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Accreditation Report **for the Postgraduate Study Programme of:**

Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion

Department: Sociology

Institution: University of the Aegean

Date: 31 May 2024



Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση
της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Πρόγραμμα
Ανθρώπινο Δυναμικό και
Κοινωνική Συνοχή



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of
the Postgraduate Study Programme of **Social Research on Regional
Development and Social Cohesion** 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 **Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion** 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. Professor Apostolis Papakostas (Chair)**
School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University

- 2. Professor Dimitris Michailakis**
Department of Culture and Society, University of Linköping

- 3. Professor Elisabeth Kirtsoglou**
Anthropology Department, Durham University

- 4. Professor Victor Roudometof**
University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus.

- 5. PhD candidate, Alexandra Kozamani**
Hellenic Open University, Patra, Greece

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

In reviewing the Postgraduate Study Programme of “Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion” of the Department of Sociology of the Aegean comprised of five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020.

The objectives of the Panel, as described in the Guidelines for the Members of EEAP, are:

- to establish whether the data provided from the various resources is consistent among one another and reflect the actual situation.
- identify strengths and areas of weakness.
- engage in a constructive dialogue with the Institution, leading to reflection and continuous enhancement of the study programme.

Following a well-prepared schedule provided by HAHE, the Panel held several separate interactive virtual (by electronic means, ZOOM) meetings and visits for two days as follows:

On Monday, 27/5/2024, the following virtual meetings took place:

- with the Head of the Department
- with the Director of the Programme
- with MODIP members and staff, and Steering Committees/OMEA members
- an online tour of virtual classrooms, online platforms, and other facilities related to the Programme. The online tour was followed by a discussion about the facilities in which teaching and administrative staff participated.

On Tuesday, 28/5/2024, the following virtual meetings took place:

- with teaching staff of the Programme
- with current students of the Programme
- with Programme graduates
- with employers and social partners of the private and public sector
- meeting with the Vice President/President of MODIP, the Head of the School, the Director of the Programme, members and staff of MODIP, and members of Steering Committees/OMEA members.

During the above virtual meetings, the Panel had the opportunity to meet, talk, and interact with all the participants of all meetings. All the participants were encouraged to express their views and talk freely about their overall learning experience. They welcomed the opportunity to talk to the Panel and to voice their views. The discussions were very constructive and fruitful and were conducted in a cooperative manner and attitude. All the meetings included presentations, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions. During the last meeting, some clarifications were provided, and the Panel made an informal presentation of some initial key findings.

The internal evaluation report and other extensive material were made available to the Panel electronically in advance through HAHE. More information and materials were made available during the meetings.

The Department worked diligently in preparing the internal evaluation report and other relevant materials and organizing and hosting the virtual meetings. It is the

feeling of the Panel that the Department has performed an excellent job throughout the internal evaluation process and that the objectives of the process have been fully met. The efficiency and eagerness of the Department to answer questions and provide additional information and clarifications during the meetings are worth noting. The Panel wishes to express its thanks and appreciation to the Department and the University administration for their co-operation and professionalism.

This Accreditation Report is based on information collected and views expressed during the virtual meetings and on information contained in the internal evaluation report and other documents submitted before and during the virtual meetings.

III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile

The Postgraduate Study Programme “Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion” started in 2003-2004 in its previous format as a program in local development. In 2008 the PSP was restructured in its current form. Lately a maximum of 70 percent of the teaching is done at distance by the use of modern electronic devices.

The thematic area of this unidepartmental Program of Postgraduate Studies of the Department of Sociology is the education of scholars, researchers and development managers of the social economy sector in the methodology of a high degree research and its application to the planning and development of local and regional policies that promote social cohesion.

The academic goals of the Postgraduate program can be described as follows:

- The acquisition of skills to conduct methodological planning and applied social research. The educational process to achieve these consists of the formulation of research – related questions and hypotheses, the selection of research plans and techniques, sampling, data collection procedures, their qualitative and quantitative process, and finally, writing reports about the findings.
- The promotion of research approaches that bridge theory with empirical research aiming at the creation of social cohesion and development policies.
- Training in specialized techniques of quantitative and qualitative data analysis focusing on secondary data analysis, the biographical method and action research.
- The application of the above skills to the planning, organization and management of programs of social development but also to the formation of new regional and local governance policies.
- Working out plans and proposals of alternative models of social development based on local and regional peculiarities aiming at the improvement of the quality of life in urban and rural environment, the socially vulnerable groups and the reduction of social marginalization risks.

