ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Accreditation Report
for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

Islamic Studies

Institution: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Date: 12 March 2023

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Islamic Studies** of the **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki** 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 Undergraduate Study Programme of **Islamic Studies** of the **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki** comprised the following four (4) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. **Professor Dragutinović Predrag (Chair)**
   University Belgrade, Serbia

2. **Professor Yaser Ellethy**
   Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands

3. **Professor Georgios Halkias**
   University of Hong Kong, China

4. **Ms Maria Rachel Mpiutu**
   University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece

II.   Review Procedure and Documentation

The Accreditation Panel received for review documentation provided by the Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Three of its members (Yaser Ellethy, Maria Rachel Mpiutu, and Predrag Dragutinovic) participated onsite in the review whereas another member (Georgios Halkias) participated online. HAHE provided all members with the following documents based on the Programme's application submitted in 2020: a) the Department's Proposal for Accreditation, b) the 2020 Internal Evaluation Report (of MODIP), c) the Study Programme and the description of courses offered (2019-2020), d) the HAHE Guidelines, and e) other relevant information about the Department. During the onsite visit, the Accreditation Panel (AP) consulted the Department's webpage and received additional documentation both digitally and in hardcopies.

The review took place from March 6 to 11, 2023. The Panel members first convened on the 6th of March, and they were briefed about their tasks and mission. Following this meeting, they visited the Department of Theology located at the campus of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where the assessment procedure took place on three consecutive days, 6th of March (9.30-16.00), 7th of March (9.30-16.00) and 8th of March (9.30-11.00). The review included various meetings with MODIP members, teaching and administrative staff, students, alumni, and stakeholders. The AP also had a chance to visit classrooms, offices, laboratories, the library of the Department as well as, a Muslim place of worship and the church of the Holy Trinity. The AP held interviews with the President of MODIP (Vice-Rector Prof. D. Koveos), the Head of the Department (Prof. N. Maghioros), OMEA members and MODIP representatives, teaching staff members, undergraduate students, graduates of the programme, and external stakeholders from the public and private sectors.

At the end of each working day, AP members held a debriefing session to share impressions and reflect on their findings. During the concluding session on Wednesday 8th of March, the members presented their impressions, observations, and preliminary findings to MODIP and OMEA members who had a chance to respond. In the following days, the AP convened to discuss and finalize the Accreditation Report. The panel members share the observation that all meetings with the authorities of the University and the representatives of the Department were held in a spirit of hospitality, collaboration, collegiality, and readiness to facilitate the work of the Panel.

III.   Study Programme Profile

In the academic year 2016-2017, the Department of Theology established the Programme of Islamic Studies (PIS) to facilitate a university-level training in Islamic studies within an academic context which cherishes and promotes religious diversity, mutual respect, and interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The aim of PIS is to address the broader needs of the Greek society, especially the Muslim Greek community. PIS focusses on the study of Islam, on its textual traditions and its historical and cultural contexts. It offers courses on the religion, culture, politics, society, and history of the 'Islamicate' world and includes current methodological and academic approaches such as, interpretation, translation and critical analysis of texts, theology, religious studies, sociology, anthropology and law. The courses cover a plethora of topics including: Muslim culture, Qur'anic exegesis and Arabic language, the religious and political status of Muslims, its legal systems, its relationship and the issues raised by the integration of Muslims into a secular legal system of European countries, understandings of human rights and religious freedom, as well as the long-standing relation between Islam and Eastern Christianity.

