



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Accreditation Report

for the Postgraduate Study Programme of:

MSc in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation

Department: Geography

Institution: University of the Aegean

Date: 09/07/2024



Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση
της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Πρόγραμμα
Ανθρώπινο Δυναμικό και
Κοινωνική Συνοχή



NOTES

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Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of
the Postgraduate Study Programme of **MSc in Natural Hazards and
Disaster Mitigation** of the **University of the Aegean** 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 MSc in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation of the **University of the Aegean** comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. Skarlatos Dimitrios (Chair)
Cyprus University of Technology

2. NIKOLERIS GIORGOS
Lund University

3. PAPANASTASIOU PANOS
University of Cyprus

4. Μελιάδης Μιλτιάδης
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

Prior to the visit, the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) thoroughly examined a multitude of materials supplied by the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education (HAHE). These materials included background information, guidance on the accreditation process, and detailed data related to the program under evaluation. The program review took place via teleconference, facilitated by HAHE in collaboration with the University of Aegean (UAegean). The review schedule and agenda were as outlined below.

Tuesday, 25.06.2024

- a) Preliminary private meeting of the EEAP members. Discussion of the programme under review; assignment of writing parts of the accreditation report draft to the members of the EEAP, and related collaboration issues.
- b) Meeting with the Directors of the two PSP, the Head of the Department, QAU members and staff, Steering Committees/ IQAS members, during which a short overview of the two postgraduate study programmes (PSP) took place. After a short welcome from Vice Rector Prof. Xanthopoulos and Head of the Department Prof. Kizos, Prof. Vaitis presented the MSc in Geography and Applied Geo-informatics, and Prof. Zouros presented the MSc in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation of the UAegean. Both presentations provided information for programme history, academic profile, current status, numbers of applications and students attending per year, strengths and possible areas of concern, etc.
- c) Meeting with administrative staff members, teaching staff members of both PSP for an on-line tour of classrooms, lecture halls, libraries laboratories, and other facilities related to the two PSPs. A short discussion followed with clarifications about learning material, equipment and software available to students.
- d) Private debriefing meeting (EEAP members only).

Wednesday, 26.06.2024

Meetings with teaching staff, students, employers and social partners of the MSc in Geography and Applied Geo-informatics

Thursday 27.06.2024

- a) Meeting with teaching staff members, Soulakelis Nikolaos (Professor), Kalabokidis Konstantinos (Professor), Chatzipetros Alexandros (Associate Professor - AUTH), Ktenidou Olga (Senior Researcher- NOA), Gaganis Petros (Professor), Klonari Aikaterini (Emeritus

Professor): discussion about professional development opportunities, mobility, workload, student evaluations; competence and adequacy of the teaching staff to ensure learning outcomes; link between teaching and research; teaching staff's involvement in applied research, projects and research activities directly related to the programme.

b) Meeting with seven (7) students of the PSP; Papachristoforou Andreas, Rapai Ina, Kapiliaris Ektoras, Chouides Charalambos, Zgournios Eftraios, Tsonidou Evriklia, Patsis Stavros, from both years of their studies: discussion about students' satisfaction from their study experience and facilities of the Department; student input in quality assurance; priority issues concerning student life and welfare.

c) Meeting with seven (7) graduate students of the PSP; Lamprakopoulos Aggelos (Geographer), Ververis Kostas (Forester), Papanis Alexandros (Civil Engineer), Chatzivasileiou Theodoros (Geologist), Georganta Ekaterini (GIS Engineer), Doukakis Georgios (Electrical Engineer), Palaiopanis Rafail (Military Officer): discussion about their experience of their postgraduate studies, their career path, strengths and weaknesses of the PSP

d) Meeting and discussion with employers and social partners of the PSP from the public and private sector; Maliaros Dimitris (Directorate of Civil Protection of North Aegean), Kyriotellis Panagiotis (Commander, Fire Brigade), Mina Kourou (Director Earthquake Planning and Protection Organization), Valiakos Ilias (Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest), Fassoulas Charalambos (Natural History Museum of Crete): discussion about the relations of the Department with external stakeholders from the private sector.

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 University's Vice-Rector, the Head of the Department, Director of the PSP and QAU members and staff: informal, oral presentation of the EEAP key findings, and clarifications.

Friday 28.06.2024 to Sunday 30.06.2024

Report writing for the two PSPs. EEAP virtual meetings. Review and finalization of draft reports.

During the review and evaluation process, EEAP maintained close communication with the University QAU. QAU was highly cooperative in supplying additional information requested by the EEAP. Furthermore, the representatives from QAU and IQAS, along with the faculty, students, and staff interviewed, were enthusiastic and helpful during our discussions, providing all necessary additional details and information.

III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile

The MSc in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation is an Inter-Institutional PSP lead by the University of Aegean (UAegean), Department of Geography, in collaboration with the School of Geology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), the Department of Environment of UAegean and the National Observatory of Athens (NOA). It was established in 2018 (Government Gazette 4459/2023, UAegean Senate Session Decision 34/25.04.2018) in its current form.

The objective of the Inter-Institutional PSP is to enhance knowledge, foster research, and meet the country's educational, research, societal, cultural, and developmental requirements, by educating scientists on topics concerning natural risks and disasters and their handling using contemporary environmental risk management methods and techniques. The PSP's explicit aim is to generate highly trained professionals who can contribute to the planning, growth, and implementation of methods and techniques for studying and managing natural risks, and for disaster prevention and mitigation. Given the environmental changes, the severe weather conditions, the increase of forest fires and water floodings in Greece, the PSP is both relevant and in high demand.

