



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



Εθνική Αρχή  
Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης  
Hellenic Authority  
for Higher Education

Αριστείδου 1 & Ευριπίδου 2 • 10559 Αθήνα | 1 Aristidou str. & 2 Evripidou str. • 10559 Athens, Greece  
T. +30 210 9220 944 • F. +30 210 9220 143 • E. secretariat@ethaae.gr • [www.ethaae.gr](http://www.ethaae.gr)

# Accreditation Report for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

**Geography**

**Institution: University of the Aegean**

**Date: 11 July 2020**

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Geography** of the **University of the Aegean** for the purposes of granting accreditation

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Part A: Background and Context of the Review .....</b>	<b>4</b>
I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel .....	4
II. Review Procedure and Documentation.....	5
III. Study Programme Profile.....	6
<b>Part B: Compliance with the Principles .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance.....	7
Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment .....	13
Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification .....	15
Principle 5: Teaching Staff .....	18
Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support .....	21
Principle 7: Information Management .....	24
Principle 8: Public Information.....	26
Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes.....	28
Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes.....	30
<b>Part C: Conclusions .....</b>	<b>32</b>
I. Features of Good Practice .....	32
II. Areas of Weakness .....	33
III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions .....	33
IV. Summary & Overall Assessment .....	34

## **PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW**

### **I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel**

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Geography** of the **University of the Aegean** comprised the following four (4) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. **Professor Dimitri Ioannides** (Chair), Mid-Sweden University, Sweden
2. **Dr. Antonia Nousia**, London South Bank University, United Kingdom
3. **Dr. Seraphim Alvanides**, Northumbria University, United Kingdom
4. **Professor Petros Petsimeris**, Université Paris - Panthéon-Sorbonne, France

## II. Review Procedure and Documentation

Three members of the External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel (EEAC) met briefly during the HAHE orientation on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Dr. Nousia who was participating in another evaluation was absent; she had attended an earlier orientation. Subsequently, the panel chair sent a series of messages to ensure everyone had the relevant documentation for the meeting on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 with the Department of Geography at the University of the Aegean.

Because of the recent global crisis relating to COVID-19, the “on-site” visit took place through a series of teleconferences held on July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020. During these two days, the EEAC met twice to discuss observations and findings and determine the division of labour. Several intensive meetings were held via Zoom during the period July 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> to finalize the report.

On the first day of the “on-site” visit, the EEAC first met with the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and Student Welfare, Professor Elena Theodoropoulou who introduced the history of the university. The head, Professor Nikolaos Soulakelis introduced the Department and explained its trajectory since the early 1990s. This was followed by a discussion with various faculty members who presented in detail the self-study report. They explained how the Department seeks to comply to the quality standards of accreditation. A more general meeting with several faculty members ensued with an open dialogue revolving around matters such as workload assignments, student mobility, student evaluations and the balance between teaching and research. The faculty also identified weaknesses.

During the second day, the EEAC first met with 9 undergraduate students currently in the programme. The discussion revolved around their experience regarding their admission to the programme but also in terms of the programme content and their interaction with the faculty. Students gave their insights as to the overall quality of facilities including accommodation. An on-line site tour (through video-link) followed through which the Department Head and other faculty described the setting of the Department, the available facilities and the plans over the next two years to enhance the environment. Subsequently, the EEAC met with ten programme graduates who finished at various times over the last 15 years and currently work or study either in Greece or abroad. This meeting was particularly enlightening since it demonstrated the close connection these individuals maintain with the university. The EEAC also met with several employers and programme partners to discuss how they benefit through the presence of the Geography Department. The final event of the day was an exit meeting with several faculty members, the Department Head and the Vice Rector, primarily in order to obtain clarification on certain points that had emerged from the previous meetings.

Overall, despite the fact that the EEAC was unable to conduct a physical on-site visit to the Department, the materials provided as well as all the meetings helped the panel to build a thorough picture as to the current state of affairs at the Department. A PowerPoint presentation provided during the first day of meetings by the Department proved especially helpful for developing this accreditation report since it addresses in detail every required principle. The Department Head and several of his colleagues and administrative support provided additional materials that proved especially helpful when compiling this report.

### **III. Study Programme Profile**

The Department of Geography is located on the island of Lesbos at the multi-campus University of the Aegean that was established in 1994. It was the first geography department in Greece and, today, it is one of just two such units nationwide (the other is at Harokopio University in Athens). A fundamental reason behind the creation of the Department of Geography at the University of the Aegean was that the (at-the-time) newly established university had a mandate to develop innovative programmes of study in areas previously not encountered in Greek academe. Since geography was then in its infancy, it was felt that the establishment of such a department, encompassing a multidisciplinary programme addressing both physical and socioeconomic processes from a spatial perspective would be an important step in the discipline's development throughout Greece. The Department (which since 1997 encompasses both human and physical geography and since 1999 has been a self-standing unit) aims: to train geographers; to conduct scientific research in various areas of the discipline, and; to demonstrate that geographers can, through their research, address several environmental and socio-economic issues locally, nationally but also globally. The Department offers degrees at all levels of study, namely: a 4-year undergraduate degree; a 2-year Masters, and a doctoral degree. At a latest count, 820 persons have graduated with an undergraduate degree, 325 with a masters' and 46 PhDs. In all, there are currently 22 full-time faculty members plus several support staff.

