



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Accreditation Report

for the New Postgraduate Study Programme of:

Primary Eye Care

Department: Medical School
Institution: Democritus University of Thrace
Date: July 2025



Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση
της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Πρόγραμμα
Ανθρώπινο Δυναμικό και
Κοινωνική Συνοχή



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of
the New Postgraduate Study Programme of Primary Eye Care 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 postgraduate study programme of Primary Eye Care 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. KARANIS, PROF. DR. PANAGIOTIS(Chair)**
Uniklinik Köln, Universität zu Köln
- 2. CHRISTOPHIDES GEORGE**
Imperial College London
- 3. Roussakis Andreas Antonios**
Imperial College London / Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
- 4. Tzimogianni Valentini**
University of Patras
- 5. VENIZELOS NIKOLAOS**
School of Medical Sciences Örebro University SWEDEN

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The evaluation of the Postgraduate Study Program (PSP) Πρωτοβάθμια Οφθαλμολογική Φροντίδα (Primary Eye Care) was conducted through a thorough review of documentation submitted via the HAHE platform, supplemented by online interviews. These included the PSP Director, the Head of the Department of Medicine, members of MODIP, teaching faculty, and external partners. As this is a newly established program, no meetings have been arranged with students or alums. All submitted documents were reviewed in advance by the panel. The teleconference meetings took place on Tuesday, July 14, 2025. A list of the reviewed documents is provided below:

1. Department Material

A0. Table of Contents of the Evaluation Dossier

A1. New Academic Accreditation Proposal

A2. Senate's Decision for the Establishment of the PSP

A3. PSP Internal Evaluation Report (MODIP)

A4. Senate's Decision for the University's Strategy on PSPs

A5. Feasibility/Viability Report for the Establishment of PSP

A6. Quality Assurance Policy of the Academic Unit

A7. Quality Objectives of the Academic Unit

A8. Study Guide

A9. Course Outline

A10. List with Names of Teaching Staff

A11. Internal Operating Regulations

A12. Study Regulations

A13. Management of Student Complaints and Appeals

A14. Regulations for the Academic Advisor Role

A15. Code of Ethics & Good Practice in Research

A16. Diploma Supplement Template in Greek and English

A17. Summary Report on Teaching Staff Performance

A18. Regulations for Distance Learning

A19. Tuition Fees Allocation Plan

2. HAHE Material

Acronyms, European Qualifications Framework, Standards for Quality Accreditations of PSPs, Accreditation Management System - Expert Manual, Guidelines for Accreditation, Guidelines for the Members of EEAP, PSP Mapping Grid, PSP Mapping Grid Assessment Guide, PSP Accreditation Report Template, Instructions for Completing the Inspection Program.

The evaluation and accreditation processes were carried out remotely via the Zoom teleconference platform. All meetings were scheduled using Eastern European Standard Time (GMT+2), which corresponds to the local time zone in Greece.

Monday, 14/7/2025 16:00 - 17:00

Private meeting EEAP members only

Brief review of the online meeting already held among the EEAP members (on the allocation of tasks and the list of issues to be addressed during the online sessions with the Institution.

15:00 - 16:00

Meeting with the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, the Head of the Department, the Director of the PSP, and the MODIP Supervisor

EEAP, Vice-Rector, Director of the PSP, Head of the Department, MODIP

Supervisor Vice-Rector & MODIP President: Prof. Marirena Grigoriou

Head of the Department: Professor Konstantinos Vadikolias

Director of the PSP: Assoc. Prof. Georgios Labiris

MODIP staff: Mrs. Styliani Gkavaki

Short overview of the postgraduate programme: academic profile, status, strengths and possible areas of concern. Discuss the degree of compliance of the programme with the Standards for Quality Accreditation.

16:00 - 16:45

Meeting with the teaching staff

EEAP, teaching staff members of the PSP Teaching staff members of PSP

- Assistant Prof. Panagiota Ntonti, DUTH
- Assistant Prof. Tryfonas Rotsos, DUTH

Discuss professional development opportunities, mobility, competence and adequacy of the teaching staff to ensure learning outcomes, workload, and evaluation by the Assoc. Prof Eirini Chatziralli, NKUA

- Assoc. Prof Andreas Katsanos, UOI

Students, the link between teaching and research, as well as teaching staff involvement in applied research, projects, and research activities directly related to the programme, may highlight possible areas of weakness.

17:00 - 17:30

Online tour: classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, and other facilities related to the PSP. Discussion about the facilities presented in the video produced for this purpose EEAP, administrative staff members, and teaching staff members of the PSP

Link to access the photos: <https://tinyurl.com/MSCduth>

Teaching staff members of PSP

- Assistant Prof. Panagiota Ntonti, DUTH
- Assistant Prof. Tryfonas Rotsos, DUTH
- Assoc. Prof Eirini Chatziralli, NKUA
- Assoc. Prof Andreas Katsanos, UOI
- Administrative staff members of PSP
- Mr. Dimitrios Angelonias

Evaluate facilities and learning resources to ascertain that the learning materials, equipment and facilities are adequate for the successful provision of the programme.

17:30 - 18:00

Break

18:00 - 18:45

Meeting with employers, social partners EEAP, employers/social partners

Employers/social partners of the PSP

- Ms. Eirini-Kanella Panagiotopoulou, Post-Doctoral researcher in Ophthalmology, PGN Alexandroupolis
- Ms. Christina Mitsi, Resident in Ophthalmology, PGN Alexandroupolis
- Ms. Kyriakoula Tsolaki, Head of the Alexandroupolis Health Centre

- Mr. Evangelos Roufos, Director of U.G.H.A (University General Hospital of Alexandroupolis)
- Mr. Konstantinos Gkotsidis, Deputy Director of U.G.H.A
- Dr. Ioannis Fotiadis, General Secretary of OETHAMVA (Ophthalmological Society of Thrace, Eastern Macedonia and Northern Aegean)

Discuss the relations of the programme with external stakeholders from the private and public sectors.

19:00 - 19:30

Debrief meeting EEAP members only

Discuss the outcomes of the virtual visit and prepare the oral report.

19:30 - 20:00

Closure meeting with the Vice-Rector, the Director of the PSP, the Head of the Department, and the MODIP Supervisor

EEAP, Vice-Rector, Director of the PSP, Head of the Department, MODIP Supervisor Vice-Rector & MODIP President: Prof. Marirena Grigoriou

Head of the Department: Professor Konstantinos Vadikolias Director of the PSP: Assoc. Prof. Georgios Labiris

MODIP staff: Mrs. Styliani Gkavaki

Informal presentation of the EEAP key findings. Discuss potential points that might need further clarification.

III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile

The Department of Medicine of the Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH), responding to the needs of society and health professionals, proceeded to establish an innovative postgraduate program entitled "Primary Ophthalmological Care".

The program addresses the increasing demand for specialised training in primary-level ophthalmological care, serving both the public and private sectors.

