should increase funding to the Department and ensure the building has adequate maintenance and security personnel.

- In cooperation with the Municipality of Drama and the Region authorities, a large parcel of land next to the building and currently owned by the Department, should be utilized and host a dormitory and a student club. A lit, paved sidewalk and a bicycle path must be constructed to connect the Department to the City Centre and ensure student safety.

- First-aid training should be provided to the laboratory staff and the DFNES/IHU should implement an emergency response protocol and conduct frequent emergency drills.

Principle 8: Collection, Analysis and Use of Information for the Organisation and Operation of New Undergraduate Programmes

The Institutions and their academic units bear full responsibility for collecting, analysing and using information, aimed at the efficient management of undergraduate programmes of study and related activities, in an integrated, effective and easily accessible way.

> *Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on the operation of Institutions, academic units and study programmes feed data into the internal quality assurance system. The following data is of interest: key performance indicators for the student body profile, student progression, success and drop-out rates, student satisfaction with the programme, availability of learning resources and student support. The completion of the fields of National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA) should be correct and complete with the exception of the fields that concern graduates in which a null value is registered.*

Relevant documentation

- *Report from the National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA) at the level of the Institution, the Department and the new UGP*
- *Operation of an information management system for the collection of administrative data for the implementation of the programme (Students' Record)*
- *Other tools and procedures designed to collect data on the academic and administrative functions of the academic unit and the study programme*

Study Programme Compliance

The Department maintains procedures for the collection and monitoring of data and has provided the EEAP with reports regarding student body, surveys, internships, performance, ERASMUS mobility, and faculty research output, funding, and infrastructure. A short analysis of the above is given, but statistical analysis of the data is done manually, as IT services are not effectively used, and therefore comparison between results is not made on a large scale. A student survey sample is not linked in the website and the QA policy and report are available in Greek.

The departmental website contains standard information such as faculty members, undergraduate programme, student support services, announcements, Erasmus opportunities, and an introduction of the head of the Department.

Extensive CVs of most faculty members are uploaded online in Greek and English as are Research Profiles for most faculty members (in Greek only) and a particular link regarding research programmes and recent publications for the department.

Website references to many student services (accommodation, food services for students, library, department overview, career office, and student mail) prompt the user to the Institution's previous form, as TEI, and that is confusing.

The career opportunities of future graduates are described at length. Alumni surveys are, according to the head of the Department, ready to be published after the first graduation. Presently, no alumni career paths are monitored.

A large amount of information regarding the department's secretary services, academic books, guide for the city etc. are listed on the "Survival Guide" which is 'buried' under the "useful documents for first years", all exclusively in Greek. While there is a mountain of information, this page needs to be re-organized and made more user-friendly.

Social media presence is found in a relatively active Twitter account. It works as a media for announcing the Departmental achievements, workshops, and events.

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

- Generate a virtual (video) tour with recent embedded pictures of the campus and especially the department and its labs and make it available from the Department's website.

- Consider automation and systematic statistical analysis on the plethora of information that can be retained through the student surveys.

- Link future alumni with the use of platforms such as LinkedIn, which would shape community-building activities.

- Infographics material could be beneficial compared to extended texts as that would make it more appealing to read.

- Update the website with a more user-friendly appearance and offer all context being in English and Greek - in line with current worldwide trends. This is vital as the Department seeks to internationalize further and invite more sponsors and Erasmus students.

- Establishing a "why choose us" section which would present the Department's most significant achievements and strengths and a "student story" to function as ambassador to prospective students.

- Unify the previous websites and redirections of TEI with the current departmental website and resolve the confusion about the current status of the school.

- Lay the foundations for a social media presence across all platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn as this would resonate with young generation students.

- Along with the faculty CVs, link to their Scopus-Google Scholar author ID and ORCID.

- Disseminate committee membership and a brief description of roles in the department website.

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

The Department's Assembly established the UGP upon recommendation by the Curriculum Committee. The content was approved by the IHU Senate and posted on the Department's website.

The evaluation process is performed in accordance with instructions, procedures, and standards developed by the IHU MODIP. Every student enrolled in a course has access to and is expected (and encouraged) to complete the survey, usually between the 8th and 10th week of the coursework, using an electronic questionnaire. By the end of each semester, the Department's OMEA evaluates the questionnaires and presents the compiled information to the Assembly.

The findings of the self-assessment procedure are made available to the public and shared on the departmental website under the "News" button. The most recent report available is for the academic year 2020-2021. The current UGP was introduced in 2019, and the first graduates are expected in about two years. An objective evaluation of student-acquired skills and knowledge would be premature.

