



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Accreditation Report

for the New Postgraduate Study Programme of:

ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability

Department: Geography
Institution: University of the Aegean
Date: 11/12/2025



Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση
της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Πρόγραμμα
Ανθρώπινο Δυναμικό και
Κοινωνική Συνοχή



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of
the New Postgraduate Study Programme of ISLANDS: Master Course in
Islands and Sustainability 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 new postgraduate study programme of ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability of the University of the Aegean comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Law 4653/2020:

1. PAVLOSTATHIS SPYROS (Chair)

(Title, Name, Surname)

School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Georgia Institute of Technology

(Institution of origin)

2. CONSTANTINOU STAVROS

(Title, Name, Surname)

Department of Geography, College of Arts and Sciences, The Ohio State University

(Institution of origin)

3. KYRITSIS DIMITRIOS

(Title, Name, Surname)

École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)

(Institution of origin)

4. STATHOPOULOS THEODORE

(Title, Name, Surname)

Centre for Building Studies & Department of Building, Civil & Environmental Engineering (BCEE), Faculty of Engineering & Computer Science, Concordia University

(Institution of origin)

5. Tsivolas Konstantinos

(Title, Name, Surname)

National Technical University of Athens

(Institution of origin)

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

Brief reference to the Panel preparation for the new postgraduate study programme review, as well as to the documentation provided and considered by the Panel. Dates of the review, review schedule, meetings held and any additional information regarding the procedure.

In preparation for the review and assessment of the Postgraduate Study Programme (PSP) ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability of the University of the Aegean, the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) reviewed a multitude of materials provided by the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education (HAHE), which included background information and guidance on the review and accreditation process, as well as detailed material and data related to the programme under evaluation, such as the programme accreditation proposal and associated appendices provided by the PSP through the HAHE. All programme evaluation material was submitted by the University of the Aegean to HAHE in September 2025.

The programme review was conducted via teleconference, organized, and coordinated by HAHE and the University of the Aegean. The schedule and agenda of the review were as stated below.

Monday 1/12/2025

a) Preliminary private meeting of the EEAP. Discussion of the PSP under review; assignment of writing sections of the draft accreditation reports to the EEAP members.

Tuesday 2/12/2025

a) Welcome meeting and an overview of the PSP with the University Vice-Rector of Administrative and Academic Affairs and Head of the University Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP) Prof. S. Xanthopoulos, the PSP Director Prof. Th. Kizos, the Department Head Prof. M. Vaitis, and the University QAU (MODIP) Supervisor Ms. Karavia: Brief presentation of the PSP ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability history, structure, strengths, weaknesses and other futures.

b) Meeting with PSP teaching staff members, Profs. G. Tsilimigkas, Th. Tscheulin, D. Kavroudakis, and I. Spilanis; Ms. E. Th. Derdemezi and Ms. S. Zafeirelli, Doctoral Candidates and Teaching Staff: Discussion of teaching involvement, learning resources and other features of the PSP, professional development, research activities, as well as the link between teaching and research.

c) Meeting with Profs. E. Petrakou and I. Chorianopoulos; Ms. A. Mylopteri, Secretariat Deputy Head: Online (video) tour of facilities, discussion of facilities, equipment, learning resources, software availability, as well as administrative and technical staff needs.

d) Meeting and discussion with employers and social partners: Ms. K. Bentana, Lesvos Museum of Natural History of the Petrified Forest of Lesvos; Mr. N. Chrisafis, Head of Forest Bureau of Lesvos; Mr. T. Theofanellis, Head of Second Degree Education of Lesvos; Mr. P. Katsavelis, President of Geotechnical Chamber of Greece (GEOTEE) N. Aegean Branch; and Mr. S. Manolakellis, President of Technical Chamber of Greece (TEE) N. Aegean Branch.

e) Private debriefing meeting (EEAP members only): Discussion of the outcomes and

findings of the PSP virtual visit; preparation of oral report.

f) Closure meeting with the Head of the University QAU (MODIP), the PSP Director, the Department Head, and the University QAU (MODIP) Supervisor: Informal, oral presentation of the EEAP PSP key findings, discussion, and clarifications.