- MSc Identity Details
- Year of establishment: 2024
- Implementing body: Department of Medicine, Democritus University of Thrace
- Language of instruction: Greek
- Total duration: 3 semesters
- ECTS: 90
- Program type: Mixed (face-to-face & distance learning)
- Tuition fees: To be determined.

Presentation of the Department of Medicine, DUTH:

- Year of establishment: 1977 (Government Gazette 42/ issue A ' /1977)
- Member of the Faculty of Health Sciences, DUTH.
- Strong presence in education and research
- Multi-level activity at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels.

Infrastructures used by the Postgraduate Program

- University General Hospital of Alexandroupolis Ophthalmology Clinic
- Unit of Ophthalmic Research and Innovation, Unit of Refractive and Reconstructive Surgery, 1st Building, University Campus of DUTH
- Laboratories & classrooms of the Department of Medicine
- E-learning platforms: Zoom, e-class
- Digital Library, videoconferencing equipment and support Telematics

Purpose of the MSc

Providing specialised knowledge and skills in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of ophthalmological and related systemic diseases

Developing skills to implement public health policies at the community level.

Training scientists capable of operating in an interdisciplinary environment and applying evidence-based practices.

Subject: Purpose of the Master of Science in Ophthalmology

The subject of the Master of Science in Ophthalmology is postgraduate teaching, research and practical training in Primary Ophthalmology. The purpose of the Master of Science in Ophthalmology is to provide students with a comprehensive picture of primary

ophthalmological care to equip students with skills that they will use as tools to be able to design and execute programs for the screening, diagnosis, and monitoring of ocular and systemic diseases.

To create professionals who will be able to implement or formulate policies for holistic disease management with a significant social and economic impact on our country

To train competent and effective scientists in medical and research methodology who will have a broader and more complete approach to clinical and diagnostic practice in Ophthalmology, and will be able to develop new diagnostic and therapeutic methods

To train medical scientists, optometrists, nurses, and Pharmacy graduates in research methodology, as well as in the evidence-based teaching of Ophthalmology.

The Master of Science in Primary Ophthalmology, offered by the Department of Ophthalmology at DUTH, promotes knowledge, research, and practical training in the critical field of primary eye care. It meets modern educational and health needs, offering high-level training to health professionals. It fills a significant gap in education for the provision of primary care in eye diseases, which is crucial for the disease outcome and patient quality of life. At the same time, it strengthens interdisciplinary cooperation and prepares graduates for doctoral studies and innovative research subjects. The Master of Science in Primary Health Care makes a substantial contribution to the strengthening of social welfare and primary health care, which should become key pillars of the National Health System.

Necessity of Establishing a Postgraduate Program

The Postgraduate Program "Primary Ophthalmology Care" of the DUTH is part of its strategic planning. It aims to promote knowledge, research and practical training in the field of ophthalmology. It aims to provide high-level education to health professionals in the timely and effective treatment of eye diseases that significantly impact the quality of life. In contrast to existing Postgraduate Programs that focus on specialised fields, this program fills the gap in the provision of first aid and basic vision care by equipping health professionals with the necessary and practical knowledge. At the same time, it fosters interdisciplinarity and prepares graduates for further academic pursuits, such as completing doctoral studies. The Postgraduate Program's role in promoting research and further academic pursuits is designed to inspire and motivate potential students and healthcare professionals. It also makes a substantial contribution to the strengthening of primary health care and social care by offering patients the necessary eye care and providing health professionals with the appropriate equipment.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Strategy, Quality Assurance Policy and Quality Goal Setting for the New Postgraduate Study Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD INCLUDE IN THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT THE DEVELOPMENT, ORGANISATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES (PSP) IN SPECIFIC SCIENTIFIC FIELDS AFTER INVESTIGATING THEIR FEASIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY. INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY FOR THE NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT.

THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT THE PSP OF THE INSTITUTION AND THE ACADEMIC UNIT. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL INTERESTED PARTIES.

By decision/s of the Institutional Senate, the Institutions should adapt their strategy to allow for the provision of postgraduate study programmes, in addition to attending to the profile, vision, mission and strategic objectives of the Institution. In this strategy, the Institutions should anticipate the potential benefits, difficulties or risks from the implementation of new postgraduate study programmes and plan all the necessary actions to achieve their goals. The Institution's strategic choices should be documented through specific feasibility and sustainability studies, especially for new postgraduate study programmes.

In the case of PSP delivered by distance methods, the Institution prepares and applies an e-learning strategy. The Institution's e-learning strategy is integrated into its overall strategy and identifies educational goals while keeping up to the rapid technological changes and to the developments in pedagogical models. The Institution should include in its strategy the justification and feasibility as to why e-learning has been selected as the appropriate learning strategy for the particular programmes of study where it is applied.

In the context of e-learning, innovation strategies, the possibility of programme revision, the linking between learning and research (requiring knowledge of the latest innovations in order to select the most appropriate means to achieve the learning outcomes) should be taken into account.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit for postgraduate study programmes should be in line with the Institution's strategy 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 postgraduate 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 continuous 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 and the availability 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 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 internal review and audit of the quality assurance system for the PSP through the cooperation of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU)*

Documentation

- *The Institutional strategy for postgraduate studies, which includes a special strategy for e-learning, as long as it is applied to the Institution's PSP*
- *Feasibility and sustainability studies for the new PSP*
- *Quality Policy of the academic unit for the development and improvement of PSP*
- *Quality Targeting of the academic unit for the PSP*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

Primary eye care. Clinical eye care services are delivered by health care personnel working in or attached to community or primary care facilities. It involves detecting and managing simple eye conditions, as well as identifying and referring patients with complex eye conditions to a higher level of care.

Primary eye health care – just like primary health care - includes not only the provision of health care services, but also supportive multisectoral policies and actions, and the empowerment of community members to take care of their eyes.

Primary eye healthcare has the potential to make sight-restoring surgery available to people in the most remote communities. Primary eye health care is a component of primary health care, comprising integrated primary care and public health services, as well as health promotion, which encompasses multisectoral policies and actions that empower people and communities. Given that a high proportion of all eye problems are simple to diagnose and manage, it makes sense for this work to be carried out at the primary healthcare level, leaving highly trained eye specialists, who usually work in secondary or tertiary level hospitals, to focus on complex eye problems. Eye care professionals alone will never be able to reach everyone in a population, including marginalized groups such as those with disabilities. This means that integrating eye health into primary healthcare is essential.

SWOT analysis

The EEAP reviewed the results of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis conducted at an institutional level. In the provided SWOT report (supplied in the A.4 document), the analysts consider the potential benefits, limitations, opportunities, and risks associated with the delivery of new PSPs. A SWOT analysis was conducted to identify strategies for exploiting opportunities, managing threats, strengthening the university's strengths, and addressing its weaknesses.

Strengths:

- **Quality Programs in Modern Directions:** High-quality postgraduate programs with a well-designed structure, educational material and educational actions of high quality, which provide specialised knowledge, abilities and skills to students in the subject of the postgraduate programs, along with the development of horizontal (soft) skills in connection with research, entrepreneurship and innovation.
- **Research and Innovation:** Promotion through the institution's postgraduate programs of active participation in research, as well as the promotion of innovative ideas.

