



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης**
Hellenic Authority
for Higher Education

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Accreditation Report
for the Postgraduate Study Programme of:
Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease
Department: Medicine
Institution: Democritus University of Thrace
Date: 14 October 2023

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Postgraduate Study Programme of **Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease** of the **Democritus University of Thrace** for the purposes of granting accreditation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A: Background and Context of the Review.....	4
I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel.....	4
II. Review Procedure and Documentation	5
III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile.....	7
Part B: Compliance with the Principles	8
PRINCIPLE 1: QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND QUALITY GOAL SETTING FOR THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES OF THE INSTITUTION AND THE ACADEMIC UNIT	8
PRINCIPLE 2: DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES.....	10
PRINCIPLE 3: STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT	13
PRINCIPLE 4: STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AND CERTIFICATION.....	16
PRINCIPLE 5: TEACHING STAFF OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES	18
PRINCIPLE 6: LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT.....	21
PRINCIPLE 7: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT	24
PRINCIPLE 8: PUBLIC INFORMATION CONCERNING THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES	26
PRINCIPLE 9: ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC INTERNAL EVALUATION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES.....	28
PRINCIPLE 10: REGULAR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES	30
Part C: Conclusions	31
I. Features of Good Practice	31
II. Areas of Weakness	31
III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions	31
IV. Summary & Overall Assessment	33

PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the postgraduate study Programme of **Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease** of the **Democritus University of Thrace** comprised the following four (4) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. Assoc. Prof. Stefanos Volianitis PhD, DSc (Chair)

Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

2. Prof. Konstantinos Pantopoulos

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

3. Dr. Nicholas Ktistakis

Babraham Institute, Cambridge, United Kingdom

4. Mr. Sotirios Mavromatis

Student, University of Patras, Patra, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) formed an external and independent Panel of experts to assess the compliance of the postgraduate study Programme of **Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease** of the Democritus University of Thrace in accordance with the HAHE Quality Assurance requirements (v. 4957/2022). The assessment was conducted through document reviews and online interviews. The method used was an evidence-based process centred on a sampling of the Department's activities and it was aimed at evaluating the fulfilment of the HAHE requirements of the relevant Quality Standard of the Postgraduate Study Programme (PSP) and commenting on its compliance, effectiveness and applicability for the scope of the requirements. The entire evaluation and accreditation exercise did not include a site visit of the Department and University campus in Alexandroupoli but was carried out remotely using the Zoom platform.

EEAP members had the first virtual meeting on Monday October 2 at 15:00 (Athen's time) to introduce each other and establish a *modus operandi* regarding the exercise of accreditation. The Panel's Review of the PSP started formally on Monday, 2 October 2023 at 16:00 (Athen's time) via Zoom. In the first part of this virtual meeting, the Director of the PSP Prof. Georgiadis Georgios and the Head of the Department Prof. Vadikolias Konstantinos and the President of MODIP Prof. Grigoriou Marirena familiarised the Panel with the department (facts and figures). An overview of the department's origins, history, evolution and current status was presented in a video that was available to the Panel members in advance. A virtual tour of the laboratories, teaching, facilities and instrumentation was presented in a video, which was also available to the Panel members in advance. Members of the PSP Steering Committee, Prof. Panagoutsos Stylianos, Prof. Tripsianis Grigorios, Ass. Prof. Kantartzi Konstantina and OMEA member Prof. Karakasiliotis Ioannis were also present in this meeting.

The second day included interviews with the teaching staff, students, graduates, employers, and social partners. Interviews and discussion with teaching staff members Emeritus Prof. Lazaride Milto, Emeritus Prof. Pasadaki Ploumi, Prof. Kakisi Ioanni, Prof. Deftereo Sava, Ass. Prof. Chloropoulou Pelagia, Mr. Liasi Nikolao, radiologist and Ass. Prof. Moulakaki Konstantino were held in the first meeting. The meeting with current students included 10 students from all semesters. After the meeting with the current students, a meeting with 5 graduates of the