The PSP covers a wide range of topics such as geological and meteorological hazards, seismic and volcanic risks, and the pollution of underground and surface waters. It also covers the management and prevention of forest fires, the study of fire behavior and pyrometeorology, using satellite remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for risk management. It also delves into the human geography of disasters and provides education for dealing with natural hazards. It emphasizes the protection of the natural environment and heritage, and addresses global climate change and extreme weather phenomena. The PSP also explores natural and technological disasters, environmental risk management, water resources management, and the protection and management of traditional ensembles and cultural heritage.

The main goals of the program are:

- enhancing scientific knowledge and research in the field of postgraduate studies, ensuring that the knowledge provided aligns with international developments in natural hazard management and disaster response.
- focusing on producing professional staff equipped with modern, competitive knowledge,

preparing them for the unified European and global labor market.

- emphasizing the study of natural hazards and disasters, employing modern methods and techniques, and training students with the necessary specialized scientific knowledge to effectively manage these risks.
- developing advanced skills in graduates, enabling them to design strategies, prevent potential risks, and prepare appropriately for natural hazards and disasters.
- encouraging the application of these concepts through practical exercises and research work, promoting interdisciplinary cooperation and learning among scientists and society. It also focuses on improving societal resilience to disasters

The study duration is three (3) semesters. The total number of ECTS credits required per semester is thirty (30), which translates to ninety (90) ECTS credits to obtain a degree. The language of instruction for courses is Greek, but there is also the possibility of conducting some courses in English, subject to the Assembly decision. A hybrid educational system is adopted with the combination of synchronous distance and in-person teaching. Teaching by means of distance education is 80% and 20% is in-person teaching and training, which is organized in Mytilene campus, in two (2) intensive cycles lasting 7-10 days per semester.

The awarded degree (MSc) is equivalent to level 7 according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It corresponds to the second cycle of higher education and signifies advanced knowledge and specialized skills in a specific field. The awarded title is Master's Diploma in "Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation".

Applicants have diverse backgrounds coming from the Departments of Geography, Geology, Environment, Forestry, Agriculture, the Schools of Sciences, the Schools of Economic Sciences, the Schools of Health Sciences, and the Engineering Schools of a related cognitive subject. There is also a significant percentage of applicants from the Higher Military Educational Institutions, the School of Officers of the Hellenic Police, the School of Deputy Firefighters of the Fire Brigade, and the Hellenic Coast Guard. Having such a broad spectrum of incoming students, all courses start assuming no prerequisite of previous knowledge. Faculty may adapt the content depending on the student background and provide optional seminars to those in need. In that way it is ensured that all students will be able to cope with the variety of courses.

The applied geoinformation aspect of the PSP allows graduates to get directly and immediately involved in operational work after graduation, which makes the programme popular among Emergency Services personnel. The majority of students are already professionals in some field and wish to either be specialized on natural hazards or use it as part of their jobs in disaster / crisis management situations.

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 Quality Assurance Policy (QAP) of the PSP 'Geography and Applied Geoinformatics' of the University of the Aegean aligns with institutional and departmental quality standards. It aims for continuous improvement, excellence, and compatibility with international norms. The program mission is to produce specialized professionals and researchers proficient in geoinformatics methods. Integral to this policy are processes ensuring high-quality education and research, with a commitment to social responsibility, human rights, and environmental ethics.

The Quality Policy of the PSP at the UAegean Geography Department aligns with institutional and Departmental Quality Standards Quality Policies. The objective of the PSP is the production of highly specialized professionals and researchers in issues related to natural hazards and disasters and their management with modern methods and techniques of environmental risk management sciences.

The PSP is committed to engaging all human resources (academic, administrative, technical) and infrastructure to provide education and to produce new knowledge in a safe, equitable, and transparent manner, as befits academic ethos. It aims for continuous improvement and excellence in all strategic goals adopted by the Institution and the Department, to provide high-level education and research for the benefit of society.

Integral to the Quality Policy are the implementation and assurance processes, aiming to provide excellent education and conduct quality research. The PSP adopted the Quality Policy of the Department of Geography and further applied it to its needs and goals, thus keeping compliance with the University and Department standards. Every member of the program academic community, including those in AUTH, and NOA, is committed in achieving these goals responsibly, respecting social partners, human rights, the environment, and bioethical principles.

A full list of KPIs has been adopted and monitored timely. The Quality Assurance Policy of the PSP is being published in the Department webpage and the link is included in the annual Program Study Guide of the PSP and orally communicated to the incoming students during the welcome ceremony, ensuring that the quality assurance policy is sufficiently communicated to all involved parties.

IQAS, along with the Coordinating Committee and the Director of the PSP, reviews the Quality Policy annually. They consider various factors such as internal and external evaluation results, suggestions from the academic community, course evaluation questionnaires, changes in the institutional framework, decisions from the University Senate or QAU, decisions from the HAHE, graduate employment research, and proposals from collaborating scientific or professional organizations. They propose changes to the Quality Policy as needed based on

these considerations.