Wednesday 3/12/2025 to Saturday 6/12/2025

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

Throughout the review and evaluation process, the EEAP was in close communication with the Department and PSP administration, who were very accommodating in providing additional information requested by the EEAP. The EEAP found that the Department and PSP administration, as well as the faculty, technical and administrative staff, and the stakeholders interviewed were eager and helpful in our discussions, providing valuable additional information.

III. Postgraduate Study Programme Profile

Brief overview of the new postgraduate study programme with reference to the following: history, academic remit, duration of studies, qualification awarded, employment opportunities, orientation challenges or any other key background information. Short description of the home Department and Institution, with reference to student population, campus, or any other related facts.

The Postgraduate Study Programme (PSP) ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability was established in 2022-2023 (Government Gazette 3478/B'/5-7-2022) by the Department of Geography of the University of the Aegean as a component of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree ISLANDS with Departments of the following Institutions: University of Groningen, Netherlands; University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain; and University of Iceland, Iceland.

The PSP aim is to develop specific knowledge and skills for the sustainable development of island regions by emphasizing the scientific and practical approach to the challenges facing islands worldwide, based on solutions to ecological, social and economic issues. The purpose of the PSP is to provide postgraduate education to address the existing need for specialized training in the field of island sustainability.

Teaching in the PSP is carried out by academic personnel of the University of the Aegean, primarily four faculty members of the Department of Geography, one emeritus faculty member of the Department of Environment, along with external lecturers and teaching assistants, who are postdoctoral researchers or doctoral candidates. In addition, scientists from Greece or abroad are invited speakers and give lectures during the academic semester.

The entire Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree ISLANDS has set at thirty (30) the maximum number of admitted students; thus, a lower number of students attend the programme at the University of the Aegean. The admission criteria and selection process are specified in the PSP Programme Guide. The annual tuition fees are € 4500 for EU citizens and € 9000 for non- EU citizens.

The PSP is a four-semester study resulting in a PSP diploma, level 7 of the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. To obtain the diploma, the student must have successfully passed eight (8) courses (90 ECTS) and completed a diploma thesis (30 ECTS). Elective courses are offered by the University of Groningen, Netherlands. Teaching is conducted in English, instruction is in-person, and attendance is mandatory. A two-month student internship is required.

Graduates of the PSP ISLANDS are prepared for careers in both the private and public sectors of the economy such as local economic development consultants, environmental management consultants, business consultants, tourism planners/managers, careers in International Organizations in the fields of environment, sustainable development, social development, entrepreneurship and climate change as well as careers in international,

regional, national or local NGOs. Graduates can continue with doctoral studies and academic careers. There are strong links to society, which is a key priority of the PSP, the Department of Geography, and the Institution.

In addition to the PSP ISLANDS, the Department of Geography offers two postgraduate studies programmes and participates in one inter-institutional postgraduate studies programme. The Department also supports doctoral studies.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

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

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD INCLUDE IN THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT THE DEVELOPMENT, ORGANISATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES (PSP) IN SPECIFIC SCIENTIFIC FIELDS AFTER INVESTIGATING THEIR FEASIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY.

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY FOR THE NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT.

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

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

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

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

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit for postgraduate study programmes should be in line with the Institution's strategy and must be formulated in the form of a public statement, which is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special goals related to the quality assurance of the postgraduate study programmes offered by the academic unit. Indicatively, the quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the postgraduate study programme (PSP), its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

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

- a. the suitability of the structure and organisation of postgraduate study programmes*
- b. the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education - level 7*
- c. the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching at the PSP*

- d. *the appropriateness of the qualifications and the availability of the teaching staff for the PSP*
- e. *the drafting, implementation, and review of specific annual quality goals for the improvement of the PSP*
- f. *the level of demand for the graduates' qualifications in the labour market*
- g. *the quality of support services, such as administrative services, the libraries, and the student welfare office for the PSP*
- h. *the efficient utilisation of the financial resources of the PSP that may be drawn from tuition fees*
- i. *the conduct of an annual internal review and audit of the quality assurance system for the PSP through the cooperation of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU)*

Documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The new Postgraduate Study Programme (PSP) "ISLANDS – Islands and Sustainability" offered by the Department of Geography, University of the Aegean, as an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD) is well-structured and aligned with its academic and institutional goals. The collaborating institutions include the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in Spain, and the University of Iceland. The curriculum progresses logically from foundational sustainability concepts to advanced research and applied policy analysis, combining theoretical rigor with practical experience through fieldwork, internships, and mobility across partner universities. The PSP's interdisciplinary design and strong student support mechanisms enhance employability and global engagement.

The new PSP is fully compliant with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Greek National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education at Level 7. The programme meets EQF Level 7 standards by fostering advanced knowledge, specialized problem-solving, and strategic responsibility in complex contexts.

The new PSP promotes teaching quality and effectiveness through a research-driven, interdisciplinary curriculum delivered by experienced faculty from multiple partner universities. It incorporates innovative pedagogical methods, student mobility, field-based learning, and collaborative projects, fostering active engagement and practical application of knowledge. Continuous evaluation mechanisms and mentoring support further guarantee alignment with international standards for postgraduate education and sustained academic excellence.

A notable feature of the programme is its emphasis on face-to-face delivery, which fosters effective interaction between faculty and students and supports the programme's research-intensive character. This approach enhances collaboration and the quality of academic outcomes.

The new PSP is supported by highly qualified faculty from the University of the Aegean and partner institutions, all holding advanced academic credentials and research expertise in geography, sustainability, and related fields. The consortium structure ensures adequate teaching capacity and diverse specialization, guaranteeing the availability of experienced staff to deliver high-quality instruction and supervision throughout the programme.

The new PSP sets and reviews annual quality goals through collaboration between the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG/OMEA) and the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP), ensuring continuous improvement and compliance with standards. Administrative support, library access, and welfare services complement academic strengths. European Union scholarship tuition-derived resources are managed efficiently to support teaching, mobility, and infrastructure, while internal audits verify the effectiveness of the quality assurance system.

The programme addresses strong labour market demand for sustainability and island management expertise, preparing graduates for roles in policy, research, and consultancy. High-quality administrative support, library access, and student welfare services enhance the learning experience, reinforcing the programme's competitiveness and alignment with international best practices.

The University of the Aegean has demonstrated exceptional professionalism and transparency throughout the evaluation process. The documentation provided is comprehensive, well-structured, and clearly aligned with international standards, reflecting a strong commitment to quality assurance and strategic planning. Furthermore, the Institution's readiness to promptly provide any additional materials requested by the EEAP underscores its collaborative approach and dedication to ensuring a rigorous, efficient accreditation process.

II. Analysis

The new PSP demonstrates strong alignment with its academic and institutional objectives through a well-structured curriculum that integrates theoretical depth with practical application. Its interdisciplinary design, mobility opportunities, and experiential learning components, such as fieldwork and internships, position the programme as highly competitive and relevant to global sustainability challenges. These features not only enhance student engagement but also significantly improve employability and international exposure.

Compliance with EQF Level 7 and the Greek National Qualifications Framework confirms the programme's academic rigor and its capacity to deliver advanced knowledge, critical thinking, and strategic problem-solving skills. The involvement of highly qualified faculty from multiple partner institutions ensures both teaching excellence and research integration, while robust quality assurance mechanisms—including annual goal setting, internal audits, and resource management—support continuous improvement.

The programme's strong research orientation is supported by dedicated courses and publication mechanisms, reinforcing its commitment to academic excellence and knowledge dissemination. This focus on research-driven education positions the programme as a leader in postgraduate studies.

Combined with strong labour market demand and comprehensive student support services, the programme reflects a high level of institutional commitment to quality, relevance, and sustainability in postgraduate education.