PIS addresses the needs of students who are interested in the academic and systematic study of Islam. The Programme aims at the qualification of future professionals and theologians who can get access to the labour market in different organizations and institutions in the public and private sectors, as well as research centers and institutions. For example, according to Greek state law only Muslim graduates have the right to be appointed as teachers at Muslim minority schools after their graduation. Throughout their four years of study, students develop linguistic skills in languages relevant to the academic orientation of Islamic studies (Arabic, Greek, English and the relevant scientific terminology). Additionally, there is the possibility of learning Persian and Hebrew.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

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

The quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The Internal Evaluation Committee (OMEA) is responsible for coordinating the efforts of the Department for the composition of internal assessment report submitted to MODIP. The latter collects findings and proceeds to make recommendations and suggestions. These are presented and discussed in the regular Department's Council meetings. The Department decides on the necessary revisions and changes to be integrated in the curriculum. The Department follows a Policy for Quality Assurance regarding teaching and research. MODIP's instructions are in line

with the requirements of HAHE and the European standards for Higher Education. In 2020 the Programme of Islamic Studies had its first internal evaluation ever. The evaluation was made 4 years after the Programme was established.

In its Quality Policy, the Department follows the strategic priority to promote high-level education in the field of theology and the study of religion according to international standards. It encourages interdisciplinarity and cross-scientific research and supports the diffusion of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge across all sectors of the Greek society and beyond. The Programme of Islamic studies is established upon these basic principles.

PIS is a unique programme in the Greek system of higher education. It demonstrates the openness of the Department for diverse approaches to the study of religion and its commitment to a social view of religion in a multicultural society.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

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

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

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The duration of the program that leads to a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology (Programme of Islamic Studies) is eight (8) semesters and the student workload is equivalent to 240 ECTS. To obtain the degree in Islamic Studies, students are required to attend and be successfully examined in forty-one (41) compulsory courses that comprise a total of 188 ECTS and elective courses with a total of 52 ECTS. Descriptions of the courses offered each semester are available online. Compulsory modules include theoretical and practical courses. Although the assessment of students' work varies in each course, usually a written-assignment or additional partial examination during the semester is required. It could be oral, written, based on an essay or a combination of both. To acquire the Teaching Certificate, students need to successfully complete a group of pedagogical courses including the "Teaching traineeship" course credited with a total of 30 ECTS. PIS seeks to provide high quality education in the academic field of Islam and Islamic cultures, teach relevant languages (with emphasis on Arabic and optionally Persian), and promote inter-religious dialogue in European academic and cultural contexts.

The purpose of the curriculum is manifold. It aims to prepare teachers of religion who will teach Islam in the public schools of western Thrace and groom scholars who will be able to research

Islamic theology and tradition, as well as contribute to the studies of religion and its relationship with civil society and culture. Graduates can apply their knowledge in practice and research, and learn to process, analyse, and synthesize data and information using current technological tools and pursue free, inductive, and deductive thinking. They are taught to work independently or in groups in interdisciplinary contexts, to foster respect for otherness, multiculturalism, and the global environment, and demonstrate social, professional, and moral responsibility and sensitivity to issues of social and gender justice. PIS aims towards the developing of academic skills and competences of its students, especially those related to academic methods in different fields of Islamic studies as well as research in theology in general. The goal is the application of academic knowledge in professional and social life.

Students' progress is regularly monitored throughout different stages of the Programme, although many students do not give exams on a regular basis. During the evaluation process, the Panel interviewed teaching staff members, students, graduates, and stakeholders. According to the interviewed students and stakeholders the Programme fulfils the goals formulated in the strategy of the Department.

The AP members agree that some essential modifications should take place in the structure and content of the current curriculum. These recommendations, included at the end of this section, would substantially strengthen the program's academic coherence and reflect a nuanced differentiation between core Islamic epistemological genres, add more clarity to existing course content, and ultimately render the program more attractive to local and international students. Several courses need revision as to their titles, structure, and contents to cover the relevant body of knowledge and meet their stated educational goals. Courses can be split and retitled to correspond to an accumulative structuring of the curriculum ranging from introductory to more advanced courses.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

The following courses could be split/retitled according to the following suggestions:

- Quran and Exegesis I, II, III, IV and V (Classical/Modern Tafsirs) > Introduction to Qur'anic Sciences; Methodology of Qur'anic Exegesis (*Uṣūl al-tafsīr)*; The Historical Development of the *Tafsīr* tradition; Classical *Tafsīr*; *Tafsīr* and Modern Issue (/Challenges).
- Muslim Tradition (Sunna[?]), I, II and III) > The Prophetic Tradition (Sunna): An Introduction; Hadith Methodology (*Uṣūl al-ḥadīth*); Sunna in the Modern Context.
- Islamic History and Theology I, II and III (Early&Middle Period/Modern Period/Contemporary Period) > Islamic History: Formative (/Early) and Medieval Periods; The "Islamicate" World: Pre-Modern and Modern Periods; Islamic (scholastic) Theology and Mysticism (*Kalām* and *Taṣawwuf*).
- Islamic Mysticism and Politics > Islamic Political Thought
- History and Methodology of Islamic Law I, II (Introduction to Law Schools/Hanafi School) > Islamic Legal Methodology (*Uṣūl al-fiqh*); Law Schools (*Madhāhib*) and Hanafi Sunnism.
- The Department must take into account the reasons why a high number of students fails to take exams on a regular basis.

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

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

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. The above entail continuous consideration of the programme's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.

The student-centred learning and teaching process

- *respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;*
- *considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;*
- *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;*
- *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement;*
- *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys;*
- *reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff;*
- *promotes mutual respect in the student - teacher relationship;*
- *applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complain*

In addition:
- *the academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;*
- *the assessment criteria and methods are published in advance;*
- *the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process;*
- *student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible;*
- *the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;*
- *assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;*
- *a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*

Study Programme Compliance

PIS presents ample opportunities for interdisciplinary knowledge and promotes interfaith dialogue and cultural pluralism in the field of religious education in contemporary contexts. It offers a variety of courses comparing various pedagogical approaches and plurality in methods, including more traditional approaches and the use of multimedia. The teaching faculty use visual aids such as, PPTs, images, maps, charts, etc. to aid students during their lectures. Moreover, some courses include a practical exercise component to complement the theoretical side of the lectures, while visits to relevant sites are regularly carried out.

Students are encouraged to actively participate during lectures and are asked to make short presentations. Interviews with students have shown that they are seen as active partners in the learning process. For this purpose, laboratory research is encouraged by groups of students together with their regular participation in seminars and conferences.

Regarding specialized language courses, the program offers training in Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew (for the last two languages, the courses are optional). Arabic courses are mandatory for four semesters and there are opportunities for students to pursue further training for the remaining duration of their studies. The curriculum enables students to have flexibility in their studies according to their potential and interests. Furthermore, students could choose either compulsory-elective courses offered by the Programme or free elective courses from other Departments. These options offer them flexibility and a wide range of learning opportunities.

Most of the course contents are available online through the main website of the Department. The website provides information about the teaching objectives, the learning outcomes, as well as the way students are assessed, and the assessment criteria which may include exercises, projects, and final examinations. The E-Learning Moodle system of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is used by students and teachers alike. The lecturers communicate in writing and via the course website how the course grade is calculated. The transparency of the system is ensured by the right of the students to review their exam scores together with the examiner or through a group oral examination. A dissertation thesis is not compulsory for graduation from the Programme, but it is offered as an optional evaluation assignment. It was highlighted by the students that staff members help with internships and Erasmus+ mobility.

The Department follows the system of course evaluation by students through electronic digital questionnaires. The process is carried out anonymously through the special platform of the IQAS on the University's website. The questionnaire is almost entirely based on the standard questionnaire of the HAHE, with some adaptations. The alumni have also been surveyed on how to improve the program and the departmental services.

