



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
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Accreditation Report for the New Undergraduate Study Programme of:

Natural Environment and Climate Resilience

Department: Natural Environment and Climate Resilience

Institution: Democritus University of Thrace

Date: 08/04/2025



Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση
της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Πρόγραμμα
Ανθρώπινο Δυναμικό και
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Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the New Undergraduate Study Programme of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience of the Democritus University of Thrace 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 of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience of the Democritus University of Thrace comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. KATOPODES NIKOLAOS (Chair)

(Title, Name, Surname)

University of Michigan

(Institution of origin)

2. ALVANIDES (ΑΛΒΑΝΙΔΗΣ) SERAPHIM (ΣΕΡΑΦΕΙΜ)

(Title, Name, Surname)

University of BambergBavaria, Germany

(Institution of origin)

3. CONSTANTINOU STAVROS

(Title, Name, Surname)

Department of Geography, College of Arts and Sciences, The Ohio State University

(Institution of origin)

4. Korovesis Stavros

(Title, Name, Surname)

Agricultural University of Athens

(Institution of origin)

II. REVIEW PROCEDURE AND DOCUMENTATION

Please refer briefly to the Panel preparation for the new undergraduate study programme review, as well as to the documentation provided and considered by the Panel. State the dates of the review and the meetings held. Feel free to mention any additional information regarding the procedure, as appropriate.

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

Monday 31/03/2025:

1. Preliminary private meeting of the EEAP. Discussion of the program under review; assignment of writing parts of the draft accreditation report to the EEAP members.
2. Meeting with the Rector, Prof. Fotios Maris, and Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, Prof. Marirena Grigoriou. A comprehensive overview of DUTH and the new USP was given by Prof. Maris, including the history, accomplishments, and quality assurance processes of DUTH. This was followed by a discussion with the EEAP that focused on the vision, opportunities, and challenges of the new USP.

Tuesday 01/04/2025:

1. Meeting with the Head of the Department, Prof. Antonios Papadopoulos, Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, Prof. Marirena Grigoriou, and the following OMEA members:
 - a. Prof. Vasiliki Kazana
 - b. Prof. Vasileios Liordos
 - c. Assoc. Prof. Spyridon Tsiftsis
 - d. Assoc. Prof. Panteleimon Xofis
 - e. Assoc. Prof. Dimitrios Raptis

Prof. Papadopoulos gave a detailed presentation of the design, strategic plan, quality assessment methods, student professional development, research activities, and goals of the new USP. This was followed by an extensive discussion with the EEAP, including numerous questions and answers.

2. Wednesday 02/04/2025 to Sunday 06/04/2025:

Draft report writing. EEAP virtual meeting. Review and finalization of the draft report.

Throughout the review and accreditation process, the EEAP was in close communication with the University, USP administration, and MODIP staff. The EEAP found that the staff and the faculty were very cooperative and helpful in our discussions, and promptly provided additional information and responses to every request by the EEAP.

III. NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMME PROFILE

Please provide a brief overview of the new undergraduate study programme with reference to the following: academic remit, duration of studies, qualification awarded, employment opportunities, orientation challenges or any other key background information. Also, you may provide a short description of the home Department and Institution, with reference to student population, campus or any other facts, as deemed appropriate.

The Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience of Democritus University of Thrace was founded according to the provisions of Articles 3 and 4 of Law 5094/2024. According to the classification of UNESCO ISCED-2013, the academic field belongs to the general areas of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary, and specifically to the subfields 0082Forestry, 0821 Forestry. The new Department is a rebranding of the Department of Forest and Natural Environment Sciences, which offered specialization in (1) Ecology and Conservation of Biodiversity, (2) Natural Resources Management & Climate Change, and (3) Landscape Architecture & Land Restoration. Thus, the new USP represents a natural evolution of the existing Department that reflects recent developments in societal needs.

The goal of the new Department is to create a unique Undergraduate Study Programme (USP) in Greece by focusing on the increasing demand for experts in environmental sustainability and the implications of climate change. The mission of the new Department is aligned with that of Democritus University of Thrace and aims to strengthen the

- Inter-disciplinary learning experience of the students;
- Incorporation of new learning and research methods;
- Improvement of the teaching approach and evaluation of students;
- Cooperation with national and international agencies that define the changes in the fields of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience;
- Management of risks associated with environmental and climatic issues.

The new programme will offer a 4-year undergraduate degree along with opportunities at the masters (in collaboration with the Greek Fire Academy), and doctoral levels. The undergraduate programme will consist of forty (40) compulsory courses, adding up to 200 ECTS, and 40 additional ECTS coming from a combination of elective courses, an optional work placement (6th semester: 10 ECTS) and/or an optional thesis (8th semester: 10 ECTS). All courses offered during the first four (4) semesters are compulsory. Therefore, the

complete programme study will consist of 240 ECTS.

The new USP will be housed in a building providing 4,500 m² for classrooms, laboratories, offices, and a library. The campus is located approximately 1 km from the City of Drama, and is very close to some of the pristine forests and natural areas in Greece.

The Department has twelve (12) full-time faculty members. They are complemented by three (3) positions for teaching, administrative, and laboratory support. In addition, the new USP has an approved new position for the academic year 2025-2026, and expects to make one additional hire in the near future aiming to increase its strength in the area of climate resilience. Several temporary hires will also be made to assist with the introduction of new courses in emerging fields.

The Department has published an extensive list of measures for the evaluation and assessment of student learning. Equally comprehensive is the list of programme and course outcomes, indicating a careful planning of the new USP. Statistical data of past performance were not provided to the EEAP, as this is considered a new programme, however, the Department made available the last external evaluation report, conducted under the USP's previous structure.

The Department expects that its graduates will be granted professional rights according to Presidential Decree 405/1995, which defines the professional rights of an "environmental scientist". This should become effective upon accreditation of the new programme.

The number of students admitted to the programme each year is determined by the Ministry of Education. Thus, the programme does not make the final decision on admissions. However, the programme plans to propose that one hundred (100) new students be admitted each year, as the ideal number, totalling five hundred (500) for the USP under steady-state operation.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE 1.1 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 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 their specific needs in infrastructure, services, human resources, procedures, financial resources and management systems.