PSP was held. The following graduates were present: Mr. Fragidis Stylianos, nephrologist, Mr. Giannikouris Ioannis, nephrologist Mr. Giasar Chasan, surgeon, Ms. Kalliopi - Maria Tasopoulou, vascular surgeon and Mr. Erchan Moustafa, surgeon. The meeting with industry representatives and social partners was held with the following participants: Mr. Roufo Evaggelo, Director, University General Hospital of Alexandroupolis; Mr Chatzipapa Christo, Orthopedic Surgeon, President of the Medical Association of Evros; Prof Panagoutso Styliano, Nephrologist, Vice President of the Hellenic Society of Nephrology; Mr Rousa Nikolao, Vascular Surgeon, Director, General Hospital of Syros; Mr Chatzigaki Petro, Vascular Surgeon, President of the Hellenic Society of Vascular Surgery and Mr Bamiha Gerasimo, Nephrologist, Coordinator / Director of the Nephrology Dept, "Papanikolaou" Hospital. Finally, after debriefing among the Panel's members in private, at 20:00 the Panel had a closure meeting with the Director of the PSP Prof. Prof. Georgiadi Georgio, the Head of the Department, Prof. Konstantino Vadikolia, as well as MODIP and OMEA members and the Steering Committee to discuss their major findings and recommendations.

Upon completion of the two days of online meetings, the Panel recognized a positive atmosphere and a willingness of the Department to cooperate and support the University's QA policy at all levels with a commitment to maintaining and further upgrading the quality standards of the postgraduate study Programme in compliance with HAHE. The Panel would like to thank the Department and University Administration as well as all faculty members for their cooperation and fruitful discussions. The Panel members had remote online meetings for the completion of the draft Accreditation Report (AR) during 5-7 October 2023. The online form at HAHE's website was used for compilation and submission of the report.

III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile

During the academic year 2019, the School of Medicine of DUTH, established the Postgraduate Studies Programme (PSP) entitled “Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease”, which operates according to the approval (ΦΕΚ 3730 / 24.04.2018), re-establishment (ΦΕΚ 2670 / 06.07.2018) and update of its operational regulation (ΦΕΚ 7006 / 31.12.2022).

The PSP offers teaching, research and practical training in the scientific field of vascular accesses in patients with end stage renal failure. It provides specialized knowledge in timely and valid surgery treatment and integrates clinical experience and research innovation using advanced surgical/endovascular/hybrid methods to provide competent health services to haemodialysis patients. The focus of the Programme is specialized in a thematic unit within Vascular Surgery with emphasis in chronic renal failure. The duration of the PSP is two (2) semesters and it offers 60 ECTS towards the award of the degree “MSc in Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease”. The PSP admits annually 30 students who are primarily medical graduates with previous specialization in vascular surgery, nephrology or general surgery.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE 1: QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND QUALITY GOAL SETTING FOR THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES OF THE INSTITUTION AND THE ACADEMIC UNIT

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES OF THE INSTITUTION AND THE ACADEMIC UNIT. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit should be in line with the quality assurance policy of the Institution and must be formulated in the form of a public statement, which is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special goals related to the quality assurance of the study Programmes offered by the academic unit.

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

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

- a) the suitability of the structure and organisation of postgraduate study Programmes*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education - level 7*
- c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching at the PSP*
- d) the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff for the PSP*
- e) the drafting, implementation and review of specific annual quality goals for the improvement of the PSP*
- f) the level of demand for the graduates' qualifications in the labour market*
- g) the quality of support services, such as the administrative services, the libraries and the student welfare office for the PSP*
- h) the efficient utilisation of the financial resources of the PSP that may be drawn from tuition fees*
- i) the conduct of an annual review and audit of the quality assurance system of the PSP through the cooperation of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU)*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Medicine, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Unit (MO.DI.P.) of the Democritus University of Thrace has harmonized the Quality Policy of the offered Postgraduate Programme (PSP) with the Quality Policy of the Democritus University of Thrace. The Quality Assurance Policy of the Department of Medicine of the Faculty of Medicine, with the commitment of the Head, as well as the rest of the Department's staff, is demonstrated with the link of the desired Educational Outcomes with the Strategy and the vision of the

University. The objectives include the continuous improvement of the PSP with continuous curriculum adjustments following the latest developments, specializations and knowledge in the field, continuous upgrading of teaching tools, interconnection of the PSP with research Programmes, synergies with external bodies related to the field of health, as well as the research upgrade and promotion of the Department.

The results of the internal and external evaluation of the Department of Medicine are posted on the website of the Department of Medicine (<http://med.duth.gr>) available with the parallel registration of the required information and data in the National Quality Information System (ΟΠΕΣΠ) of the ETHAAE.

The academic unit has set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely goals regarding the PSP and especially in respect of teaching methods, student satisfaction, learning outcomes and research output.

II. Analysis

The Quality assurance policy of the PSP is in alignment with the policy of Democritus University of Thrace. The learning outcomes of the PSP are appropriate for level 7, according to the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The Quality goals set meet the overall accreditation Standards of HAHE.

