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ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
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AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT: Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki



European Union
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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
MANAGING AUTHORITY

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Early Childhood Educational Sciences of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki consisted of the following three (3) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Dr. John Spiridakis (Coordinator)
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2. Dr. Panayota Gounari
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3. Dr. Costas Constantinou
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Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) conducted an exhaustive review of the Aristotle University Early Childhood Department's Internal Report. The three members of the Committee had the opportunity to discuss their analysis and comments prior to and during the site visit for the purpose of framing questions for interviews.

It was agreed by the members that the availability of additional documents for all faculty members, would be helpful to the evaluation process, and these were requested through an email to the HQA. These included the Student handbook, Resumes for all faculty members, access to the online platform, sample course syllabi and select assignments, student papers and MA Theses. An in-depth review and analysis of additional documents requested by the committee and volunteered by the Department faculty was conducted upon arrival at Aristotle University. Extensive interviews took place throughout the four days of on-site visit. During the four-days visit (Sept 23-26), the external evaluation committee arranged, with the cooperation of the Vice Rector, Dean, Chair and Assistant Chair, to interview at some length and in varying degrees of depth depending on the Quality Assurance issue, every faculty member of the Department. Every faculty member participated, some several times, in the committee's evaluation interviews. Many faculty members had the opportunity to respond several times to questioning in their different roles: individually; as part of a sector of the Department; and as a member of the faculty at large. The faculty members were also interviewed in their roles as members of the Department's Internal Evaluation Committee. The Dean, Chair and Assistant Chair were also interviewed at length, concerning their respective administrative roles. In addition, current students as well as graduates also participated and contributed to responding to questions from the committee regarding Quality Assurance steps already implemented, initiated and planned for the future. It was clear that the entire faculty of the Department was committed to the goal of improving and strengthening the areas of curriculum, teaching, research, community-school connections, and strengthening and expanding the continuing process of Departmental self-study and action for change.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The Department of Early Childhood education produced a detailed report addressing the requirements of HQA. Detailed narratives and statistical data were included. Since the initial version of the report was written three years ago, we were also provided with two updates, in yearly intervals. Overall the reports were good and the interviews with faculty helped illuminate these parts that needed clarification or further information.

A. Curriculum

A. Undergraduate

The EEC reviewed the Department's curriculum based on the following data: Information included in the Internal Evaluation Report, the student handbook available online, faculty presentations and faculty and student interviews. The Department's curriculum was recently revised with the aim of creating a more meaningful and flexible course of study, as well as in order to meet ECTS system criteria. The redesign included merging together courses in order to produce a heavier student workload that would justify 6 ECTS per course. This translates into reducing the 70 courses required under the old curriculum (first implemented in 1999) to 30 courses while maintaining the same number of 240 ECTS. This change introduced greater flexibility on the part of the students to create their personal plan of study by selecting courses from two groups: 20 (out of a total of 30 on offer) base courses; 10 (out of a total of another 30 on offer) elective courses. This allows students to assume more ownership for the content of their studies and also to assume the responsibility to determine how early, how much and in what dimensions they would like to specialize.

Another important recent change was the abolishment of Sectors (Τομείς) as stipulated by the new legislation and their replacement by "Concentrations." The old "Core-Sector-Elective" model has now been replaced by a "Core-Concentration" model. Practicum is introduced in the sixth semester, as opposed to the third under the old curriculum. The rationale behind this choice is that the school practicum is concentrated in two semesters so that students can devote more time in school and develop a better sense of the variety of approaches of implementing theory into teaching practice.

The Department is currently in a transitional stage as they are slowly moving away from the old curriculum and adopting the new one (starting with incoming students in the Fall of 2012) while students accepted under the old curriculum will be grandfathered. As the newly revised curriculum takes full effect the Department hopes to create more uniform student groups and enhance both the engagement and participation of students. Uniformity is achieved by offering all 60 courses every semester and by limiting the number of places for enrollment to 60 students per course. Gradually the Department will stop offering courses with 120 or more students which is a step toward the right direction. Improved engagement is achieved by the commitment to offer multiple forms of assessed assignments including end-of-semester examinations but also investigation and writing assignments, collaborative group work and creative, action-oriented activities, depending on the course content.