During the evaluation of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their individual academic units in terms of meeting the criteria for the organisation of undergraduate study programmes, particular attention must be placed upon:

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

The profile and the 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 Institutional strategy 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 its 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 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. Sustainability of the new department

Mention must be made to the infrastructure, human resources, funding perspective,

services and 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
- 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 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-centred 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. Research

- It is necessary to indicate research priorities in the scientific field, opportunities for interdisciplinary research, the challenges towards new knowledge, possible research collaborations, etc.

h. Quality assurance

- The quality assurance policy and quality assurance target-setting should be stated, as they have arisen from the gained experience of internal and external evaluation(s) of the Institution to date.

Relevant documentation

- Explanatory 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

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

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

The proposed USP, entitled Natural Environment and Climate Resilience, aims to create a new undergraduate programme that is unique for Greece, and positions itself among a few elite programmes internationally. The mission of the programme is to train scientists in the development and application of modern methods and best practices for the protection of the natural environment and the mitigation of the problems arising from climate change. The new USP is an evolution of and is based on the experience of almost forty (40) years of operation of the existing programme of Forest and Natural Environment Sciences. The proposed USP will offer an interdisciplinary study in environmental sciences and the management of crises associated with climate change.

According to the classification of UNESCO ISCED-2013, the academic field of the new USP belongs to the general areas of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary, and specifically to the subfield 0082 Forestry, 0821 Forestry.

b. The Institutional strategy for its academic development

The strategic plan of the new USP is a result of many years of teaching and research, study of similar programmes in Greece and abroad, analysis of new trends in education, and monitoring emerging challenges to the natural environment due to climate change. The strategic plan was documented in the proposal of the USP, and was described in detail during the presentation by the Department head.

The strategic plan of the new USP has several explicit and implicit goals. The main explicit goal is to refocus the programme on current and emerging issues related to the natural environment with emphasis on climate change. The implicit goal is to create a unique programme in Greece that will attract and keep students in an area outside the major urban centers.

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

The documentation of the feasibility of the Department is excellent. A significant effort has been made in collecting all the relevant information and preparing the document. The new USP has a well-functioning group of classrooms, laboratories, computer facilities, and a library. The Department has twelve (12) full-time faculty members. They all have published work in the general field of environmental science. The two new hires in the next academic year will also increase the programme's strength in the area of climate resilience.

d. Sustainability of the new Department

During his presentation, the rector of Democritus University of Thrace reiterated the support of the University for this New Programme, confirmed the two additional faculty positions, and acknowledged the need for such a programme in the Province of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The programme will be housed in a well-maintained facility, with modern classrooms and laboratories, which receive adequate support from the institution. Funding from the public sector is minimal; however, the faculty are working hard to attract funds from the private sector and research grants. The Departmental services are satisfactory and stable.

e. The structure of studies

The organization of the studies has undergone several changes in the last few years. The three-year programme of study that was followed during the time that the Department was part of the TEI of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace was replaced by a five-year programme during the short period when the Department joined the International Hellenic University. The new USP will consist of a four-year study with the first two years offering only compulsory courses, and the last two years offering a mixture of compulsory and elective courses. A diploma thesis will be optional.

The learning process is meticulously planned and well documented. The learning outcomes are listed in detail both for each course and for the entire programme of studies.

f. The number of admitted students

Based on data for the existing USP in Forest and Natural Environment Sciences, the number of admitted students has decreased in recent years. The trend started with the COVID-19 pandemic, and was exacerbated by the implementation of the Minimum Entry Base by the Ministry of Education during the academic year 2021-2022.

For the new USP, the proposed number of admitted students is one hundred (100), and over a five-year period, the enrolment goal is to achieve a total number of five hundred (500) students.

The new USP is making a valiant effort to increase enrolment by ensuring that there are no similar Departments in other Greek universities, and thus eliminate the possibility of student transfers to schools in major urban centers. There is also an increase in the base of potential candidates by allowing entries not only from the science sector, but also from economics and informatics.

g. Research

The research priorities in the impact of climate change on the natural environment are perfectly aligned with the interests and expertise of the faculty of the new USP. As a result, there are numerous opportunities for interdisciplinary

research. There are possibilities for research collaborations within the university and other institutions, both in Greece and abroad.

h. Quality assurance

The USP proposal includes a long list of steps that will be followed to ensure quality of learning and evaluation of the programme. As this is a new programme, there are no data available from internal and external evaluations. However, the Department provided the EEAP with the last evaluation of the USP when it belonged to the International Hellenic University.

II. Analysis

The documents provided to the EEAP for the justification of the new USP show an outstanding preparation, serious commitment by the faculty and the administration of the University. The oral presentations and interviews projected an image of synergy and coordination that is worthy of praise.

The goal of the USP to refocus the programme on current and emerging issues for the natural environment with emphasis on climate change and to create a unique programme in Greece is commendable and deserves the support of Democritus University of Thrace and the Greek Ministry of Education. The new USP has the necessary number of faculty, the knowledge basis, and the experience to deliver a quality education to its students. The location of the new USP is ideal for studies in Natural Environment and Climate Resilience, as the campus is located near one of the largest forests in Greece, which has been adversely impacted by climate change.

The future of the new USP seems to be very bright. The real challenges will be to increase the visibility of the programme, sensitize high-school graduates to environmental and climate change issues, convince the government to invest in the construction of a modern dormitory near the Drama campus, and fund several scholarships targeted specifically to environmental and climate change studies. Since matriculation and admission of students is controlled by the Ministry of Education, the Department can only affect the number of admissions indirectly. The uniqueness of the programme would be sufficient in a flourishing economy; however, the government has a moral obligation to find financial incentives in order to attract students to a remote region. It is a universal truth that a university is as good as its students. The only exception are Greek universities away from large urban centers. The reasons are complex and multi-dimensional, thus to overcome this persisting cultural conundrum, the Ministry of Education needs to take some bold, radical measures. The faculty of the Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience have issued a challenge by making an outstanding proposal on a critical problem for the nation. It is the turn of the government to prove that they truly believe in supporting peripheral Universities and Departments, and care about the environment and climate change.