According to the Departmental Assembly, faculty members serve as Student Advisors on a rotating basis. Currently, four lecturers serve as Student Advisors. The Advisors provide students with all essential information concerning course requirements, schedule, registration, and the duration of studies. Student complaints are dealt with in the following ways. The Scientific Committee of the Department, the Chair of the Department, or the Department Assembly takes note of the nature of the complaint and proposes solutions to remedy impending issues. In cases of a problem arising in relation to the fairness and accuracy of examinations, a special examination committee is formed in accordance with the Department's regulations. If other problems arise, the student may consult the Student Advocate service provided by the Institution.

In general, students described their experience in favourable terms commenting on mutual respect, a friendly and family environment where an open dialogue between students and staff members transpires without superfluous formalities.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

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

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

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

Alongside admission information on the website, during the first two weeks of October the program offers open days and welcome-information sessions to newcomers. Students expressed their gratitude to the teaching staff for properly presenting the program to new students supporting their transition from high school to university. Teachers and administrative staff seem to be always available when assistance is needed and that helps students to smoothly integrate into the university-academic context. The program includes, inter alia, students who are active in the labour market – for example, teachers in (minority) schools – along with those who struggle to subsidize their studies under unfavourable economic circumstances.

The Department participates in the Erasmus+ program. Students regularly receive emails about various mobility options to different academic institutions within and outside the Muslim world with which the program has signed MOU's. However, according to the 2020 internal review, the number of students participating in mobility programs is unsatisfactory. English language courses are compulsory, and students feel that language should not be a problem for engaging in mobility activities. The ECTs system is properly applied across the curriculum. The Diploma Supplement is issued without request for all graduates.

A certain percentage of course grading is dedicated to the writing of a final paper/essay. A thesis handbook is not available nor is there a standard evaluation-matrix for essays concerning requirements and assessment criteria. The program has no final BA-internship that corresponds to certain number of required ECTs for graduation. However, practical training during the study is well coordinated and supported by different partners and networks. Students for example visit Muslim minority schools in Komotini and Xanthi to implement and test new pedagogic strategies and methods which they have set up during practicum sessions in the Department's laboratories. The Department deems practical training as an invaluable part of the program,

both in terms of developing job-specific skills and with a clear post-graduation professional aim of employability in Muslim minority schools of Thrace.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Long-standing students need special attention and monitoring by the Study Advisors, and other members involved at the faculty and university levels, so that support can be offered to minimize the graduation period.
- In order of promoting a study-commitment culture among students, the AP recommends tracing the number of gained ECTs per semester and developing a system of first year Binding Study Advice (BSA, with exceptional cases) would result in keeping a student progression record that can be periodically reviewed with each student, and keep the program updated concerning ill-disposed and obsolete policies.
- The mobility system needs to be systematized and properly mirrored in the study program reflecting agreements with certain international institutions on the kinds of courses offered, the number of ECT's to be obtained abroad, their inclusion in the students' record, qualifying language criteria, and so forth.
- Developing a thesis handbook for those students who wish to opt for this option, plus a standardized evaluation-matrix for marking essays.
- Introducing practical skills on important aspects of Islamic) studies, theology and dialogical strategies, female religious leadership, hermeneutic competence and comparative ethics.

Principle 5: Teaching Staff

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

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

- *set up and follow clear, transparent and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff and offer them conditions of employment that 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 members (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training etc.);*
- *develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff.*

Study Programme Compliance

The Islamic Studies Programme aims to provide students with a foundational understanding of Islamic thought, history, and culture and offers interdisciplinary educational options to foster critical and comparative thinking among its students. During the AP assessment, the deputy head of the Department presented an overview of the Department's accomplishments, the challenges they face, and their goals for the future. The program was found to be following the required academic standards, and its curriculum was deemed relevant and adequate. The quality of teaching was also found to be satisfactory, with faculty members being knowledgeable and effective in their teaching methods. However, it seems that only two faculty qualified in relevant Arabo-Islamic specialisations hold permanent positions. Student learning outcomes were found to be in line with the program's objectives, and graduates were found to be satisfied with the curriculum and teaching.

