



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:
Environmental Design
School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design
Hellenic Open University
30 September 2023



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



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Postgraduate Study Programme of **Environmental Design** of the **Hellenic Open University** for the purposes of granting accreditation.

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PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the postgraduate study programme of **Environmental Design** of the **Hellenic Open University** comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

- 1. Professor Emeritus Spyros Pavlostathis (Chair)**
Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, USA

- 2. Professor Thomas Panagopoulos**
University of Algarve, Faro, Portugal

- 3. Professor Sotiris Xantheas**
University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

- 4. Professor Emeritus Panagiotis (Pete) Scarlatos**
Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA

- 5. Mrs. Despoina Boulogiorgou**
PhD Candidate, Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of West Attica,
Athens, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

In preparation for the visit, the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) reviewed multitude of material provided by the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education (HAHE), which included background information and guidance on the accreditation process, detailed material and data related to the programme under evaluation, such as the programme accreditation proposal and associated appendices.

The programme review was conducted via teleconference, organized and coordinated by HAHE with the help of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) The schedule and agenda of the review were as stated below.

Monday, 18/09/2023:

- a) Preliminary private meeting of the EEAP. Discussion of the programme under review; assignment of writing parts of the accreditation report draft to the members of the EEAP.
- b) Welcome meeting and short overview of the two postgraduate study programmes (PSP) with the University Vice-President/President of MODIP Prof. I. Sibetheros, the Deputy Director of the Waste Management postgraduate programme Prof. K. Komnitsas, the Director of the Environmental Design postgraduate programme Prof. Zervas, the Deputy Dean of the School of Science and Technology Prof. K. Bourikas, the Dean of the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design Prof. S. Zerefos, MODIP members Prof. D. Kalles and Assoc. Prof. I. Mavrommati, OMEA members Prof. Assistant Prof. A. Sgourou and Assoc. Prof. I. Mavrommati, MODIP staff Mrs. E. Kaldani, Mr. N. Karousos, and Mr. S. Karaiskakis: presentation of Institution and PSP history, academic profile, current status and future developments, strengths and areas of concern, degree compliance of the PSP to the quality standards for accreditation, internal procedures, course examinations, review of students' progress, course/instructor evaluations, etc.
- c) Meeting with two teaching staff members, Profs. K. Komnitsas and E. Zervas, Chief Administrative Officer, Mrs. M. Taliouri, and administrative staff members Mrs. M. Thanopoulou, Mrs. A. Christakopoulou, Mr. Th. Vagenas, Mrs. S. Stavropoulou, Mr. D. Ikonomou, and Mr. G. Temponeras: Discussion of facilities and learning resources.
- d) Private debriefing meeting (EEAP members only).

Tuesday, 19/09/2023:

Draft report writing.

Wednesday, 20/09/2023:

- a) Meeting and discussion with PSP of Environmental Design external teaching staff members: G. Arabatzis, F. Kehagia, D. Nalmbantis, Th. Theodosiou, and K. Sakantamis.
- b) Meeting and discussion with three (3) current PSP students.
- c) Meeting and discussion with three (3) PSP graduates.
- d) Meeting and discussion with employers and PSP social partners from both private and public sector: L. Vatikiotis, Institute of Small Businesses (IME GSEBEE); D. Tsesmelis, Neuropublic SA.
- e) Private debriefing meeting (EEAP members only): discussion of the outcomes and findings of the virtual visit; preparation of oral report.
- f) Closure meeting with the University Vice-President/President of MODIP, the PSP Director, the Dean of the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design, MODIP

members and staff, and OMEA members: informal, oral presentation of the EEAP key findings, and clarifications.

Thursday 21/09/2023 to Saturday 30/09/2023:

Draft report writing. EEAP virtual meetings. Review and finalization of draft report.

During the first meeting with the administration, the EEAP witnessed a hostile exchange between the program and the HOU upper administration. Such exchanges create a negative impression. Any issues should have been addressed internally before the EEAP review.

The number of PSP current students, graduates, as well as employers and social partners was very limited and representative of only one out of three thematic units of the PSP of Environmental Design.

Throughout the review and evaluation process, the EEAP was in close communication with the University MODIP, which was very accommodating in providing additional information requested by the EEAP. The EEAP found that OMEA and MODIP representatives, as well as the faculty, external teaching staff, students, and staff interviewed were eager and helpful in our discussions, providing all additional information requested by the EEAP.