III. Conclusions

This will be a unique undergraduate programme for higher education in Greece. The subject is vital for the Nation, the faculty is highly motivated, the location is perfect, and all academic prospects are ideal. To succeed, however, the new USP will need the support of the government. In summary, the programme is fully compliant with Principle 1.1.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 1.1: Strategic Planning, feasibility and sustainability of the academic unit	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R1.1.1 In coordination with Democritus University of Thrace, continue pursuing additional faculty positions in environmental science.

R1.1.2 Initiate a continuous and sustained effort to increase the visibility of the programme (e.g. via scientific publications, events on public awareness, school visits, media and press releases).

R1.1.3 Seek funds, either from public or private sources, for the construction of a modern dormitory on campus.

PRINCIPLE 2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

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.

Relevant documentation

- Quality Assurance Policy
- Quality Targeting (utilising the S.M.A.R.T. methodology)

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

Based on the documentation provided to the EEAP and the presentations by the rector and Department head, Democritus University of Thrace has compiled an impressive list of goals and activities for implementing the quality assurance of the new USP. These cover teaching, research, connection to society, internationalization, the institution's climate, and internal administration.

Eight independent committees will oversee the quality assurance activities, involving students, faculty, and Department stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on increasing the level of research activity according to social and market needs, recognition of students and faculty members for high achievement, and enhancing the visibility of the Department at the national and international level. The EEAP met with members of MODIP and discussed its methods for quality assurance and the enforcement of its plans. It is evident that MODIP collects detailed data related to each academic programme, including the number of students registered, student evaluations, research activities, and student support services. The data are processed, and a variety of statistical measures is made available to the Departmental administration and its faculty. There is a commitment to repeat the process on an annual basis.

Based on the results of the last evaluation of the programme under its previous name, the course evaluation questionnaires are straightforward and cover most aspects of the courses in the programme of study. There is a well-designed process for the timing and completion of the evaluations; however, the student participation rates were low. The evaluation results reveal strong agreement that the teaching faculty is genuinely dedicated to a high quality of education. The accessibility of the faculty recognized, and the response to student concerns is satisfactory. It is clear that the students respect the instructors, and that the approach to teaching and learning has created a strong bond between teachers and students.

II. Analysis

The plans for quality assurance of the new USP are comprehensive, well articulated and impressive for their breadth and depth. As this is now a new programme with many of its goals in transition, it is important to maintain the present quality standards in teaching. Considering the relatively small number of tenured and tenure-track faculty in the Department, this may be a challenging issue. The current quality of the programme is achieved by a major effort and exceptional dedication of the faculty. However, the new teaching subjects will require hiring new, early career faculty and relying on external instructors. In addition, the retirement of some senior faculty who have long worked to establish high quality standards in teaching is approaching quickly. These factors introduce elements of uncertainty in the quality of teaching, accessibility by the students, and quality control.

III. Conclusions

The EEAP has found an outstanding effort and documentation regarding quality assurance. Its implementation in practice will have to be safeguarded against possible vulnerabilities in the transition to the new programme. The programme is fully compliant with principle 2.1.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.1: Quality assurance policy	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.1.1 Introduce measures to increase student participation in course evaluations. They may include a return to paper evaluations in class, mid-term evaluations, so the students can see the impact of their opinion on the current term, and seminars to explain to the students the value of evaluation to the programme and their own careers.

R2.1.2 Establish a mentoring process for early career faculty and temporary instructors to ensure continuity and stability of quality standards.

PRINCIPLE 2.2 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 by the students. 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 of the new UGP (courses for the acquisition of digital skills are included)
- Student Guide
- Course syllabi
- Teaching staff (name list including subject area, employment relationship, assignment of teaching in the UGP and other study programmes)
- QAU minutes for the internal evaluation of the new study programme and its compliance with the Standards.

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience was incorporated into the School of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences of Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) under the provisions of Articles 3 and 4 of Law 5094/2024 and represents the renaming of the former Department of Forestry and Natural Environment of the School of Geotechnical Sciences of the International Hellenic University (DIPAE). The complete text of the internal regulations of the DUTH appeared in the Government Gazette, Issue 2, no. 4751, 20 August 2024.

The Undergraduate Studies Programme (USP) under review broadens the scope and orientation of the Programme with an emphasis on climate resilience and the risks to rural, urban, and forest areas due to climatic change.

The Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience designed the new Undergraduate Study Programme (USP) following a well-defined procedure presented in a well-crafted, detailed Accreditation Proposal comprising 46 pages.

The USP emerged following thorough, rigorous, and extended deliberations at the Departmental and University levels. The design process of the USP started with the invitation by the Curriculum Committee of the Department for course suggestions from the representatives of the various tracks. The input needed to be backed by data and considerations from the international literature, trends and developments in the respective fields, and conclusions from research collaborations and external bodies. The Faculty Assembly of the Department discussed the Curriculum Committee proposal. Following its approval, the University's Directorate of Academic Affairs (DATH) verified the submitted proposal's completeness and legality.

After the completion of the audit, the Directorate informed the Department by notifying MODIP, and the complete dossier of the establishment was forwarded to the Undergraduate Studies Committee with notification to the Directorate of Academic Affairs to draft a relevant recommendation for the Senate. Following its approval, the Senate of Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) approved the USP "Natural Environment and Climate Resilience" at the Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience on 23-07-2024.

The Undergraduate Studies Programme (USP) leads to the awarding of a degree in "Natural Environment and Climate Resilience." The course of study is delivered in eight (8) semesters of study, and includes compulsory courses, compulsory elective courses, and an elective degree thesis. In the first four (4) semesters, the Programme focuses on general and special introductory courses, deepening and focusing on individual subjects with specialized classes. The Curriculum consists

of 40 compulsory courses corresponding to 200 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and a combination of eight elective courses corresponding to 40 ECTS (from a selection list) and/or an optional work placement (10 ECTS) and/or an optional thesis (10 ECTS). Therefore, 240 ECTS are required to obtain a degree.

The academic staff who deliver the courses are well-qualified researchers in their respective fields with peer-reviewed publications in international journals and involvement in various research projects.