The new curriculum orientations include: providing specialized knowledge for the disciplinary fields covered by the specific sectors; the application of scientific (pedagogical) knowledge and development of relevant competencies; "teacher as researcher" pedagogic model for students; flexibility in the management of courses chosen by students; adaptation to the requirements for organizing curricula based on the ECTS system.

The Committee highly commends the Department for achieving the difficult task of revising the curriculum as delineated above. It seems that this redesign brought the Department together to engage in a self-reflective process that has had extremely positive results. It was very clear to the Committee that the whole Department and all its members individually are committed to implementing the undergraduate course of study professionally, with care and with a strong sense of social and educational responsibility. All faculty members are extremely committed to teaching their courses to the extent that this forms the greatest part and the strongest feature of their professional identity. We want, however, to raise the following issues:

(a) The Department needs to continue to coherently articulate its mission in

disciplinary, pedagogical, professional and social terms. This will enable the continual mission of alignment of Departmental goals with goals and objectives within each course and with the overall Department's vision. Course alignment with overarching goals should continue as a part of the excellent restructuring. Significant issues regarding changing legal mandates must be addressed and the addition of courses to the curriculum should be part of the Department's dynamic vision and strategic planning. As mentioned in the Internal Evaluation report "courses, understandably and logically, represent the faculty's personality and research interests to a great degree" (p. 29). This is an important aspect of academic integrity and all courses should be connected to the mission of the Department and overall curricular goals. It is recommended that the Department continue to examine proposed courses in terms of what and how they will they contribute to the curriculum.

(b) This program consists of three parts: the first part that has a duration of four semesters – that is the first two years of study – introduces students to the disciplines of education and gives them the opportunity to choose 20 out 30 core courses. The second part, which lasts one year (6th and 7h semester) and is devoted to the school practicum and relevant courses (all obligatory), provides students with the necessary preparation for the profession of early childhood education. Finally, during the third part, which also lasts one year (5th and 8th semester), students will have the opportunity to study a number of subjects, that will provide them with sound pedagogical content knowledge. Within this context, students will also get to know a range of formal and non-formal aspects of education and will gain research experience (teachers as researchers) and motives for postgraduate studies.

Along these lines, the Department should continue its laudatory review of its curricular identity. For instance, the "cutting edge" exemplary Departmental curricular theme of producing "Teachers as Researchers" (and other core themes) could be weaved into additional courses earlier in the program in order to produce "graduates theoretically informed but also ready to deal with unpredictable issues arising in class, to analyse and plan & update their knowledge" (Interview with Faculty). Department identity is coded in the curriculum. The ongoing curriculum revision has enable the Department to create a more solid and strong identity as well as to position itself educationally and disciplinarily both on a national and international level.

(c) The sectors (ΤΟΜΕΙΣ) have functioned mainly as administrative divisions and did not presuppose research collaboration among their members. Collaboration among members with different research interests and from different subjects has occurred, throughout the years, across divisions. From an implementation point of view, the existence of Sectors (Τομείς) as academic concentration units seems absolutely necessary. While the Committee understands there is a need to dissolve them administratively in order to meet the stipulation of the law (or so it seems, the Committee is unclear whether this is actually a mandate), we deem that academically, they are useful and do contribute to a better organization of the Department.

(d) The Department might want to think about the implementation of pre-requisites in a way that resonates with the existing legal framework in Higher Education. Particularly in the context of the new Curriculum where all courses are offered all semesters and there is no required sequence, students should be encouraged to gradually build background knowledge by taking some introductory courses in order to be successful in more advanced courses. This could be done through advising (both in student-professor conferences) but also in writing on the website and through announcements. The EEC acknowledges that the program has been designed to comply with the Law, according to which 3 types of courses should be offered: Compulsory/required, electives offered by the divisions and free- electives. Within this context, 3 pools of courses have been created: a) those which relate to

the school practicum and the practicum itself (all compulsory), b) core courses and c) orientation courses. The EEC recognizes that the newly designed school practicum, presupposes – apart from students’ activities in kindergartens – a required “preparatory” sequence of courses, necessary for preparing students in the theory and pedagogy to successfully complete the school practicum.