III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile

The postgraduate study programme (PSP) of Environmental Design is organized and offered by the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design of the Hellenic Open University, located in Patras, Greece. The current postgraduate programme was established in 2016 by combining two previous programmes, Environmental Planning of Infrastructure Projects and Environmental Planning of Cities and Buildings (Government Gazette 4308/B/2016) and was restructured in 2021 with duration until the academic year 2023/2024. Originally under the School of Science and Technology, in the academic year 2021-2022 the current PSP was moved and is now under the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design.

The purpose of the PSP of Environmental Design is the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills related to the sustainable management and protection of the environment by those involved in the design, control, and management of technical infrastructure works, such as buildings, urban public space, landscapes, cities, as well as environmental planning and design to mitigate and/or adapt to climate change. The PSP has three options/specializations:

- Environmental Design of Infrastructure Works
- Environmental Design of Cities and Buildings
- Environmental Design for the Mitigation of Climate Change

For each specialization there are three specific thematic units (modules) and a fourth unit common to all three specializations.

Teaching in the PSP is realized by one faculty member of the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design and a roster of 54 external teaching staff members of other Greek Institutions and agencies. In addition, special technical staff and administrative staff assist the PSP.

The programme has set at 260 the maximum number of admitted students per academic year, distributed in groups of no more than 25 students. In the academic year 2022-2023, the mean number of students in each module was approximately 36, while 65 students were working on their postgraduate studies thesis. In 2022, the number of newly admitted students in the PSP of Environmental Design was 101, the number of registered students was 251, while the number of graduates was 66. The total number of graduates since the establishment of this new PSP is 125. Several of the postgraduate students the EEAP interviewed stated that the PSP of Environmental Design of the Hellenic Open University was among their first choice based on the combination of subjects covered and the specific specializations offered.

The PSP is a minimum two-years study resulting in a Diploma of Postgraduate Studies; the mean length of study is 3,34 years. To graduate, the student must have successfully passed 3 modules and a total of 120 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits, 80 for work related to the chosen modules and 40 for the preparation and successful completion of a postgraduate thesis. The EEAP found that the modules are extensive, covering advanced as well as new topics and technologies in Environmental Design.

The PSP prepares graduates for careers in both the private and public sector of the economy. There are strong links to the society, Industry, and local/national administration, which is key priority of the PSP of Environmental Design and the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design.

The School supports doctoral studies.

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)*

Documentation

- *Quality Assurance Policy of the PSP*
- *Quality goal setting of the PSP*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP of Environmental Design of the Hellenic Open University has set forth procedures towards adopting a high-quality assurance policy that is on par with the one of the Institution. The structure and organization of the courses within the PSP are well thought and appropriate,

while the teaching philosophy aims at instilling high quality education and specialized skills through distance learning in the aforementioned domain. The programme has set forth strategic goals of the quality of the education offered and the overall recognition of the programme to the public at large. The first is achieved by the overall overhaul of the programme, the partnership with specialized teaching staff from other Institutions and the increase of the percentage of students participating in the evaluation. The metrics for the second goal are the advertisement of the offered skills in job fairs, workshops and social media and the increased presence on the web advertising the programme, the specialized skills offered and the expertise of the teaching staff.

II. Analysis

The findings are supported by the detailed documents provided to the EEAP by the Institution and the Director of the PSP as well as the interviews with the teaching and support staff, current students, and alumni as well as stakeholders. Both the alumni and stakeholders were very enthusiastic about the quality of the programme.

III. Conclusions

The academic unit has established a Quality Assurance Policy that is appropriate for the PSP. It includes a commitment for its implementation and continuous improvement by both the academic unit and the institution. The established goals are relevant, measurable, and timely while they comply with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

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

To enhance adherence to Principle 1, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- The institution should consider offering nominal monetary awards solicited from outside sources, including industry, to students for papers published in peer-reviewed journals or “best paper” or “best poster” presentations in scientific meetings. This can further strengthen the relationship with the national job market.
- The alumni network should be more organized and be occasionally invited to offer input especially when major changes to the goals and metrics are planned.

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).