The USP Environment and Climate Resilience has incorporated six courses into its Curriculum for students to acquire digital skills, as recommended in Principle 2.2. These courses include Geographic Information Systems, Computer Programming, Remote Sensing, Environmental Informatics, and Artificial Intelligence.

The Study Guide presents the course outlines and content, including expected learning outcomes, teaching methods, student assessment methods, and relevant bibliography. They are appropriate for an Undergraduate Study Programme (USP), following the European Qualifications Framework level 6.

II. Analysis

The USP has been established in compliance with the relevant regulatory framework, Departmental, and the Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) levels, confirming its legitimacy and structured implementation. The Programme's academic profile and orientation have been meticulously defined, clearly articulating its goals.

The curriculum design aims to provide students with the competencies to apply their knowledge practically and possibly pursue postgraduate studies. The student workload is aligned with the ECTS for level 6, providing a comprehensive and balanced educational experience.

The Study Guide is well structured and presents essential information for students, including details about the programme structure, study regulations, registration process, course enrolment, and Erasmus+ opportunities.

III. Conclusions

The USP in Environment and Climate Resilience fully complies with HAHE requirements under Principle 2.2. However, the structure could be refined to include an honors thesis option. Additionally, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should become integral to the Programme.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.2: Design, approval and monitoring of the quality of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.2.1 Consider “mapping” courses to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> . For example, SDG 13 is Climate Action: The urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

PRINCIPLE 2.3 STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH IN LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

Institutions 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*

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The USP in Environment and Climate Resilience embraces the principles of student-centered teaching and active learning. It implements systematic evaluation methods, ensuring that students are informed about the assessment criteria and methods used.

Instruction occurs in a variety of methods tailored to student needs and preferences. Students actively engage in seminars, exercises, projects, presentations, and discussions, fostering a collaborative learning environment. They can also participate in field trips and educational visits to gain practical knowledge and experience. This approach ensures that teaching is flexible and utilizes various pedagogical methods, catering to diverse learning styles.

Evaluation procedures for courses are clear and include the following methods, individually or in some combination: written exams, multiple choice questions, oral exams, reports, projects, technical drawings, reflections, presentations, and participation in seminars. These varied assessment methods allow students to demonstrate their understanding in ways that best suit their strengths.

Student assessment includes students with illnesses and learning difficulties, allowing extra time for examinations for students with special needs, and the option of oral examinations when needed.

The Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience has a detailed regulation for dealing with student complaints approved by the Senate and posted on the Department's website.

Student evaluation of instruction takes place at the end of each term. Specifically, students are informed by email that during the 8th to 11th week of the semester that they will be able to evaluate the quality of the teaching by completing a structured questionnaire for each course they take. This feedback mechanism ensures that student voices are heard and considered in improving teaching practices.

The USP includes a detailed account of the role of the Academic Studies Advisor in helping students with their courses, selection of topics for projects or undergraduate theses, postgraduate studies, employment opportunities, and other issues regarding the successful completion of their studies. The advisor's role is pivotal in providing personalized guidance and support, ensuring each student's academic journey is tailored to his/her individual goals and aspirations.

II. Analysis

III. The USP in Environment and Climate Resilience adopts the principle of student-centered learning, and instructors use various teaching methods to accommodate different student learning paths and styles. Each student can structure an individual curriculum based on particular interests from the 5th semester onwards by choosing a variety of elective courses, undertake a work placement and/or complete an undergraduate thesis, that focus on individual specialized subjects of interest. Thus, students have relative autonomy in the learning process, which encourages them to engage in the educational process, develop critical thinking, and evaluate their needs and professional prospects.

Student programme evaluation occurs toward the end of each term, and the Department commits to using the results to institute improvements as needed. This feedback mechanism ensures that student voices are integral to the continuous enhancement of the Programme.

The academic advisor works with students by providing personalized support throughout their studies. Such support includes assistance with course selection, project topics, undergraduate theses, postgraduate studies, and employment opportunities, ensuring that each student's academic journey is tailored to their goals and aspirations.

III. Conclusions

The USP Natural Environment and Climate Resilience flexibly uses various instructional methods to adopt the student-centered learning approach. The Department regularly evaluates and adjusts teaching methods and delivery modes for improvement. Additionally, it reinforces student autonomy while providing adequate guidance and support and has appropriate procedures for handling student complaints.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.3: Student-centred approach in learning, teaching and assessment of students	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.3.1. Consider making the undergraduate thesis (8th semester: 10 ECTS) compulsory, while increasing the workload to 15 ECTS. This would strengthen the research engagement of the Department and enhance the student-centered learning in Principle 2.3.

R2.3.1. Allow more flexibility with the timing of the work placement (currently 6th semester: 10 ECTS), by allowing students to undertake the placement from the 6th semester onwards, even during the 8th semester, potentially in combination with an undergraduate thesis. This would encourage students to build an entrepreneurial portfolio by engaging with various stakeholders combining a work placement and a piece of applied research.

PRINCIPLE 2.4 STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION OF ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS AND AWARD OF DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCE OF THE NEW STUDY PROGRAMMES

Institutions 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 (Senate decision)*
- *Regulation of studies, internship, mobility and student assignments*
- *Diploma Supplement*

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The USP in Environment and Climate Resilience provides a detailed statement regarding the admission process and the support of new students. Every year, the

Department organizes a reception for new students during which the new students learn about the Department and the University, their programme of studies, and the prospects of employment upon graduation. The Department chair briefs the new students about the importance of the Academic Studies Advisor, and how the Faculty Assembly assigns students to an advisor. The Academic Advisor explains to the new students the curriculum structure (compulsory and elective courses), ways of class participation, the writing of a thesis, prospects of postgraduate work in Greece or Abroad, employment opportunities in the public or private sectors of the economy, matters about their progress toward the completion of their degree, and the university student services.

The Internal Evaluation Unit (OMEA) monitors the student's progress toward their degree and suggests the appropriate course of action to the Faculty Assembly when necessary.