III. Conclusions

The PSP is fully compliant with the Standards for Criterion 1.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Quality assurance policy and quality goal setting for the postgraduate study Programmes of the institution and the academic unit	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

PRINCIPLE 2: DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING A DEFINED WRITTEN PROCESS WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE PARTICIPANTS, INFORMATION SOURCES AND THE APPROVAL COMMITTEES FOR THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES. THE OBJECTIVES, THE EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS ARE SET OUT IN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN. DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES, THE DEGREE OF ACHIEVEMENT OF THE LEARNING OUTCOMES SHOULD BE ASSESSED. THE ABOVE DETAILS, AS WELL AS INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME'S STRUCTURE ARE PUBLISHED IN THE STUDENT GUIDE.

The academic units develop their postgraduate study Programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the Programme, the research character, the scientific objectives, the specific subject areas and specialisations are described at this stage.

The structure, content and organisation of courses and teaching methods should be oriented towards deepening knowledge and acquiring the corresponding skills to apply the said knowledge (e.g. course on research methodology, participation in research projects, thesis with a research component).

The expected learning outcomes must be determined based on the European and National Qualifications Framework (EQF, NQF) and the Dublin Descriptors for level 7. During the implementation of the Programme, the degree of achievement of the expected learning outcomes and the feedback of the learning process must be assessed with the appropriate tools. For each learning outcome that is designed and made public, it is necessary that its evaluation criteria are also designed and made public.

In addition, the design of PSP must consider:

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active involvement of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for level 7*
- *the option of providing work experience to students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the PSP 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 Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The DUTH developed the PSP following a well-defined procedure following recommendation of the Assembly of the Department with an absolute majority and subsequent approval of The Graduate Studies Committee and the Senate and eventually the Ministry of Education and Culture. The subject of PSP are vascular accesses and their holistic management. The aims of the PSP are the training and specialization of scientists, the scientific and research approach, the development of methods and techniques, the provision of knowledge background and the creation of specialized scientific and educational personnel in the area of vascular accesses.

The PSP is delivered by very well qualified practitioners in the field (Vascular Surgeons, Nephrologists, Radiologists (including interventional Radiologists), Surgeons, Pathologists, Anaesthesiologists, Haematologists, Anatomists and Statisticians (with an emphasis on Biostatistics), who deal with vascular accesses on a practical and/or theoretical level, with a notable research capacity both from Greece and abroad.

The credit units (ECTS) required for the award of the degree are 60 over two study semesters (A and B). The thesis (8 ECTS) is defined at the end of the B semester and can be completed over a period of one year.

The structure and Learning Outcomes of the PSP are presented in depth in a Study Guide. However, upon inspection of the Study Guide, the courses syllabi and the Programme presented on the website of the PSP, the EEAP has not been able to verify agreement between the information provided in the two sources with respect to the teaching load (hours) offered.

Even though certain curriculum updates may take place at the beginning of each academic year, nevertheless, there is no formal procedure/regulation in place for periodic revisions of the Programme curriculum. Furthermore, there is continuous ongoing contact with graduates and stakeholders that promotes the awareness of the teaching staff with market needs and academic subject development, nevertheless, there is no formal procedure to involve such feedback consultation in a potential curriculum revision.

II. Analysis

The PSP offers an essential part of medical specialization in the areas of vascular surgery and nephrology and covers a significant gap in the knowledge and practical experience in the specialization training of medical doctors.

However, even though the PSP offers invaluable expertise in a critical and very important area for the health and quality of life for haemodialysis patients, its scope is very narrow and it lacks significant breadth and academic load to qualify it as an MSc Programme on its own right. Furthermore, the Thesis of the PSP awards only 8 ECTS, which is significantly less than international standards. This view of the Panel is supported by the fact that there is no similar PSP offered anywhere in Europe, presumably because the subject matter of the PSP is incorporated into the formal specialization training of vascular surgeons.

Additionally, the relatively narrow scope of the PSP has implications for the academic load offered, as reflected in the detailed Programme for 2021 that is on the website of the PSP. Specifically, the teaching offered is organised in 11 weekends in two semesters (less than 1 semester/month in the academic year). Thus, the actual teaching hours are 145 for the 2 semesters (18% fewer than the teaching hours described in the Courses Syllabi (176) and the Study Guide. Furthermore, these 145 teaching hours are deemed insufficient for the academic credit of 52 ECTS that is offered (according to European standards an academic load of 52 ECTS would be delivered with more than ~200 teaching hours).

III. Conclusions

Despite the excellent scientific content and practical significance and importance of the PSP, there are significant limitations in the delivery of the required academic load corresponding to the minimum ECTS required for a Master's Programme.