The undergraduate programme in geography is worth 240 ECTS spread through 4 years (8 13-week semesters). Students can choose from 4 areas of concentration, namely: physical geography and the environment; human geography; spatial planning and development, and geoinformatics (geospatial science). All students, regardless of area of concentration, must take 23 mandatory courses spread over 4 years and complete a compulsory final thesis. Each area of concentration students must also choose several elective courses to complete their studies. Almost all courses are worth 5 ECTS each while the thesis is worth 10. The Department's detailed study guide offers useful information concerning the curriculum, including a suggested programme of study for students in each of the 4 areas of concentration. Upon completing each class, students are encouraged to complete an evaluation, which is used by the faculty to make changes and improvements in future versions of the taught material. Most courses include a mix of teaching methods including lectures, seminars and presentations, practical exercises, and field work.

Since 2016 the programme graduates together with their counterparts at Harokopio have enjoyed employment rights, which strengthen their position to gain employment as geographers in the labour market. Approximately 52% of students who completed their studies in the undergraduate programme are employed while 39% of the graduates took between 0-3 months to find employment.

Overall, the Department of Geography has built a solid reputation as a centre of research. The specialization of faculty members reflects the four disciplinary concentrations: geoinformatics; human geography; physical geography and the environment, and spatial planning and development.

Most of the Department's 22 faculty members are highly productive with publications in international peer-reviewed journals, presentations at international conferences and invited keynote speeches in high profile venues.

## PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

### Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

**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 ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.**

*The quality assurance policy of the academic unit is in line with the Institutional policy on quality, and is included in a published statement that is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special objectives related to the quality assurance of study programmes offered by the academic unit.*

*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 programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.*

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

- a) the suitability of the structure and organization of the curriculum;*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education;*
- c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching;*
- d) the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff;*
- e) the enhancement of the quality and quantity of the research output among faculty members of the academic unit;*
- f) ways for linking teaching and research;*
- g) the level of demand for qualifications acquired by graduates, in the labour market;*
- h) the quality of support services such as the administrative services, the Library, and the student welfare office;*
- i) the conduct of an annual review and an internal audit of the quality assurance system of the undergraduate programme(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

### Study Programme Compliance

The Department of Geography has a quality assurance policy for its undergraduate programme, which aims to provide education and produce new knowledge in a manner that reflects equity, security and transparency in an ethical manner. In developing this policy, the Department has adhered, among others, to the strategic and operational plan of the University of the Aegean

2018-2024, an external evaluation of the Institution from 2016 and an external evaluation of the Department from the same year. It also follows the guidelines of quality of the Institution.

Strategically the Department has 6 goals aimed at quality, which are respectively:

1. Continuous upgrading of the programmes and improvement in the performance of students.
2. Support for innovative research, which will reinforce the development of the Department's several research environments.
3. Support for the internationalization of the Department's educational and research undertakings.
4. Expansion of the Department's role and contribution to the communities of the Aegean.
5. Improvement in the quality of organization and operations of the labour force.
6. Support for the continuous maintenance and upgrading of infrastructure and services relating, for instance, to teaching.

Operationally, in order to ensure continuous quality assurance, the Department develops and adopts a policy aimed at quality through discussions and formal decision-making involving faculty, support staff members and the student body. The Department annually investigates and recommends necessary changes. For instance, by conducting student evaluations in each of the courses, the aim is to examine both the perceived quality of the content of the courses while assessing the performance of individual faculty members. Furthermore, the Department produces, on an annual basis, a comprehensive list of quality-related indicators. For example, it monitors the average number of credits per course, the proportion of required courses to complete the programme, the proportion of programme prerequisites or the proportion of courses that emphasize skill development. Subsequently, the Department seeks to institute, among others, improvements in terms of faculty course loads, student evaluation scores and the participation of students in international exchanges (e.g. through the Erasmus+ programme). The Department also monitors gender balance in terms of its student body and seeks to see an improvement in the number of female graduates.

The Department's internal evaluation as well as its quality assurance measures are uploaded for review and discussion in Greek of the unit's website.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 1: Institution Policy for Quality Assurance</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The Department of Geography at the University of the Aegean maintains a quality assurance policy that is in tandem with the Institution's guidelines. The constant monitoring in terms of quality related indicators is a positive aspect. Of course, room for improvement exists. For instance, the Department should constantly seek to identify measures to improve the student

retention rate (from admission to graduation) and improve the gender ratio, especially in terms of the graduation rates of female students. In the context of growing internationalization, it is also important to intensify efforts to encourage the Department's students to participate in international exchange programmes such as through Erasmus+.

## Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING A DEFINED WRITTEN PROCESS WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE PARTICIPANTS, INFORMATION SOURCES AND THE APPROVAL COMMITTEES FOR THE PROGRAMME. THE OBJECTIVES, THE EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES, THE INTENDED PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND THE WAYS TO ACHIEVE THEM ARE SET OUT IN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN. THE ABOVE DETAILS AS WELL AS INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME'S STRUCTURE ARE PUBLISHED IN THE STUDENT GUIDE.