Programme completion requires 90 ECTS. During the first semester the programme is structured in six courses, compulsory for all students. During the second semester five elective courses are offered (10 ECTS each) of whom students choose three. A mandatory thesis (30 ECTS) will be authored and defended during the third semester.

The fee for the whole programme is 1800 Euros. 40 student positions are offered annually.

The Programme is supported by academic staff from the Department. All teaching staff are Ph.D. holders who are active scholars and researchers in diverse areas of studies in sociology.

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 of the academic unit is formulated as a public statement, and it is available electronically via an accessible website. It corresponds to the Policy of the institution, and it is implemented by all stakeholders. focuses on the achievement of specific

goals that relate to attracting, hiring and keeping high quality research active teaching staff, producing excellent research and delivering excellent teaching. A focal point of the objectives is the continuous development of the programme in directions that will endow students at postgraduate level with skills appropriate for the fast-changing labour market. Connecting research, teaching and employability is a central objective the PSP's Quality Assurance Policy.

The QAP has been approved by the Assembly of the Department and aims to develop and improve the Programme in line with the overall Quality Assurance Policy of the University of the Aegean. The quality assurance procedures of the Programme are coordinated and carried out under the supervision of the Department's Internal Evaluation Team.

II. Analysis

The pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications was found to be in accordance with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education at level 7.

Teaching staff was found to be appropriately qualified and research active and the curriculum delivered follows current developments in the field.

The QAP is evaluated internally and by students who complete relevant questionnaires. The results of the questionnaires are properly analysed, and results are taken into consideration.

III. Conclusions

There is a solid Quality Assurance Policy in place, with appropriate, quality goals and in line with the QAP of the institution as a whole. The PSP teaching team are fully compliant, there is a strong positive evaluation culture that facilitates the realisation of the programme's goals and sets the framework for achieving them. Financial resources appear to be effectively allocated, although a part could be diverted towards a staff research budget that would allow staff members to enjoy greater research mobility (participation in conferences and important events). All teaching staff are properly qualified, research active and active research led teaching in practice (despite being slightly out of focus when they attempt to describe this process – see principle 5).

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

- Part of the tuition fees funds could be diverted towards creating a research budget for staff.
- Professional support services could be enhanced with more staff.

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

II. Findings

The PSP “Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion” of the Department of Sociology at the University of the Aegean is interdisciplinary in its character in the sense that it is not limited exclusively to the further specialisation of sociologists but also to the wider range of social scientists and humanities graduates with the learning of the methods and techniques of sociological research.

Thus, the PSP aims a) to provide adequate knowledge within the fields of: social organization, social inequalities and social exclusion, employment and social development policies, delinquency and anti-crime policy, b) to provide knowledge in the theory and methodology of social research and c) to develop alternative models of social development, based on local and regional specificities, with the aim of promoting the social and economic integration of socially vulnerable groups and reducing the risks of their social marginalization and exclusion. The achievement of these goals implies training in the formulation of research questions and hypotheses, the development of a research design and research techniques, the process of data collection and their qualitative and quantitative processing.

Regarding the content and structure of the PSP it is obvious that the courses cover a wide range of subjects. The eight courses are divided into Compulsory and Compulsory Elective. The Compulsory courses are the courses that are considered necessary for the theoretical and methodological training of the student. The student is required to successfully complete these courses as a prerequisite for the award of a degree. There are seven of these courses, which are offered in the first and second semesters of study. Compulsory electives are courses that complement the scientific physiognomy with specialized scientific knowledge by constituting modules of subject matter that help in research specialization.

As a result of that postgraduate students acquire highly specialized knowledge of social research methodology through two compulsory core courses focused on the subject and two compulsory elective courses on the application of case studies, field research and social data analysis. In the third semester of studies, the preparation of a thesis is required to be implemented through empirical social research. In addition, the PSP encourages the participation of students in the work of the Department's research laboratories and in research projects of the University of the Aegean.

III. Analysis

The PSP design highlights the institution's student-centred approach offering a broad range of courses among which students can freely choose some courses. Given the duration of the semester (13 weeks) the workload equals to approximately 60 hours per week, which is rather high compared to usual standards. The committee wonders how students cope with such a workload when most of them have a job to do and some also have family or need to travel long distances to attend lectures that require compulsory attendance.