Weaknesses:

- **Financial Issues** - A lack of adequate competitive funding limits the ability to provide scholarships and resources.
- **Limited International Exposure:** The insufficient promotion of postgraduate programs at an international level limits the attraction of international students.
- **Insufficient Connection to the Labour Market:** The lack of connection with companies and the professional world limits future graduates' employment opportunities.
- **High cost of studies:** The postgraduate programs of the DUTH, which utilise a large percentage of distance learning, face difficulties in increasing the target group throughout the Greek territory due to the university's location, as commuting is prohibitively expensive.

Opportunities:

- **Development of Partnerships:** Creating partnerships with businesses and other educational institutions to strengthen the programs of the DUTH further.
- **Increased International Attraction:** Exploiting international education markets and increasing the attraction of international students with the opportunity provided by the legislative framework for 100% distance learning postgraduate degrees.
- **Development of Educational Technologies:** Using technology to improve education, such as online courses and interactive educational tools. The utilisation of new tools such as Virtual Reality, which has already begun at the DUTH, is a key advantage.
- **Increased Demand for Postgraduate Studies:** The growing recognition of the value of postgraduate education has led to a surge in demand for doctoral

programs.

Threats:

- Competition: Increased competition from other universities to attract the best students.
- Reduced Funding: Possible cuts in education funding, which could affect the quality of programs.
- Global Challenges: The impacts of international events, such as pandemics, wars, and economic crises, can affect student mobility and the operation of programs.
- Unstable Legislative Framework: Frequent changes in the legislative framework for postgraduate programs cause corresponding changes/modifications in curricula and their operation.

Feasibility:

- Attracting high-level (academic, professional, research) teaching staff to the Postgraduate Program.
- Promoting gender equality.
- Strengthening the Promotion of the Postgraduate Program.
- Strengthening internationalisation actions.
- Infrastructure Improvement.
- Increase in the production of high-quality research work by the Teaching Staff of the PSP.

Sustainability

As can be seen from the provided material (A5), the Department of Medicine at DUTH has both the staff and educational structures necessary to support the postgraduate programs it coordinates. In particular, the Department of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Sensory Organs organises three additional doctoral programs. At the same time, the University Clinic of Ophthalmology, which is responsible, does not manage any other postgraduate programs. Therefore, the Department, which, according to the above, carries both the administrative support and the teaching burden of the postgraduate program "Primary Ophthalmological Care", also has the critical mass of staff per postgraduate program and the ability to contribute added value to the education of the doctoral students who attend it. Based on the operation of the postgraduate programs that the Department has been coordinating for several years, with parallel support from the undergraduate study programs of the same Department and other Departments of the DUTH, the Department demonstrates the ability of the teaching staff to be involved in the proposed program without neglecting their legal obligations. All faculty members who undertake teaching postgraduate courses also teach undergraduate courses, thereby fully covering their legal obligations.

Structure of the studies

The course material is thoughtfully distributed and aligns with the ECTS system. The Postgraduate Diploma (PMS) program, leading to the award of the Postgraduate Diploma (PMS), spans a minimum of three (03) semesters (90 ECTS), including the time for the preparation and submission for evaluation of the Postgraduate Diploma Thesis (MDE). Students' training in research methodology is integrated into the preparation of their diploma thesis, with comprehensive support provided to ensure their success. To maintain academic integrity, students' assignments are rigorously checked using the Turnitin software, available at DUTH. The postgraduate thesis (PT) is a scientific, applied work that the postgraduate student is required to prepare to systematise and apply the knowledge acquired from their studies, and deepen their understanding in a specific subject area using international bibliographies and publications (e.g., PubMed, Google Scholar). The Program of Studies includes a thesis, the duration of which is at least six (06) months and corresponds to thirty (30) ECTS. Please note that the program does not provide work experience opportunities.

The Department of Medicine has the basic infrastructure to support the Master of Science in Primary Ophthalmology Care. More specifically, the Clinics and Laboratories mentioned, as well as their interconnection with funded research projects, ensure access to high-level, specialised equipment, including state-of-the-art CT and MRI scanners, as well as specialised computer image analysis software. The collaboration with other Clinics and laboratories also ensures training in relevant subjects related to the overall knowledge of primary ophthalmology care. All of the teaching staff are adequately trained and have experience in the research process. In combination with the increased research activity of the Department's university clinics, they provide opportunities to interconnect teaching with research and project preparation.

Number of students 10 to 30 students.

Key Quality Assurance Areas & Strategic Goals Strategic Objectives:

Student Support & Evaluation: Aim for 70% completed course evaluations, and 20 Faculty members will serve as academic advisors.

Research Excellence/Research production

The Department's research activity is also increasing, as is evident from the number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals, numbering 3684 publications in total, of which 1081 publications were produced in the five years 2019-2024. During this period, the average number of publications per person is 22.

Research project quality

The number of citations, taking into account the SCOPUS database for all publications produced by the lecturers of the MSc, exceeds 125174 citations. The number of citations based on the SCOPUS system per publication (paper) is 34 citations/publication.

Key Quality Assurance Areas & Strategic Goals: A6 & A7; Strategic Objectives: A7;
Student Support & Evaluation: Γλα to Student Support: A1 pages 21-25;
Evaluation: A1 pages 11-13
Research Excellence: A17 & A1 pages 3-6; Internationalisation: A1 pages 3-6;
Inclusivity & Accessibility: A1 pages 11-13

Internationalisation: Strive for international student enrolment and offer Courses with international faculty.

Inclusivity & Accessibility: Maintain a 50% female enrollment and graduation rate. And ensure 100% AMEA-accessible classrooms and labs.

II. Analysis

Based on the reports of the meeting with the Vice-Rector/President of MODIP, the Head of the Department, the Director of the PSP, and the MODIP Supervisor, there are no previous experiences related to this course, and it is a new course. The feasibility and sustainability report provides a comprehensive overview of the foundation of the Department and its established direction. However, all parties are requested to revise the plan and make it much stronger before its starting date in February 2026.

The Department's profile and mission are clearly described and aligned with the DUTH strategic goals. The applicants present a SWOT report, which could be presented in a more detailed manner to demonstrate the greater depth required for a new PSP. In this report, the applicant acknowledges their strengths, weaknesses, threats, and challenges, and identifies areas for growth.

The latest PSP is a good example for Greece, confirming its necessity in the field. However, it is also clear that this example will be influenced by the Greek primary care health system, the geographical and strategic implementation, the dedication, and expertise of the available experts who promote the field. Achievements are possible when long-term knowledge is built upon the experiences established by the involved teaching staff and their long-term expertise.

III. Conclusions

The field of eye care is witnessing advancements that promise to offer improved diagnostics and treatments in primary eye care. Overall, the PSP is a well-planned course, and its necessity in Greek primary healthcare is self-evident.