III. Conclusions

The new PSP demonstrates full compliance with Principle 1 through a clear strategic framework, strong quality assurance processes, and effective governance. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely (SMART) goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provide a structured approach to continuous improvement. At the same time, alignment with EQF Level 7 ensures academic rigour and international recognition. Overall, the new Erasmus Mundus PSP "ISLANDS – Islands and Sustainability" at the University of the Aegean is well-positioned as a high-quality, globally relevant postgraduate offering that reflects the Institution's commitment to sustainability, innovation, and international collaboration.

Panel Judgement

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

Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

R1.1. Establish a formal External Advisory Board that meets regularly with PSP faculty and administrators to provide feedback on curriculum, research integration, and overall programme quality.

R1.2. Diversify funding sources to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

R1.3. Develop a targeted marketing strategy aimed at the Greek Diaspora to attract prospective students and strengthen cultural and academic ties.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of New Postgraduate Study Programmes

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

The academic units develop their postgraduate study programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the research character, the scientific objectives, the specific subject areas, the specialisations, the expected learning outcomes, the structure, the courses, the teaching and assessment modes, the teaching staff and the necessary resources are described at this stage.

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

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

In addition, the design of PSP must consider:

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

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

Documentation

- *Senate decision for the establishment of the PSP*
- *PSP curriculum structure: courses, course categories, ECTS awarded, expected learning outcomes according to the NQF, internship, mobility opportunities*
- *Labour market data regarding the employment of graduates, international experience in a relevant scientific field*
- *PSP Student Guide*
- *Course and thesis outlines*
- *Teaching staff: teaching assignments per subject area and per course*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The EEAP was fully satisfied with the development of this PSP on “ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability” by the University of the Aegean, Department of Geography, in cooperation with the University of Groningen (The Netherlands) under the auspices of Erasmus Mundus. Other European universities, such as Las Palmas Gran Canaria of Spain and the University of Iceland also participate in this programme, whereas discussions with other institutions are currently under way. The programme is well designed and covers a broad selection of topics in the field of Island countries regarding their energy resources and sustainability.

The scope and orientation of the programme are scientific, educational and professional with great emphasis on research. This PSP is unique because it admits students from European and non-European countries – truly international. However, no students from Greece have participated in this PSP as of now. Students admitted may have diverse educational backgrounds ranging

from science and engineering to sociology and commerce relevant to the curriculum content of the new PSP. Admitted students pay total tuition fees at the level of 9,000 Euros (Europeans) and 18,000 Euros (non-Europeans) for the entire programme, consisting of four semesters: the first and third semesters are carried out in Groningen, whereas the second and last semester are carried out in another of the participating countries, i.e. Greece, or Spain or Iceland (at present) - the same for both semesters. Most students receive generous scholarships covering the tuition fees and travel expenses.

Admission criteria are strict concentrating in the fit of each student to the programme and the good knowledge of the English language, which is the language used in the entire programme, which also requires physical presence of students and instructors. Online version is disallowed. The last semester is used for carrying out research followed by the completion of a diploma research thesis. Course content is diverse based on both theory and applications. The teaching personnel has excellent academic qualifications to teach in their fields. Group teaching is also encouraged. Lectures have been planned from national and international experts enriching the programme content. There is a minimal overlapping with the content of programme courses or any similar undergraduate courses.

The PSP has already completed two successful cycles. There is a target of maximum 30 students admitted to the programme for the entire MUNDUS PSP. All finances have been evaluated on the assumption that the number of students will be 30. Some flexibility, however, is acceptable.

External stakeholders are strong supporters of this PSP on an individual basis. Their expressed enthusiasm and dedication for this PSP appear impressive. There was no clear evidence of stakeholders and students' participation in the curriculum development.

II. Analysis

The EEAP was impressed by the hard work, efforts and dedication of the administration and the faculty members teaching in this PSP. This success, as well as the interest in this PSP on ISLANDS can also be attributed to the uniqueness of the programme. There are only two similar programmes, one in Canada (Prince Edward Island), the other in Malta but their development is not at the same level and orientation with the PSP currently under evaluation for accreditation.