Practicum

(a) The External Evaluation Committee is enthusiastic about the changes implemented to the undergraduate curriculum, both in terms of the goals of this self-directed reform process and also the actual structure that has been designed. Concentrating the school practicum in the sixth and seventh semester makes sense. And the pedagogical applications attached to coursework taken in the fifth and last semesters are an excellent approach. Given the drastic shortage in human resources and support brought on by the dire financial situation, we would encourage the Department to continue its crucial connection of pedagogical applications to core courses taken during the first two years, in which some school-based activities could be introduced as part of the course assignments (a pre-practicum field work.) The Department should continue its critical objective of connecting research and pedagogy to the field experiences of students in schools and communities in the fifth and eighth semesters. Along these lines, the Department should continue its efforts to maximize clock hours in schools to conduct observations and practice teaching. The EEC acknowledges that all core courses have 6 ECTS, i.e. a large number of credits, because the Department intends them to also function as a preparation for the school practicum (microteaching, case studies, clinical interviews etc). Depending on implementation, students are given the vital opportunity to gain practical experiences early on.

(b) A detailed Practicum Handbook delineating clearly the goals, process and contact people is highly recommended.

(c) We were especially interested in the Practical Training or Field Experience components of coursework and curricula at the undergraduate and graduate (Master’s Degree) levels. The Internal Report explicitly noted the challenges in achieving optimal field experiences. The interviews fleshed out the daunting obstacles involved, whether by the heavy loss of financial support for mentors to certain government regulations related to conducting classroom or school-wide research. The EEC finds it impossible for the Department of Early Childhood Education to run effective Practica, administratively and pedagogically, without funding for Supervising practitioners whose role is instrumental in this particular exercise. It seems challenging to find placements for student-teachers. One suggestion might be to offer incentives to cooperating classroom teachers to agree to host and mentor student teachers in their classrooms. Students do benefit from regular oral and written performance feedback from as many individuals as possible during the various phases of practical training.

B. Graduate

The Department offers four graduate programs a) a Greek-French MA on the “Didactic of multilingualism and language policies” b) an Interdisciplinary, intradepartmental MA on Psychopedagogy of Inclusion” c) an Intradepartmental MA on Environmental Education and d) an MA in Museology (Museum science) led by the Dept of Architecture

- a. Greek-French MA on the “Didactic of multilingualism and language policies” is offered in collaboration with the French University of Maine. The committee deems this MA much needed particularly because the Dept does connect multilingualism and multiculturalism with the local communities and addresses some of their immediate needs.
- b. MA on Psychopedagogy of Inclusion is two years long. Students take

required courses the first three semesters and dedicate the rest of their study to complete an MA thesis. There are five core courses and nine concentration courses required (two concentrations Special Needs and Multiculturalism).

- c. MA on Environmental Education in collaboration with the Dept of Biology: two years long aiming at educating educators through the development of research, policy design, fostering collaborations, etc.
- d. MA in Museology is a very interesting interdisciplinary MA in collaboration with the Department of Architecture.

The interdisciplinary collaboration with other Departments is to be commended. However, the Committee noted that some of the scholarship produced in these MAs may go beyond the disciplinary limits of preschool education.

The Program of Graduate Studies is proposing an organization of the MAs suggesting the following concentrations (with the addition of a number of new MAs): 1. Educational Policy 2. Inclusion (existing) 3. Cultural studies (new) 4. Creative writing (new) 5. Aesthetic education and Creativity (new) 6. Environmental education (existing) 7. Administration of Total Quality and novel applications in education (new) 8. Inter-Departmental and inter-university: Sciences of Education and learning technologies (new).

Offering the new MAs may be difficult, given the scarcity of human resources and overwrought faculty schedules. The rationale for these new MAs, the ways they align with the Department's mission and how they might enhance the existing graduate curriculum, should be clarified. The committee recommends that proposed new programs relate to and contribute to the field of Preschool Education. For example, an MA in Administration of Total Quality and Novel Applications in Education in collaboration with the Department of Economics in the Department of Early Childhood Education and other proposed new MAs should be based on the professional and career needs of students, research and practice parameters of the discipline and the conditions and needs of early childhood schooling in Greece.