The online tour, which included classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, and other facilities related to the PSP, was underrepresented. Discussion about the facilities presented in the video, produced for the EEAP, administrative staff, and teaching staff, was underrepresented.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Strategy, Quality Assurance Policy and Quality Goal Setting for the New Postgraduate Study Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The newly defined PSP Primary Eye Care is a necessity for the country, and the criteria are compatible with high-standard education and training in Greece.

- The EEAP recommendation is to: a) attract graduates in the new field and promote the specific training and skills in Greece; b) disseminate this particular knowledge in the whole geographic area on a large scale. Although it appears that employability and future opportunities are secured for medical doctors, the EEAP recommends continuing to take into consideration the other categories and implementing actions to secure additional funding sources (such as scholarships and donations) to maintain sustainability, excellence and employability.
- The course organisers need to be aware of and consider ways to minimise the failure rate of the new course.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of New 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 NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES. THE OBJECTIVES, THE SPECIFIC SCIENTIFIC SUBJECT AND THE STREAMS OR SPECIALISATIONS, THE EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS ARE SET OUT IN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN. DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW 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, the specialisations, the expected learning outcomes, the structure, the courses, the teaching and assessment modes, the teaching staff and the necessary resources 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. In particular, for each expected 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 for the 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).

Documentation

- *Senate decision for the establishment of the PSP*
- *PSP curriculum structure: courses, course categories, ECTS awarded, expected learning outcomes according to the NQF, internship, mobility opportunities*
- *Labour market data regarding the employment of graduates, international experience in a relevant scientific field*

- *PSP Student Guide*
- *Course and thesis outlines*
- *Teaching staff: teaching assignments per subject area and per course*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The EEAP reviewed the submitted documentation in line with HAHE guidance for EEAP/Panel reviews. The document set for the review was complete and well-presented. The EEAP discussed the details of the Programme with the Course Director, MODIP members, the DUTH Senior Management team, associate academics, and fellow teaching staff. Feedback was sought from external stakeholders. Preliminary conclusions were discussed with the Course Director, MODIP and DUTH Senior Officers at the close-out meeting.

The Senate decided to establish the Programme on 23 July 2024, with its educational activities set to commence in the 2029-2030 academic year. Of note, the Course Director confirmed to the EEAP during the review that they aim to initiate the Programme early, in winter 2026. In its current form, the Programme design adheres to HAHE principles, the European standards for Quality Assurance within the EHEA, and the DUTH strategic development plan. The Programme maintains a high standard through a comprehensive curriculum structure, which effectively integrates a wide range of educational activities. The learning objectives are well-defined and focused, helping prospective students to meet their various academic and professional needs.

The expected volume of work follows the standards of the EU ECTS system (level 7). The total number of ECTS credits is 90, with a course layout that spans three semesters. Each ECTS credit corresponds to approximately 25-30 hours of study time. The workload breakdown is included in Appendices A.8 and A.9. Prospective students are required to attend all mandatory classes and tutorials. The “Master’s Degree in Primary Ophthalmology Care” qualification is awarded following successful participation in lectures and tutorials, and upon completion of a research project and a dissertation. In this Programme, marking ranges from 0 to 10. It is implied that a pass is considered an overall mark over 5/10 ($\geq 50\%$). The Course is taught in Greek. The dissertation is expected to be written in Greek, accompanied by a synopsis (approximately 300 words in length) in another official EU language, such as English, French, or German.

The course outline is comprehensive and well-structured, providing a clear understanding of the curriculum and its requirements. The student guide is precise and detailed. It is written in Greek. The guidance document serves as an introduction to new students and applicants, as well as a navigation tool for prospective students. The modules are presented in detail.

The course subject is ophthalmology applied to the primary care environment with

a focus on integrating experience from clinical practice. The classes are designed to create a dynamic learning environment for individuals who wish to further develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies in ophthalmology within a primary care setting.

The introduction to basic research methodology, principles of ethical considerations, and basics on Greek and EU legislation related to clinical research are scheduled to be taught in the first two semesters. However, these topics are not included in the current curriculum as a distinct module.

The Programme is designed to promote active student involvement in the educational process. Prospective students are encouraged to initiate a research project in the area that interests them. Assisted by teaching staff, and according to the capacity of each investigator, the students are required to choose a single topic to focus on, and agree to work collaboratively with their academic supervisor(s) to complete their project and dissertation on time.

The Programme includes an interactive feedback mechanism in which students are encouraged to express their needs freely. Combined with outcome-heavy metrics, the Course Director and teachers are confident that the academic staff-students interaction will evolve in a constructive and informative way for the benefit of all parties involved. In response to the students' professional needs, the Programme Director is, in principle, happy to support individual students who wish to gain work experience through this Programme. The aim is to allow students to familiarise themselves with the job market landscape in Greece. External stakeholders have shown a significant interest in the Programme. This includes the possibility for third parties to support academically led research and work placements (in line with local regulations and policies), thereby helping students.

The Programme includes a list of highly qualified teaching staff who are active in clinical ophthalmology services across Greece and cover several areas of specialisation. The Course Director agrees to maintain an active Programme-specific network for teaching staff, DUTH administrators, and students, ensuring its productive use for all.

II. Analysis

Overall, the course guide is well-structured and comprehensive, offering clear information on the Programme's structure, academic requirements, and learning objectives. It serves as a solid reference point for students and reflects a thoughtful approach to curriculum planning. If there is one area where the Programme might further develop—and both the Course Director and the Panel have expressed agreement on this point—it would be in making a few targeted adjustments aimed at helping students better understand certain conceptual and practical aspects of their studies:

[1] The difference between what is taught and what is learnt, with a particular

emphasis on highlighting the educational process and the distinction between teaching inputs and achieved learning outcomes. Greater clarity in this area could help students reflect more critically on their progress and actively engage in the learning process.

[ii] Where the research outcomes from the Programme could fit in the broader academic and clinical landscape, including identifying areas for novel research and pathways for translating evidence into clinical practice within the primary care setting. Encouraging students to see how their work contributes to the “big picture” could further enhance their sense of purpose and academic motivation.

[iii] The importance of strengthening the focus on prevention and ophthalmology care within primary care, particularly outside the hospital environment, where appropriate. Expanding this dimension would align the Programme more closely with the evolving needs of modern healthcare systems, which increasingly emphasise community-based and preventive care models.

These comments are offered in the spirit of supporting the Programme’s continuous development, and are not intended as criticisms. Addressing these areas (in the future) could further enhance the Programme’s effectiveness and the overall educational experience of its students.

III. Conclusions

The Programme is well-designed and structured. A few changes are recommended to develop certain areas further. The aim is to support students and ensure optimal learning experience.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- The EEAP recommends minor changes in the course guide to better support the students. This includes layout/additions to the course guide, course schedules, rules on deadlines and absences, etc., to improve the document's style for the promotion of the programme. The EEAP recommends the Course Director to revisit timelines and introduce a separate module in the course (within the existing total ECTS score) in which students will be taught the “Basics on conducting research” appropriate to the Master’s level. The EEAP recommends that this module include the basics of conducting original research, systematic literature reviews, fundamental statistical analyses, and interpreting

research data, as well as the fundamentals of ICH principles and regulations for the use of medicines and medical devices in humans. Combined with basic knowledge of the framework for animal studies and the rules for research tissue banks and research databases, students are expected to have a solid understanding of the basics in data protection and information governance, including the EU GDPR and Greek law, by the end of this course. The EEAP recommends implementing changes from this point in the A.8 and A.9 documents (course guide and summary of modules) for consistency and increased transparency. The EEAP recognises the openness of the Course Director to make changes before the beginning of the course begins. Programme. The EEAP recommends that changes be implemented promptly.