II. Analysis

The department has established a Quality Assurance Policy specifically for the needs and goals of the PSP. During the interviews, department faculty has demonstrated commitment to implement the QAP to guarantee continuous improvement, and harmonization with graduate suggestions. Faculty members are not being compensated for their services, hence all financial resources from the tuition fees is reinvested to the PSP itself. This fact demonstrates the commitment of the department to make efficient use of the financial resources. Administration, equipment and consumables absorb 50% of the financial resources. Teaching personnel, internal or external, are not compensated for their service, hence zero percent of the resources is allocated to teaching. According to the updated financial analysis of the 2023-2024 academic year, mobility (field trip) and dissemination actions absorb 40% and 7% respectively of the financial resources. A small percentage (5.6%), is allocated to scholarships. Annually, a specialized commercial company is hired to promote the call for applicants. This invitation is disseminated via appropriate websites and social platforms, targeting individuals potentially interested in pursuing postgraduate studies in the program field. Furthermore, it's among the program objectives to further boost its visibility by establishing a profile/account on popular social networks and escalating the number of posts on the Geography Department's social platforms.

The Quality Assurance implements several KPIs that are summarised in tables along with their status and goals. These KPIs are monitored and updated annually taking into consideration the previous academic year and the feedback answers by the students. Goals are achievable, relevant and reveal a dedication to constant improvement. Learning outcomes from the PSP are appropriate for level 7 according to the European and national qualification framework for higher education.

The PSP is endorsed by the society, especially personnel of Emergency Services. The available positions were fully covered three out of the six (6) academic years since its establishment. After COVID-19, there was a notable decline in applications, but during the 2023-204 academic year applications were more than double the offered position, which highlights a healthy growth.

III. Conclusions

The PSP is successful and sustainable. The faculty, both internal as well as external, are dedicated to teaching, and they are determined to sustain and expand the PSP.

The PSP is fully compliant in Principle 1.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Quality assurance policy and quality goal setting for the postgraduate study programmes of the institution and the academic unit

Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

PRINCIPLE 2: DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

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

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

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

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

In addition, the design of PSP must consider:

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

The procedure of approval or revision of the programmes provides for the verification of compliance with the basic requirements of the Standards by the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

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 MSc in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation is an Inter-Institutional PSP lead by the University of Aegean (UAegean), Department of Geography, in collaboration with the School of Geology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), the Department of Environment of UAegean and the National Observatory of Athens (NOA). It has accepted students for the first time in academic year 2018-2019. It aims to turn the natural risks and disasters into a strength and competitive edge for the Geography Department and the UAegean at large. This vision takes into account the scientific and technological advancements in this field, new job opportunities in both the public and private sectors, and the chances for further research development and promotion. Issues related to natural hazards and disaster management are particularly relevant due to the frequency and intensity of extreme events associated with the climate crisis. These events cause serious disruptions in the functioning of society and extensive human, material, or environmental losses. To address them, scientists specialized in this field are required. The choice of material taught was heavily influenced by collaborations with faculty members from AUTH and NOA.

The main objective of the Inter-Institutional PSP is to train highly skilled professionals and researchers who can understand, plan, develop, and apply methods and techniques to effectively manage natural risks and disasters. It is doing so by enhancing scientific knowledge and research in this field, ensuring that the provided postgraduate knowledge aligns with international standards in related sciences, research specializations, and areas of expertise, making sure that it meets the specific developmental needs of the country and its unique spatial issues. The PSP also educates graduates, professionals, and public sector officials on issues related to their work. The program subject significantly contributes to the improvement of their knowledge and the quality of the services they provide to citizens and society.

Learning outcomes for all three directions are well defined and quantified, therefore, the PSP is considered compatible with the European and National qualification framework. All courses have 5 ECTS, and the workload is reported in the outline of each course (module). A master's thesis contributes 25 ECTS in the overall workload of the PSP, which is below the average of 30 ECTS of equivalent European postgraduate programmes. There is also a compulsory Graduate

Internship course with 5 ECTS. Courses cover a wide and diverse spectrum of natural hazards and risks, which require many different specialties among teachers and an extra effort from the students to follow. The variety of specialties needed is covered by the faculty of UAegean, AUTH and the research staff from NOA. During the interviews with students and graduates it was noticed that the main areas of focus are earthquakes and forest fires, as these are the main disasters that Greece is facing. The PSP learning outcomes are designed, evaluated, and updated by the faculty, with inputs from their research, teaching, and stakeholders, through personal communication rather than as a result of a formally established process. Overall, the learning outcomes as described in the outlines of the courses as well as the general description of the PSP, are fully compatible with European and National Qualifications Framework (EQF, NQF), and the Dublin Descriptors for level 7.

Students are required to complete an individual thesis. Some MSc theses incorporate elements of research, and many of these are presented at Greek and international scientific conferences or published in scientific journals. Through these educational activities, postgraduate students acquire the skills and abilities to clearly formulate research questions and work hypotheses, to locate, select and interpret their sources, to conduct literature research, to analyze and synthesize information, and to evaluate their produced work.

Graduates of the program fall into two categories. Those who were employed before enrolling and those who were fresh graduates. Employed graduates often continue working at their current organizations after graduating from the program. The master's degree can help them to advance in their careers, especially in areas related to natural hazards, disaster management, and civil protection. On the other hand, graduates who were not employed before by enrolling use the master's degree to find jobs in new services of the Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection, the Fire Service, regional and municipal civil protection services, and other organizations in Greece and abroad. Also, the degree provides additional qualifications during evaluations for public sector positions, according to the current legal framework. Overall, the PSP is well accepted, mainly because it focuses on Geoinformatics that allows for applied approach in operations and handling of natural hazards.