A SWOT analysis is also undertaken.

Students and stakeholders opined that the UGP of 57 courses is comprehensive and will ensure adequate skill sets and theoretical backgrounds for its graduates.

Course information includes a syllabus, suggested bibliography, coursework type, prerequisites, expected learning outcomes, workload, and the instructor's name. The information is uploaded to the Departmental website in PDF format. This applies to all courses offered by the Department.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

● The number of UGP courses must be reconsidered and likely reduced to promote more in-depth learning and skill development. By international standards, the number of courses completed as a prerequisite for the diploma is excessive. This implies that, if reduced, courses may span more than one semester. The overall ECTS total will remain the same.

● Add an extra tab to the departmental website with information regarding the quality of studies in Greek and English. Include the annual quality assessment report in English, thereby providing prospective Erasmus programme students with the necessary information and the belief that the Department is committed to transparency and is striving for excellence.

● Advertise to prospective students the advantages of living in the town of Drama. This could be included in the website's "why choose us" section.

● Future curriculum updates must consider feedback offered by the student body's elected representative. This will enhance compliance with the mandate for student-centered learning.

Principle 10: Periodic Internal Review of the New Study Programmes

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

The Department's OMEA in cooperation with the faculty designed the UGP quality assurance protocol which the Assembly ultimately approved. The procedures governing the collection and tabulation of information related to the performance and progress of the students, the faculty, the structure of the UGP, and the evaluation of the educational outcome and services are outlined below.

The Department's secretariat manages the student and UGP information electronically. It supports collecting and processing data related to all individuals in the student body, including modifications and updates to scholastic achievements, their curriculum, any research appointments, completion of practical training, field work, grades obtained, issuing of certificates, and graduation procedures.

The content of the electronic questionnaires the students are asked to fill out during each course have a department-specific structure designed by the IHU's MODIP. The process guarantees anonymity and typically uses a 5-level scale to quantify student opinion on the coursework, the classroom and lab materials used, the perceived performance of the instructor(s), the infrastructure available to them, and the administrative services. Due partly

to the pandemic and the recency of the electronic questionnaire system, student participation is low (24%).

Additional data is collected regarding the conduct of the faculty and teaching staff via forms they are expected to complete annually. The forms seek information enumerating teaching loads and quality indicators, participation in research projects, number and outlet of publications, and the condition and needs of physical and research infrastructure available to them and to the students. The Department ultimately archives the forms, while a summary report is submitted to the MODIP, forwarded to the faculty, and published on the Department's website.

Report outcomes are evaluated at least annually by the Assembly in the presence of student representatives. Noted weaknesses or issues are addressed with specialized action plans. Examples of such action plans include the utilization of an additional building (former κτήριο ΚΕΓΕ) granted to the Department in 2016, the building of a greenhouse, the encouragement of guest lecturing, and utilization of the ECTS system for all courses (since 2015). It should be noted that most of these activities were initiated when the Department was part of the TEI system.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Quality indicators must be revised and adapted to the strategic objectives of the Department

- Faculty and teaching staff must monitor student participation and engagement in coursework and learning opportunities as well as in their filling of evaluation

questionnaires with the provision that the latter's content is examined regularly and revised where needed.

- The Department must design a comprehensive questionnaire that will quantify the scholastic achievements of the UGP graduates that are expected in two years.

- The Department must seek, collect, and compile information from stakeholders regarding the skills and knowledge of the graduates.

- The Department must take actions aiming at increasing student participation to evaluation questionnaires.

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

The predecessor TEI Department was evaluated in 2012. This is the first evaluation of the university Department. Given that the scope of the new Department is fundamentally different from the TEI one and the recency of the former, the Committee considers it is fully compliant to the principle more in good faith and less on actual information.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

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

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

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

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

Relevant documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

The establishment of the university Department was decided abruptly by the State with simultaneous discontinuation of the TEI system. The newly formed Department had incoming first-year students right away. To complicate matters further, the new Department joined a newly founded University, lacking in fundamental functions and services. As with most ad-hoc decisions, several serious issues emerged.

Among the many oxymora that the new Department faced, perhaps the most critical was the absence of an a priori accreditation. Those in the State who designed the abolishment of the TEI system and absorption its schools into university structures failed to address a critical issue, namely, how a newly formed Department would be expected to attract and accommodate students without offering any guarantees that at the completion of their studies they will be rewarded with an accredited degree and diploma and, by extension, with an opportunity to obtain a professional license to apply their skills.