As students come from very different backgrounds, often without a background in sociology, a special effort is required to deepen the programme's subjects compared to the undergraduate course.

IV. Conclusions

The PSP delivers a concise number of courses which helps students to understand how to approach some of the major problems of our time.

Graduates highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, which helped to strengthen their own professional careers. The teachers are very helpful in choosing the topics for the thesis. Access to resources is satisfactory.

Stakeholders stressed that in a multicultural society such as Mytilene has become over the last decade, sociology is a valuable tool for understanding and addressing the everyday problems of a multifaceted society.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Stakeholders could be better involved in the selection of thesis topics.
- Capable students should be motivated to write their theses in English.
- The progression of knowledge in relation to courses during the first two semesters must be demonstrated more clearly.

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 PSP "Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion" complies with the third principle. The teaching methods that are applied in this particular PSP are encouraging students' active involvement in the learning process. Students are prompted to follow their own research paths while faculty are guiding constantly. The "non-exam-oriented" assessment

method reflects that general ideology that promote reflection and critical analysis. Students' feedback is desirable and asked for the course assessment via questionnaires. The program is open to review, taking into consideration the questionnaires. It is also accepting appeals and comments from students. Moreover, stakeholders can make comments about the PSP utilizing formal procedures.

II. Analysis

This particular post-graduate programme due to its limited student number can offer flexible learning paths. Moreover, the fact that the number of students is limited contributes to a greater, closer interaction and feedback between students and faculty. Consequently, the assessment of students can be achieved more easily, and the faculty may provide a more personalized teaching method to each student.

The role of the students in the whole teaching experience is very active and it is considered to be one of the reasons of success of this program. A widely used teaching method to accomplice that is seminar-like lesson with the use of technology wherever possible. e.g. through presentations and references to relevant bibliography.

Furthermore, students are undertaking research initiatives for a better assessment and by doing so they are developing their proficiency. Students, whilst choosing topic for their theses, are supported to pursue their research interests. Asynchronous learning is also supported through e-class, where students can find supporting bibliography and the power point presentations used in the classroom.

The criteria that the student will be assessed are published in the school's website. Also, additional pointers are given throughout the course of the class.

Course and teaching assessment questionnaires are employed to measure the effectiveness of teaching, before the end of each semester. However, participation is limited and combined with the students' culture, one cannot draw safe conclusions.

It is the institution's policy to except appeals either from the students or the stakeholders via a formal procedure. Students and other stakeholders can submit their comments and suggestions and will be taken into account for further improvements in the future. There is, always, an academic advisor who can help and guide the students in their future endeavours.

III. Conclusions

Overall, the program complies with the principle of student-centred learning, where students are given space to research their own ideas and to develop their interests. Nonetheless positive student-faculty interaction based on support and mutual respect is evident while students' obligations and assessment criteria are clearly articulated.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Every year, the changes selected for implementation based on the questionnaire results is recommended to be evaluated and discussed with the students.

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

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

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

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

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

Documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP has delivered the required documents, incl. of the postgraduate program's Student Guide, internal regulations of the post-graduate program (inclusive of rules pertaining to the MA Thesis) as well as relevant information concerning student mobility options. The documents address in detail the requirements – inclusive of admission requirements, the program's duration and progression guidelines, thesis guidelines, Erasmus+ details, award opportunities, course descriptions, students' obligations, etc. They offer students assistance and relevant information to guide them during their studies.

II. Analysis

The MA program's Student guide as well as the aforementioned related regulatory materials provide a comprehensive framework with regard to student progression throughout the post-graduate program.

According to documents provided, the ECTS system has been successfully implemented. The MA program does not include requirements for internship or practical training.

Individual students' progress is monitored by a supervisor assigned to each student.

There is a step-by-step explanation of the overall process of developing the MA thesis and a description of evaluation criteria. The program abides by the university's code of research.

Post-graduate students have expressed satisfaction with the overall operation of the program and with the tutoring of individual faculty members.

During interviews with students and alumni, participation in mobility was mentioned as a positive experience.

III. Conclusions

The MA Program has demonstrated a strong commitment in developing, revising and publicizing the required regulations to address all the major aspects of post-graduate work. Through the provision of detailed guidelines, faculty support, and online resources there is a well-defined framework available to both students and faculty.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

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

Teaching staff are adequate, and the teaching staff-student ration is satisfactory. Staff are appropriately trained, and their research specialisations match the programme of study. The recruitment process appears to be fair, objective and transparent, in accordance with national standards and following national regulations.