II. Analysis

The PSP is regularly updated and well positioned in terms of studies within the Greek higher education map. It addresses the needs of the Prefecture and is well perceived and supported by the stakeholders. Graduates are employed in the market in a variety of jobs demonstrating the gap in the market for experts in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation with experience in geoinformation. It fully complies with level 7 of EQF, follows the ECTS, and supports research activities both during studies and MSc thesis elaboration. The fact that half of the graduates are already employed in organizations related to natural hazards, disaster management and civil protection seeking ways to make better use of

geoinformatics in their work, emphasizes the importance of the Inter-Institutional PSP.

III. Conclusions

The PSP is substantially compliant in Principle 2.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R2.1) Consider increasing the thesis ECTS to 30, so that it is inline with the European Master's average.

R2.2) Collect feedback from graduates and external stakeholders regarding the PSP in a manner that is both more efficient and structured.

R2.3) Encourage students to make use of Erasmus+ for training and experience.

R2.4) Introduce more practical scenarios, especially in cases of risk management.

R2.5) Consider the introduction of a Civil Protection course concerning application of best worldwide practices of risk management.

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

The Postgraduate programme in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation is a three-academic semesters programme. It is attended by students with various backgrounds. The first semester has 2 mandatory courses, 2 required elective courses based on the direction of the student, 1 elective course and 1 seminar, with each count for 5 ECTS. The second semester has 2 mandatory courses, 3 required elective courses based on the direction of the student, and 1 seminar each of 5 ECTS. In the last semester there is the Master Thesis of 25 ECTS and 5 ECTS for practical training. Each semester has 30 ECTS with all modules to have equal ECTS. The courses are mainly conducted through theoretical lectures and laboratory courses using computers with sophisticated computer programs being used. The students can make a choice of thesis to be either research-oriented or literature-based.

The exam period is at the end of each semester and the degree of each course is mainly based on the performance in these final exams, except the ones for field exercises.

The university provides students with an evaluation system at the end of each academic semester. The evaluation system is given in the form of a questionnaire, where students can rate the courses, lecturers, lecture content etc. The same platform provides an opportunity for students to express any complaints, dissatisfaction or report any harassment.

The teaching staff takes into account the diversity of the postgraduate students, who come from different Schools than Geography, and have different knowledge backgrounds and provide significant help and support accordingly. The lectures and their content are quite understandable to the student population, and the lecturers assist the students to solve any questions that may have.

II. Analysis

The curriculum of this postgraduate programme includes a wide range of courses covering current and local issues in the fields of Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation and more. Consequently, the theoretical and practical training of the students at the end of the Master's degree is quite satisfactory, since the students will require specialized knowledge in this field. Due to all the above, following this Master's degree, the student gain satisfactory degree of experience in the professional field. At this point it is worth mentioning that the majority of the students and graduates proposed to have laboratory training into various courses in order to be ready for the market and its diversity.

Despite the heterogeneity of the students, who come from different departments and have different backgrounds, the comprehension of the courses is generally satisfactory. As the students stated, the teaching staff has adapted the content of their courses to this broad audience, and they are always available to respond to any questions and queries.

One of the problems that the panel identified is that many of the courses are not available for Erasmus students as they are offered in Greek .

The course and teacher evaluation systems are widespread among students. A reasonable percentage of students participate in the internal evaluation process. The panel did not find any significant dissatisfactions in general.

The students and graduates informed EEAP that the majority of them chose this Master to be more successful at work or to find a related job. Not so many students wanted to participate in Erasmus+ or an internship mainly due to their personal life and professional work demand. However, Erasmus+ may be well suited to those who do not already have a job to get experience.

III. **Conclusions**

The curriculum of the postgraduate programme "Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation" is fully in line with the standards of the HAHE, as it is of satisfactory quality. Graduates are provided with good knowledge and experience in both the professional and research fields.

The PSP is fully compliant in Principle 3.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R3.1) Introduce more field exercises and more seminars.

R3.2) Upgrade the webpage fully in English in order to inform foreign 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

Student admission for this PSP is restricted up to 25 per year. Eligible for admission are graduates from specific fields of studies from various academic fields such as Geography, Environmental Sciences, Forestry and Engineering. This PSP started its function in 2018 and offers the diploma of “Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation”. The number of admitted students from applied candidates is restricted upon a well-defined selection procedure. The selection of the applicants is based initially on the study scores and recommendation letters, followed by candidate interviews by an established academic committee. These procedures are clearly described to the required supporting documents, which also contain information for the student rights and obligations, and ways allowing monitoring their progression. Research ethics regulation, regulation of studies and information on internship, and mobility and student assignments are also provided. A website with all this information exists, both in Greek and English languages but it requires some upgrades in the English version.

The graduates who apply for this PSP are very well balanced from the various academic fields. The ratio of women/men is also balanced. A large number of applicants have a full time job, and they attend the PSP after working hours as an extra activity. For this reason, the specific PSP is quite demanding and challenging for the students as it requires a lot of time and effort. The teaching courses are offered mostly online and very few in the physical presence of the students.