C. Doctoral Program: The Department of Early Childhood Education offers a Doctorate Degree as well. There are currently 35 PhD dissertations in progress. The committee studied the Internal Evaluation Report, and spoke to faculty and to doctoral students about their doctoral studies. The Department follows the stipulations of the law regarding Doctoral studies and faculty members encourage sound research. However, we did not see evidence of clear written procedures and protocol on how the doctoral program functions. Doctoral Studies, as in many universities, rely heavily on the interpersonal and working relationship between the candidate and the mentor faculty member. It is also unclear how the Department manages and monitors the student-professor working relationship and what requirements are in place for the different stages of development as students are mentored for their dissertation. In addition, there are no required courses that all PhD candidates must take since they are supposed to have taken methodology courses during their MA studies. Based on international experience, one suggestion is to offer post MA courses in research methods that all PhD students could take. Another point that is unclear to the Committee is how the three-member committees are set up and what the role of each faculty member participating in it is. We understand that the Department announces research domains; a candidate selects a topic in collaboration with member of the Faculty, the proposal is approved by the supervisor/advisor and then by the Department. The Department should articulate the process of choosing a topic based on the cutting edge research in the disciplinary field.

The EEC notes that doctoral students could benefit from opportunities to meet with each other on a regular basis. While the research domains might be disparate, a scholarly community of learning could foster a culture of research, collaboration, apprenticeship to specific academic discourses and expectations, etc.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

The Internal Evaluation report emphasized the Department's continuing pursuit of strengthening and improving the teaching practices of faculty members at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The Department's report noted the need to find ways to achieve this goal of faculty improvement, especially in connecting research by faculty and from the field to teaching and learning in the university classroom.

The Internal Report also emphasized the unique characteristics of each sector or program of the Department. Faculty from each sector, not surprisingly, exhibited different approaches to teaching.

The Internal Report and the faculty members, during the interviews and presentations made, also noted the importance of inculcating in their students the pedagogy and practices known as "Teacher as Researcher," "Action Research" and "Classroom Research." Along with this approach is the attendant approach known as "data-based instruction." The benefits of these approaches have been well documented and the decision by the faculty to make the "teacher as researcher" approach the lynchpin of the curriculum is commendable.

The external evaluation committee reviewed teaching practices at all three levels of study, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral level, offered by the Department faculty's dedication to the education of students could be described as truly global. Teaching was not limited to the four walls of the university classrooms. Many faculty members engaged and involved students in extra and intra curricular activities. These activities, including but not limited to, Departmental sponsored conferences. These conferences are captured in a book edited and published by the Department. The publication also serves as a tool for continuing professional development of all students and for faculty, as well.

These conferences were initiated, structured and implemented by the faculty of the Department of Early Childhood Education and often with partners from other universities, schools and community agencies.

It is also notable that the faculty members enhance student learning and their own continuing knowledge and skills in their fields of teaching through the formation of several professional organizations. These organizations have provided conferences on a larger scale that are available to the entire university community on a national and international level, in some instances.

The faculty on their own and through such organizations organized by Dept faculty, also structured and implemented numerous seminars for students, fellow faculty members and the community.

Another vivid example of the deep commitment of the faculty members to teaching and their students is the fact that so many of the faculty members routinely teach additional courses without compensation. While the reason and need for this phenomenon to occur could possibly be obviated by a different organizational structure and/or scheduling issues, it is a remarkable and highly commendable achievement.

The Department faculty members value and seek to strengthen the field experience, components of teaching, including but not limited to the structuring and

implementation of practical seminars.

Faculty members were also available to assist and advise students outside of class. Usually tests are given at one or two intervals during the semester.

IMPLEMENTATION

Undergraduate and Graduate Levels

As John Dewey aptly stated, “There is no community without communication.”

The Aristotle University’s Department of Early Childhood’s chair and Dean of the College of Education, with assistance from the Vice Rector, approach the mission of achieving progress in designing and implementing quality assurance through collaboration, conviviality and communication.

The Department faculty members collaborated, analyzed and revised their curriculum courses to be fewer in number and more efficient. In the internal report, it is noted that multiple modalities are used. Methods noted include the traditional lecture style, groups for discussion, and use of e-learn and Blackboard for resources. A law in place apparently does not allow for the extensive or total use of e-learn or Blackboard for fully online teaching.