Panel Judgement

Principle 2: Design and approval of postgraduate study Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	X
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The Panel consider that there is a need for significant restructuring of the PSP in order to improve the compliance with Criterion 2.

It is also considered that the limited teaching hours are reflecting the narrow and very specialised focus of the PSP. One possible solution for this structural limitation could be to a) increase the ECTS offered by the Thesis to a minimum of 20, as is the international norm and b) consolidate the ECTS of the courses offered to 40 (in two semesters). With such restructuring, the total number of ECTS for the two semesters will remain 60 but the thesis will be part of the second semester and the existing teaching hours will more closely approach the expected teaching load (contact hours) for the offered ECTS.

An alternative solution could be to extend the duration of studies to 1.5 years (3 semesters). With such restructuring the current ECTS load (52) in the two first semesters will be retained, albeit with significant enhancement in the teaching hours of the current courses and a considerably larger ECTS load (20-30) with an enhanced capacity for experimental research Thesis could be offered in a third semester.

The Panel considers that it is up to the department which of the recommended solutions would be more appropriate, considering the resources and logistics required, for the restructuring of the PSP in order to improve its compliance with Principle 2.

PRINCIPLE 3: STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES PROVIDE THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS. THE ASSESSMENT METHODS SHOULD REFLECT THIS APPROACH.

Student-centred learning and teaching play an important role in enhancing students' motivation, their self-evaluation and their active participation in the learning process. The above entail continuous consideration of the Programme's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.

The student-centred learning and teaching process

- *respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs by adopting flexible learning paths*
- *considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate*
- *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods*
- *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement*
- *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys*
- *strengthens 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 the students' complaints*
- *provides counselling and guidance for the preparation of the thesis*

In addition

- *The academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field.*
- *The assessment criteria and methods are published in advance. The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process.*
- *Student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible.*
- *Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and conducted in accordance with the stated procedures.*
- *A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*
- *The function of the academic advisor runs smoothly.*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP "Vascular Access in Patients with End-Stage Renal Disease" is a one-year Master's Programme, with a total number of 60 ECTS. According to the curriculum guide, the Master's Programme has 13 compulsory courses, distributed in two semesters and a thesis in the last semester. Courses are mostly in-person and are conducted in a three-day session each month. The content of the courses is sufficiently up-to-date and aims to specialise students both theoretically in the management of patients with end-stage renal failure and practically, as many of the courses include laboratory exercises. The examination of the courses is mainly in the form of written examinations, closed or multiple choice and sometimes oral examinations

are also held. Regarding assessments, students have the opportunity to grade the nature and content of the courses at the end of each academic semester. Any complaints and comments from students are discussed among the professors, as well as directly among the students, with the aim of resolving any issues.

II. Analysis

The present postgraduate Programme provides a very useful specialisation for medical students regarding end-stage renal patients. The study guide is very detailed and is updated every year. The teaching staff are qualified doctors, who ensure that the students receive a proper and updated knowledge. Communication between teachers and students is pretty direct, as the postgraduate course accepts a limited number of postgraduates. In fact, many postgraduates have had the opportunity to attend extra surgeries aside from the postgraduate Programme, which in any case includes practical exercises. It is worth mentioning that so far, the majority of students are doctors, residents and non-residents, so that the course schedule is convenient for the students, as it takes place every three days a month. Finally, student evaluations are taken into account by the entire teaching staff. Meetings are conducted in which the complaints of the students are reported and the corresponding modifications are made in order to improve the Programme.

III. Conclusions

The PSP “Vascular Access in patients with end-stage renal failure” provides a broader research-scientific approach to the pathophysiology of renal diseases, contributing to the all-round specialisation of students. The lectures Programme is limited to one three-day lecture per month, but still includes useful laboratories and surgeries, in order to familiarise students with the clinical requirements of the PSP’s theme.

The Panel concludes that student-centered learning, teaching and assessment are at high standards and are substantially compliant with the guidelines. Panel members were impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of teaching staff and students. It also identified areas where student-centred teaching, learning and assessment could be improved. The major weakness was the monothematic nature of teaching and evaluation approaches.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

A diversification of the teaching and evaluation methods used is recommended. These could include more student assignments of a formative nature. For instance, students could be assigned to critically present key primary papers in areas relevant to the course, discuss the results in class, identify important open questions and propose follow up studies. These assignments could contribute to part of the final grade of the courses, which currently mostly depends on a single summative final examination with multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The assessment criteria and methods should be published in advance on the PSP web site. Along these lines, the Panel also feels that the students should be encouraged to participate more in research projects aiming to acquire experience in research methodologies and techniques.