Several new staff have been hired in recent years. This is important for the dynamic of the PSP and the department as a whole, as new staff usually bring cutting edge research in academic units and this PSP is no exception. All staff are research active and (despite the lack of funds) strive to remain mobile, attend conferences and link with other departments in Europe. There are stable research leave (sabbatical) arrangements and generally we were given the impression that career development is not hindered in any way by structural factors, or implicit academic hierarchies.

II. Analysis

All staff are highly specialising and produce significant research. Scholarly activity is encouraged at staff level and research outputs are significant and closely linked to what is taught at programme level. There are no irregularities in how staff are hired or develop career-wise. There are two areas where we would like to draw the team's attention to.

First, although instituted in practice, staff did not seem to be fully aware of the importance of research-led teaching at discursive level. Second, and perhaps as a result, the department lacks a stable and structured seminar series that would bring together academics, postgraduate research and taught students as well as external speakers (either from other universities in the country, or from abroad). As a result, the research culture of the department is not as developed as one would expect and there is the need to create spaces for dialogue, presentation of research and critical debate. Such spaces have also a 'mentoring' character and they can become contexts for productive peer-review and advancement of knowledge in the field.

The department, as a whole, has a positive reputation. It can and it does attract highly qualified academic staff who are familiar with new technologies in research and teaching. Funded and unfunded research conducted is published in international publishing houses (such as Routledge) and staff maintain productive research links with colleagues at national and European levels.

III. Conclusions

Hiring and development processes are transparent, adequate and follow national regulations. Staff are aware of how to develop their career; they are appropriately trained and conduct research that closely matches the subjects taught on the PSP. Nevertheless, the departmental research culture can be strengthened with the introduction of research spaces, peer-review and mentoring practices. The department does not seem to hinder professional development, but we are not sure that it facilitates adequately the production of scholarly activity and the exchange of research knowledge between all strata of the academic community (including research and taught postgraduate students).

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

The development of a stable seminar series (weekly or fortnightly) with the participation of academic staff, research and taught postgraduate students. A hybrid format would facilitate the invitation of external speakers without any extra costs.

The development of a 'local' annual conference where staff, research students and postgraduate taught students will be able present their work, discuss and offer peer-review comments in a constructive manner. This will familiarise both PSP and research students with the format of presenting original research in appropriate fora.

The development of mentorship structures that could facilitate professional development, sharing resources and networking, the exchange of ideas and good practice.

PRINCIPLE 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 University of Aegean hosting the PSP “Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion” has the infrastructure, the classrooms, amphitheatres, labs, library, and digital libraries, and all that is needed to support the program. The funding is presumably adequate. Moreover, the university has supporting services for the students, such as career counselling and psychological support, sports and cultural clubs that contribute to the welfare of students during their academic training.

II. Analysis

The University of Aegean has the necessary infrastructure to teach this PSP. Apart from the classrooms the university has laboratories, seminary halls, meeting halls and library. In the

library a student can access digital libraries and databases using the computer network of the library and/or use their personal computer to connect to the university's network.

Most of the infrastructure of the university is deemed new and in a well-maintained condition. Fact that is reflected to the classroom, since none of the students complains about the buildings and are coming to class with joy.

On the other hand, even though the administration of the library's has renewed most of its material the books that are in the library are considered outdated and in few copies. The number of the copies is deemed few, since there are few copies for all the students to borrow, in order to make their research, resulting in the lending of books from faculty and their private collections. Some of the latest publications can be found on the university's database, however acquiring a hard copy of those publications, as admitted by the faculty, is rather difficult.

Regarding all other aspects of the students' living conditions, there are dorms where students that meet the criteria are housed. There is counselling that informs students about the markets needs and gives help to every matter that a student encounters. There is psychological counselling to students and staff alike if needed. Furthermore, there are extra-curriculum activities that the students can attend to, such as sports, lectures and seminars.

III. Conclusions

Overall, the university offers all required resources for the smooth operation of the program. Infrastructure, resources and services are readily accessible for the students.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

- Increase the funding of the library to acquire new publications or make a petition for donation.
- Ensure access to the latest issues of journals in the field.