The duration of the PSP is one and a half years (three semesters, 90 ETCS in total). Students are evaluated at the end of each semester. Students are also obliged to write a dissertation, which can be either research based or a literature survey. Faculty members of the PSP show understanding and flexibility for students that are professionals. The PSP diploma allows the students to get a job in the public and private sectors with specific requirements, or to progress further in research for acquiring a PhD degree.

There is a very good communication between the students and members of the PSP, who are constantly available in helping the students and provide the necessary information. Progress of the students of the PSP is monitored closely by the faculty members.

The meeting of the panel with current and past students of the PSP left a very positive impression of the utility of this PSP. All students were enthusiastic and positive concerning their experience and knowledge received. Several past students are excelling in private companies and in the public sector in good positions. These achievements indicate the importance of this PSP. Several current and past students requested that the programme should include more laboratory courses. Concerning the quality and number of courses, students pointed out that courses are well-structured. Some of the courses are challenging for students from different academic backgrounds but PSP professors always support the students. Many students and faculty members emphasized that the

PSP is very rewarding, greatly helping to their own development.

The mobility of the students is not satisfactory, even though Erasmus+ and other mobility platforms are available.

The degree certificate template is provided electronically to the students upon completion of the PSP.

II. Analysis

This PSP provides an important and interesting basis for further studies in the fields of The PSP on Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation fulfills an important need for education and training of engineering and other disciplines graduates.

The length of studies of this PSP is generally considered satisfactory from the panel. The acquired knowledge is beneficial to the students and in general to the society.

The panel realized that student mobility is not satisfactory. An effort should be made more actively to promote the use of Erasmus+ and other existing mobility platforms within Greece and abroad.

Concerning the teaching mode for the PSP, online teaching is more desirable in general for students due to the fact that the live communication and interaction between students and professors is more important for this demanding PSP.

A point of concern for the panel is that many students of the PSP have full time jobs limiting the full commitment to the PSP.

The existence of a web page providing information in both Greek and English is a very positive effort but it requires continuous upgrades and changes.

III. Conclusions

This is a well-organized and designed PSP in the fields of Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation. The involved institutions developed and applied published regulations covering all aspects and phases of studies from admission, progression, thesis drafting, to recognition and certification.

The PSP is fully compliant in Principle 4.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R4.1) Keep updated information in the PSP website

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 MSc in Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation is offered jointly by the Departments of Geography and Environment of the University of the Aegean, the Department of Geology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) and the National Athens Observatory (NAO). The teaching staff of the Inter-Institutional PSP comes from the Faculty and EDIP members of the above Departments and Research Organizations that participate in its operation as well as faculty members and researchers of other universities that have a subject corresponding/related to the content of the Inter-Institutional PSP courses. Specifically, 19 faculty members (including 2 emeritus professors) 9 researchers

and 6 members EDIP, i.e. a total of 34 teachers, teach in the Inter-Institutional PSP

The EEAP had the opportunity to meet some of the academic and lab teaching staff from the involved departments of the UAegean and representatives from AUTH and NAO. The EEAP was impressed by the level of professionalism, academic competency, and devotion to their duties. The involved Organizations follow, with reference to recruitment/hiring, the procedures established by Law. The 34 academic staff are involved in various research activities covering different areas of specialization, including Environmental Changes and Natural Hazards, Spatial Analysis, Meteorology - Meteorological Hazards, Geological Hazards, Seismology, Neotectonics, Volcanology, Landslides, Surface and Underground Pollution and Contamination of water, Fire-meteorology, Geographic Information Systems, Remote Sensing, Cartography Visualization of geographic data, Micro-zonal studies, Drought - Floods, Applied Geomorphology, Climate Change and Extreme Events, Forest Fires, Unmanned Aircraft, Disaster Theory - Risk Assessment - Vulnerability, Disaster Geosites and Natural Hazards Training.

The average teaching load presented was 7,14 hours per week which is well above the average of 6 hours/week for 2 courses per term or 4 per academic year that is considered normal in the overseas university practices which in case of highly performing researchers this may be reduced to 3.

The data from student evaluations of courses (given to us provide a positive picture with the overall average for most of them well above 4 out of 5, which is considered very good.

The EEAP refers here to the research output of the Department of Geography, as the research output provided in A17-Anafores OPESP was referred to the output of the whole UAegean. The research output of the Department of Geography over the period 2019-2023 indicates 283 journal (peer reviewed) articles for an average per professor equal to 12 over a period of 5 years (2.4/year) or 2.1 for the 2023 according to Scopus database. This is sound research output if we take into account additional output in the form of conference papers and the various admin challenges impacting research activities (e.g., management of research funds, lab supplies, equipment maintenance etc.). Cumulative research funding data point to several active grants (38) obtained not only from National agencies but also European agencies with the latter being a very good indicator of research competitiveness.

II. Analysis

The faculty members in their majority are experts in the subjects they teach as they are involved in various research activities covering different areas of specialization. A problem we noticed is that several co-instructed courses are not transparently accounted for in the teaching load, leaving the impression of “double counting” and should be rectified with proper reporting. In other words, some professors carried more than 2 courses that should be avoided although

special circumstances (e.g., faculty retirement) may contribute to this. The presented student/teacher ratio that is 1 might be misleading as the instructors teach in the undergraduate program and other postgraduate programs. Nevertheless, this ratio shows that the students have access to a diverse learning process.