- The EEAP recommends the development of a handbook for students to be used as guidance on how to use commercially available equipment required for up-to-date ophthalmology clinical practice in primary care, including the use of any relevant software for clinical/clinical research purposes.
- A frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) section, a table with timelines per academic year, and onboarding & offboarding checklists could be included in the course guide to help students familiarise themselves with processes and to optimise planning.

Principle 3: Regulations for 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).

The Institution should develop and publish the internal regulations prescribed by law which, among other things, should regulate all issues of postgraduate studies from the beginning to the end of the studies.

Indicatively:

- *The students' 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*

In case that the PSP is offered through distance learning methods, the Institution should have in place a regulation for e-learning, including in particular the following issues:

- *Services of the Institution to support e-learning*
- *Methodology for the development and implementation of courses*
- *Ways of providing teaching and variety of teaching and assessment modes*
- *General standard of course structure*
- *Student support system*
- *Support of faculty/teachers with mandatory e-learning training for new staff members*
- *Technological infrastructures made available by the Institution*
- *Student identity confirmation system (student identity check, assignment and exam writing process, security and certification issues).*
- *The Institution should establish rules for the provision of appropriate access and for the assurance of the participation of students affected by disability, illness, and other special circumstances.*
- *Ethical issues, such as those concerning data protection, intellectual property rights and rules for protection against fraud are governed by the e-learning regulation.*

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

Documentation

- *Internal regulation for the operation of the postgraduate study programme*
- *Special regulation for the implementation of e-learning if the PSP is delivered through distance methods*
- *Research Ethics Regulation*
- *Regulation of studies, internship, mobility, and student assignments*
- *Degree certificate template and Diploma Supplement template*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The postgraduate Program entitled "Primary Eye Care" offered by the Medical School at Democritus University of Thrace is structured over three academic semesters, each comprising 30 ECTS credits. The tuition fee amounts to €1,500 each semester. Financial support through scholarships is available for up to 30% of students who demonstrate exceptional academic merit or meet specific socioeconomic criteria.

Graduates of the Departments of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, as well as Biomedical Sciences (direction of Optics & Optometry) can apply to this PSP. Admission to the Program is conducted through a merit-based process, following the formal announcement of available positions on the Program's official website. The selection of candidates is based on their bachelor's degree, CV, and letters of recommendation. Good knowledge of English is a prerequisite. There is no quantitative participation of each criterion in the selection of students. The Program admits between 10 and 30 students annually. There is a website with some necessary information, but it does not seem to be really up to date.

The curriculum integrates 45% online lectures, in-person lectures, practical lessons, and a mandatory master's thesis. During the second semester, students will attend mandatory in-person workshops on select weeks of the semester. In the third semester, students are expected to undertake their research thesis at accredited hospitals, either in Greece or abroad. Upon successful completion of the Program, graduates are awarded a diploma that certifies their academic credentials in both Greek and English, serving as a foundation for further studies or professional advancement. Although there is typically the possibility of an Erasmus+ mobility, it is not clear to what extent it can actually be implemented.

There is also in place a Code of Research Ethics for the PSP.

II. Analysis

The Program represents a significant contribution to the field of Ophthalmology, addressing the growing demand for advanced research and specialised education in this area of health sciences. The Program's three-semester duration is deemed appropriate and well-structured offering essential knowledge for primary eye care.

The mandatory thesis, primarily delivered in English, further reinforces the research character. The possibility of carrying out the thesis abroad is a very important opportunity offered to students.

Academic support is expected to be provided throughout the studies through the Academic Advisor, and effective communication ensured by the teaching staff.

The lectures outlines and the assessment procedures of the students and the monitoring of their progress are described very clearly to the prospective students.

There is no precise description and classification of the qualifications required for admission to this PSP. The website doesn't seem to be up to date.

III. Conclusions

The "Primary Eye Care" Program offers a distinguished postgraduate academic opportunity for graduates in Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, and Optometry who seek to enhance their skills in primary healthcare. The integration of Erasmus+ mobility opportunities would be a highly beneficial enhancement to the PSP. There is a need for a detailed description of the admission process to the postgraduate programme and the weighting of each admission criterion, as well as an updated website.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Regulations for Student Admission, Progression, Recognition of Postgraduate Studies, and certification	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The panel suggests considering Erasmus+ mobility.
- The panel proposes a detailed list of admission criteria with their respective percentages.
- The panel suggests a more up-to-date website.

Principle 4: Teaching Staff of New 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 and scientific competence of the teaching staff at the PSP, the appropriate staff-student ratio, the proper staff categories, the appropriate subject areas, the fair and objective recruitment process, the high research performance, the training, 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.

Documentation

- *Procedures and criteria for teaching staff recruitment, policy for attracting highly qualified staff, and PSP Obligation Regulation*
- *List of the intended for recruitment teaching staff including subject areas, employment relationship, Institution of origin, Department of origin and relevant individual achievements*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The programme relies heavily on visiting professors affiliated with other Greek universities. These professors play a crucial role in covering all core content areas of the PSP, including advanced clinical topics such as diabetic retinopathy, neuro-ophthalmic symptoms, and emergency eye care. Their contributions are significant, but their role and expectations for long-term engagement need to be clarified.

The programme director, Assoc. Prof. Georgios Labiris is a seasoned academic and clinician with substantial experience in education, including involvement with the Open University. His leadership and international academic collaborations (e.g., with institutions in Turkey and Bulgaria) are a strong asset to the programme.

Teaching will be delivered in both face-to-face and distance learning modes (up to 46% online), using certified platforms and equipped classrooms at DUTH. The teaching team has contributed to the development of course content and learning outcomes, structured across three semesters: basic sciences and diagnostics in the first, disease management and emergency care in the second, and a Master's thesis in the third. Up to 40 collaborating health centres are expected to

facilitate clinical exposure and support thesis work.

The programme admits students from diverse professional backgrounds (e.g., doctors, nurses, optometrists, opticians). Faculty members acknowledged this diversity and have proposed small-group teaching (e.g., subgroups of five) to support practical learning. However, detailed strategies for accommodating the varied learning needs of such a diverse cohort remain underdeveloped.

Supervision of Master's theses has been pre-structured, with a pool of proposed topics reflecting the research interests of the teaching team. During the interview, it transpired that emphasis will be placed on applied or clinical research, which involves practical application and patient interaction, avoiding non-research outputs such as literature reviews, although reviews were also mentioned. This is particularly relevant and concerning for students who will be supervised remotely.