Documentation

- *Senate decision for the establishment of the PSP*
- *PSP curriculum structure: courses, course categories, ECTS awarded, expected learning outcomes according to the EQF, 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 (name list including of areas of specialisation, its relation to the courses taught, employment relationship, and teaching assignment in hours as well as other teaching commitments in hours)*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The current PSP represents the amalgamation of two previous programmes, namely Environmental Infrastructure Design and Environmental Design of Cities and Buildings. The goal of the PSP is the development of a critical thought, knowledge and specific skills aiming at the management and protection of the environment. The study programme of the thematic units offered in the PSP is quite detailed and informative. The incoming student has a clear picture of the workload and the expectations of the programme, issues that are particularly important for the targeted community of students who already have a professional career. There is a plan for the update of the teaching material (books, notes, etc.).

II. Analysis

The findings are supported by the detailed documents provided as well as the interviews with the teaching and support staff, current students, and alumni as well as stakeholders. Both the alumni and stakeholders were very enthusiastic about the appropriateness of the material covered in the programme and how this has helped shape their professional career. Overall, the PSP is well organized, focusing on the quality of the offered education and skills, the close interaction between the teaching staff and the students and the successful professional careers of the alumni that were interviewed.

III. Conclusions

The study programme complies with accepted standards and practices at other Institutions in this area of study. The expectations of the students are clearly articulated making the Student Guide appropriate. The study areas offered by the programme address real problems encountered by the public or the industry.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 2, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- Strong feedback from shareholders and alumni can assist in the further development of the programme.

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 plays 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.*

Documentation

- *Sample of a fully completed questionnaire for the evaluation of the PSP by the students*
- *Regulations for dealing with students' complaints and appeals*
- *Regulation for the function of academic advisor*
- *Reference to the teaching modes and assessment methods*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

In the PSP of Environmental Design, a set of good practices are implemented, including continuous contact with students beyond the obligations of the study guide, the adaptation of teaching and study programmes in accordance with current developments and the needs of

the public sector. Good communication and coordination among academic staff to align each subject area with the needs of distance learning. All of these are in line with the methodology of distance learning, in order to provide additional incentives, tools, and knowledge resources to the students. All academic staff at the Hellenic Open University attend specialized seminars on teaching using the distance learning methodology. This ensures their familiarity with the specific educational system. As part of the effort to enhance the student-centred educational process, a process for managing and tracking student complaints at the Hellenic Open University has been designed. Students are not provided with access to the statistical outcomes of the course/instructor assessments.

Students are well-informed and familiar with the assessment procedures, and they attest to receiving ample support from their professors and the programme. There is mutual respect between students and instructors, fostering a collaborative atmosphere and a sense of appreciation in their relationships.

II. Analysis

The Hellenic Open University clearly serves the societal need for lifelong learning and the demand for professional development of individuals in both private and public sectors. The teaching methods are adequate for meeting the needs of adult students, who are typically employed and self-sustaining. From the assessment of the programme, the student-centred approach of the postgraduate programme was evident, along with the academic staff's ability to meet this task and the successful implementation of existing procedures.

III. Conclusions

The rules and regulations that have been developed for this programme, such as student-centred learning, teaching, assessment, and degree award are considered adequate. There is room for improvement in the methods, processes, and tools used for the student-centred approach.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 3, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- The course/instructor assessment process could be combined with a collection of views before the start of the postgraduate programme on the expectations of incoming students. The results should be statistically analysed, and the conclusions communicated to the students.
- Every year, the changes selected for implementation based on the results of the assessment process should be evaluated and discussed with the students.

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.

Documentation

- *Internal regulation for the operation of the Postgraduate Study Programme*
- *Research Ethics Regulation*
- *Regulation of studies, internship, mobility, and student assignments*
- *Degree certificate template*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The admission procedures for the study programme are clear and accessible to students. They differ from those of a traditional university and provide an equal opportunity for lifelong learning to participants who meet basic undergraduate study criteria. According to the scholarship regulations of the Hellenic Open University, there are established scholarships available in all Study Programmes offered by the Institution. The EEAP did not engage in a conversation with a student who has received a scholarship. Student, academic, and administrative staff mobility is based on two main axes. Firstly, it involves personal collaborations and participation in conferences, scientific committees, elective bodies, as well as research collaboration and teaching in departments of other academic institutions. Secondly, it includes participation in the ERASMUS+ programme. There are processes and ample guidelines provided for the completion of assignments and theses.