PRINCIPLE 4: STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AND CERTIFICATION.

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

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

- *the student admission procedures and the required supporting documents*
- *student rights and obligations and monitoring of student progression*
- *internship issues, if applicable and granting of scholarships*
- *the procedures and terms for the drafting of assignments and the thesis*
- *the procedure of award and recognition of degrees, the duration of studies, the conditions for progression and for the assurance of the progress of students in their studies*
- *the terms and conditions for enhancing student mobility*

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP admits a maximum of 30 students each year, mostly graduates of medical schools with a minority from allied health professions.

Applications from prospective students of the PSP are evaluated by a three-member faculty committee according to a pre-determined formula that takes into account: graduation score, research activity, participation in research conferences or research Programmes and having a second post-graduate degree.

In addition to the above formula, an interview with faculty members is also taken into account for the final evaluation of the student applicants.

Academic and research activity of the students of the PSP are well described in documents given to the students at the beginning of their studies. This includes course obligations, how a thesis project is organised and what is required for graduation. In the meetings of the Panel with current and recent graduates it was clear that all aspects of this principle are well executed by the PSP.

Thesis work starts at the end of the second semester of studies and extends into additional time after the official end of the Programme. Nobody has graduated so far within one year.

Due to the short duration of the PSP (one year of course work) and the additional requirement for thesis work after the end of the academic terms, no serious pathway was evident for the students to spend time abroad via Erasmus+ or a similar scheme. This is perhaps understandable as well given that the students of the PSP are full-time professionals in the medical area.

There is a provision for the awarding of maximum two fellowships each year based on academic performance and financial need-however the Panel was not given detailed information whether such fellowships have been awarded.

All course work is in Greek but there is provision to have courses in English if there is such need.

II. Analysis

This is a Programme tailor-made for the needs of medical professionals who already have full time jobs but also want to be taught and trained in a subspecialty of kidney disease. As such it is well designed. The Panel had some discussions with the faculty and the students about the duration of the Programme and the fact that thesis work is not counted in the official length of studies. Pros and cons of such an arrangement can be imagined.

As will be mentioned elsewhere, another issue with this PSP related to the point above is whether the duration and content of the Programme as currently designed justifies the ECTS given.

III. Conclusions

The PSP fulfils an important niche area in medicine and it provides high level of academic and practical training, rather unique in Greece.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student admission, progression, recognition of postgraduate studies and certification	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Consider increasing the proportion of courses, or practicals that are taught in English.

PRINCIPLE 5: TEACHING STAFF OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF THEIR TEACHING STAFF 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 teaching at the PSP, the appropriate staff-student ratio, the appropriate staff categories, the appropriate subject areas, the fair and objective recruitment process, the high research performance, the training- development, the staff development policy (including participation in mobility schemes, conferences and educational leaves-as mandated by law).

More specifically, the academic unit should set up and follow clear, transparent and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff for the PSP 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 (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training, etc.); develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff.

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP has attracted qualified faculty from the Department of Medicine of the Democritus University of Thrace and other Medical Departments in Greece. It has also attracted leading clinicians from hospitals in Greece who are specialized on vascular access procedures for dialysis patients.

Professional development opportunities are on a personal basis. The Democritus University of Thrace or the Department of Medicine do not appear to offer faculty development Programmes. However, they encourage mobility of faculty for sabbatical leaves, which is financially supported by the University.

There is linking of teaching with research. The focus on research is more evident during the diploma work of the students.

The teaching staff is regularly evaluated by the students for the quality of teaching in satisfaction surveys. Representative questionnaires with student responses are attached but no cumulative data are provided in form of graphs.

II. Analysis

The faculty and teaching staff have a good academic profile, as judged by publications in specialized journals and by citations. Most of faculty and teaching staff are excellent clinicians and have a leading role in the training of students to interventional vascular access procedures. Their reputation attracts students from all over Greece.

Thus, there is evidence that the PSP applies merit-based criteria for the recruitment of faculty and teaching staff.

While faculty and teaching staff are aware of mobility opportunities in the context of Erasmus faculty exchange Programmes, but none has used it thus far. The issue was raised during the personal interviews with teaching staff, where one of the teachers argued that there is not enough time due to participation in 12 different graduate Programmes. This is an exaggerated teaching load, but rather appears to be an exception. The Panel got the impression that the teaching load of most faculty members and teaching staff is reasonable. The courses are offered in intense lectures over weekends and take place once per month.