In addition, it is also remarkable to mention that all stakeholders interviewed by the EEAP expressed a very positive opinion of the programme and the anticipated technical and professional skills of the programme graduates both in depth and in breadth. There was a general belief and expectation that the programme graduates will not have any problem in getting good jobs and serving

the scientific community and the local, national, European and International companies and corporations. The EEAP discussed the possibility of formal development of an External Advisory Board and suggested including in its membership the stakeholders of the programme output, for instance, senior government or industry officials and other experts from national academia and technology to advise the PSP administrators regarding the strategic development of this PSP, potential curriculum enhancements, research, technological and socioeconomic needs and the like. At present, the proposal specifies receiving input from the students through well-prepared questionnaires to be completed by the students. However, the EEAP knows that participation rates are always low, so it recommends that a more formal process should be established to include student participation in the process of curriculum development.

Finally, a concern discussed by the EEAP was the long-term viability of the programme, which is currently based on Erasmus Mundus European Commission funds. The recommended External Advisory Board should include this in their agenda as an action item.

III. Conclusions

The PSP on ISLANDS: Master Course in Islands and Sustainability of the University of the Aegean in cooperation with the University of Groningen (Netherlands) is highly promising and complies fully with the HAHE requirements of Principle 2. However, this PSP could be enhanced and enjoy much higher success with the formal establishment and function of an External Advisory Board which will provide critical input on issues such as curriculum evolution, case studies, and fieldwork experience, as well as a professional network for the PSP graduates.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R2.1. Establish formally and publicize an External Advisory Board made of senior government/industry officials and international experts to advise the programme

administrators regarding the strategic development and enhancement of this programme.

R2.2. Establish a formal process for the active participation of students in the curriculum development of the programme.

Principle 3: Regulations for Student Admission, Progression, Recognition of Postgraduate Studies, and certification

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

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

Indicatively:

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

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

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

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

Documentation

- *Internal regulation for the operation of the postgraduate study programme*
- *Special regulation for the implementation of e-learning if the PSP is delivered through distance methods*
- *Research Ethics Regulation*

- *Regulation of studies, internship, mobility, and student assignments*
- *Degree certificate template and Diploma Supplement template*

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP has established comprehensive internal regulations that cover all stages of the programme, from admission to graduation. Admission criteria are clearly defined and publicly available on the official website of the programme. Although the current intake is limited, the programme aims to gradually increase the number of admitted students each year. As highlighted in the meeting with the University and PSP administration, the PSP accepts candidates from a wide range of academic backgrounds. Newly admitted students are informed about the registration process through email communication and online meetings before they arrive in Lesvos. During these meetings, students receive detailed guidance regarding the required documentation for enrolment in the Department and for accessing the electronic learning platforms.

The programme employs a variety of assessment methods, including written or oral examinations, assignments, or a combination of these, as well as exemption through coursework where applicable. The assessment methods for each course are clearly stated in the course outline. Student progress is monitored by the academic advisor, who is currently the PSP Director. Individual meetings are held once a month with each student. Other members of the teaching staff will also assume the role of academic advisor as the number of admitted students increases.

Scholarships funded by Erasmus+ are available to eligible students, although their continuation depends on the renewal of the Erasmus Mundus programme. The internship is compulsory for all students and takes place during the summer period following the second semester or concurrently with it. The PSP is a two-year programme corresponding to a total workload of 120 ECTS. Regulations regarding study duration, possible extensions, and conditions for dismissal in case of academic failure are clearly outlined. In the fourth semester, students complete their PSP thesis, for which the procedures and evaluation criteria are explicitly defined. The programme's academic staff encourage students to disseminate their research findings at scientific conferences and in academic journals. Finally, the Diploma supplement of the double degree programme is in place.

II. Analysis

The PSP is governed by a clear regulatory framework that effectively outlines admission procedures, student obligations, and assessment methods. Admission

criteria are transparent and address the needs of students across the world with different academic backgrounds. Communication with new students through email and online meetings ensures that they are well informed about registration procedures, digital platforms, and practical matters such as accommodation. Assessment methods are appropriate and clearly stated in each course outline, and the student's progress is monitored through monthly meetings with the academic advisor. Scholarships through Erasmus+ enhance the programme, although their continuation depends on future funding. The compulsory internship after the second semester adds valuable practical experience. The two-year, 120-ECTS structure aligns with European standards, and regulations on study duration, extensions, and dismissal are clearly defined. The PSP thesis follows a well-specified process, and the programme actively encourages the dissemination of students' research results.