There was a clear sense of openness, collegiality, and honesty among all the faculty interviewed. All teaching staff are qualified and appear to be research active to a greater or lesser extent, although not everyone's publication records and professional experience is readily available at the school's website. It is desirable that the particulars concerning the publications and qualifications of the teaching staff are standardized on the website in a uniform and easily accessible way. The AP was not given any data to be able to offer an assessment concerning the Department's process of recruitment and promotion of its teaching faculty. The Panel members have been told that the Department follows guidelines as set by the Greek State and the University.

The Department supports and encourages the professional development of its academic staff in several ways: a) through their integration into and leading role in running research labs; b)

the resources provided by the library of the University; c) their mobility within the framework of Erasmus exchanges; d) sabbatical leaves and professional exchanges with academic institutions abroad; e) constantly evaluating their performance as teachers by the questionnaires that students must fill out during the final weeks of a course taught. There is also provision by the University for regularly financing research-related travel or participation in regional conferences. There is lack of funding for regular attendance to international conferences. The Department is also active in organizing conferences and seminar talks by inviting scholars from Greece and abroad. The AP acknowledges that the number of 12 research programmes organized by the Department in a single year (2019) is impressive.

Given the uniqueness and importance of PIS for the academic, social, and cultural life of Greece, it is highly recommended that the Greek Ministry of Education provides substantial funds to the Department of Theology so that additional P/T and F/T teaching faculty are hired to enhance the current academic structure of the programme and take measures for its future expansion. The AP has ascertained that increasing the international academic strength and visibility of PIS and having it been widely advertised among interested stakeholders will contribute to the growth of student enrolment.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Teaching Staff	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The School, the University, and the Ministry of Education should expeditiously coordinate efforts to realize the appointment of four (4) new positions in (1) Quranic Studies and Hermeneutics, (2) Islamic Law, (3) Islamic Practical Theology with special focus on Islamic Ethics and Spiritual Care, and (4) Arabic Literature and Language. The Secretary General of the Ministry of Education openly expressed the commitment to directly offer the necessary financial support and facilitate the administrative process to guarantee a smooth and quick implementation of the appointment procedures suggested by the AP.
- Accelerate the process of developing attractive MA-programs.
- Improve the percentage of student participation in the evaluation of teaching faculty.
- Improve the academic strength of the Programme by hiring more qualified teaching staff and increasing the number of peer-reviewed publications.
- Standardize the web visibility of the teaching staff by adopting uniform criteria of items listed in the CVs (for example: academic qualifications, publications, courses taught, students supervised, research and knowledge exchange).

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

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

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counselling services.

When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities) and the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

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

Study Programme Compliance

The Islamic Studies Programme is hosted by the School of Theology that has its own infrastructure. Significant improvements have taken place over the past years with a good number of facilities. Although the Department has a substantial library collection dedicated to biblical studies, the available collection of Islamic literature and relevant bibliography is found wanting and not adequately updated. More efforts should be invested to enrich the Islamic collection to attract students from and outside this trajectory and enhance the general research-oriented activities of the study program.

It is noteworthy that the School of Theology is known and distinguished for decades especially among Muslim international students from different faculties in the AUTH for offering an alternative worshipping space for the Friday prayer. Students seem to be well informed about the availability, functionality and accessibility of the university and faculty services. There is sufficient and competent administrative staff to ensure the smooth operation of the student support services. The Department's office is open daily for certain hours and the supporting staff is efficient, friendly, and helpful. In some laboratories, more support is needed to cover the current workload that burdens the teaching staff. The program underlines and displays a heightened awareness concerning the importance of its diversity policy, respect for otherness, and promotion of interreligious dialogue. Many efforts are done to stress and reflect this inclusive culture within and outside the AUTH. However, this inclusive culture could be better reflected in some unofficial yet important tokens of showing sensitivity toward Muslim-practicing students and teaching staff. A telling example could be the overlap between

examination periods and ritual Islamic feasts, where students would be eager to have day(s)-off.