For each course of the Inter-Institutional PSP there is a statutory independent evaluation process that takes place electronically by each student anonymously. Its evaluation results of the courses are available to each teacher, in OMEA and through this in the executive committee of the PSP. This process allows faculty members to evaluate and improve teaching methods, perceive difficulties in understanding of the material and in general to strengthen their teaching presence. Also, the results assessments of teachers are used in the context of the internal evaluation of the Inter-Institutional PSP. The data from student evaluations of courses were very positive. However, the evaluation process and the limited participation does not allow for a deeper appreciation of how effective teaching is. However, the feedback provided by the students and graduates was very positive for the quality of the program and the teaching support.

The Department encourages the mobility of teachers for teaching or training abroad through the European and International Mobility Program ERASMUS+. The office of the University's ERASMUS+ provides appropriate support at all stages of the process. The Department encourages Faculty/EDIP members to utilize their sabbatical leaves for collaborations with other Universities (internal/external), for the development of their research. Several of the faculty members have established international collaborations from collaborative research funding consortia to conference co-organizing or proceedings co-editing and short exchanges. In terms of sabbatical leaves however, there is limited activity despite the availability of programs like Erasmus + mobility due to the “full year” teaching obligations (and the three examination periods!) but also the financial burden.

The faculty members of the department, with minor exemptions, are clearly of very high calibre that in some cases can be seen easily making careers abroad. This is very encouraging as they serve a solid base for the future. Consideration should be given not to overload them with teaching and admin duties in their early stage of their careers but only doing this gradually.

The members of the Panel from overseas universities note that the process of promotion from one rank to the other with “open” calls that the Law requires is unrealistic and rather a bureaucratic burden. Quality in promotion can be equally or better achieved with formation of a promotion committee with internal (UAegean) and external members familiar with the particular field and the submission of external expert referee letters. Meanwhile, granting tenure only after 3 years (in essence 2 years when the candidate prepares for submission of their dossier) is too early. The international minimum of 6 years (based on the

output of the first 5 years) should be considered. We realize this to be across the Greek university system issue, but we contend that UAegean and HAHE should actively raise it with the proper authorities.

III. Conclusions

The Organizations involved have clearly achieved their objectives and goals for continuous upgrading of the educational project and the enhancement of student performance with measurable quality indices. It also clearly supports the research activities and the increase of research potential which is manifested by the research output.

The students and the graduates we met had very positive commentary on the access they have to their teachers which reflects teaching staff commitment.

The teaching staff devotes the effort to integrate compulsory field exercises in the context of the two intensive lecture cycles (Winter and Spring Semesters) and the planning of Civil Protection Exercises (In collaboration with the Civil Protection Directorate of Region B) is very positive for an applied field as is the one covered by the Inter-Institutional PSP . The introduction of the e-class system by UAegean and the wide adoption by teaching staff and students, it seems, is an excellent development that is expected to greatly improve the teacher-student interfacing.

The UAegean created a support centre for teaching & learning that is hoped can be fully utilized by the Department to improve teaching methods and effectiveness by its members. The on-line course offering (e.g., using web tools and videos) of more than half of the teaching hours creates more opportunity for attracting part-time students.

Student evaluation of courses and teaching innovation/effectiveness are part of the evaluation of a staff member's performance when considered for re-appointment and promotion.

The research activities of faculty members help the connection of teaching to research as they involve student training (postgraduate theses or lab exercises). In particular the postgraduate diploma thesis is chosen on a subject that is part of the wider knowledge field of the Inter-Institutional PSP, it is conducted in cooperation with Research Laboratories, it must contain elements of originality, it is assigned to a Supervisor and three-member examination committee, is given to option to be written in English and with the goal to result in publications.

The EEAP was particularly impressed with the research about and the international recognition through academic metrics (Scopus, Google Scholar) of the nearly all academic staff with a very limited exemption. It is vital for the Department to maintain the high quality of the academic staff by applying high standards in the hiring and promotion processes.

The PSP is substantially compliant in Principle 5.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R5.1) There should be a separation of the process between hires for new (or vacated) positions and internal promotions. In the latter case no open call should be used but an internal school/university pathway that includes external referees.

R5.2) Granting tenure only after 3 years (in essence 2 years when a candidate prepares to submit their dossier) is too early. The international minimum of 6 years (based on the output of the first 5 years) should be considered.

R5.3) The Departments involved, in collaboration with the Teaching & Learning Centre of UAegean, should organize teaching seminars and semestrial or annual reviews to improve teaching effectiveness by all teaching staff.

R5.4) Course teaching load should be transparent so as to avoid the appearance of “double counting” in cases of co-instruction.

R5.5) The involved organizations should continue encouraging faculty mobility through the Program ERASMUS+ and the utilization of the sabbatical leaves for collaborations with other Universities for the development of their research.

R5.6) Individual academic staff achievements like securing an important grant with international partners, election to an important international society executive position, and important awards for teaching or research should be internally and externally publicized and celebrated. This type of individual data granulation was absent from the documentation or presentations during the site visit.

R5.7) In the future data must be processed to generate summary graphs and tables that clearly show trends making easier the extraction of conclusions

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 Department of Geography has the infrastructure and adequate resources and means to support education of postgraduate students and his academic activity in general. The human resources of the Department include the Teaching Research Staff (Faculty) and Laboratory Teaching Staff (EDIP), who contribute to the education of Inter-Institutional PSP students, as well as the technical (members of the Special Technical Laboratory Staff) and administrative staff which supports the operation of the Inter-Institutional PSP.