III. Conclusions

The PSP meets the expectations of Principle 3. Student admission, progression, and certification are all well-defined and communicated.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

There are no specific recommendations for Principle 3.

Principle 4: Teaching Staff of New Postgraduate Study Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF THEIR TEACHING STAFF, AND APPLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR THEIR RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT.

The Institution should attend to the adequacy and scientific competence of the teaching staff at the PSP, the appropriate staff-student ratio, the proper staff categories, the appropriate subject areas, the fair and objective recruitment process, the high research performance, the training, the staff development policy (including participation in mobility schemes, conferences, and educational leaves-as mandated by law).

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

Documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The teaching staff of the PSP ISLANDS is drawn almost exclusively from the academic personnel of the University of the Aegean, primarily from the Department of Geography, whose scientific fields correspond directly to the content of the PSP curriculum. In particular, five faculty members deliver courses in the programme, while an additional and fluctuating number of staff members undertake the supervision of International Research Training (IRT) or postgraduate theses. To address needs related mainly to auxiliary teaching duties or co-teaching arrangements arising from high teaching and administrative workloads, the programme engages five external lecturers and teaching assistants, who are postdoctoral researchers or doctoral candidates.

The selection of faculty members falls within the remit of the Department of Geography and the electoral bodies constituted in accordance with the legislation in force at each time. Vacancies are announced and applications are

submitted through the APELLA and DIAVGEIA information systems, thereby ensuring transparency at all stages of the recruitment process. The selection criteria include the research output, teaching experience, professional activity, and administrative work of the candidates.

The PSP does not provide additional incentives or dedicated funding for Erasmus+ travel related to the PSPs activities, as it is already financed under Erasmus+ by the European Commission. Nevertheless, members of the teaching and research staff are generally encouraged to participate in mobility and exchange activities with other institutions in Europe and beyond.

Teaching duties are assigned to lecturers by the PSP Coordinator before the start of each academic semester. The allocation takes into account both subject relevance and each lecturer's overall weekly teaching load across all programmes. In line with current legislation, the minimum weekly teaching load for faculty is 6 hours and is generally not allowed to exceed 9 hours. Training and support of the PSP teaching staff is accomplished through the Centre of Support for Teaching & Learning (CTL) of the University of the Aegean (<https://tiso.aegean.gr/?lang=en>).

The scientific research performance and publication record of the PSP teaching staff are commendable, demonstrating a high level of productivity both in terms of quantity and the calibre of the peer-reviewed journals in which their work appears. This assessment is supported by data from the Scopus bibliographic database. Collectively, the faculty have authored 258 publications and have received over 6,000 citations, reflecting significant recognition within the scholarly community.

II. Analysis

The academic unit responsible for the PSP implements a transparent and objective recruitment process, cultivating a conducive work environment with adequate resources for teaching and research. Faculty involved demonstrate appropriate expertise and experience to impart specialised content through theoretical and practical modalities.

Special emphasis is accorded to the integration of faculty research with teaching, whereby contemporary research outcomes inform course content and research-oriented diploma theses are assigned to postgraduate students. This integration advances scholarly productivity among faculty while cultivating research proficiency in students. Dissemination of thesis findings at publications and conferences is encouraged.

Faculty mobility for teaching or professional development abroad outside the PSP's activities is facilitated through the ERASMUS+ programme, with

comprehensive administrative support extended by the University's ERASMUS+ Office. Faculty members are further encouraged to utilise their academic credentials to forge collaborative partnerships with domestic and international universities.