While the programme aims to increase research output, with a modest target of raising the average h-index of teaching staff from 19 to 20, this ambition is not currently supported by any structured initiatives. The absence of structured initiatives in this area is a concern that needs to be urgently addressed. Similarly, while there was verbal commitment to evaluating teaching quality and staff performance, the mechanisms for pedagogical training, peer review, student feedback, or regular performance assessment are either insufficiently described or absent.

II. Analysis

The teaching staff is a key strength of the programme in terms of academic and clinical expertise, national reach, and commitment to interdisciplinary education. Their involvement in curriculum design and alignment with the programme's learning objectives, particularly the focus on primary ophthalmological care, is evident. The programme director's leadership and cross-institutional collaborations further enhance its credibility.

Nonetheless, the staffing model raises some concerns. The heavy reliance on unpaid visiting contributors may pose challenges for programme continuity, accountability, and long-term cohesion. There is limited evidence of structured pedagogical training, integration into the department's academic life, or staff development planning. The absence of formalised mechanisms for quality assurance, including teaching evaluation and workload allocation, may adversely affect consistency and the overall student experience.

Furthermore, while the PSP intends to serve a diverse student body with varying professional backgrounds, it lacks articulated teaching strategies to address this diversity. The proposed group-based learning model, which involves subgroups of five, is promising. However, details regarding group composition, supervision ratios, and feedback mechanisms need to be outlined to ensure the effectiveness of the programme.

III. Conclusions

The PSP is supported by a well-qualified and clinically experienced teaching team, whose breadth of expertise is appropriate for the interdisciplinary and applied nature of the programme. However, the model relies heavily on visiting professors, who have limited structural integration and unclear expectations regarding long-term engagement. Mechanisms for staff development, pedagogical support, and performance evaluation are underdeveloped, and there is no specific strategy for adapting instruction to suit students from different professional backgrounds.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Teaching Staff of New Postgraduate Study Programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Establish a formal framework for the evaluation of teaching staff, incorporating regular student feedback, peer review, and alignment with intended learning outcomes.
- Develop a staff development and training programme, including modules on distance learning pedagogy and supervision of interdisciplinary postgraduate research.
- Clarify the distribution of teaching and supervision workloads, ensuring transparency, sustainability, and adequate support for thesis guidance.
- Create incentives or formal contractual structures to enhance continuity and engagement among visiting professors, such as honorary appointments.
- Introduce targeted strategies to support mixed-background student cohorts, including pre-course orientation, differentiated tutorials, and bridging workshops to address disparities in foundational knowledge and clinical experience.

Principle 5: Learning Resources and Student Support

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER THE TEACHING AND LEARNING NEEDS OF THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES. 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, 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 and foreign students, students with disabilities), in addition to the shift towards student-centered 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.

Documentation

- Detailed description of the infrastructure and services made available by the Institution to the academic unit for the PSP, to support learning and academic activity (human resources, infrastructure, services, etc.) and the corresponding firm commitment of the Institution to financially cover these infrastructure-services from state or other resources
- Administrative support staff of the PSP (job descriptions, qualifications, and responsibilities)
- Informative / promotional material given to students with reference to the available services
- Tuition utilisation plan (if applicable)

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The Democritus University of Thrace offers a decentralized yet integrated library system that supports the educational and research needs of postgraduate students. The Central Library, located in Komotini, functions through administratively nine (9) Libraries – Annexes situated across four cities, Komotini, Xanthi, Alexandroupolis, and Orestiada. These Annexes are aligned with the respective Faculties and Departments, enabling students to access specialized learning materials and enhance their research activities. The library system includes a searchable online catalog (OPAC, https://opac.seab.gr/search~S4*gre), branch-specific resources tailored to departmental needs, and digital access to books, journals, and other educational content.

In addition to library resources, students benefit from strong IT and communication services. These include an Electronic Secretariat that manages academic records and administrative tasks, as well as an advanced e-classroom platform (<https://eclass.duth.gr/>) where course materials, announcements, and communication with instructors are centralized and easily accessible.

Postgraduate students receive comprehensive academic and administrative support through the appointment of Academic Advisors, faculty members who offer individualized guidance on coursework, research planning, career development, and doctoral study opportunities. Each student is provided with an institutional account, granting access to key electronic services, including course registration, email, digital classroom environments, and course declarations. The system also includes online management of student IDs and certificates, streamlining access to vital academic functions. All these services are personalized and password-protected, ensuring both security and ease of use.

The Institution also maintains a dedicated Student Counselling and Accessibility Structure. This unit provides psychosocial support for a range of issues, including exam-related anxiety, adaptation to academic life, and social integration. Furthermore, it ensures that students with disabilities can participate equally in academic life through the provision of electronic tools, accessible infrastructure, and individualized accommodations. Confidentiality is strictly observed by staff, in line with professional and legal standards.

Student advocacy and well-being are further supported through the Office of the Student Ombudsman. Acting as an independent mediator between students and University staff, the Ombudsman is responsible for ensuring fair treatment, addressing cases of maladministration or institutional dysfunction, and promoting transparency. Students can express concerns via multiple channels, including email, online forms, or in-person submissions. This mechanism contributes to an environment of trust, accountability, and institutional responsiveness.

In terms of career development and research support, postgraduate students benefit from the services of the University's Employment and Career Structure (DASTA) and the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit. These structures provide exposure to real-world work environments, encourage entrepreneurial thinking, and offer training in business development. Additionally, students have access to seminars, networking events, and information on available research funding, which together foster their professional readiness and engagement with the research community.

Financial support is available through various scholarships and awards. These are funded by internal resources, such as the "DEMOKRITOS" Scholarship Regulation, as well as external foundations, collaborating institutions, and tuition-generated income. For the academic year 2024–25, approximately €3,500 has been earmarked for scholarships. Clear eligibility criteria and application procedures are

communicated via the University's official websites, ensuring transparency and accessibility.

The effectiveness of the University's support services is regularly assessed through surveys conducted by the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). Student participation in these surveys is voluntary, and the results are made publicly available. This practice reflects the University's commitment to transparency, continuous quality improvement, and evidence-based institutional development.

The Democritus University of Thrace has implemented a detailed financial plan for the use of tuition fees in the 2024–25 academic year, with a total budget of €73,500. This budget shall include allocations for administrative and technical support (€17,000), teaching remuneration (€5,000), and investments in infrastructure and equipment (€15,500), with the remaining funds directed toward scholarships and other operational expenses. This careful and strategic financial planning underscores the Institution's dedication to maintaining and enhancing the quality of postgraduate education and support services.

II. Analysis

The Democritus University of Thrace's approach to supporting postgraduate students is marked by a well-structured and comprehensive system that addresses academic, technological, personal, and professional needs.

The library system is decentralised yet cohesive, offering specialised resources across nine branches (Library's Annexes) in four cities, each tailored to the faculties they serve. This setup not only ensures accessibility but also enhances the relevance of learning materials to students' academic pursuits. In parallel, robust IT infrastructure supports student learning through tools such as the e-classroom platform and the Electronic Secretariat, both of which streamline academic management and communication. Institutional accounts grant students access to these systems, making day-to-day academic engagement efficient and secure.