Democritus University of Thrace offers support to students during their studies. The Senate has established scholarships funded by Special Account Funds for Research (ELKE). Performance and study grants are also provided by various bodies and institutions at the national or local level, regularly or occasionally (ad hoc). The notices and the terms of eligibility are included in a relevant annual circular of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

The Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience is active in the Erasmus+ programme, which ensures the mobility of students who can study abroad at universities with a bilateral agreement with DUTH. Students can also participate in an internship programme in European Union countries for 2 to 4 months. Democritus University is part of the European University Emerge Group, which comprises nine peripheral universities of Europe to engage in regional and global empowerment.

Under existing legislation, the Department implements the credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) (Ministerial Decision Φ5/89656/B3, Government Gazette B 1466/13.8.2007). The number of ECTS per course is stated in the Department's Study Guide. The procedure for matching courses taken at partner universities with those in the Department's Curriculum and facilitating the transfer of the respective credits includes a recommendation to the Assembly of the Erasmus Coordinator of the Department in collaboration with the lecturer for the corresponding course in the Curriculum. In case of non-recognition of the taught course, this course will be listed in the Diploma Supplement as taught and successfully examined at another university.

The Department issues a Diploma Supplement in Greek and English to its graduating students free of charge. The Diploma Supplement follows the model developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and

UNESCO/CEPES.

The procedures for preparing a thesis are part of the Internal Operating Regulations of the Department and are posted on the Departmental website. The thesis will preferably be of a research nature, but it can also be bibliographic. As a rule, it is prepared during the 4th year of studies, in the spring semester of the same academic year, and carries 10 ECTS.

II. Analysis

The Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience provides a clear statement regarding the admission procedure to the four-year degree programme in "Natural Environment and Climate Resilience." Student rights and obligations, and monitoring progress toward the degree are clearly stated.

The Internal Regulations of the Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience clearly describe the procedure for awarding a degree to the students who completed 240 ECTS. The duration of the Programme is four years. Conditions for progression include meeting academic performance standards and completing the compulsory coursework. The Department has mechanisms in place to monitor student progress through regular assessments and provide support to ensure students stay on track.

Enhancing student mobility involves terms and conditions facilitating international exchanges and study-abroad programmes as part of Erasmus+. These include reciprocal arrangements between institutions.

III. Conclusions

The New USP Natural Environment and Climate Resilience complies fully with principle 2.4. The student admission procedures, monitoring progress toward completion of the degree, the duration of the Programme, and opportunities for mobility are clearly stated.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.4: Student admission, progression, recognition of academic qualifications, and award of degrees and
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certificates of competence of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.4.1. Consider incorporation of the SDGs into the Curriculum.

R2.4.2 Promote Erasmus+ exchanges as part of the Regional and Global Alliance.

R2.4.3 Considering the nature of the academic program and the desire to bring students close to the natural environment and climate resilience, the practical training course should be re-assessed in becoming mandatory. The practice period should be extended to 4-6 months. This could be achieved by expanding it to split into two years or as a full semester, or by combining it with a study abroad program.

Trainees should be provided with basic financial support with/or the contribution of employers.

R2.4.4 Consider expanding current collaborations and signing A memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Natural Environment & Climate Change Agency (Ο.Φ.Υ.Π.Ε.Κ.Α) under the aim of increasing both the contribution of experimental dissertations and the practical trainings/internships.

PRINCIPLE 2.5 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, and an effective 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*

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The Department presently has 12 faculty members, while awaiting the appointment of one more faculty, with the view of reaching 15 faculty members in the medium to longer term. All faculty hold qualifying doctoral degrees and are research active. The career stage of the faculty is distributed as follows: 6 Full Professors, 5 Associate Professors and 1 Assistant Professor. This “reverse pyramid” is starkly different from the distribution of faculty ranks in Departments outside Greece, where full Professors are a minority and gives the impression that faculty advancement is based on length of service, rather than scientific accomplishments. The criteria for progression and promotion of faculty were not clearly stated in the documentation provided. In addition, there seems to be no

formal distribution of tasks and obligations for faculty members, neither explicit guidance on how time and effort should be distributed between teaching and research, nor references to administrative tasks.

According to the evidence provided, the mean H-index of the faculty is 12.1 (ranging from min: 4.0 to max: 31.0), mean number of citations 549 (min: 62, max: 2737) from mean number of publications 38.6 (min: 10, max: 119). As implied by the max values, the means are dominated by a single outlier, therefore it would have been useful to report also the median values of the above indicators. Ten of the 12 faculty have profiles on Google Scholar and/or ResearchGate, although around half of the faculty affiliations are not updated on these platforms, some pointing to the dated TEI Kavala's and a couple not indicating any affiliation. Half the faculty have published peer-reviewed work the past 3 years and the majority of the faculty have published the past 5 years. It is essential for the academic reputation of the Department and for attracting good students to keep the various profiles updated, also linking from the Departmental website to the platform profiles (e.g. ORCID).

II. Analysis

The reported teaching loads look reasonable with most faculty having a balanced split of teaching hours between the two semesters, while 3 faculty members having a lower/higher teaching load in one of the two semesters. It is not clear whether this is accidental or by design, i.e., because of a study leave or an attempt to free up time for research in one of the two semesters. It is also not very clear what the teaching load is in relation to other teaching (e.g. marking assignments, supervising theses) and administrative commitments. The Department is proposing to admit 100 students per academic year, aiming for 500 students in 5 years. Such student numbers are unlikely to materialize from evidence related to similar peripheral Universities/Departments in Greece. Even if 70% of the proposed target were to enrol, and the extra faculty member was appointed, that would lead to 350 students for 15 faculty members, i.e., a student/faculty ratio of 23.3, which would be relatively high.

III. Conclusions

The faculty are experts in the topics they teach, with an excellent match to the USP courses, which is also evident from the two most recent appointments. However, the faculty research trajectories need to be maintained and strengthened. Currently, there is no evidence that faculty are offered half or full-year sabbaticals or alternative professional development skills. In an era of severe competition for undergraduate students, the research reputation of departments and their faculty is becoming increasingly important. If the Department is to succeed academically as a hub of research and practice in the respective fields, it should consider carefully the student number targets in relation to the available faculty numbers and support the faculty in developing their research profiles via research mentoring and sabbatical schemes. Given the lack of graduate students, the undergraduate thesis could be a way to recruit the most promising students

as research collaborators, thus enhancing the research outputs of the faculty and the overall research activity of the Department.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.5: 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

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.5.1 Ensure that faculty research profiles on the Departmental website are up to date and provide weblinks to research-related platforms (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCID).