II. Analysis

There are necessary documents that accurately describe all procedures for participation in the postgraduate programme, the rights and obligations of the students, the assessment requirements, and the completion of their thesis work. The EEAP recognized the effective organization of the postgraduate programme and the effectiveness of the regulations that promote academic culture and the value of knowledge.

III. Conclusions

The rules and regulations that have been developed for this programme guiding admission, progression, recognition, and degree award are considered adequate.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 4, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- For the internationalization of the PSP, interaction with similar University programmes abroad is recommended.

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.

Documentation

- *Procedures and criteria for teaching staff recruitment*
- *Employment regulations or contracts, and obligations of the teaching staff*
- *Policy for staff support and development*
- *Individual performance of the teaching staff in scientific-research and teaching work, based on internationally recognised systems of scientific evaluation (e.g. Google Scholar, Scopus, etc.)*
- *List of teaching staff including subject areas, employment relationship, Institution of origin, Department of origin*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The teaching staff of the HOU, and consequently of the PSP of Environmental Design is divided into teaching research staff (DEP) of the programme and external teaching staff of fixed duration contracts. One (1) faculty member of the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design of HOU and 54 external teaching staff members participate in the PSP.

For the selection and development of faculty members, the applicable provisions of the relevant laws are always applied. In addition to teaching duties, the external teaching staff members are obliged to undertake a set of other educational programme activities.

An internal evaluation is conducted annually to determine the level of quality of all educational processes and focuses on instructors, the organization of thematic units, educational material, material and administrative infrastructure. Students as well as coordinators of Thesis have the right to participate in this assessment. The evaluation by students is done by filling out an online questionnaire that is carried out before the start of the final exams. The internal evaluation is completed with the creation of the annual evaluation report, which includes statistical and qualitative analyses on the data of the electronic evaluation system. The unit

responsible for the evaluation of instructors is the Internal Evaluation Unit of School. Underperforming faculty are taken off of the roster of potential SEP teaching staff.

The academic development strategy of the University foresees actions such as: 1) the enrichment of existing Schools with academic staff of existing and new disciplines; and 2) the continuous training of academic staff in the utilization of innovative, educational methodologies and technologies. Incentives and financial support are actively provided by the University for the development of research and innovation. Also, the ERASMUS+ programme, in which HOU has been included since 2004, gives the opportunity to faculty members to teach or train in the framework of cooperation with European universities. For the dissemination of research results, faculty members participate in scientific networks, through which connected users are informed.

II. Analysis

The analysis of the findings is supported also by the interviews (via teleconference) with students, PSP graduates, employers, and stakeholders, as well as written documentation provided by the MODIP. Special attention is given to the PSP uniqueness, i.e., fully online multidisciplinary programme, with mid-career students of different educational backgrounds and practical experiences, and teaching staff comprised mostly of external teaching staff members. In spite of its complexity, the PSP of Environmental Design is able to attract, support and successfully develop a roster of qualified external teaching staff who subsequently deliver a robust educational programme. Faculty mobility and research is not only encouraged but also supported and rewarded.

III. Conclusions

Based on the above the following conclusions are derived:

The PSP enjoys a very enthusiastic support from students, graduates, employers, and the public. However, the number of students, graduates and other individuals who participated in the interviews with the EEAP was very limited, and represented mainly the thematic unit of Environmental Design which deals with the mitigation of climate change.

The programme maintains an excellent roster of external teaching staff (SEP) but is again limited to a single thematic unit. The PSP promotes a good environment for faculty growth through mobility and research.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 5, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- Add three additional School DEP faculty, one for each of the thematic units (i.e., environmental design of infrastructure works, environmental design of cities and buildings, and sustainability-environmental assessment).
- Rotate the PSP Director's position among the School faculty establishing a maximum three-year term.

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.

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 HOU and the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design make available to the PSP the necessary facilities including classrooms, laboratories, IT infrastructure, access to digital libraries and databases, etc. to ensure an appropriate teaching and learning environment. Due to the uniqueness of the PSP (fully online, multidisciplinary, and nontraditional mid-career student body), the PSP made sure there is an adequate range of support services to students as appropriate. The students are informed about the available services and these services are functional and easily accessed by the students online. There is a great number of competent administrative staff that ensure the smooth operation of student support services.