Academic support is strengthened by the assignment of Academic Advisors, who provide personalised guidance across various domains, including coursework planning, research development, and career progression. The University's commitment to student well-being is further demonstrated through its Counselling and Accessibility Services, which offer confidential psychosocial support and ensure that students with disabilities can participate equally in academic life. Complementing these efforts, the Student Ombudsman serves as an impartial mediator, restoring a culture of fairness and accountability by addressing student concerns transparently and constructively. In terms of career preparation and research integration, the University provides meaningful opportunities through the Employment and Career Structure (DASTA) and the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit.

These entities facilitate real-world exposure, entrepreneurial learning, and access to research funding, thereby enhancing students' readiness for the labour market and academic advancement. Financial support is another integral component, with scholarships funded through internal and external sources, including tuition fees. The University ensures that clear eligibility criteria and transparent application processes govern these opportunities.

To maintain and improve the quality of these services, the University applies a systematic evaluation of its effectiveness through student surveys administered by the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). Results are publicly available, affirming the institution's commitment to transparency and evidence-based improvement.

Additionally, the financial planning for tuition fee allocation is clearly articulated, with targeted spending on administrative support, teaching remuneration, infrastructure, and scholarships. This strategic financial management underscores the University's dedication to sustaining high-quality education and support services.

III. Conclusions

The Democritus University of Thrace and the PSP meet the expectations of Principle 5 by delivering comprehensive, accessible, and student-centred support services across all areas of postgraduate education. The University's structure reflects a balanced investment in infrastructure, technology, psychosocial support, academic advising, and career services, underpinned by transparent planning and a culture of continuous improvement. The decentralised model of support (e.g., Annexes libraries aligned with faculties) allows for context-specific service delivery while retaining institutional coherence.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Learning Resources and Student Support	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Feedback gathered through student surveys should not only inform institutional decisions but also be followed by communicated action plans, which are also shared with students.
- Promoting collaboration between departments and support units could reduce duplication and promote best practices across the institution.
- Explore increasing scholarship funds, especially as tuition fees grow, to maintain accessibility and equity.

Principle 6: Initial Internal and External Evaluation and Monitoring of New Postgraduate Study Programmes

INSTITUTIONS AND ACADEMIC UNITS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM, FOR THE AUDIT, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE NEW POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES, THUS ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PRESENT STANDARDS. ANY ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED.

The internal evaluation of the new PSP includes the assessment of the accreditation proposal, as well as the documentation in accordance with the Principles of the present Standards and the quality procedures of the Institution's Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). The internal evaluation of new postgraduate study programmes also aims at maintaining the level of educational provision and creating a supportive and effective learning environment for students. The Institution, through its Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) and the corresponding academic units, organise and support the external evaluation procedures of the new PSP, according to the specific guidelines and directions provided by HAHE.

The above comprise the assessment of:

- the objectives, content, and structure of the curriculum, the knowledge offered and the level of science and technology in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the PSP is up to date, according to the relevant documentation listed in the decisions of the pertinent bodies*
- the entailed students' workload for the progression and completion of postgraduate studies*
- the satisfaction of the students' expectations and needs in relation to the programme*
- the learning environment, support services, and their fitness for purpose for the PSP in question*

Postgraduate study programmes are designed and established in accordance with the provisions of the Institution's internal regulations, involving students and other stakeholders.

Documentation

- *The Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) procedure for verifying whether the requirements of the Standards for Quality Accreditation of New PSP are met, as well as the procedure for organising and supporting their external evaluation procedures*
- *Assessment and feedback mechanisms of the PSP strategy and quality targeting, and relevant decision-making processes (students, external stakeholders)*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

Internal Evaluation Mechanism

The institution has established an Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), and the Postgraduate Program (MSc in Primary Ophthalmological Care) follows a structured annual internal evaluation process as required by national legislation (Law 4957/2022). This includes data collection, course evaluations by students, departmental reporting, and targeted quality assurance initiatives. The annual internal evaluation of the MSc is carried out in collaboration with MODIP. This system ensures continuous monitoring and periodic internal evaluation of

postgraduate programmes, with mandatory certification by the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) before programme commencement.

Data Collection and Student Feedback System

Aggregated data on curricula, research, and services are collected annually through the National Information System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education NISQA (ΟΠΕΣΠ) system of HAHE and MODIP's information system, which interfaces with the departmental secretariat. Semi-annual student evaluations are conducted via digital questionnaires, covering teacher abilities, quality of teaching, course quality, and the Departments may add custom questions, approved by MODIP, to address specific needs.

The students participate in electronic evaluations of teaching quality and course content each semester, with results influencing internal reviews and faculty development.

Annual Internal Evaluation Process

MODIP delegates data verification tasks to its members, who review reports from academic departments. Standardized files (e.g., audit questionnaires, action plans) streamline the process. The internal evaluation reports are published on departmental and MODIP websites under "Quality Assurance → Evaluation → Internal Evaluation of Departments.

External Evaluation Process and Certification

The new curriculum of the MSc programme of the Democritus University of Thrace, in Primary Eye Care, has not yet started. Thus, there are currently no graduates, and no external evaluation report is available. While the internal quality assurance mechanisms are active and robust. It is noted that a formal external evaluation is planned to be conducted, coordinated by MODIP by an independent external committee of experts appointed from the HAHE, which shall validate the program's quality and offer improvement recommendations. The evaluation examines the programme achievements, areas needing improvement, and the effectiveness of prior corrective actions. The programme is committed to fully implementing all recommendations provided by the external evaluators, demonstrating its dedication to continuous improvement.

Continuous Improvement Culture and Strategic Goals

The regular meetings between OMEA, the Coordinating Committee, and departmental assemblies foster iterative improvements of Feedback Mechanisms. The program commits to a clear follow-up process post- certification, including the preparation of Action Plans, performance tracking, and follow-up reports on the implementation of improvements. Action plans are re-evaluated annually to measure success and adjust strategies, ensuring sustained programme

enhancement.

II. Analysis

The MSc in Primary Ophthalmological Care is embedded within a structured Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), in alignment with national legislation (Law 4957/2022). The programme's quality management is based on a systematic annual internal evaluation process, carried out in collaboration with MODIP (the university's Quality Assurance Unit). This process ensures continuous monitoring and feedback-driven improvement of the postgraduate programme.

The internal quality assurance system includes systematic data collection on courses, research activities, and administrative services. It incorporates annual internal reviews supported by audit tools and standardised templates, as well as a mandatory certification by the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) before the programme's launch.

The programme employs robust mechanisms for collecting student feedback and performance data. These include a semi-annual electronic questionnaire evaluating teaching quality, instructor effectiveness, and course structure; integration with HAHE's National Information System for Quality Assurance (NISQA); and the use of MODIP's internal database. Department-specific questions may also be added to the surveys with MODIP's approval, allowing flexibility to address local academic concerns.