R2.5.2 Encourage faculty to create/maintain profiles on the most important research-related platforms (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCID).

R2.5.3 Consider carefully the proposed student targets of 100 per year in light of the resulting student/faculty ratios and implications for research performance.

R2.5.4 Develop formal schemes to support research activity: research mentoring for early career faculty, semester blocking (where teaching is concentrated in one semester), and research sabbaticals.

R2.5.5 As the USP thesis is not mandatory, consider incentives for attracting the best students to undertake research, also by increasing the thesis workload to 15 ECTS (e.g. placement with laboratories, prizes for the best dissertation, etc.)

PRINCIPLE 2.6 LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT OF THE NEW UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

Academic units should have adequate funding 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 and means to support learning and academic activity in general, in order to offer to the students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications 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

- *Description of the infrastructure and services made available to the academic unit by the Institution for the support of learning and academic activities (human resources, infrastructure, services, etc.)*
- *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*

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The undergraduate programme Natural Environment and Climate Resilience is supported by a comprehensive network of services and infrastructure provided at both the Departmental and institutional levels. The Student Affairs Office and the Career Office of Democritus University of Thrace play a key role in ensuring that students receive timely and effective guidance throughout their academic journey.

A well-established academic advising system is in place: each student is assigned to a faculty advisor who supports and monitors academic progress and provides personalized guidance. This system is reported to function effectively and is well received by the student body.

Teaching and laboratory activities are conducted in facilities located on the Department's premises. The available infrastructure includes lecture halls, teaching and research laboratories, and access to digital platforms and IT services, contributing to an adequate and supportive learning environment. According to the documentation, the Department has access to the University's Information Technology & Network Centre, which supports both teaching and administrative functions. Furthermore, educational material and resources are also available through the University Library and its electronic platforms, to which students have full access.

The allocation and use of available physical spaces are carried out rationally. Teaching activities are implemented in rooms that adequately accommodate the student population and the specific needs of the programme. Laboratories are appropriately equipped for environmental measurements, GIS applications, and analysis of ecological parameters, supporting both theoretical instruction and hands-on learning.

Psychological support services are offered through the University's Counseling and Psychological Support Centre, which provides confidential counselling sessions and psychological guidance. The institution also offers access to a Student Ombudsman, Erasmus+ mobility opportunities, and practical training placements. These contribute positively to the students' academic experience and professional development.

While the University does not provide student housing specifically for this programme, largely due to the geographical dispersion of its facilities, dining services are available to all students. There are also no notable barriers in accessing the services, and students are well informed about them through the Department's website, social media channels, and email announcements.

Student support is further enhanced by the presence of competent administrative staff. The programme benefits from dedicated secretarial support, and university-wide services are well coordinated. However, the documentation indicates that the increasing administrative workload and the specialized nature of the programme point to a need for additional administrative personnel with relevant qualifications to better address the growing support needs of students and faculty.

II. Analysis

The undergraduate programme Natural Environment and Climate Resilience benefits from several important strengths in the area of learning resources and student support. A notable strength is the implementation of a comprehensive student support system, which includes an effective academic advising structure where each student is assigned a faculty advisor. This mechanism enables regular monitoring of student progress and personalised academic guidance. Additionally, students have access to a wide range of support services coordinated at the university level, such as the Career Office, the Counselling and Psychological Support Centre, the Student Ombudsman, and Erasmus+ mobility and internship programmes. These services collectively contribute to a well-rounded academic

and professional experience. The infrastructure available to the Department is also a significant asset. Lecture halls, teaching and research laboratories, as well as specialised facilities (such as those for environmental measurements and GIS), are adequately equipped and accessible. Furthermore, students benefit from digital resources provided by the University Library and supported by the University's Information Technology & Network Centre. The Department ensures that students are consistently informed about available services through its website, social media platforms, and direct email communication, fostering a culture of transparency and support.

Despite these strengths, certain weaknesses were identified. One key issue is the limited number of administrative personnel available to the Department. As the programme expands and its administrative complexity increases, the existing staff structure may not be sufficient to meet evolving needs. The documentation highlights the necessity of reinforcing the administrative team with individuals possessing relevant qualifications to support students and faculty adequately. Another area of concern is the lack of student accommodation. The absence of dormitory facilities for students enrolled in this programme, largely due to the geographical dispersion of the university's Departments, may hinder accessibility, particularly for students from remote areas. Furthermore, some critical support services, including psychological counselling and IT support, are primarily managed at the central university level rather than being tailored to the specific needs of the programme. This structure, while functional, may occasionally limit the programme's ability to respond promptly and effectively to its unique requirements.

There are considerable opportunities for further enhancement. The ongoing digital transformation in higher education presents an opportunity to expand online services, including digital advising platforms, virtual labs, and blended learning environments. These developments could improve flexibility, accessibility, and the overall learning experience. Additionally, the programme could benefit from increased collaboration with other Departments, enabling shared access to infrastructure and broadening the scope of support services available to students. Career support services also hold potential for enrichment. By strengthening connections with environmental organizations, local government agencies, and the private sector, the Department could create more targeted internship opportunities and employment pathways aligned with the programme's focus on climate resilience and sustainability.

Nevertheless, a number of external threats may pose challenges to the long-term sustainability and quality of student support. Financial constraints in the public higher education sector could affect the ability of the institution to maintain and upgrade learning facilities or to hire additional staff. The geographical dispersion of university Departments, while structurally embedded, may continue to complicate the integration and accessibility of services. Finally, as the student population diversifies, in terms of background, needs, and expectations, the programme will need to ensure that its support services evolve accordingly. Special attention will be required to accommodate part-time students, working

students, and those with disabilities, in line with the broader commitment to student-centred and inclusive education.