At HOU, the infrastructure and services for student learning and support are primarily central and therefore the coverage offered by the University is equally distributed among the different post-graduate programmes. The financial resources of the university come from student tuition fees, from competitive national or international development and/or research

programmes. The Curriculum is mainly supported through the electronic study platform. HOU has been supporting the organization of teleconferences, instead of face-to-face meetings, using communication software. More specifically the following services are functional and readily available:

- The Student Registry Department, responsible for handling all student issues.
- The Career Office, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, connecting HOU students and graduates with the labour market.
- The Erasmus Mobility Office, responsible for managing the mobility issues of students.
- The @distance Library and Information Center of HOU, aiming in the continuous support of the members of the academic community in their educational and research work.
- The Internal Evaluation Unit (in collaboration with HOU's Quality Assurance Unit, MODIP)
- Laboratory of Educational Material & Educational Methodology (EECOEM)
- Office of Teaching and Learning (GRADIM)
- Teaching Material Distribution Unit, responsible for sending the teaching material to the members of the Collaborating Teaching Staff and the students of HOU.
- Counselling & Psychological Support Center (KESYPSY)
- Office of the Student Ombudsman
- Laboratory of Energy and Environment Technology and Policy (ETEE). It should be noted that several instruments of the laboratory, mainly portable, are used from time to time by students preparing their dissertation.

During the semester, students can consult the faculty member responsible for the thematic unit they follow primarily by email and secondarily by phone. All of the aforementioned services are staffed with specialized support and administrative personnel. There is an approved staff reward as well as a tuition fees utilization plan.

II. Analysis

Based on the findings obtained from students, graduates, and faculty interviews, written documentation provided by MODIP, and the website, it is evident that the PSP of Environmental Design provides all the necessary support services for successful implementation of the programme.

III. Conclusions

The PSP of Environmental Design enjoys the HOU support and delivers a successful postgraduate programme.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 6, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- Implement software for closed captioning of lectures to assist hearing impaired students.

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.

Documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP of Environmental Design has established an integrated and well-documented procedure for the collection of data concerning the programme's activities. The PSP monitors the status of the students, the effectiveness of teaching methods, the progression of the students through the programme, and the employment opportunities that become available. The data collection is performed using several information systems for electronic registration and evaluation. The electronic system supports the collection and analysis of data. The course/instructor evaluation is embraced by both the faculty and the students.

The PSP has made an effort to stay in contact with the alumni of the programme in order to strengthen the ties among students, faculty and graduates, and to receive feedback for the programme.

II. Analysis

Recent graduates of the PSP have a high respect for the education they received and are enthusiastic about their potential involvement with the programme. The students interviewed

by the EEAP noted a significant improvement in how they deal with issues in their professional lives and how the process of seeking scientific and technical literature has become more systematic. However, none of them could provide a specific example from their professional life or analyse how they applied the knowledge gained during their studies. This highlights the challenge of implementing, or at the very least satisfactorily describing, the application of theoretical knowledge in their professional field.

The PSP does not currently have an external advisory board. The importance of the establishment of such a board cannot be overemphasized.

III. Conclusions

The continuous improvement of a graduate programme depends strongly on its ability to adopt new subjects and methods that are relevant to government, industry and the society in general. An external advisory board would create a link to the real world, bring visibility to the programme, and attract new resources for its support.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 7, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- The EEAP commends the efforts of the PSP to optimize the data capture methods, and the use of the information to continuously improve the educational process. The course/instructor evaluation process could be further improved by conducting a mid-term evaluation and making the results available to the students.
- The PSP has made some efforts to connect with the alumni of the programme. These efforts should be intensified by including recent graduates in the evaluation process, conducting additional surveys of graduates, and trying to engage them in promoting the mission of the programme.
- It became evident during the interviews with employers and senior stakeholders of the PSP that this group represents an untapped resource that could bring immense benefits to the programme. The EEAP believes that this group should be included in the formal information exchange and should be invited to participate in the continuous improvement of the educational process and the PSP as a whole.
- An external advisory board should be created and invited to meet once a semester with the faculty and administration.

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.