The Inter-Institutional PSP supports its operation also on the important human resources that the cooperating departments and institutions provide that contribute with a significant number of teachers in the education of Inter-Institutional PSP students. The infrastructures and services are divided into: (a) academic infrastructures, (b) educational or consulting services (c) IT and communications services, and (d) care services.

The Department of Geography has 21 faculty members and three (3) EDIP members with academic subjects that most fall into areas related to Inter-Institutional PSP and it is complemented by Doctoral candidates and a limited number of external teachers on a limited contract for covering staff shortages. The cooperating Departments and Institutions contribute to the teaching of courses, exercises and the preparation of diplomatic theses.

The management of the Inter-Institutional PSP is done by the Director and the Inter-Institutional PSP Curriculum Committee. The technical support of the courses and infrastructures (computer and network systems and services) is carried out by two members of the Special Technical Laboratory Staff (STP). The administrative staff of the Department devoted to Inter-Institutional PSP is two full time staff. The administrative and technical staff of the Department is supported by corresponding personnel of the central services of the University of the Aegean.

II. Analysis

The Department of Geography has adequate facilities (classrooms, relatively well-equipped research laboratories (12 in number), computer facilities, and study rooms) to support the learning and academic activities of the students.

The University of the Aegean offers a range of educational and advisory services, staffed with appropriate administrative and specialized staff. These services include Summer Schools, Complaining and Support Office, Office of Teaching and Learning support, Erasmus Office, Liaison Office and Alumni Office. The students have access to affordable restaurants, housing and athletics activities.

The IT Services of the Department of Geography provide to postgraduate students the following services: user account management (local network and e-mail), wireless network access (eduroam), storage space on the Department's servers, use of a network printer, use of a device CD copying, use of a scanner. Also, the UAegean offers IT and Communications Services that operate a series of information systems that support the educational and administrative work of the Inter-Institutional PSP.

Other than the research laboratories where the different lab exercises are obligatory for the students it is not clear to what extent the other offices are fully utilized. There is some improvement to student mobility but still the number is low (funding seems to be a big problem but also some issues like unclear course

equivalency or rigidity of the program/curriculum). The Practicum office should intensify its efforts to promote the program to students and employers.

The panel noted the efforts by the Department to provide orientation to the new students. The hosting of invited seminars is another important activity. Also, launching e-class by UAegean is a great addition to the available resources/services to the students and teaching staff.

For the allocation and distribution of limited resources from tuition and fees, special effort is taken to enhance student-centered learning. Some financial support is allocated for students' participation in scientific conferences or for covering the cost of article publication in scientific journals.

III. Conclusions

The resources described above are deemed sufficient for the Inter-Institutional PSP to operate without problem and achieve its goals. Care is taken that the resources are continuously operational, maintained, renewed and improved (e.g. replacement of older computers, supply of new versions of software, etc.).

The PSP is substantially compliant in Principle 6.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R6.1) Revisit and update teaching methods by introducing project-based learning opportunities and work closely with the Teaching and Learning Centre of UAegean.

R6.2) Strengthen the operation of the Practicum office.

R6.3) The University shall invite graduates from industry to explain their work and career paths.

R6.4) Secure resources to ensure student mobility.

R6.5) Plan for critical lab facility upgrading

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 Department and PSP continuously collect and process diverse data including, course evaluation, research projects, expenses, and website visitation. A complete Student's Record is maintained, including student admission, student process, graduation and dropout rates. The teaching, technical and administrative staff of the Department contribute to the collection of data. The data are gathered, maintained and analysed in separate databases and different softwares (Google forms, e-class, Rescom, NISQA ,etc) depending on their nature. The data are maintained by the Secretariat, respecting the principles of GDPR, and are available to the Head of the Department, The Director of the PSP, the internal

consulting committee of the PSP, and QAU for KPI calculation.

During the interviews it was not clear that the stakeholders are officially involved in the data acquisition process. A study for the graduates will be initiated in the following year, as graduates have just reached sixty (60), to form a healthy sample for statistics. Stakeholders that accept interns as part of the obligatory course, are filling in questionnaires after the completion of the internship and students fill in questionnaires for each course. The response rate of students is 50%, which is rather low.

At the interviews both students and graduates expressed their satisfaction with the study programme. While all wished for more training and field exercises, this is limited to the intense week, and some students with full time jobs cannot apply for more days leave.

Students and graduates acknowledge support from faculty for additional teaching hours to fill in gaps for those with diverse academic backgrounds. Faculty are also versatile and supportive with issues arising from job workload for those who have full time jobs.

Learning resources in terms of notes, books and literature are fully covered by the material available to students by the teaching personnel and University library. The PSP provides access to laboratory equipment with updated computers, which is also open to students during Saturdays. Software license availability for those who wish or have to work from home, is ensured by ESRI's University license policy, which allows students to download and locally install necessary software. In addition, use of open source or free software is encouraged by faculty members.

II. Analysis

In general, the PSP's information management system is well-structured and tackles the majority of concerns. However, the active involvement and feedback contribution of stakeholders and graduates in the PSP update process remains unclear. Additionally, the student response rate is relatively low.

III. Conclusions

Although it is the Department's intention to perform a study about graduate satisfaction, professional progression and feedback during the next year, there is no one available yet. Also there is no established process for feedback from stakeholders' suggestions for PSP improvements.