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	X
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Proper consideration should be given to people with special educational and physical needs, both inside and outside the classrooms.
- More efforts should be invested to enrich the collection of Islamic bibliography to attract students from and outside this trajectory and enhance the general research-oriented activities of the study program.
- Now that the Department hosts an official program in Islamic studies which facilitates Muslim students and staff, the prayer-room, currently hosted in the basement, should be improved by introducing necessary hygiene systems, security, and disaster safety requirements.
- Introduce more supporting staff in some laboratories to cover current workload that burdens some of the teaching staff.
- The inclusive culture of diversity should also be reflected in the regulations of the program concerning Friday prayers, Islamic feast days, and so forth. To create and promote a diversity-culture, internal modifications could be developed to accommodate the needs of students from different denominational backgrounds.

Principle 7: Information Management

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

Institutions are expected to establish and operate an information system for the management and monitoring of data concerning students, teaching staff, course structure and organisation, teaching and provision of services to students as well as to the academic community.

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

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the Institution. The following are of interest:

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

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

Study Programme Compliance

The Department collects and processes data on enrolment, course offerings, student and teacher performance, events, electronic journals, and other metrics. Such data collated and visualized in graphs are processed with the purpose of managing and improving its undergraduate programme. The AP members have been informed that the data are regularly utilized to inform decisions on curriculum development, faculty hiring, and student support services, among other areas. Moreover, they are circulated and shared across OMEA and MODIP to guide the self-assessment process. Individual members of the academic staff receive student survey data relating to their own courses and it is up to their discretion whether and how they wish to implement changes in response to student feedback. According to recent graduates of the program, the teaching faculty take into consideration students' suggestions in improving the course contents.

The AP has found that most essential information is accessible to relevant stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students. The information management system is user-friendly and reliable, and integrated with other relevant systems and platforms. However, the Department has not yet developed mechanisms to systematically gather data on the employability of its graduates and on the needs, recommendations and demands of external stakeholders.

Panel Judgement

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

Panel Recommendations

Provide information about employment opportunities to graduates. The Department should develop mechanisms for systematically gathering data on the employability of its graduates and assess information regarding the recommendations and demands of external stakeholders.

Principle 8: Public Information

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

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The Department's website offers useful information about the structure of the Undergraduate Program, the degree awarded, the CVs of teaching staff, office hours, course descriptions, etc. Also, information is available on higher education and vocational training programs (Erasmus+, CIVIS, Internship) in which students of the Department could participate. The scientific and research projects carried out by the faculty members of the Department are well represented. All academic events organized by the Department and its members, sometimes in collaboration with other institutions, are announced on the Department's website. The laboratories have websites to promote and publicize their results, achievements, and available services. Links to the University are found on the Department's website.

Students can be informed mainly through the E-Learning platform and most of the students report that most lecturers post on the platform updated information such as documents, scoreboards, assignments, course calendars, user groups, questionnaires, and multimedia.

The website is comprehensive in Greek and English languages and for the most part up to date but it is not sufficiently user-friendly. Most information is centralized with links leading to the main university website. There is a member of staff who is responsible for IT support, and this is of great help to the Department. However, a main setback is the fact that the website does not clearly indicate the direction of Islamic studies nor does it assist in advertising the programme to attract future students.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Public Information	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	**X**
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- PIS should be more visible and easily accessible. It is also recommended to make it more user-friendly.
- The Programme website should indicate the specialty of Islamic studies. This would greatly contribute to the visibility and advertisement of the Programme and increase the potential attraction of future students.

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

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

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

The above comprise the evaluation of:

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

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

Study Programme Compliance

The program submitted only one internal assessment that took place in 2020. During the site visit the committee was informed that another one is being prepared for the year 2023. The outcomes of the self-assessment in 2020 are recorded and submitted to the MODIP of the AUTH and the findings of the self-assessment are shared with the academic unit. The results are documented and communicated as action plans.