*Academic units develop their programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the objectives, the subject areas, the structure and organisation, the expected learning outcomes and the intended professional qualifications according to the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. The approval or revision process for programmes includes a check of compliance with the basic requirements described in the Standards, on behalf of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

*Furthermore, the programme design should take into consideration the following:*

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
- *the option to provide work experience to the students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution*

### Study Programme Compliance

The four-year (240 ECTS) undergraduate programme in geography at the University of the Aegean offers a holistic approach to the science of geography by developing both the student's knowledge and theoretical understanding while providing them with the skillset to conduct research and engage in educational activities but also enabling them to be employable upon graduation. The progression of courses is logically organized beginning with those offering basic knowledge during the first years, and progressively, a greater degree of specialization in their chosen main track and secondary track during the latter part of their studies. Courses are awarded credits on the basis of ECTS, which is now the standard throughout the European Union. Until 2020, the structure of the programme was as follows. Students had to complete 125 ECTS in subjects offering basic knowledge in the main areas of thematic study in geography as well as methods-based courses while also completing a compulsory major project (thesis). Further, the students chose to take 60 ECTS in two of the four programme tracks (i.e. human geography, physical geography and the environment, spatial planning, and development and geoinformatics). Finally, the students had to select a further 55 ECTS of electives to complete their respective programme of study.

Following a programme adjustment in 2020 there will now be 23 courses worth 5 ECTS each under the compulsory rubric of general knowledge in geography plus the compulsory thesis worth 10 ECTS making up 125 ECTS. The number of required courses relating to the areas of concentration shall now make up 70 ECTS (instead of 60) whereby student must pick eight courses from one area and a further six from a secondary one. The programme will be completed with nine elective courses for a total of 45 ECTS.

There are several learning outcomes of the courses and the programme overall, all of which relate to the broader strategy of the University of the Aegean, which seeks to provide education of the highest quality while producing high-ranking research. These learning outcomes include ones relating to the development of knowledge and skillsets in the field of geography but also to more general objectives relating to the ability to think critically when encountering scientific-related problems and to be capable to present their work both orally and in writing.

The undergraduate programme is evaluated according to two processes, each of which follows two different timelines. First, there is the annual evaluation that relates to the allocation of courses to be taught each year. The exact number of these courses depends on the availability of qualified permanent faculty members and the number of temporary teaching positions that are on offer. In allocating teachers to courses it is imperative that all compulsory courses are covered while a minimum number of electives relating to each of the programme four concentrations must also be covered. Lesser priority is given to the additional electives and so it is highly possible that several of these may not be taught in any given year.

The second type of evaluation is the one that takes place periodically either every five or every ten years. Here, the committee of the programme discusses with members or administration and all faculty members in the Department as well as representatives of the student body but also the Association of Greek Geographers and, if necessary, various stakeholders. Depending on the feedback of all these participants, while also taking into consideration the student evaluations that are carried out after the completion of each class, recommendations are made for improvements/changes. The latest evaluation of this kind occurred in 2019, leading to the programme shifts in 2020. It was based, among others, on observations regarding the realities of the employment market.

Efforts have been made to institute a degree of compatibility between the Department of Geography at the University of the Aegean with the only other geography department in Greece, namely the one at the Harokopio. Further, efforts have been made to follow trends that have been set at various international universities, including one of the leading institutions in the US (the University of Georgia). In other words, the undergraduate programme in geography at the University of the Aegean reflects trends at various universities worldwide.

A final point should be made about the opportunity for students to participate in practical training. Currently, the Department offers to students in the latter stages of their studies an elective practical experience. This can either be done through funding provided by the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) or if the employer agrees to pay the student(s) directly. The Department assigns one person to be in charge of the practical training. This person seeks to ensure that students who apply to do the practical training will have a placement and to assign academic advisors for each participating student. Unfortunately, since this course is not

mandatory and, perhaps because it is hard to find placements (especially paid ones) for everyone, not every student can participate.

### Panel Judgement

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

### Panel Recommendations

The EEAC is satisfied that the Department has in place a quality programme that parallels offerings in terms of disciplinary tracks (physical geography, human geography, geoinformatics and spatial planning and development) that exist in many universities worldwide. Obviously, improvements can always be implemented when it comes to academic programmes given a number of factors such as the changing needs of the labour market, technological advances and the emergence of novel disciplinary specialisations.

While the EEAC acknowledges that considerable efforts have been made to refine the course offerings and cut down on the number of overall courses (something that was recommended after the evaluation of 2014) there remains a concern that there are still too many courses in the programme, thus raising worries relating to (among others) teaching loads.

The faculty should at least explore the possibility of further streamlining the number of course offerings, perhaps by eventually consolidating some of the required introductory courses into ones worth a higher number of credits. For example, there could introduce a couple of general “introduce the discipline” courses such as “Introduction to human geography” and “Introduction to physical geography” each of which is worth a higher number of ECTS than 5. Each of these would and incorporate material that appears in several of the existing introductory courses. Furthermore, efforts should be made to make the practical training placement a mandatory requirement for all students. This would substantially improve their chances upon graduation of finding employment in fields that are highly relevant to their degree.

### Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES ARE DELIVERED IN A WAY THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CREATING THE LEARNING PROCESS. THE ASSESSMENT METHODS SHOULD REFLECT THIS APPROACH.**

*Student-centred learning and teaching play an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement 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, enabling flexible learning paths;*
- *considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;*
- *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;*
- *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement;*
- *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys;*
- *reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff;*
- *promotes mutual respect in the student - teacher relationship;*
- *applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.*

*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;*
- *the regulations for assessment consider mitigating circumstances;*
- *assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;*
- *a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*

#### Study Programme Compliance

The Department indicates that the teaching methods used in the undergraduate programme are strongly linked to the Department's overall educational strategy, which has two interlinked educational objectives. These involve both scientific education (enabling the accumulation of knowledge and theoretical understanding) but also the provision of professionally oriented (practical) skills and knowledge to enhance these individuals' chances of employability upon graduation. Several courses include various combinations of teaching methods. For example, in addition to traditional lectures there can include in-class exercises and labs, presentations and/or field work. Students are regularly required to complete both individual and group assignments.