III. Conclusions

The academic unit administering the PSP implements a transparent, objective, and equitable recruitment procedure, consistent with established accreditation standards for postgraduate programmes. It sustains a conducive professional environment characterised by favourable employment conditions and comprehensive provision of requisite resources and infrastructure to support pedagogical and research activities. The selection of the students to the PSP is done by the PSP Coordinator who is representing the University of the Aegean PSP component in the whole ISLANDS programme. The assignment of diploma theses and IRT projects is done by the PSP Coordinator taking into account the interests of the students, the subject relevance, and the teaching load of lecturers. However, this process is not yet formalised and documented.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R4.1 Formalise and document a) the process of selection of students to the University of the Aegean PSP component from the list of the pre-selected students to the whole ISLANDS programme; and b) the process of the assignment of PSP diploma theses and IRT projects to the students and respective academic supervisors.

Principle 5: Learning Resources and Student Support

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

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient resources and means, on a planned and long-term basis, to support learning and academic activity in general, so as to offer PSP students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as the necessary general and more specialised libraries and possibilities for access to electronic databases, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, IT and communication services, support, and counselling services.

When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g., whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed and foreign students, students with disabilities), in addition to the shift towards student-centered learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the Institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance proves -on the one hand- the quantity and quality of the available facilities and services, and -on the other hand- that students are aware of all available services.

In delivering support services, the role of support and administration staff is crucial and therefore this segment of staff needs to be qualified and have opportunities to develop its competences.

Documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

The PSP is delivered fully on site, in person, ensuring direct interaction between students and teaching staff. The University of Aegean provides appropriate teaching facilities, including classrooms equipped with projection and audiovisual capabilities, allowing for enhanced instructional delivery and flexibility when needed. In addition, a dedicated postgraduate student laboratory is available for study and group work. To support the courses in geoinformatics, the University offers access to a specialised Geoinformatics Laboratory. This facility is equipped with the necessary software and tools required for the programme's coursework

and provides extended opening hours to accommodate students' schedules. Moreover, the course outlines clearly specify the use of open-source software within the framework of the courses, ensuring that all students have unrestricted access to the necessary tools. Students also have access to the University's electronic library, including scientific books, scientific journals, and other resources, as well as the e-class platform for course materials.

At the institutional level, a comprehensive set of support services is available. These include the Career Office, the Office for Complaints, and counselling units that support students' academic and personal well-being. Administrative procedures, such as issuance of student certificates and other documentation, are also carried out electronically, as confirmed during discussions with administrative staff. The University restaurant provides three meals per day at a symbolic cost, contributing to the overall support of students.

A tuition utilization plan is in place, ensuring transparency in the allocation of programme resources. Part of the tuition income is reinvested in students through financial support for participation in scientific conferences, encouraging academic engagement and development.

II. Analysis

The PSP is well supported by the University's infrastructure, with adequately equipped lecture rooms and access to several laboratories in order to strengthen the learning experience of the students. These facilities, along with the necessary software and extended opening hours, effectively meet the academic and technical needs of the programme. Students benefit from reliable access to e-class, the electronic library, and efficient administrative services, including the option to obtain official documents electronically. The support services provide a solid framework for academic and personal support. The availability of affordable daily meals further enhances the student experience. Administrative support staff is well qualified to assist the students throughout the duration of their study.

The tuition utilization plan is clearly defined, and the reinvestment of funds to support student participation in scientific conferences strengthens the academic profile of the programme and encourages student engagement in research activities.

III. Conclusions

The PSP meets the expectations outlined in Principle 5. Students have access to appropriate learning resources, academic guidance, and support services.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

There are no specific recommendations for Principle 5.

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

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

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

The above comprise the assessment of:

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

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

Documentation

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

Study Programme Compliance

I. Findings

Relative to HAHE requirements with respect to Principle 6, the proposal submitted to HAHE by the University of the Aegean QAU (MODIP) elaborated on the specific processes and procedures relative to Principle 6 requirements

regarding the annual internal evaluation, its external evaluation and monitoring of the PSP in accordance with the University Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). Relative to Principle 6 HAHE requirement for an initial internal evaluation, required for new PSPs, the University QAU (MODIP) approved a report prepared based on a review of the Academic Certification Proposal, and submitted it to HAHE. However, the PSP accreditation proposal did not mention the report in Principle 6 and did not elaborate on the report's findings and recommendation.