The Department sectors teach an extensive array subjects related to early childhood pedagogy and practice. Some of these include, but are not limited to, courses in early childhood pedagogy and practice, Greek literacy development and linguistics courses, special education and education psychology courses, multilingual-multicultural education courses and cultural education courses. These subjects are taught through the courses offered by the several sectors or programs housed in the Department.

Teaching about the arts, music, dance, theater and museums gave the Department a powerful creative array of methods and practices for both undergraduate and graduate students. This core of cultural teaching also provides the students at all levels to integrate the arts into their teaching once they become early childhood educators.

The dynamic teaching practices of the cultural sector also can be applied in the teaching and motivation of students at all grade levels.

The faculty members of the multilingual-multicultural sector also employed teaching practices and pedagogy through action research in a manner that involved the entire community and thus enriched the learning of the university students to become teachers of ALL classrooms students.

Another excellent approach utilized by several faculty members is “co-teaching” of courses. This approach can enhance the teaching-learning process even as it provides a form of faculty development for the collaborating faculty.

The Department also hosted exchanges of guest lectures by professors from other universities as well as Departments from within the EC and other Aristotle University Departments. These exchanges were used as a valuable adjunct for enhanced teaching and learning regarding timely topics.

All faculty members agreed that the reduction and consolidation of existing courses was extremely beneficial to the teaching-learning process. Specifically, because of the reduction in the number of courses to 60 from 120, faculty taught fewer courses per semester, now two, and class sizes that had numbered 300 at times were now usually about 50.

The smaller class size enabled more faculty-student interaction, and enabled the possibility for small group activities that helped improve teaching. Smaller classes also enabled the planning of dynamic approaches such as the co-teaching of

certain courses.

Resources for faculty teaching improvement included specific seminars, conferences, and collaborations that also enhanced the results of teaching by supplementing the faculty member's classroom presentations.

Quality of teaching procedures is amply evident. Faculty members in certain sectors co-taught certain courses. This highly dynamic and creative approach enabled these faculty members to observe and learn from each other's teaching, both content and style. Co-teaching, importantly, further enhanced existing strong student engagement.

The approach of encouraging and enabling faculty members in the EC Department to produce publications on timely, critical topics also provided a rich resource for the professional development of faculty as well as of the students.

One prime example reflecting faculty expertise sharing is the publication entitled "Modern Pedagogical Approaches in Early Childhood Education" edited by Dimitrios Germanos and Meni Kanatsouli (2010). Ten faculty members from the Aristotle Department of E.C. and two from the E.C. Department of Thrace have articles related to research-based practices for early childhood pedagogy, mathematics and science approaches, theater pedagogy, early childhood language learning for Greek and (GSL) immigrant children, and children's literature.

This recent collaborative Departmental publication includes a chapter on mathematics education by the chairperson, Professor Tzekaki. This chapter illuminates the latest pedagogy and practice evinced by the research in the field; what mathematics teachers today should be aware of. Another chapter dealt with issues in Greek as a second language pedagogy for immigrants, especially.

A chapter on the theory and practice of children's literature and children's literacy and writing expertise reflects another major approach for the reinforcement of teaching and learning in this important subject of early childhood education. It is notable, as well, that the faculty members teaching about children's literature are themselves writers and authors of such literature which they share with their students.

Both faculty and students throughout the Department and at every level, undergraduate and graduate alike can benefit from this and other similar publications sponsored by the EC Department.

The students interviewed voiced the overall effectiveness of the teaching practices of the faculty at the undergraduate and graduate Master's level. They expressed satisfaction with their teachers. They also noted that the successful teaching and coursework prepared many of them to further their education at the next level of academic studies.

Undergraduates felt prepared to enter the Master's program, while some of the graduates of the Master's degree program felt prepared to continue with their doctoral studies.

Practica and field experiences involve seminars at the undergraduate level to support the experiences of new and in-service teachers. As part of the Quality Assurance goals of the Department, the faculty members involved in field practice or student teaching coursework were all committed to, and involved in, the continuing process of helping their students relate research to practice in the field. The faculty also conducted special seminars to further enhance achievement of this goal.