These approaches are fully compliant with methods utilized in undergraduate teaching in other countries of the EU and further afield that also emphasize student-centred learning. The students who were interviewed (both current students and those who have graduated) expressed a high degree of satisfaction concerning the manner of teaching in the Department. They pointed out that the relatively small size of classes, rarely above 20 students (except for introductory courses), is a positive factor since it encourages high student-teacher interaction. Moreover, the students and the alumni expressed a high degree of satisfaction concerning the easy accessibility to their teachers either in person or via email or other electronic means of communication (e.g., SKYPE meetings). One of the alumni stated that it was the easiness of accessibility to the faculty and the fact that the teachers are extremely supportive and care about the students that enables the latter to develop the skills as geographers.

The course objectives and expected outcomes but also the expectations and methods of assessment are clearly listed in the syllabi, which appear on the Department website. Furthermore, students are encouraged upon completion of each class to fill in a course/faculty evaluation form. In this form, half the questions address quantitative indices while the other half address issues that can be expressed qualitatively. Several faculty members also conduct in-class “exit” discussions on the final day of the class where students are encouraged to express their opinions verbally as to what they liked or disliked about the content, the assignments and the teaching style, and what improvements they would like to see implemented.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

Overall, the Department of Geography has for several years adopted student-centred learning and this is visible in the various syllabi but also acknowledged by the students who were present during the site visit. The EEAC notes that, in recent years, the assessments conducted at the end of each course are completed by an increased number of students possibly because now these include qualitative oriented questions as well as quantitative indices. Nevertheless, on average, fewer than 10% of students fill in these surveys and so it is recommended to step-up efforts to encourage them to do so while also identifying other means for students to communicate their perceptions concerning courses and faculty.

## Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

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

*Institutions and academic units need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, manage and act on information regarding student progression.*

*Procedures concerning the award and recognition of higher education degrees, the duration of studies, rules ensuring students progression, terms and conditions for student mobility should be based on the institutional study regulations. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.*

*Graduation represents the culmination of the students' study period. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed (Diploma Supplement).*

### Study Programme Compliance

Incoming students are supported at the University level in the first instance, with a dedicated website and a detailed "Guide for New Students". In addition, there are specific sections in the departmental website providing all the relevant details to incoming students. The Department organizes a welcome event in early October to support the new students, inform them on administrative and wellbeing matters, as well as guide them through the academic programme and their options. All members of academic and teaching support staff post dedicated office hours, advertised at the start of each semester and are available for students to consult them. These provisions extend to incoming Erasmus+ students who also receive language tuition and support from a dedicated Erasmus+ office, as well as 4 courses delivered in English (20 ECTS in total). There are very clear guidelines and regulations for the progression and monitoring of students and the Department has implemented fully the ECTS throughout the programme of studies. Work placements are encouraged, but not compulsory and can be recognized with a dedicated course of "Practical Training" (2.5 ECTS), funded either by the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) or via Erasmus+ for traineeships abroad.

The EEAC's discussions with groups of current and past students, confirmed the impression that the university and departmental websites are well designed and provide ample information not only for the current but also for potential students making their choices. In addition, past and present students commented very positively on the continuous support and mentoring received by the academic and administrative staff of the Department throughout their studies and beyond. The practical training opportunities were also positively highlighted by the groups of students, as well as by the group of non-academic stakeholders, offering current and potential employment opportunities.

Although the University and the Department are supportive of Erasmus+, the numbers involved are relatively low, especially for outgoing students and faculty. This is related to the fact that the Department is located in a relatively “remote” island meaning that many students already must relocate from other parts of the country to attend their studies. This imposes an additional financial and temporal burden on many students (many of whom are from families with limited resources) and, therefore, additional mobility as part of Erasmus+ might be beyond their means. There is, however, a clear commitment from the Department and support from staff for Erasmus+ mobility to be strengthened in the future for students and faculty alike.

As part of their studies, students must complete a compulsory Diploma (“Bachelors”) Thesis (*Πτυχιακή Εργασία*) in order to graduate, worth 10 ECTS (from 2020 onwards). The Department has detailed guidelines for the steps of the thesis. Topics are approved at a meeting and each supervised student is allocated an examination committee of 5 academic/teaching staff. Students are encouraged to participate in research activities and engage with the various Research Laboratories. The grading criteria for the thesis are communicated clearly to the students and the examination involves presentation of the thesis and a public defence.

### Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The Department has a “student-centric” approach, demonstrating dedication to the learning process and overall student experience. A number of recommendations:

- **Mobility:** Efforts to increase student and faculty mobility should be strengthened through transparent processes for the allocation of Erasmus+ funding.
- **Practical Training:** The course is well-organized in terms of allocation/supervision and monitoring. It is an excellent opportunity to connect with local/national and European employers/organisations promoting the Department and its graduates. Although this course is for 2 months, it is worth just 2.5 ECTS. The Department should review the workload for this course and consider increasing it to at least 5 ECTS. The academic deliverable should be modified to a reflective assignment (currently it is a descriptive “activity report”).
- **Diploma (“Bachelors”) Thesis:** Given the quality of the Theses reviewed, the research strengths of the Department and the academic effort involved (both from students and from staff), the current weighting (10 ECTS out of 240 ECTS) allocated to this activity is on the lower end, compared to international standards. Effectively, it is valued as 2 “normal courses”, but 10 ECTS is only 1/24<sup>th</sup> of the overall programme. For comparison, most UK Universities award 20 out of 180 ECTS or 1/9<sup>th</sup>. Given the research strengths and support the Department offers,

we strongly encourage an increase to 20 ECTS for the Diploma (“Bachelors”) Thesis to reflect the effort involved.

## Principle 5: Teaching Staff

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCE OF THE TEACHING STAFF. THEY SHOULD APPLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING STAFF.**

*The Institutions and their academic units have a major responsibility as to the standard of their teaching staff providing them with a supportive environment that promotes the advancement of their scientific work. In particular, the academic unit should:*

- *set up and follow clear, transparent and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff and offer them conditions of employment that recognize the importance of teaching and research;*
- *offer opportunities and promote the professional development of the teaching staff;*
- *encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;*
- *encourage innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies;*
- *promote the increase of the volume and quality of the research output within the academic unit;*
- *follow quality assurance processes for all staff members (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training etc.);*
- *develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff.*

### Study Programme Compliance

There are 22 academic faculty members distributed as follows: eleven professors; five associate professors and six assistant professors. Further, there are three laboratory-based teaching staff members. All are drawn from a range of academic and professional backgrounds with expertise and research activity which reflects the four disciplinary areas of the Department: Physical Geography and Environment, Human Geography, Spatial Planning and Development, and Geo-informatics. In addition, there are two IT technicians responsible for the information system of the Department.

All faculty members are actively involved in research that supports and complements the delivery of the study programme and teaching of the courses. There is evidence that faculty relate and translate their research activities into their courses. This sometimes leads to joint research publication together with students. The publication track record of the staff is excellent and confirms the strong research profile and activities of the Department. According to the data published in 2019 by the Department, the faculty members had collectively produced 794 articles in refereed journals, 59 monographs, 311 chapters in books and 795 conference presentations by members of staff. Moreover, these individuals' works have collectively accumulated 21,950 citations to date.

The use of electronic platforms and e-class for teaching and administration confirms that the Department promotes the use of new technologies. The faculty and students view this platform as integral to enhancing both the teaching and learning experience. The students confirmed the usefulness of the platform and the fact that it is a highly dependable resource, which enables them to follow their various course activities.

Faculty members are encouraged to take sabbatical leave, which provides the opportunity for them to advance their careers and engage in professional development opportunities. The Department maintains connections with many institutions in Greece and abroad leading to teaching and research collaborations and staff mobility opportunities, which are highly encouraged. Several faculty members have participated in Erasmus+ teaching mobility exchanges and many travel as part of research programmes, collaborative activities and conferences. Each faculty member, on average, receives funding for two conferences per year.

The Department administers anonymous student evaluation questionnaires regarding the course content and delivery. The EEAC was informed during the discussions with current students of the programme of instances where their evaluations resulted in course content changes and improvements. This situation indicated to the students that their opinion is well regarded, and actions are often taken based on their input.

The faculty members stated during the EEAC-staff meeting that they believe their teaching workload is acceptable. Nevertheless, some of them stated that approximately eight additional teaching staff are needed in order to better streamline the workload for all. No specific evidence was provided as to why this is the desirable number.

There are no formal assessment processes for faculty with respect to attendance and performance. This could be detrimental to the overall performance of the study programme due to the location of the university. However, it is the Department Head's role to monitor these activities. EEAC was told that these issues can be raised during the promotion process for individual staff.

Unfortunately, given the peripheral location of the university, no specific policies exist to attract new faculty members nor are there any incentives to entice them to move to the island. Generally, in Greece most persons who are seeking an academic position prefer to move to more metropolitan locations, especially Athens and to a lesser extent Thessaloniki. This problem according to the faculty members, which the EEAC interacted with, does not appear to affect the programme although that might have been the case in the early years of its operation. This is because the Department has, over the years, developed an international reputation as a centre of research excellence and, as such, now finds itself in a position to attract highly qualified and experienced academics.

There is a clear and transparent process for the recruitment of staff. Job availability postings are advertised at the University and departmental webpages. A panel of internal and external members decide on the most suitable candidate based on selection criteria.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 5: Teaching Staff</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## **Panel Recommendations**

The Department has excellent faculty and staff members, many of whom have a very strong (international level) track record as researchers. Given the number of persons who have reached the rank of professor it is evident that there are opportunities for mobility up the employment ladder and, indeed, many of the faculty members have remained in the Department since having been hired as junior members; in other words, quite a few of the faculty members retain their association with the university for many years or even their entire professional career despite the University's peripheral location. We do, however, recommend that when persons leave the environment either because of retirement or for another job that the Department should have the ability to substitute them. In other words, if two persons leave, they should be replaced by two others. Finally, we note that there is a skewed gender balance in terms of the faculty composition. Of the eleven professors, only three are women while there are currently no female associate professors and only three assistant professors (out of eight). The EEAC recommends that the faculty will seek to rectify this situation when new openings arise, especially since there are several Greek women who are currently studying for a PhD in geography as well as several individuals who already hold their degrees.

## Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER TEACHING AND LEARNING NEEDS. THEY SHOULD –ON THE ONE HAND– PROVIDE SATISFACTORY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT AND –ON THE OTHER HAND– FACILITATE DIRECT ACCESS TO THEM BY ESTABLISHING INTERNAL RULES TO THIS END (E.G. LECTURE ROOMS, LABORATORIES, LIBRARIES, NETWORKS, BOARDING, CAREER AND SOCIAL POLICY SERVICES ETC.).**

*Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or 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 or international students, students with disabilities) and 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 ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.*

*In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.*

### Study Programme Compliance

Because of the existing global circumstances during the time the assessment was conducted, the on-site visit to the campus could not take place. Thus, the EEAC relied on distance-based means to gain information concerning the facilities of the Department itself as well as the overall university. Two of the members of the EEAC had visited the Department relatively recently (one of them was a member of the evaluation committee which conducted a site visit in 2014) so, overall, it has been possible to develop a good picture of the situation.

The Department of Geography has its own dedicated building on the suburban campus situated just south of the city. The building is relatively new and has been dedicated from the outset for the needs of the Department. The multi-storey structure has several classrooms and lecture halls as well as spaces where the various laboratories are housed. Almost every faculty member has their own office. The building is compliant with regulations relating to persons with disabilities, although it was pointed out that gaining access to the campus and the building itself from other parts of the city is not easy in part because of the extremely hilly terrain and the inadequate supply of pedestrian friendly infrastructure.

In total there is one large lecture hall with a capacity of approximately 135 persons plus four smaller classrooms, each of which holds around 30 persons. Three educational labs exist to support teaching activities, namely the geoinformatics lab, the physical geography lab and the human geography lab. Further, there is one large and one small computer lab and a total of 60 personal computers. Although the computers quickly become outdated, this is no longer

considered a serious problem, given that the vast majority of students have their own laptops and the required licenses and use these to do much of their work. The Department Head mentioned that perhaps the most pressing need is to provide more plug-in stations throughout the building for the students' laptops. A downside is that currently there is no designated space for students to sit and work on their homework when they are in-between classes, although some of them use the labs if these are not taken for other reasons. The Department has informally placed several tables and chairs in the corridors where students can sit and do their work.

In terms of technological services, the Department houses, among others, its own server, distance-based learning infrastructure (e-class) as well as a comprehensive website that includes among others a description of programmes, a listing of courses and their descriptions, suggested programmes of study, the academic calendar and information about student exchanges. It is worth mentioning that several of the students were extremely positive about the quality of the Department's website, stating in a couple of cases that this was an instrumental reason in terms of selecting to study geography at the university of the Aegean.

The present university library is situated at a considerable distance from the Department in the middle of the old town. Despite this problem, the library now has at its disposal most if not all journals in the field of geography and related subjects, which the students can access online. On the plus side, the new building of the Faculty of Social Sciences, whose construction will begin very soon, will be situated soon close to the Department of Geography (expected to be completed within the next two years). This will include the new library included, which will be a major advantage for the faculty and the students of the Department.

The secretarial office offers support to the students and is open on weekdays between 8:00 and 13:00. Students also have access to a student liaison office that offers advice relating to matters such as housing while within close proximity to the Department there is a student restaurant, which serves free meals to those individuals who are eligible while the others pay a rate of 2.5 € per day. Limited accommodation is offered in student housing in Mytilene where students who are eligible can reside free of charge. The university also offers an office of support services that basically deals with those who need psychological counselling. An organization aimed at sporting activities provides opportunities to students to engage in various sporting activities.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

Overall, the level of services and facilities offered by the Department and the Institution for the undergraduate students is satisfactory and, according to some interviewed students, possibly of a much higher quality than in many other universities around the country. Having its own

dedicated building is a major plus for the Department of Geography while the construction of the new social sciences building including the library over the next two years will certainly strengthen this situation. Evidently, efforts are made to maintain and clean all spaces in the Department. It is recommended that if this has not already been considered when the new library is constructed that some space is provided for students to study during the time that they are not attending classes since the geography building itself does not really have a student lounge or reading room per se. For instance, spaces where students can prepare group assignments would be particularly welcome.

## Principle 7: Information Management

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

*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 as well as to the academic community.*

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

*The information gathered 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 programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

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

### Study Programme Compliance

Both the University and the Department have comprehensive information systems for collecting and recording data on the overall operation of the Institution, facilities, staff, research/teaching/administrative activities and student performance. The Department has provided the EEAC extensive and up-to-date lists of data and quality indicators. The quantitative information is comprehensive, while additional analyses allow comparisons between years and illustrate geographical distributions, enabling the identification of temporal and spatial trends. Regarding teaching, the Department conducts questionnaires that evaluate course content and instructor effectiveness for every course, which are then used for analysis, reflection and actions, depending on the results. Overall, the Department performs very well on all fronts, based on the evidence provided to the EEAC.

### Panel Judgement

Principle 7: Information Management	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## **Panel Recommendations**

Evidently, the Department's analysis of the available evidence goes beyond what is normally expected, for example by providing a sophisticated analysis of the geographical distribution of incoming students in the form of maps and detailed graphs. This interesting analysis highlights some hidden aspects of the issues regarding geographical remoteness/accessibility of Aegean University overall. One recommendation for improvement is to conduct a similar detailed analysis of student non-completion and associated factors for non-graduation. The Department has been open about the challenge of student retention and completion, but the available monitoring and progression data, not to mention the departmental expertise, would be useful to generate a more in-depth predictive analysis of the factors that could improve student retention/progression and substantially increase the numbers of graduates.