The Programme has not undergone an external evaluation. Following HAHE instructions for Principle 6, the EEA Panel utilized the University of the Aegean's Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), which was evaluated and fully accredited by HAHE (28/02/2025). The IQAS Accreditation Report included specific recommendations pertinent to postgraduate study programmes as well as student and external stakeholder feedback. The Institution, through its QAU (MODIP), organizes and supports the external evaluation procedures of the PSP according to the specific guidelines and directions provided by HAHE.

II. Analysis

The University QAU (MODIP)-approved report with respect to the initial internal evaluation confirmed that all quality criteria were met and concluded with a positive recommendation highlighting the need for the establishment of the PSP ISLANDS. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned report included a SWOT analysis, further substantiating the sustainability of the new PSP.

Previous recommendations in the above-mentioned University of the Aegean IQAS Accreditation Report relative to student and external stakeholder feedback seems to not have been fulfilled or documented for the PSP development. Measures should be taken regarding the systematic and documented feedback by future students, alumni, and external stakeholders, as well as the implementation of the programme's periodic internal evaluation findings. The participation of alumni and external stakeholders in the annual PSP evaluation should be made in a formal, structured, and documented manner.

Given the articulated quality assurance and control policy and procedures (see Principle 1), the experience of the Department, PSP administration and teaching staff, as well as the experience of the University QAU (MODIP) administration and staff with the review and accreditation process, it is expected that the PSP will fulfil the expected requirements of Principle 6.

III. Conclusions

The Department, PSP and University administration, faculty, and staff are aware of the importance of external evaluation and accreditation. However, recommendations made below, if adopted, will result in an enhanced

implementation and documentation of the quality policy and the continuous development of the programme.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

R6.1 Develop a formal mechanism for the input of alumni and external stakeholders, as well as the systematic implementation and documentation of such input in the programme's annual internal evaluation.

R6.2 Develop a formal and systematic process for adopting the recommendations of external evaluations, along with a detailed and documented action plan, as well as implementation timelines.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- The programme has the necessary procedures for monitoring quality assurance and continuous improvement, which align with the strategic objectives of the Department and the University.
- Faculty and staff are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and dedicated to PSP's mission, resulting in a very positive and professional environment.
- Infrastructure and other resources are generally adequate for the successful operation of the PSP.
- Instruction is exclusively in person.
- The employment potential of the PSP graduates in public and/or private sector is high.
- Stakeholders and social partners praised the PSP and believe there is a clear need for such graduates.
- The programme addresses an area of critical expertise needed locally, nationally, and internationally.

II. Areas of Weakness

- There was no formal, organized involvement of external stakeholders in the design of the programme.
- The number of enrolled students at the University of the Aegean component of the Erasmus Mundus PSP is relatively low, especially when considering the existing shortage of the knowledge and skills of this type of PSP's graduates.
- There is no established formal process for the active participation of students in the curriculum development of the programme.
- Relying exclusively on Erasmus Mundus European Commission funds may threaten the long-term financial viability of the PSP.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- 1) Develop a formal mechanism for the input of alumni and external stakeholders, as well as the systematic implementation and documentation of such input in the programme's annual internal evaluation.
- 2) Establish a formal process for the active participation of students in the curriculum development of the programme.
- 3) Develop a targeted marketing strategy aimed at the Greek Diaspora to attract prospective students and strengthen cultural and academic ties.
- 4) Formalise and document a) the process of selection of students to the University of the Aegean PSP component from the list of the pre-selected students to the whole ISLANDS programme; and b) the process of the assignment of PSP diploma theses and IRT projects to the students and respective academic supervisors.
- 5) Explore additional funding opportunities to ensure long-term financial viability of the programme.
- 6) Develop a formal and systematic process for adopting the recommendations of external evaluations, along with a detailed and documented action plan, as well as implementation timelines.
- 7) Establish formally and publicize an External Advisory Board made of senior government/industry officials and international experts to advise the programme administrators regarding the strategic development and enhancement of this programme.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

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

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