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 Coordinating Committee (CC) is responsible for the monitoring and coordination of the PSP's operation. The CC is responsible for the continuous study and evaluation of the educational process, with the aim of its continuous improvement. Information from internal and external evaluations are taken into account in the planning process. The number, type and content of the courses of the curriculum may be adjusted by decision of the Assembly of the Department in order to ensure the proper functioning of the PSP.

The Department uses modern information systems to gather, analyse and spread information. The Department of Sociology collects, analyses and utilises information in a functional and easily accessible way in order to effectively manage the PSP. The technical tools and communication channels used in the context of the PSP are:

Universis: The student directory posts grades and provides personalised information for students and faculty members.

Uni-teacher: This is a certified teaching support system, in which the teaching staff can access the list of registered students, communicate with students and process exam scores etc.

Open Eclass: this is an e-learning platform, where the teaching staff post announcements related to the courses (syllabus etc.), publish material (videos, power points, articles, links etc.).

Nautilus: This is an information system used to post applications for postgraduate programmes and the qualifying examinations that take place once a year.

APELLA: It is a central information system of the Ministry through which the overall process of election and promotion of faculty members is organised.

Shared Resource Management System: information system that informs about room reservations in the buildings of Mytilene.

Central Management Board of the MSc: It is an information system in which information on the settlement of the tuition fees of students of postgraduate programmes is posted, sending personal updates and information on the settlement of their payments.

All the above information and communication tools respect and protect the personal data of both students and staff of the Department. The process of collecting and analysing information is carried out in accordance with the rules set out in the privacy policy.

The website of the Department and the MSc includes updated information about the teaching, administrative, laboratory and research staff.

The analyses of the selected information and the resulting conclusions are used, depending on their subject matter, by the competent committees and bodies of the Department (the Department Assembly, the OMEA, etc.). The committees are obliged to take these reports explicitly into account in order to substantiate their recommendations.

II. Analysis

The institution's data collection and analysis methodologies appear comprehensive, potentially offering valuable insights for decision-making. The practice of involving students and staff in the process adds a layer of authenticity to the collected data, promoting transparency. Using various data sources contributes to an overarching understanding of the PSP's performance. These practices likely assist in highlighting both strengths and areas needing improvement, supporting an evidence-based approach to PSP enhancement.

Students and lecturers are provided with all the information on the operation and activities of the Programme, including the Study Guide, regulations, announcements, etc. Information on the structure of the PSP, information on the assessments and accreditations, the units and services, the history, mission and operation of the Department, research that is conducted, etc.

III. Conclusions

The dedication towards collecting, analysing, and utilizing data for the continuous improvement of the PSP is apparent. The comprehensive and inclusive information management system assures quality and informs decisions. The PSP appears to use information management as a critical part of its strategy to maintain standards and support student success.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Finding methods to increase the participation rate of students in the evaluation 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 Department's website allows the publication of relevant information concerning the department of Sociology as well as specifically this Programme (<https://www.soc.aegean.gr/index.php/gr-m-ma/gr-m-etkas>) It offers information about the overarching structure of the MA program and the courses offered. The website is bilingual, offering content in both English and Greek, thereby broadening its accessibility to a more diverse audience.

II. Analysis

The program under examination has fulfilled the obligations specified under this particular principle. The website provides a clear, objective, and up-to-date overview of the Programme, catering to the informational needs of a diverse audience, including prospective students, graduates, and other interested parties. The bilingual content promotes inclusivity and wider accessibility.

III. Conclusions

The Department's website for the Programme addresses the requirements of Principle 8. It provides information about the overarching structure of the program and the courses offered

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

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

There is an internal committee responsible for the MA program's periodic evaluation and self-assessment. It is the principal body responsible for this particular Principle. It works collaboratively with the Department's OMEA which is in charge of the process of collecting student evaluations. The Departmental Council is ultimately responsible for the approval of the MA Programme as well as for the approval of subsequent revisions and modifications. The formulation and monitoring of specific policies is based on input and feedback from various sources. These range from internal evaluation reports to student evaluations to the MA Program's external evaluation to the MODIP indicators and so on. These sources are subject of analysis in order to develop specific recommendations and then implement them accordingly.

II. Analysis

According to the documentation provided, the Department has specific processes in place to ensure an ongoing mechanism for the MA program's review and revisions. These processes attest to departmental efforts to maintain international standards.