Documentation

- *Dedicated segment on the website of the department for the promotion of the PSP*
- *Bilingual version of the PSP website with complete, clear and objective information*
- *Provision for website maintenance and updating*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

Vital information about the Hellenic Open University and the PSP of Environmental Design is available online. The website is organised into seven categories. The main tabs consist of the following:

- Hellenic Open University
- Administration
- Education
- Research
- Announcements
- Contacts

In tab Education, there is information about the offered PSP of Environmental Design <https://www.eap.gr/en/environmental-design/>

The information is clear, objective, and current. Content is available both in Greek and English for most part. The purpose, learning outcomes and structure of the programme can be easily seen at the frontal page of the PSP.

II. Analysis

The PSP of Environmental Design website offers sufficient information about the programme and a detailed outline of each course module, the intended learning outcomes of every module, the teaching-learning procedures used, and the evaluation method. Most information covers institutional activities such as new undergraduate and post-graduate programmes, ECTS, Tuition fees, degree awarded, the responsible professor/instructor and contact information.

The University website provides information about employment prospective and announcements. It also covers basic information about services offered to students, registration, the issuing of academic ID, academic calendar, infrastructure, laboratories, research, and the library.

Active LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram profiles for the Institution have been set up, raising visibility of events, lectures and accomplishments of students and staff. Meanwhile, there are no profiles specifically for the PSP of Environmental Design.

Accessibility options (Text Readability, Colour Contrast) are provided by pressing the appropriate button, making the website accessible to vision-impaired visitors.

The release of all information is subject to the internal quality control of OMEA, which is responsible for curating the material.

There needs to be more information about bus transportation to the institution's facilities.

It is not possible to find information about the teaching staff other than the name and contact of the director of the PSP of Environmental Design, while his curriculum can be seen only on the website of the School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design to which this PSP belongs.

III. Conclusions

The Institution's website provides information about both teaching and other academic activities in both Greek and English. The website of the Post-graduate Programme Environmental Design could have more marketing information about the programme's usefulness, job opportunities and testimonies on Alumni. The brief curriculum of the teaching staff (Director and external teaching staff members) should be more visible.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Public information concerning the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 8, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- Include Google Scholar, Web of Science, ORCID and/or Scopus ID for each Staff member on the webpage of the PSP.
- Homogenization is needed of all accessible information regarding faculty: education, published work, collaborations, research areas of interest.
- Create relevant information for prospective incoming ERASMUS+ students. In particular, it should be simple to locate the English courses offered each semester. An "International/Exchange students" button could be used.
- Design Social Media button prompts for the PSP to increase the visibility of the online presence.

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.

Documentation

- *Procedure for the re-evaluation, redefinition and updating of the PSP curriculum*
- *Procedure for mitigating weaknesses and upgrading the structure of the PSP and the learning process*
- *Feedback processes concerning the strategy and quality goal setting of the PSP and relevant decision-making processes (students, external stakeholders)*
- *Results of the annual internal evaluation of the PSP by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), and the relevant minutes*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The self-assessment of the programme is based on procedures and continuous improvement of the level of educational offerings along with supporting the learning environment, ensuring the current character of the programme, and the strategic goals of the Institution. Factors considered for the assessment include the student's workload, students' expectations, and the assessment of the students. Also, scientific/technological developments, societal and job market needs, and national, European, and international environmental policies are considered. The annual report is submitted to MODIP for review, and recommendations are shared with the School general assembly. Decisions are made at the end of the academic year and are implemented at the beginning of the next academic year. The programme director collects information from the delivery of the programme, along with scientific, technological, business, and societal developments. The Director collects all requests for changes to the programme, such as changes to the course content, course schedule/calendar, faculty workload, proposals for new courses, etc. Using the student course/instructor evaluations

along with requests related to suggested changes, a proposal is submitted to the School assembly.

II. Analysis

Through the process of internal review and continuous improvement plan, the positive aspects of the programme are reinforced, such as adding new topics based on scientific developments. The collected information is analysed, and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up to date. There is a strategically designed consideration for improving courses using the course evaluations by students. Programme weaknesses are immediately addressed when problems are identified with the programme in students' evaluation. Remediation of knowledge gaps of the students was achieved through special seminars, extended office hours for the faculty to assist students, in addition to the availability of the academic advisor.

The PSP is reviewed and revised regularly but without the direct involvement of students and other stakeholders. Extension of collaborations with international sectors and involvement in external activities such as conferences should be common practice. Enrichment of learning materials should be more frequent.