Obviously, the lack of continuous student presence is a negative factor in the research orientation of the PSP. Nevertheless, there are efforts to engage students who are based in remote locations on research projects and take advantage of their access to patient cohorts and databases.

The provided data show a high degree of student satisfaction with the lectures.

III. Conclusions

The Panel appreciated the enthusiasm and commitment of the faculty and teaching staff. The interviews with current students and alumni gave the impression that the PSP is very well received and covers an important educational gap. The PSP is highly specialized and involves cooperation between vascular surgeons, general surgeons and nephrologists, who can shift the focus towards more specialized thematic areas.

The Panel also identified some limitations related to the part-time format of the PSP and the lack of continuous on-site presence of students, which may compromise research orientation and output. This is acknowledged by the leaders of the PSP, but it appears that with the current student demographics and professional commitments there is no realistic alternative, at least for the time being.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Teaching staff of postgraduate study Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The Panel encourages a stronger engagement of teaching staff and involvement of students in research projects, if necessary, also at remote locations. A more pronounced research orientation would make the PSP even more attractive and complement its excellent teaching Programme, which is essential for up-to-date training of clinicians and for the optimal management of dialysis patients. Finally, the Panel recommends the faculty members to exploit mobility opportunities, for instance the Erasmus faculty Programme.

PRINICPLE 6: LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER THE TEACHING AND LEARNING NEEDS OF THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMME. 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, NETWORKS, CAREER AND SOCIAL POLICY SERVICES ETC.).

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient resources and means, on a planned and long-term basis, to support learning and academic activity in general, so as to offer PSP students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as the necessary general and more specialised libraries and possibilities for access to electronic databases, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, IT and communication services, support and counselling services.

When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed students, students with disabilities), in addition to the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance proves -on the one hand- the quantity and quality of the available facilities and services and -on the other hand- that students are aware of 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.

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Department of Medicine and the University Hospital have at their disposal several lecture halls, seminar rooms and laboratories. The PSP is primarily using a seminar room at the University Hospital and, alternatively, a seminar rooms in the Department of Medicine for teaching purposes. They are all equipped with modern audiovisual infrastructure for in-person and remote teaching.

The PSP supports its teaching Programme with the aid of the central library of the Democritus University of Thrace and the library of the Department of Medicine. Teaching is also supported by an open e-class platform from the University, which contains details on each course. Access to this content is password-protected and restricted to students and teaching staff with credentials. The PSP provides to each student an email account and access to eduroam wi-fi and the virtual private network (VPN) of the University.

There is dedicated administrative staff for learning resources and student support. A “student attorney” acts as mediator between students and the University administration in case of student complains or other conflicts. The students are also offered to opportunity to apply for exemption of tuition fees, or for competitive fellowships. Information on these services is provided on the central University web site.

The Director of the PSP is in charge of academic, administrative and financial decisions, with the support of administrative staff. He or she is member of the PSP steering committee and has a renewable term of 2 years. The Director is not entitled for salary supplement due to this work. A major responsibility of the Director is to provide a detailed report to the Department at the end of the steering committee's term on academic, administrative and financial issues related to the PSP.

The funds of the PSP are managed centrally by ELKE, a unit that administers research funds and operates by charging 30% overheads. The remaining funds cover operational expenses such as administrative and infrastructural support, salary supplements to teaching staff, support for conference participation, or miscellaneous expenses.

II. Analysis

Based on the audiovisual material presented during the Panel members during the remote interviews, the seminar rooms and overall facilities are in excellent condition. All students have access to the resources of the libraries, which covers their needs regarding specialized literature.

The e-class platform offers the possibility for remote teaching; nevertheless, the faculty and teaching staff stressed during the interviews that the vast majority of lectures are given and attended in-person.

The concept of academic advisor has been introduced into all graduate Programmes of the Department of Medicine. The academic advisor can consult students on several issues ranging from the educational Programme and student life to professional opportunities. Psychosocial services are also offered to students. These services provide professional support to students facing distress, integration and adaptation problems, emotional instability, or problems with addiction and substance abuse.

The students are given informative and promotional material on the PSP. The syllabus is provided to each student, while the internal rules and regulations and other announcements are posted on the PSP web site.

A plan for utilization of tuition fees and other financial resources such as donations is in place.

III. Conclusions

The Panel agrees that the PSP is fully compliant to the requirements on learning resources and student support. The PSP web site is informative and well-designed; however, it lacks an English version.

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Learning resources and student support	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The Panel recommends the PSP to update the PSP web site by including a version in English language.