Against the odds, the newly founded Department continued supporting the former TEI students until their old study programme is completed, accommodated TEI graduates interested in upgrading their degrees to university equivalents and designed a 5-year / 10 semester curriculum. Each of these endeavours alone was a challenging and ambitious undertaking; all of them together turned out to be a feat.

In a small amount of time, a seriously understaffed Department managed to outline a complete curriculum that the Committee deemed to be in alignment with the requirements of an accredited Bachelor's degree in Forestry. The Programme meets ECTS unit standards established by European regulations.

Unfortunately, the State did not approve the necessary faculty positions, and the Department continues to operate on skeleton faculty implicitly expected or forced to perform unconventional duties as is, for example, that of a doorkeeper responsible for locking or unlocking the building. Owing to a lack of financial support from the State, the otherwise adequate building has not received necessary maintenance and repairs for a decade. Access to the building requires students to walk about 2km one way along a street lacking sidewalks and lights and used by speeding vehicles. Under these conditions, a serious accident or a fatality is not a matter of if but rather of when. The Department lacks the authority and resources to resolve these issues, and multiple relevant requests to the local authorities have remained unanswered. The EEAP firmly believes that these conditions and associated planning are not compatible with a developed country and must be resolved immediately.

Further, there is no provision or budget for summer practical training in the forest. Each of the other four forestry Departments do have secured summer practical training. There is also no budget for daily excursions for lab work in the forest or to visit an industrial setting.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The State must immediately approve permanent faculty positions and stop using temporary 407-type hires to cover teaching needs. The temporary hiring practice is not compatible with sound university-level programmes.

- The State and the local authorities must work together to build infrastructure that guarantees the safety of students going to and returning from the building.

- The State must provide the funds for long-due building maintenance, upgrades in Wi-Fi resources critical to the students, and permanent security personnel.

- The Department must continuously evaluate the undergraduate programme and its alignment with evolving science, societal expectation and needs, and recommendations by local, regional, and national collaborators and authorities.

- In collaboration with the Forest Service, authorities, industry, and University resources, the Department must establish clear procedure for career tracking of graduates.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- A constructive relationship among students, academic and administrative staff is evident.

- The DFNES maintains an extensive network of public and private sector stakeholders.

II. Areas of Weakness

- Summer practical training in the Department/University proprietary forest is still under development and several issues with infrastructure need to be resolved.

- Low student participation in departmental and course evaluations/surveys.

- Excessive number of temporary hires with teaching responsibilities and no contribution to research efforts.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Reconsider and ultimately reduce the number of courses offered by the UGP to promote more in-depth learning and skill development.

- Establish and communicate formal procedures and quantitative criteria for faculty hiring, performance reports and recognitions, promotions, and tenure requirements. Post all relative information on the website timely.

- Enhance experiential learning by improving options for student participation in research projects and by maintaining close contact with stakeholders/external experts.

- Fully standardize course descriptions and frameworks (syllabi).

- Enhance reputation and status by offering direct, quantitative comparisons to similar curricula in renowned European and global programmes and universities.

- Stakeholders, collaborators, and peers must be formally and regularly consulted for UGP revisions and future planning. Consider establishing an external advisory board to engage with the Department. Establish a "Stakeholders/Industry Liaison" (both from public and private sectors) with annual membership subscriptions directed towards student grants and Department activities within the curriculum framework.

- The UGP should include a new course, perhaps in the first semester, teaching the main elements of a high-level programming language such as Python, R, or Java. Successful course completion should be a prerequisite for enrolment in any biometry, economics, remote sensing, or GIS course and be noted in the Digital Skills Certificate.

- Ensure that graduates are awarded pedagogics education/sufficiency certification (Πιστοποιητικό Παιδαγωγικής και Διδακτικής Κατάρτισης).

- Maintain and even increase the number of courses that use enriched student assessment methods based on multiple examination measurements and course expectations and grading provisions communicated clearly in the curriculum.

- Implement strategies to increase student participation and anonymity confidence in course evaluations.

- Strengthen student participation in the internal UGP evaluation.

- Promote the role and responsibilities of the Academic Advisor according to HAHE guidelines. A formal assessment of Academic Advisors by students should be considered. Instead of the current practice of a study year-specific advisor, consider assigning each student to a single Academic Advisor, until graduation time.

- Strongly encourage students to engage and participate in professional development activities, even if the ERASMUS+ programme provides limited funding. Explore opportunities (e.g., dedicated lectures, active website promotion) to communicate the tangible benefits emanating from the participation in the ERASMUS+ network programme.