III. Conclusions

The undergraduate programme Natural Environment and Climate Resilience is supported by a solid framework of infrastructure and student services, ensuring a conducive academic environment.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.6: Learning resources and student support of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.6.1 Consider exploring solutions to improve accommodation options or student housing access, particularly for students from distant regions, and for low-income students

R2.6.2 Foster stronger connections with professional organizations and employers in the field of environment and climate resilience to enhance career services and internship opportunities.

R2.6.3 Develop programme-specific enhancements to existing university-wide services, such as tailored psychological support and IT assistance

PRINCIPLE 2.7 COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE OF INFORMATION FOR THE ORGANISATION AND OPERATION OF NEW UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

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 information collected depends, to some extent, on the type of accreditation (initial or re-accreditation). 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(s), availability of learning resources and student support, career paths of graduates. During the initial accreditation, the data concerning the profile of the academic unit and the structure of the study programme must be entered.

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

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The Department has established mechanisms for the systematic collection of data concerning various aspects of academic life and student progress. These include demographic data of the student body, data related to teaching and learning methods, student progression, as well as employability and graduate career trajectories. Data collection is facilitated primarily through the institutional quality assurance unit (ΜΟΔΙΠ), which oversees processes of internal evaluations, including student surveys on teaching effectiveness and course content via anonymous online questionnaires accessible through the university's digital infrastructure.

The Department makes use of several information systems to support data collection and management. These include the asynchronous e-learning platform (Open eClass), the electronic registration system for student records (such as the academic identity issuance platform and "Eudoxus" for textbook distribution), and internal databases for course management and communication. For teaching

evaluation specifically, the MOΔIP website provides a secure portal where students can submit evaluations using their institutional credentials and randomly generated access codes.

Moreover, the Department analyses data concerning the availability and accessibility of infrastructure and support services. Recent internal assessments led to upgrades of IT infrastructure, including the full renewal of computer lab equipment and the reinforcement of digital resources across four educational laboratories. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to improve resource availability and ensure equitable access to IT facilities, student support services, and learning environments. The Department's analysis further extends to social services such as student accommodation, transportation, and food provision, with evidence of adequate planning and investment in these areas.

II. Analysis

One of the key strengths of the new undergraduate programme Natural Environment and Climate Resilience lies in its proactive integration into the University's institutional quality assurance framework. Even prior to the enrolment of its first students, the Department has established structured procedures for the collection and monitoring of key academic and administrative data. These procedures are supported by university-wide digital platforms and infrastructures, including the National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NISQA), the eClass asynchronous learning environment, the student registration and records system, and the MOΔIP online evaluation portal. These systems will allow for consistent and centralised collection of data related to student demographics, academic progression, and teaching activity, once the programme is operational.

At this preliminary stage, the Department has already implemented mechanisms to ensure that teaching quality, course delivery methods, and infrastructure availability will be systematically assessed once the programme commences. Furthermore, the design of the programme includes the use of student questionnaires and feedback forms to evaluate teaching effectiveness and satisfaction with learning resources. The programme structure also foresees the regular generation of internal evaluation reports to be submitted to MOΔIP, feeding into the wider institutional quality assurance processes.

However, given that student admissions will begin in the academic year 2025–2026, there is currently no available data regarding student progression, satisfaction, or graduate employability. While the necessary infrastructure and processes for future data collection are in place, the system has yet to be tested in the context of this specific programme. Additionally, graduate tracking mechanisms—particularly those linked to employability and long-term career paths—are not yet developed at the programme level and should be a future area of focus.

The launch of the programme presents significant opportunities to design and implement modern, integrated data collection practices from the outset. For example, the Department could establish tailored tools for monitoring the

learning experience, tracking student success, and assessing alignment with labour market needs in collaboration with the Career Office. It can also benefit from leveraging institutional best practices in information management, while incorporating student involvement into data-driven improvement processes from the very beginning.

Nonetheless, the programme may face certain challenges as it begins its operation. Limitations in administrative capacity and IT support may initially affect the speed and breadth of data collection and analysis. Moreover, until sufficient data is accumulated through the experience of enrolled students, any evaluation of programme effectiveness will remain largely theoretical or based on indirect indicators. It will be essential for the Department to monitor closely the implementation phase and to adjust data-related procedures in real time, ensuring that all future quality assurance decisions are grounded in meaningful evidence.

III. Conclusions

In conclusion, the Department operates an integrated information system properly developed by the Democritus University of Thrace.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.7: Collection, analysis and use of information for the organisation and operation of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.7.1 Design specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Department

R2.7.2 Introduce mechanisms such as feedback focus groups, student representation in decision-making bodies, or open discussion sessions from the early stages of programme implementation, to enhance student engagement and inclusiveness in quality assurance.

PRINCIPLE 2.8 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

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

As the new undergraduate programme of the Department of Natural Environment and Climate Resilience is scheduled to begin in the academic year 2025–2026, most of the relevant public information is still under development.

A dedicated section on the Departmental website for the promotion of the new study programme is not yet active. However, the existing website of the predecessor Department (<https://neclir.duth.gr/index.php/el/>) offers insights into the academic and administrative structure, including electronic services such as eClass, e-Secretary, access to library resources, and student support systems.

II. Analysis

The university demonstrates a clear structure for disseminating public information via digital means, and the central IT infrastructure (e.g., eClass, e-Γραμματεία, HEAL-Link access, MODIP platform) provides robust support for future information availability. The current Departmental website, although useful, reflects the profile and content of the predecessor Department and does not yet serve as a comprehensive source for the new programme's details. The existing 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. The website references many student services (accommodation, food services for students, library, Department overview, career office, and student mail). There is full transparency in the currently active communication plan or online repository that reflects the previous academic identity, learning outcomes, and the faculty profiles. The findings of the self-assessment procedure are made available to the public and shared on the Departmental website under the “News” button. Course information includes a syllabus, suggested bibliography, coursework type, prerequisites, expected learning outcomes, workload, and the instructor's name. 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.

III. Conclusions

The Department has the institutional support and digital tools to provide complete and accessible public information.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.8: Public information concerning the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.8.1 Implement a routine schedule for web updates to maintain up-to-date and clear information, and appoint a web administrator responsible for content accuracy and maintenance.