PRINCIPLE 7: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

INSTITUTIONS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING INFORMATION, AIMED AT THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES AND RELATED ACTIVITIES, IN AN INTEGRATED, EFFECTIVE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE WAY.

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

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

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

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their Programmes*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The postgraduate Programme “Vascular access in patients with end-stage renal failure” is a new one-year postgraduate Programme at the University of Thrace, which was established in 2019. Therefore, the data provided to the Panel are not statistically significant. For example, of the 2019 entrants only 50% have graduated, while all others plus the 2020 and 2021 entrants are still studying. As was evident from the data presented to the committee regarding the progress and employability of graduates, there was one graduate who continued academically by pursuing a PhD, while the rest are employed in hospital units. Regarding annual evaluations by students on course content and teaching methods of faculty, a small percentage participate in these, but from the results so far it is evident that students are satisfied. Finally, the infrastructure and equipment provided by the postgraduate school is quite modernized, as was evident from the teaching rooms as well as the operating rooms and the nephrology clinic.

II. Analysis

Considering that a small percentage of entrants have graduated from the postgraduate Programme, it is implied that the academic Programme should be extended to more than 2

semesters. Also, the results of the internal evaluations are indeed satisfactory, since the teachers and the courses have good ratings, but the proportion of participants is quite small.

III. Conclusions

The organization of the academic unit is good, but the total number of academic semesters should be extended so that the majority of graduates finish on time. Finally, students should be encouraged to participate in evaluations in order to better improve the Programme.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Encourage students to participate in the evaluation process.

Increase the total number of semesters in order for student to finish the master on time.

PRINCIPLE 8: PUBLIC INFORMATION CONCERNING THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES IN A DIRECT AND READILY ACCESSIBLE WAY. THE RELEVANT INFORMATION SHOULD BE UP-TO-DATE, OBJECTIVE AND CLEAR.

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 PSP they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the degrees awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures applied, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students. Information is also provided on the employment perspectives of PSP graduates.

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The primary means for the PSP to communicate its existence and academic characteristics is via the website (<https://vascaccess.gr/pms/>) which however requires very significant improvements. Listed below is a selection of its most serious shortcomings:

- There is no English version.
- The faculty description is for only 3 faculty whereas 28 faculty take part. Even for those 3 faculties, their CVs stop well short of the current date (October 2023).
- The course descriptions stop in January 2022.

All of those findings contradict the claim of the PSP that “Η επίσημη ιστοσελίδα του Π.Μ.Σ. ενημερώνεται διαρκώς και περιέχει όλες τις πληροφορίες και ανακοινώσεις του Προγράμματος και αποτελεί τον επίσημο χώρο ενημέρωσης των φοιτητών και φοιτητριών”, p36 of the application document.

The Panel was not made aware of any other method(s) that communicate the activities of the PSP to the wider community.

II. Analysis

The obligation of the PSP to communicate its activities to prospective students and other audience has been neglected. This will not help to attract large numbers of students to the Programme and it is especially problematic for a Programme with some very unique and useful characteristics.

The audience to keep in mind while designing a new and improved website would be prospective students from Greece, prospective students from abroad, faculty from Greece wanting to be informed about PSP activities, faculty from abroad who may contemplate teaching in the Programme, general audience interested in the scientific area that the PSP teaches.

III. Conclusions

Much work is required to satisfy this principle.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Public information concerning the postgraduate study Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	X
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Create a small group which, with the help of the medical school, will update the website to reflect the activities of this PSP.

PRINCIPLE 9: ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC INTERNAL EVALUATION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

INSTITUTIONS AND ACADEMIC UNITS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES, SO AS TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET FOR THEM, THROUGH MONITORING AND POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS, WITH A VIEW TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. ANY ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED.

The regular monitoring, review and revision of postgraduate 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:

- a) the content of the Programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the PSP is up to date*
 - b) the changing needs of society*
 - c) the students' workload, progression and completion of the postgraduate studies*
 - d) the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students*
 - e) the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the Programme*
 - f) the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the PSP in question*
- Postgraduate study 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.*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP is evaluated by the MOΔIII and OMEA organisations of the University of Thrace in a way that is thorough and consistent.

Feedback from the students is obtained formally via questionnaires and informally by discussions with faculty. The Panel determined that students and faculty have an excellent relationship and whatever is possible is done to accommodate student needs.

The design of the PSP is based around the realisation that when kidney patients needing dialysis are in the process of being prepared for the procedure, several different medical teams are involved with a different expertise each. The objective of this PSP is to teach to this disparate groups of medical professionals the best ways to approach this problem in order to obtain the maximum benefit for the patient. In this aspect, the PSP is almost unique in Europe and it is definitely an asset for Greece.