## Principle 8: Public Information

### INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH IS CLEAR, ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE.

*Information on Institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public.*

*Therefore, institutions and their academic units provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students, as well as graduate employment information.*

#### Study Programme Compliance

Information about teaching and academic activities is presented in a clear and comprehensive way. The Department of Geography's webpage, which is publicly accessible, is the main way to provide information to both prospective and current students and anyone interested in the teaching and research activities of the Department. There is a direct and easy-to-find link to these pages from the University of Aegean main website. The homepage has a legible layout with a menu bar at the top and an area with announcements, recent activities and useful links below. The structure is clear and easy to navigate between the different topics.

The website offers detailed information on the available programmes at the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate levels together with the study curriculum, regulations and schedule for each programme. A separate area presents the extensive research activities of the Department, the research projects of the faculty members and the work of the eleven research laboratories and their staff.

There is appropriate information on the Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance. Additional details can be found on the main site of the University of Aegean where there is a dedicated area with information linked to the MODIP (Unit for Quality Assurance) webpages. There is also an extensive description on how the University of the Aegean complies with the quality standards for accreditation and processes including past external accreditation reports for all schools and departments.

Overall, the webpages are excellent in terms of their respective content, design, clarity and they are extremely easy to navigate in both Greek and English. It is also obvious that they are regularly updated. The students that met with the EEAC were particularly complimentary about the design and content of the website. For a number of them, that was a main factor that drew them to apply to study in the Department and, indeed, rank it as one of their top choices.

For the faculty and other staff members as well as the current students of the Department, information on student affairs can be found on the Student Registry (Foititologio). This is a platform where staff can view class lists, student records and submit grades. Students can see their grades, submit choices for elective courses and apply for transcripts and other documents. Office staff administer student records, keep track of courses, and manage statistics for student progression and retention.

The main electronic platform for teaching is e-class. It can be used for posting class schedules, announcements, teaching resources and the exchange of messages between staff and students. Students can submit coursework, receive marked feedback comments and attend videoconferencing.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 8: Public Information</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

Appropriate information about teaching, academic matters and administration is published either on the University of Aegean or the Department of Geography webpages and electronic platforms. The webpage of the Department is well organised, up-to-date, clear and accessible.

## Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes

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

*Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to maintain the level of educational provision and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.*

*The above comprise the evaluation of:*

- *the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;*
- *the changing needs of society;*
- *the students' workload, progression and completion;*
- *the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students;*
- *the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;*
- *the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme*

*Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.*

### Study Programme Compliance

The Department of Geography at the University of the Aegean conducts an annual evaluation for each its degree programmes. This evaluation considers the most recent changes in research and socio-economic circumstances so as to make sure that courses are fully up to date. Considerable effort is devoted to developing their programmes according to international trends, mainly in North American and British universities. The students are encouraged to participate in the course assessments that are conducted upon completion of each class and include an evaluation both of the teaching content, an approach and the teacher. This on-going process of evaluation is used in the development of a rolling action plan that helps to assure the relevance and overall quality of each of the degree programmes and the work of the Department of Geography in general.

The internal evaluation is carried out by using questionnaires following the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Unit of the University of the Aegean. A synthesis of the individual answers is made in order to inform the QAU, the University and the Department. Information is also given to the teams of teaching staff who participate in each course in order to improve the quality of the offer and address any eventual problems. Although the assessment exercise is part of the policy of the Department, and all teaching staff encourage their students to complete the questionnaires, the participation of the students remains low (despite recent changes in the surveys that include more qualitative questions than in the past). While the number of students who fill in the questionnaires has increased it still remains below 10% on average. The Department uses this tool in order to improve the quality of teaching and remove any imperfections.

## Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## Panel Recommendations

In light of the above, it is recommended that the Department continues with its practice of conducting internal evaluations. Efforts should be made to improve the feedback from the students since this input certainly results in improving even further the quality of teaching.

## Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

**PROGRAMMES SHOULD REGULARLY UNDERGO EVALUATION BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HAHE, AIMING AT ACCREDITATION. THE TERM OF VALIDITY OF THE ACCREDITATION IS DETERMINED BY HAHE.**

*HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.*

*Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.*

*The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.*

### Study Programme Compliance

The Department seriously considers the recommendations of the external evaluation of undergraduate programmes. The previous external evaluation occurred in 2014. The resulting recommendations were, on the whole, followed by the Department to further improve the study programme. For instance, in line with the evaluation's recommendations, they reduced the number of optional courses (by rationalizing their distribution in the various years of the curriculum), and introduced several innovations aimed at further developing the students' general skills (e.g., in terms of information-gathering, bibliographic research, writing skills, presentation skills, teamwork).

All of these efforts aim at increasing the employability of graduates. Efforts have also been made in order to introduce four courses in English, mainly for incoming Erasmus+ students, and in terms of informing students at an early stage about their future specializations.

Although no further formal external evaluations were conducted between 2014 and 2020, the EEAC had the opportunity to interact with students who are currently studying in various years of the programme as well as several alumni who graduated over the last 15 years or so. Additionally, the EEAC engaged in a conversation with national and local stakeholders to gauge, among others, their opinions regarding current needs in the labour force. These exchanges were useful in terms of assessing what further skillset the students can take away from their studies in the coming years and for improving the curriculum.

## Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## Panel Recommendations

In light of the above, it is recommended that the Department continue with its positive attitude towards valuing the feedback from external recommendations, as this will further improve the quality of the Department.

## **PART C: CONCLUSIONS**

### **I. Features of Good Practice**

The Department of Geography has a reputation as one of the leading departments at the University of the Aegean. Its undergraduate programme - the first of its kind in Greece (and still one of only two such units in the entire country) - has shaken off the problem of its peripheral location and now attracts several students from around the country, a number of whom regard it as their top choice for their studies. Several practices highlight the programme's status.

- The faculty is productive in terms of research and publish consistently in peer-reviewed international journals and other publications while earning a healthy number of citations.
- There is high awareness among all faculty of the latest international trends in geographic research and teaching and efforts are constantly made to adapt the program according to these.
- The undergraduate programme benefits because of the involvement in teaching of high-ranking professors in the introductory courses. This means that students are exposed early on in their studies to the faculty members' direct involvement in research activities and do not only rely on information from the required literature.
- Students believe that it is extremely easy to find and communicate with the faculty members. Further, the alumni maintain that a good contact with many of the faculty endures even after graduation.
- A high degree of support and collegiality exists in the Department. The EEAC were particularly impressed by the fact that there is support for junior faculty members to go on sabbaticals and travel abroad in order to develop their research profile. Each of the working labs involves the participation of two or more faculty with similar research interests.
- The undergraduate programme is comprehensive, and every effort is made to provide students with a holistic knowledge of geography as a discipline. Students gain through the mandatory introductory courses a solid theoretical foundation about the field of geography overall while, during the latter stages of their studies they specialize in one of four concentrations as well as having a secondary area of concentration.
- The mandatory multi-day field trip that is offered to the students in the latter stages of their studies is fully funded by the department. Student pay only for their meals.
- The Department boasts very good facilities when compared to many institutional facilities around Greece. It has its own modern building where all the faculty and staff offices are located together with all the teaching facilities and laboratories. The proximity of the department to the student restaurant is a major plus while the anticipated construction of the new library nearby on the same campus will be of great benefit to the faculty and students.

## **II. Areas of Weakness**

The Department faces certain problems, which challenge its ability to further strengthen the quality of its undergraduate programme. These include the following:

- A challenge emerging from the Department's peripheral location is that it has always been hard to entice students to list it as a first choice while many of those who do come to study either transfer out or never finish. The growing reputation of the programme as well as broader knowledge about what the discipline of geography entails has somewhat rectified the situation but the retention rate as well as the graduation levels remain below optimal.
- It is hard to entice programme students to participate in international mobility exchanges, partly because of the financial burden this implies for individuals who already must spend considerable sums to move within the country and rent space on the island. The students in the Department miss out on the opportunities and rewards such exchanges lead to. This is a pity, especially since several students expressed the desire to participate in such exchanges if their means allow this.
- The very high number of courses available in the programme can be problematic because of the implications this situation has in terms of faculty workload distribution
- There are inadequate funds to cover all of the Department's needs. Generally, only a few of the items on the Department's wish-list are funded each year.

## **III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions**

The EEAC is impressed by the Undergraduate Programme in Geography at the University of the Aegean. Despite several problems, including that of its peripheral location as well as the extreme economic crisis that has plagued all of Greece for several years, the Department of Geography seeks to excel both in terms of teaching and research. What makes this ambition work so well is the presence of several highly dedicated faculty and staff members who truly care about their tasks. Nevertheless, the EEAC has several recommendations that should be considered in order to further improve the undergraduate programme's standing as well as that of the Department overall. These are:

- Increasing the number of ECTS for the mandatory thesis work, which is completed in the final year of study, to better reflect the workload for conducting individual research while also mirroring the credits awarded in equivalent programmes nationally and internationally.
- Consider eventually transforming the practical training course from an elective to a required course. The Department has a strong relationship with a multitude of stakeholders and, because of an increasing number of graduates over the years, opportunities for further connections with various employment settings should open up. Practical training is very useful for students who seek to increase their employability upon graduation.

- Further to the previous point, the practical training course should be worth a higher number of credits than its current 2.5 ECTS. The EEAC believes that at least 5 ECTS should be given for this course while the assignments associated with the practical training should place emphasis on reflection and critical thinking rather than being descriptive analyses.
- Efforts should be made to encourage students to participate in international mobility programmes, especially through Erasmus+. These include identifying various resources to support this mobility.
- Periodically conduct a major review of all courses, especially the electives, to examine their popularity and, if needed remove those that consistently fail to attract a reasonable number of students. Introduce new courses only after a thorough examination of the value added (and the contribution to the overall learning outcomes) these may offer to the programme and the students. Similarly, conduct a review of each of the four areas of concentration in the undergraduate programme and, if needed, modify or remove/replace these if they have lost their appeal.

#### IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are:

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are:

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are:

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

**Name and Surname**

**Signature**

1. **Professor Dimitri Ioannides** (Chair), Mid-Sweden University, Sweden
2. **Dr. Antonia Nousia**, London South Bank University, United Kingdom
3. **Dr. Seraphim Alvanides**, Northumbria University, United Kingdom
4. **Professor Petros Petsimeris**, Université Paris - Panthéon-Sorbonne, France