The assessment report can hardly be found on the website of the Programme. The digitally shared information on the internal assessment could be more accessible, not only for the sake of the current external evaluation, but also for more transparency and openness to feedback from different stakeholders, alumni, and students. The reason for this might be that the Programme's online information is totally independent on and peripheral to the Department's website (see also P. 8).

It is thus not clear to the AP whether the plans are properly implemented since no internal assessment took place since 2020. The AP understands the difficulties met by all academic units during the COVID-19 period. However, an earlier self-assessment procedure could have begun after the return to normal campus life. Some important recommendations on the assessment procedures are still salient in the current situation such as, overburdened teaching staff, a few number of students who participate in exams and mobility issues.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Internal assessments should take place more regularly, preferably on an annual basis, especially for recently established programs where different aspects of academic performance need to be constantly assessed and improved.
- Regular monitoring on the implementation of plans should take place.
- It is recommended to make self-assessments accessible online, share the results and plans with stakeholders, students and alumni, and request from them to share feedback on best practices.
- Using SWOT and SMART-plan strategies would surely help concretizing the weak points, the actions needed, the time span and the progress of implementation.

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

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

> *HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.*
>
> *Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.*
>
> *The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.*

Study Programme Compliance

This is the first external evaluation of PIS which, according to the members of the Panel, is appropriate considering that the Programme has been in existence only for a relatively short time. The AP assessed the program's curriculum, teaching methods, and learning outcomes based on the following criteria:

1. Relevance and Adequacy of the Curriculum: The evaluators assess whether the program's curriculum is relevant to the field of Islamic Studies and whether it provides students with adequate knowledge and skills.

2. Quality of Teaching: The evaluators assess the quality of teaching by observing classes, reviewing course materials, and interviewing faculty members.

3. Student Learning Outcomes: The evaluators assess whether the program's learning outcomes are being achieved by reviewing student work and interviewing students.

4. Resources: The evaluators assess the program's resources, including the library, IT facilities, and physical infrastructure.

The regular external evaluation of the undergraduate program in Islamic Studies is recommended to ensure that the program meets all required academic standards. The program has been found to be relevant and effective in achieving its learning outcomes. The recommendations provided by the external evaluators in this document offer useful insights on how the program can be further improved. The Aristotle University in Thessaloniki is committed to implementing these recommendations to enhance the quality of the undergraduate program in Islamic Studies.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes	
Fully compliant	**X**
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I.   Features of Good Practice

- It is praiseworthy the effort and commitment of the Department and its staff to overcome essential and crucial academic, institutional, socio-political, and cultural challenges amid unfavourable social and financial circumstances.
- Provides a good infrastructure in terms of administrative staff, teaching, course offerings, support facilities, and laboratories.
- Shared commitment to follow the Quality Assurance Policies.
- An open willingness to improve the Programme and pursue interdisciplinarity.
- Application of academic knowledge in many professional and social aspects and engagement in inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.
- A team-spirit, amicable and family-like atmosphere among all partners involved in this Programme.

II.   Areas of Weakness

- Study Programme should be revised in accordance with the academic trends of the Islamic studies at European Universities.
- There is understaffing as to qualified teaching faculty specializing in Islamic studies.
- Small number of the enrolled students for the academic year 2022-2023
- The Programme is not adequately well-known among the communities where future students are expected to come from.

III.   Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- Improve of the Programme regarding the Islamic studies curriculum.
- Increase the number of teaching stuff setting clear goals in collaboration with the University's relevant authorities and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.
- Advertised and promote PIS in various ways to reach target groups.
- Encourage students to benefit from Erasmus Exchange Programmes and utilize other possibilities for academic visits abroad.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 10.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **2, 5, 6, and 8.**

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 Dragutinović Predrag (Chair)**
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3. **Professor Georgios Halkias**
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