Because Greece has the highest number of dialysis patients in Europe, there is an element of social service to the PSP which could be better promoted in the wider community.

The meeting of the Panel with employers and social partners of the PSP revealed that they have a high opinion not only of the Programme, but also of the medical and societal reasons for its existence.

II. Analysis

A well-designed PSP offering important academic and practical training for medics involved in the care of dialysis patients. The Programme could improve its outreach to local community and the Greek population in general.

III. Conclusions

The PSP does well in principle 9.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: On-going monitoring and periodic internal evaluation of postgraduate study Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Consider enhancing the outreach activities of the PSP by presentations to lay audiences in Alexandroupoli as well as in the rest of Greece the problems and pitfalls associated with patients undergoing dialysis.

PRINCIPLE 10: REGULAR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY 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 PSP accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure and implemented by Panels of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of Programmes, based on the Reports delivered by the Panels of external experts, with a specific term of validity, following to which, revision is required. The quality accreditation of the PSP acts as a means for the determination of the degree of compliance of the Programme to 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.

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP “Vascular access in patients with end-stage renal failure” has not been subjected to an accreditation and evaluation process before. In any case, the professors and the director of the Master's Programme were more than willing to participate in the accreditation process. They provided us in a timely manner with the necessary paperwork and were very detailed and honest during the questioning. The faculty seemed to agree with the committee's observations and they had all the goodwill to correct any failures reported in order to improve the quality of the graduate Programme.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Regular external evaluation of postgraduate study Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The Panel has no further recommendations.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

The Quality assurance policy of the PSP is in alignment with the policy of Democritus University of Thrace. The learning outcomes of the PSP are appropriate for level 7, according to the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The Quality goals set meet the overall accreditation Standards of HAHE.

The PSP offers an essential part of medical specialization in the areas of vascular surgery and nephrology and covers a significant gap in the knowledge and practical experience in the specialization training of medical doctors

The PSP is delivered by very well qualified practitioners in the field (Vascular Surgeons, Nephrologists, Radiologists (including interventional Radiologists), Surgeons, Pathologists, Anaesthesiologists, Haematologists, Anatomists and Statisticians (with an emphasis on Biostatistics), who deal with vascular accesses on a practical and/or theoretical level, with a notable research capacity both from Greece and abroad.

II. Areas of Weakness

There are significant limitations in the delivery of the required academic load corresponding to the minimum ECTS required for a Master's Programme.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

The Panel consider that there is a need for significant restructuring of the PSP in order to improve the compliance with Criterion 2. It is considered that the limited teaching hours are reflecting the narrow and very specialised focus of the PSP. One possible solution for this structural limitation could be to a) increase the ECTS offered by the Thesis to a minimum of 20, as is the international norm and b) consolidate the ECTS of the courses offered to 40 (in two semesters). With such restructuring, the total number of ECTS for the two semesters will remain 60 but the thesis will be part of the second semester and the existing teaching hours will more closely approach the expected teaching load (contact hours) for the offered ECTS. An alternative solution could be to extend the duration of studies to 1.5 years (3 semesters). With such restructuring the current ECTS load (52) in the two first semesters will be retained, albeit with significant enhancement in the teaching hours of the current courses and a considerably larger ECTS load (20-30) with an enhanced capacity for experimental research Thesis could be offered in a third semester.

A diversification of the teaching and evaluation methods used is recommended. These could include more student assignments of a formative nature. For instance, students could be assigned to critically present key primary papers in areas relevant to the course, discuss the results in class, identify important open questions and propose follow up studies. These assignments could contribute to part of the final grade of the courses, which currently mostly depends on a single summative final examination with multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The assessment criteria and methods should be published in advance on the PSP web site. Along these lines, the Panel also feels that the students should be encouraged to participate more in research projects aiming to acquire experience in research methodologies and techniques.

In conclusion, the PSP is tailor-made for the needs of medical professionals who already have full time jobs but also want to be taught and trained in a subspecialty of kidney disease. As such it is well designed. However, significant restructuring would be needed to satisfy the academic load expected from an MSc degree. Furthermore, extraversion (in the form of student and staff mobility) would contribute to improve the identity of the PSP from a mere specialised training certification to proper academic Master's qualification.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

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

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **3, 5**

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: **2, 8**

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

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

- 1. Assoc. Prof. Stefanos Volianitis PhD, DSc (Chair)**
- 2. Prof. Konstantinos Pantopoulos**
- 3. Dr. Nicholas Ktistakis**
- 4. Mr. Sotirios Mavromatis**