The PSP is substantially compliant in Principle 7.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R7.1) The first planned survey next year is necessary and a significant step towards fulfilling Principle 7. Establishing a formal procedure for stakeholders and alumni to give feedback, will help collect data regarding graduate career progression as well as recommendations for enhancing and updating the PSP. Existing information management tools can be utilized to facilitate this process.

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

The postgraduate program on Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation has a sufficient presence in web sites. There are references in the UNESCO site on Geoparks and the Rocapply site in English and an UAegean web site of the program in both Greek and English.

The University website provides detailed information about the programme's structure, curriculum, faculty, student services, and quality assurance policies. It is recently updated providing up-to-date information about the program and it is easily accessible to new and current students.

Also available are the program of studies, the current year study guide, which is downloadable, information on registration for the course with a link to the electronic registration webpage, a brief description of the assistance offered by academic advisors, and other relevant information.

There is no evidence of the Department's presence in career days or similar to attract potential students.

The call for applications for new postgraduate students in the PSP is promoted annually on social media by an external company. Additionally, the Department is committed to increasing its overall presence on social media.

II. Analysis

The website of the postgraduate program on Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation is well-designed and structured, making it easy to find information and facts about the program. The segmentation of information into different sections ensures that visitors will find relevant content.

Web-based information should be enhanced by other activities, web-based or in real life to promote the program.

There is a list of the alumni students but no other way of keeping in touch with them.

III. Conclusions

The EEAP finds that the information provided by the department is in compliance with the requirements of principle 8. There are improvements that can be made involving better contact with the alumni and organizing dissemination events.

The PSP is fully compliant in Principle 8.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R8.1) Improve contact channels with the alumni

R8.2) Organization of annual symposiums where stakeholders explain job opportunities, present faculty's research and give the opportunity to graduates to showcase best theses.

R8.2) Improve presence in social media channels (Facebook, X, LinkedIn, YouTube channel, etc).

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 PSP self-assessment procedure takes place annually with the support of the QAU. The findings of the PSP self-assessment are shared within the academic unit. The PSP is assessed using students' and graduates' evaluations. The EAAP found no information on surveys from external stakeholders.

II. Analysis

The PSP collects data, which it uses to improve. The students' and graduates' evaluation surveys serve as an indirect assessment method for the PSP. Students, graduates, and other stakeholders do not appear to have been directly involved in

the decision-making processes for curriculum improvements. The number of students participating in the course evaluations can be improved.

III. Conclusions

The PSP is assessed predominantly through student surveys. No evidence of the engagement of students, graduates, and external stakeholders in its improvements.

The PSP is substantially compliant in Principle 9.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R9.1) Engage an external advisory board for the ongoing annual evaluations

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

I. Findings

This is the first external evaluation and accreditation of the postgraduate program on Natural Hazards and Disaster Mitigation, and as such, no prior recommendations are available. However, the programme is continuously evaluated via the QAU and the students' feedback, which leads to improvements. Additionally, the department has established a comprehensive process for reviewing the findings and recommendations from future external evaluations.

The findings from the evaluation highlighted several strengths of the programme, including its comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum, the high qualifications and active research involvement of the faculty, and the positive feedback from students regarding the quality of education and support services.

II. Analysis

The strengths identified in this evaluation, such as the robust curriculum and the faculty's expertise, underscore the programme's commitment to providing high-quality education. The process for reviewing the findings and recommendations from future external evaluations is comprehensive and sufficient.

III. Conclusions

The PSP is fully compliant in Principle 10.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

The applied geoinformation aspect of the PSP allows graduates to directly and immediately be involved in operational work after graduation, which makes it popular among Emergency Services personnel.

It addresses existing needs and is particularly consistent to climate change and relevant hazards.

The PSP is well perceived among the stakeholders, especially the Fire Brigade and the Civil Protection.

Hiring a commercial company to promote the Inter-Institutional PSP, has increased applications, allowing better student selection, and supports sustainability.

It is offered in a hybrid manner, with 80% synchronous distant education, which allows more applicants with full time jobs to attend.

II. Areas of Weakness

UAegean location is considered a disadvantage from faculty members, but on the other hand has enhanced collaboration with the Prefecture of North Aegean. The

collaboration covers many aspects and is beneficial to both parties. Last year's planning of Civil Protection Exercises, in collaboration with the Civil Protection Directorate of Region B) was welcomed by the students.

The advantage of the PSP might be lost in a couple of years due to 4957/2022 law, which supports strategy for distance education with the pedagogical use of ICT to all Universities, hence allowing for distance learning.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

Establishing a formal procedure for stakeholders and alumni to give feedback, will help collect data regarding graduate career progression as well as recommendations for enhancing and updating the PSP.

Engage an external advisory board for the ongoing annual evaluations.

Introduce more field exercises and practical scenarios, especially in cases of risk management.

Continue the planning of Civil Protection Exercises, in collaboration with the Civil Protection Directorate of Region B.

Encourage students to make use of Erasmus+ for training and experience.

Organize annual symposiums where stakeholders explain job opportunities, the faculty to present their research and to give the opportunity to graduates to showcase best theses.

Improve the presence in social media channels (Facebook, X, LinkedIn, YouTube channel, etc).

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are:

1, 3, 4, 8, 10

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are:

2, 5, 6, 7, 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

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Signature