- Improve soft skill training and experiential learning. Increase research experience through projects/grants/contracts and expose students to new technologies. Promote practical training to private and public stakeholders.

- Recognize and highlight faculty and student successes using objective criteria and maintain/create press releases on the Department's website. Revise and adopt quality indicators to the Department's strategic objectives, mission statement, and vision.

- Issue a verbose Thesis Handbook offered to the students with detailed information on the expected thesis format and quality.

- When the proprietary University/Department Forest is available, the Department should consider upgrading the mandatory fieldwork/summer practical training (Πρακτική Άσκηση Φοιτητών) as an individual course with corresponding ECTS workload.

- Clarify in the charter the need for more robust scientific outputs documented in peer-reviewed journals. Strike a balance between basic and applied research and design a graduate studies programme. Improve status by producing adequate research papers in high-impact factor journals.

- Faculty should increase the number and scope of research funding proposals each submits yearly. Every member should explore opportunities with colleagues within and outside the university.

- Pursue options to secure support and funding from the Municipality of Drama and Regional authorities to develop a large parcel of adjacent land as a dormitory and a student club. Generate a virtual (video) tour with recent embedded pictures of the campus, especially the department and its labs, and make it available from the Department's website.

- Link future alumni to professional platforms such as LinkedIn with the prospect of the endeavour to morph into a community-building activity. Enhance social media presence.

Include links to their Scopus – Google Scholar, Research Gate – Academia, etc. pages in faculty pages and CVs.

- Deploy infographics as means to declutter the information offered on the website. Include a 'why choose us' option featured prominently. Advertise to prospective students the advantages of living in the town of Drama. Ensure that all content is available in Greek and English and equivalent in both languages. Include a tab with information on the study and programme quality. Remove confusing cross-references to the no longer existing TEI Department.

- Ensure future curriculum updates consider student feedback.

- Design a comprehensive questionnaire that will quantify the scholastic achievements of the UGP graduates that are expected in two years.

- Seek, collect, and compile information from stakeholders on the skills and knowledge of the graduates.

- Continuously evaluate the UGP and its alignment with evolving science, societal expectations and needs, and recommendations by local, regional, and national collaborators and authorities.

- In collaboration with the private and public stakeholders, establish a clear procedure for career tracking of all graduates.

Addressed to the International Hellenic University

- Must assist the Department in analysing and reporting information collected by the quality assessment, and student-filled electronic questionnaires. Compared to other Forestry Department evaluations previously, the IHU MODIP has only a token presence that inhibits the efforts of the Department to secure its accreditation.

- The University must establish an alumni/career office and develop methodologies to collect data and generate reports on career paths and employability of graduates.

- Provide first-aid training to laboratory staff and emergency response protocol/procedures and drills.

Addressed to the State Authorities

- Immediately provide funds (~€70.000) that enable summer training camps for 4th year students in the location suggested by the Department. Field summer training is a prerequisite for graduation

- Immediately provide funds (~€25.000) that support daily field or industrial facilities training activities. Those activities are essential for an experiential training-based curriculum.

- Immediately approve tenure-track positions proportional to the number of courses taught by temporary 407-type appointments. The present situation is unsustainable and

undermines the mission and vision of the Department. Only fourteen (14) faculty cannot support the mandated 300 ECTS programme.

- Ensure the number of students accepted by the Department annually is not subject to extreme fluctuations. Unbalanced enrolment threatens the survival of the Department.

- Increase funding to attract and support external/guest lecturers.

- The state should support financially and encourage periodic sabbaticals and regular professional development activities for the faculty.

- In collaboration with local and regional authorities, the State must build a lit sidewalk and bicycle lane that links the Department to the city. The approximately 2km distance one way is walked daily by many students, and while the physical exercise is welcomed, the dangers associated with it are not. A serious accident or fatality is only a matter of time without improvements.

- The State should increase the funding to the Department and ensure the building has adequate maintenance, security personnel, and modern Wi-Fi throughout its grounds.

IV.   Summary & Overall Assessment

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

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **3, 5, 8, and 12.**

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

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

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname   **Signature**

1. **Dr. Demetrios Gatziolis (Chair)**
   USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon, USA

2. **Prof. Stavros Avramidis**
   University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

3. **Prof. Filippos Tsikalas**
   University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

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

5. **Mr. Ioannis Praskidis Alympakis**
   Hellenic Mediterranean University, Department of Agriculture, 3rd year Undergraduate Student, Heraklion, Crete, Greece