III. Conclusions

The self-assessment procedure of the programme is scheduled to take place annually.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: Periodic internal review of the new study programmes	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 9, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- The students' participation and the involvement of external stakeholders in the study programme revisions should be enhanced further.
- Enrichment and update of learning materials should be more frequent.

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.

Documentation

- *Progress report of the PSP in question, on the results from the utilisation of possible recommendations included in the External Evaluation Report of the Institution, and in the IQAS Accreditation Report, with relation to the postgraduate study programmes*

Study Programme Compliance

The PSP of Environmental Design does not have an external evaluation. Following the instructions of HAHE to this Principle, the EEAP utilised the IQAS Accreditation Report (2021) of the HOU.

I. Findings

The Evaluation and Accreditation Council of HAHE, at its 10th/11-02-2021 meeting, certified that the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) of the HOU fully complies (Fully Compliant) with the principles of the Quality Standard IQAS of the HAHE and the Quality Assurance Principles of the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). The duration of the Accreditation is set for four years, from 11-02-2021 to 10-02-2025. HAHE, with its decision number 31301/27-12-22 revised the validity period of the HOU IQAS certification from four to five years. The new validity period of the certification was set from 11-02-21 to 10-02-2026.

II. Analysis

The IQAS Accreditation Report included several recommendations for improvement for the HOU and the School's graduate and post-graduate programmes. MODIP transmitted to the Schools and Directors of the postgraduate programmes a progress report with seven recommendations for follow-up actions from the 29 recommendations for the Institution.

The PSP of Environmental Design complies with most of the recommendations of the external evaluation but, recommendation #2 related to incoming Erasmus students and professors, more needs to be done since only two incoming Erasmus students participated. Also, regarding recommendation #1 about updated educational materials, the progress still needs to be faster and more frequent.

III. Conclusions

A few recommendations (#1, #2) of the IQAS Accreditation Report in 2021 have yet to be fully realised.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Regular external evaluation and accreditation of the new undergraduate programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

To enhance adherence to Principle 10, the EEA Panel recommends the following:

- All recommendations of the external evaluations at Institutional and postgraduate programme levels should have a deadline for implementation by the HOU.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- The Institution has implemented compliant, efficient mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring high quality of work and services relative to the PSP. Quality assurance policies are already implemented regarding teaching delivery, assessment, and student progression. The existing quality assurance and continuous improvement policy and practices followed by the PSP align with the strategic objectives of the School and the Institution.
- The faculty and staff are enthusiastic and dedicated to their mission. The students' overall experience is very positive. The enthusiasm of current students, employers, and other stakeholders was evident.
- The participation of women in teaching, research, and administration is valued and recognized.
- Structured and relatively well-organized distance learning.
- Employers and social partners see a clear need for graduates of the postgraduate studies programme.

II. Areas of Weakness

- The existing programme website needs improvement; English version should be updated and completed.
- There are limited interactions with alumni after graduation.
- Usage of phone and/or email instead of teleconference platforms for communication between faculty and students.
- There is only one permanent teaching member of the School involved in the PSP.
- Costly procedures for student participation in group activities (transportation, accommodation and participation, e.g., summer school).
- Lack of an External Advisory Board.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Establish a formal process for the active participation of students in the curriculum development and study programme revisions.
- Enhance and regularly update the web site of the programme, including the complete development of a version in English. In particular, include Google Scholar, Web of Science, ORCID, and/or Scopus ID for each teaching staff member; homogenize all accessible information regarding faculty, such as education, published work, collaborations, research areas of interest; create relevant information for prospective incoming ERASMUS+ students; identify courses in English offered each semester; add Social Media button prompts.

- Add three additional School DEP faculty, one for each of the thematic units (i.e., solid waste management, liquid waste management, and management of air pollutants). Rotate the PSP Director's position among the DEP faculty establishing a maximum three-year term.
- Implement software for closed captioning of lectures to assist hearing impaired students.
- Enrich learning materials frequently.
- Establish an External Advisory Board which will guide the continuous review, revision, and further development of the PSP curriculum, and enhance the entire programme.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 10.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **5, 7, 8, and 9.**

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

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

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

Signature

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2. **Professor Thomas Panagopoulos**
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