These feedback mechanisms are integral to the internal review process and influence both course delivery and faculty development.

Internal evaluations are conducted annually using standardised tools such as audit questionnaires and structured action plans. MODIP members are responsible for verifying departmental reports to ensure consistency and accountability. The results are made publicly available through the departmental and MODIP websites under the "Quality Assurance" section, promoting transparency.

As the programme is new and has not yet started, no external evaluation has yet taken place. The present review represents the first external evaluation.

However, an external review is scheduled to be organised by MODIP and conducted by an independent expert panel from HAHE. This review will assess the programme's achievements and shortcomings, evaluate the effectiveness of any previously implemented corrective measures, and provide targeted recommendations for improvement.

The programme has expressed a strong commitment to adopting all external recommendations, underscoring its dedication to quality assurance and continuous enhancement.

A proactive culture of improvement is evident through regular coordination between OMEA (Internal Evaluation Team), the Coordinating Committee, and departmental assemblies. This includes a formal follow-up process after certification, the development of detailed action plans with performance tracking, and an annual re-evaluation of these plans to refine strategies and optimise programme delivery.

This strategic cycle reflects a well-institutionalised culture of responsiveness to feedback and adaptability.

III. Conclusions

The MSc in Primary Ophthalmological Care at Democritus University of Thrace exhibits a well-structured and effectively implemented internal quality assurance framework. Although external validation is awaiting, the foundational systems and processes that are in place ensure that the programme is well-positioned for continuous enhancement and alignment with national and European standards. The integration of feedback, data-driven evaluations, and strategic action planning is indicative of a considered academic programme committed to excellence.

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Initial Internal and External Evaluation and Monitoring of New Postgraduate Study Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Streamline the data flow between MODIP, OPESP, and department secretariats to reduce administrative burdens and improve turnaround times for evaluations and feedback implementation.
- Increase participation of alumni, industry partners, and international academics in feedback and external evaluation phases to enhance relevance and international alignment.
- Invest further in multimedia and e-class tools, ensuring uniform quality across digital course materials to support diverse learning styles.
- Provide regular training to faculty and administrative staff on quality assurance processes, digital tools, and interpretation of evaluation results.
- Introduce a mid-year internal review to address urgent issues without waiting for the full annual cycle, allowing more agile responses to feedback.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

The proposed PSP represents a timely and strategically relevant educational initiative. It is designed to address a pressing gap in structured training for primary eye care within the Greek healthcare system. It aligns well with the institution's overall quality assurance policy and educational goals.

The programme displays several excellent features, including its interdisciplinary scope, its responsiveness to labour market needs, and its intent to train a diverse range of healthcare professionals. It also benefits from the leadership of an experienced Programme Director and an academically strong, nationally distributed teaching team. Specifically:

- The programme is aligned with national healthcare needs and broader efforts to strengthen primary care services, particularly in ophthalmology.
- The Programme Director's academic and clinical experience, as well as national and international collaborations, enhance the PSP's credibility and scope.
- Participation of staff from multiple Greek universities strengthens national cooperation and ensures wide coverage of specialised content areas.
- The focus on clinically relevant thesis topics and collaboration with numerous healthcare centres supports experiential learning and applied research.
- The programme is open to applicants from diverse health-related backgrounds, promoting interdisciplinary exchange and team-based learning.

II. Areas of Weakness

At the same time, the programme's long-term sustainability, operational coherence, and pedagogical robustness would benefit from greater integration of quality assurance mechanisms, improved support for teaching staff and students, and a more systematic approach to feedback, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Specifically:

- The heavy dependence on external, unpaid teaching staff poses a risk to continuity, coherence, and accountability in programme delivery.
- By implementing structured teaching evaluations, peer review, and formal feedback loops, the programme can significantly enhance its ability to self-monitor and improve, instilling a sense of hope and optimism in the audience. The PSP curriculum lacks key foundational topics such as biostatistics and ethical approaches, which are essential components of postgraduate education in health-related and scientific fields. Their absence may limit students' ability to critically appraise research, conduct ethically sound studies, and engage with evidence-based practice.

- The PSP, while welcoming student diversity, urgently needs to develop clear instructional strategies and support systems to bridge knowledge or skills gaps between student subgroups, emphasising the need for immediate action. There is limited transparency in how teaching and thesis supervision are distributed and supported, especially given the externally based teaching cohort.
- Precise support mechanisms, incentives, or resources do not yet accompany goals for improving research productivity.
- Communication and data flow between MODIP, OPESP, and departmental secretariats are not yet streamlined, creating inefficiencies in evaluation and feedback response cycles.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

The following recommendations are intended to support the continuous improvement, long-term sustainability, and academic robustness of the proposed PSP. They are not mandatory conditions for the initiation of the programme but are offered as constructive suggestions to enhance quality assurance, operational coherence, and alignment with international good practices as the programme evolves.

- Identify ways to ensure the long-term sustainability of the PSP, such as by introducing contractual, honorary, or incentive-based structures for visiting academic staff to secure their long-term involvement and accountability.
- Establish structured mechanisms for evaluating teaching quality, including student feedback, peer observation, and systematic outcome monitoring.
- Provide regular training for academic and administrative staff on quality assurance processes, digital tools, hybrid pedagogical practices, and the interpretation of evaluation results.
- Offer preparatory orientation modules, differentiated tutorials, and bridging workshops to accommodate varied academic and professional backgrounds.
- Introduce dedicated teaching on biostatistics and health research ethics—either as standalone modules or integrated into existing courses—to strengthen students’ scientific literacy, research capabilities, and understanding of ethical standards in healthcare.
- Ensure transparency in teaching and supervision duties and monitor workload distribution to prevent imbalances and ensure student support.
- Support faculty in increasing research output through mentoring, collaborative opportunities, internal grants, and integration with thesis projects.
- Ensure that student surveys not only inform internal decisions but are followed by visible action plans and feedback to students.
- Facilitate collaboration between departments and support units to reduce redundancy, share resources, and promote best practices.
- As tuition fees increase, ensure that scholarship availability also grows to maintain equitable access for students.
- Improve the coordination between MODIP, OPESP, and departmental units to

reduce administrative burden and accelerate the implementation of evaluation findings.

- Upgrade and standardise digital learning materials across courses to ensure high-quality, inclusive, and interactive remote learning experiences.
- Implement an interim internal review mechanism to address emerging issues promptly, without waiting for the full annual evaluation cycle.
- Increase participation of alums, industry professionals, and international academics in curriculum review and external assessments to enhance relevance and global alignment.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **5, 6**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 3, 4**

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

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

KARANIS, PROF. DR. PANAGIOTIS
CHRISTOPHIDES GEORGE
Roussakis Andreas Antonios
Tzimogianni Valentini
VENIZELOS NIKOLAOS

Signature

Signed by KARANIS, PROF. DR. PANAGIOTIS
Signed by CHRISTOPHIDES GEORGE
Signed by Roussakis Andreas Antonios
Signed by Tzimogianni Valentini
Signed by VENIZELOS NIKOLAOS