III. Conclusions

The Department has satisfied the requirements set forth in order to comply with this particular Principle. The program's operation and monitoring procedures contribute to an internal quality assurance system that operates efficiently.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

None.

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 Programme has not been externally evaluated in the past. During the current external review, all stakeholders were actively engaged. The Department and the University worked diligently in preparing materials, and presentations and organising and hosting virtual meetings with the Panel. All the meetings included presentations, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions. The Panel had the opportunity to meet, talk, and interact with all the participants of all meetings. The discussions were very constructive and fruitful and were conducted in a cooperative manner and attitude. The efficiency and eagerness of the Department to answer questions and provide additional information and clarifications during the meetings are worth noting.

II. Analysis

Based on the materials submitted and the information gathered during the online presentations and discussions, it appears that all members of staff (teaching and administrative), as well as students, alumni and other stakeholders, are aware of the importance of external review, its usefulness and the contribution it can make in improving the Programme. The current external evaluation process showed that the University and the Department are committed to the letter, spirit and process of quality assurance and external review. There is already in place a step-by-step action plan for utilizing the findings and recommendations of the external evaluation. As they pointed out during the meetings, it will help them improve by enabling them to identify problematic areas and find suitable solutions.

III. Conclusions

The panel's impression is that the Department and the University are committed to external evaluation as a vital component of a quality assurance system. They worked diligently to facilitate the current review and meet its objectives. Overall, their positive approach toward quality assurance and external review is expected to impact the Programme and contribute to its continuous improvement positively. However, more tangible results and a more meaningful assessment regarding this Principle will be possible when a second external evaluation is carried out.

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 PSP is one of the few Postgraduate Programmes in Greece, dealing explicitly with issues of research methods in social sciences and sociology. It is stated that it was designed based on the up-to-date international standards and combines academic knowledge and practical research experience.

All teaching staff should be praised for their firm commitment, concentrated effort, and enthusiasm to reach this point despite the obstacles and difficulties created by limited resources and other external factors. A new generation of younger sociology zealots has entered the department, and it is manifested in a cooperative atmosphere, mutual respect and collegial spirit. The teaching staff has the appropriate qualifications, which are continuously cultivated by development activities at the Department. The curriculum is organized according to the latest trends in the scientific field. The Programme was praised by the social partners, students and alumni, and it is supported by the leadership of the University.

The Programme delivers a student-centred education that cultivates diverse perspectives and independence and prepares students for important roles in social life. It prioritizes transparent student selection and a full-time attendance model. The Regulation of Studies document provides comprehensive guidance.

The Programme actively encourages and values regular student course evaluations to drive continuous improvement.

II. Areas of Weakness

The Panel feels that the fit between the title of the course and the content of the Programme is not perfect. The title seems to reflect the history of the Department, but the Programme is more of a Programme in Research methodology in the Social Sciences.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- The development of a stable seminar series (weekly or fortnightly) with the participation of academic staff, research and taught postgraduate students. A hybrid format would facilitate the invitation of external speakers without any extra costs.
- The development of a 'local' annual conference where staff, research students and postgraduate taught students will be able present their work, discuss and offer peer-review comments in a constructive manner. This will familiarise both PSP and research students with the format of presenting original research in appropriate fora.

- The development of mentorship structures that could facilitate professional development, sharing resources and networking, the exchange of ideas and good practice.
- Consider the question of how the title of the course corresponds with the content of the Programme.
- Stakeholders could be more involved in the selection of these topics.
- Capable students could be motivated to write their theses in English.
- The progression of knowledge in relation to courses during the first two years must be demonstrated more clearly.
- Part of the tuition fees funds could be diverted towards creating a research budget for staff.
- Professional support services could be enhanced with more staff.
- Find methods to increase the participation rate of students in the evaluation. Every year, the changes selected for implementation based on the questionnaire results is recommended to be evaluated and discussed with the students.
- Increase the funding of the library to acquire new publications or make a petition for donation.
- Ensure access to the latest issues of journals in the field.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are:

None.

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are:

None.

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are:

None.

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

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

Signature

- 1. Professor Apostolis Papakostas (Chair)**
School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University
- 2. Professor Dimitris Michailakis**
Department of Culture and Society, University of Linköping
- 3. Professor Elisabeth Kirtsoglou**
Anthropology Department, Durham University
- 4. Professor Victor Roudometof**
University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- 5. PhD candidate, Alexandra Kozamani**
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