R2.8.2 Utilize the MODIP and QA documentation tools already in place at DUTH to ensure timely publication of relevant academic and administrative content related to the new programme.

R2.8.3 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.

R2.8.4 Link future alumni with the use of platforms such as LinkedIn, which would shape community-building activities

R2.8.5 Along with the faculty CVs, link to their Scopus-Google Scholar author ID and ORCID.

PRINCIPLE 2.9 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)

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The Office of the Department Secretary manages the student and USP information electronically, while supporting the collection and processing of data related to all students, including modifications and updates to achievements, their curriculum, grades obtained and, if relevant practical training and research appointments, issuing of certificates and graduation procedures.

At the end of each academic semester, undergraduate students will evaluate the courses they have attended, the curriculum taught, its relevance to the learning objectives and the level of teaching provided by the teaching staff. The evaluation by the students is carried out online, in order to ensure the complete anonymity of the participants without the possibility of identifying the answers, allowing the management of data in formats that can be used for further analysis. The aggregated results of the evaluations will be statistically processed and evaluated by the Departmental Assembly, which will propose, where appropriate, ways of improving the teaching and evaluation processes.

The content of the electronic questionnaires the students are asked to fill out during each course have a department-specific structure and 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 students and the availability of administrative services. The questionnaires also allow free text observations and comments by the students.

In addition to the evaluation by students, the Department will be monitoring the student performance and achievements, including graduation rates and employability of the graduates.

II. Analysis

The internal review of the Department indicates that there has been a significant effort to revise the programme and modernize it to reflect current scientific trends and changing societal needs.

There is a need for a systematic and continuous review of the study program to ensure that the Department responds to the challenges at hand and identifies actionable paths to verify that it develops its identity.

The Department should consider the development of a survey of its graduates at regular intervals following graduation in order to identify potential areas of improvement.

III. Conclusions

The EEAP finds the Department has put together a sound plan for internal evaluation, thus the USP is fully compliant with this principle.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.9: Periodic internal review of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

R2.9.1 Develop strategies for ensuring high rates of participation by the students to increase response rates to evaluation questionnaires.

R2.9.2 Consider collecting information and compiling reports from stakeholders regarding the skills and knowledge of the graduates.

PRINCIPLE 2.10 REGULAR EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION OF THE NEW UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

New undergraduate programmes should regularly undergo evaluation by panels of external experts set by HAHE, aiming at accreditation. 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

- *Utilisation of the recommendations of the external evaluation of the Institution for the establishment and successive improvement of the operation of the new UGP (incl. reference to the action plan)*

New Undergraduate Study Programme Compliance

Please comment on the compliance with the Principle. Specifically: Please describe the findings related to the Principle, analyse, and conclude your judgement. Findings, analysis of judgement and conclusions should be developed below in three distinct parts.

I. Findings

The predecessor USP (Department of Forest and Natural Environment Sciences, International Hellenic University, IHU) was evaluated in 2022. This is the first evaluation of the new USP in the newly formed Department. Given that the scope of the new Department is fundamentally different from that of the IHU, it is not necessary to verify if there is compliance with the recommendations of the last evaluation. On the other, hand, the new USP has proposed a multi-step plan for addressing the findings of future external evaluations. These include a commitment to follow the recommendation of the EEAP, the study of the proposed changes, and their implementation when feasible.

II. Analysis

The documentation provided by the new USP and the presentations by the Department head during the virtual visit of the EEAP were very comprehensive, reflecting the level of importance this evaluation represents for the department.

III. Conclusions

The EEAP considers that the new USP Natural Environment and Climate Resilience is fully compliant to this principle.

Panel Judgement

Please tick one of the following:

Principle 2.10: Regular external evaluation and accreditation of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Please provide your recommendations with regard to issues that need to be addressed, as appropriate.

None.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Please state aspects of good practice identified, with regard to the new undergraduate study programme.

- The new programme is unique and addresses an area of high importance both in Greece and internationally.
- The geographic location of the USP is ideal for the new mission and strategic plan.
- The USP has proposed sound procedures for monitoring quality assurance and continuous improvement.
- Infrastructure and laboratory facilities are adequate for the successful operation of the new USP.
- Faculty and staff are knowledgeable and dedicated to the USP's mission.
- Employment potential of the new USP graduates in public and/or private positions is promising.

II. AREAS OF WEAKNESS

Please state weak areas identified, with regard to the new undergraduate study programme.

- The student admissions process may undermine the sustainability of the program, as it is controlled by political and often arbitrary decisions of the Ministry of Education.
- The location of the campus away from large urban areas and the main campus of Democritus University of Thrace lowers the probability of the program's selection by high-calibre students.
- Low student participation in course evaluations
- Dependence on temporary hires on some of the key topics of the proposed refocusing on climate change.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Please make any specific recommendations for development.

- In coordination with Democritus University of Thrace, continue pursuing additional faculty positions in climate change.
- Initiate a continuous and sustained effort to increase the visibility of the programme.
- Seek funds, either from public or private sources, for the construction of a modern dormitory on campus.
- Introduce measures to increase student participation in course evaluations.
- Establish a mentoring process for early-career faculty and temporary instructors to ensure continuity and stability of quality standards.
- Consider making an honors thesis option one of the degrees offered.
- Consider the incorporation of the SDGs into the Curriculum and promote Erasmus+ exchanges as part of the Regional and Global Alliance.
- Develop formal schemes to support research activity: research mentoring for early career faculty, semester blocking (where teaching is concentrated in one semester), and research sabbaticals.
- Foster stronger connections with professional organizations and employers in the field of environment and climate resilience to enhance career services and internship opportunities.
- Introduce mechanisms such as feedback focus groups, student representation in decision-making bodies, or open discussion sessions from the early stages of programme implementation, to enhance student engagement and inclusiveness in quality assurance.
- 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.

IV. SUMMARY & OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are:

1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.9, 2.10

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are:

2.8

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are:

None

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are:

None

Please tick one of the following:

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel


Name and Surname

Signature

Prof. Emeritus Nikolaos Katopodes (Chair)



Prof. Emeritus Stavros Constantinou



Dr. Seraphim Alvanides



Mr. Stavros Korovesis