Faculty teaching practices seem also to have been enhanced through the help of online resources that summarize course objectives, methods and certain rubrics.

Course modifications were revised and the modified, streamlined courses have also affected the teaching practices of the faculty. The reduction of courses and collapsing of two courses into one has created new challenges for faculty to engage students in a deeper and wider examination, analysis and discussion of said topics

over the past two years since the changes were made. The efficacy of the new approach of fewer courses but more intense, sharpened teaching practices has evoked differing sentiments among the faculty.

The Department has entered into bilateral ERASMUS agreements with 22 institutions in 13 countries. In recent years approximately 40 students benefit from mobility opportunities every year. These opportunities add a valuable global dimension to undergraduate and graduate studies in the Department.

RESULTS

The Department's highly responsive efforts are to be commended. Students are performing considerably better now due to the increased attention of faculty members and the organization of more efficient groupings. Teaching is more effective and interaction with and among students has been enhanced with the drastically reduced class sizes at the undergraduate level. Failure rates are also lower. Attendance is greater for some courses and for some extracurricular performances.

Faculty and course evaluations by students are promulgated. However, the response rate is low, partly because students do not trust that their responses are truly anonymous.

It bears noting that Greek higher education has a unique and questionable law that specifically does not make attendance mandatory for students. Course attendance continues to be spotty, with certain courses well attended and others not. Student engagement by faculty, to the extent it can make a difference in attendance, should be beneficial.

Faculty members were also available to assist and advise students outside of class.

Faculty members usually assign tests and papers at one or two intervals during the semester. Additional feedback from faculty could possibly enhance student engagement and attendance. The tenets of action research reflect the benefits of collecting and analyzing a variety of evidence of student progress and achievement. Such tenets can also be applied to the university classroom.

The paucity of resources, human and financial, has exacted an onerous burden on the Department's goal of providing competent field experiences and student teaching teacher preparation. The funding in this area is imperative.

Faculty are already teaching at the various academic levels, are advising hundreds of Undergraduate, Master's and Doctoral level students, and are mentoring theses. The loss of mentor teachers for undergraduate Early Childhood student teachers, for example, is unacceptable and should be rectified as soon as possible.

Mentors are key to providing the global support of faculty member, mentor, and classroom teacher for each student teacher.

IMPROVEMENT

Student evaluation of faculty members is an elusive goal internationally, it seems. Part of the problem may be the content of the evaluations as well as the form of administration of the surveys. Allowing students to complete evaluations in class may help. But the issue of students not believing the surveys are confidential is a big obstacle to getting more respondents.

A faculty committee should continue to also try to survey the students regarding their views on the curriculum, course content and teaching practices of faculty members.

During interviews of the faculty, a consensus was voiced regarding the need to continue to seek the achievement of certain goals stated in internal report a chief concern of the faculty is with regard to assuring that the quality of teaching of faculty and students is enhanced through improved field experiences and up to date research in the field.

As noted in the Research section, faculty should receive stronger support for conducting original research and conference presentations.

More interaction has been enabled due to the curriculum modifications.

The review of course content and instructional practices should continue to be a goal of the Department.

The Departmental Internal Report committee should remain intact and continue to embrace the challenges for improving instruction. It should meet with the committees or representatives of each Concentration not already included and have regular meetings with Chairman and Dean.

Structure and organize faculty development seminars and available online resources and tutorials for faculty growth in teaching and research. For example, provide seminars and resources related to integrating “action research” pedagogy and practice into certain courses.

Teaching effectiveness of the faculty is also inextricably tied to the organization and structure of the curricula at each academic level.

Teaching students who have taken certain pre-required courses enhances teaching effectiveness and strengthen learning.

Smaller classes are allowing many faculty members to deepen and widen their inquiry with their students into certain subjects.

Research to introduce a process for peer-review of faculty teaching with an eye or sharing new pedagogy and co-teaching should also be replicated by other sectors whenever possible. Post tenure review of teaching practices has become popular in some circles of academia. Research indicates that effective teaching enhances student retention as well as student achievement from pre-school through university levels.

Pedagogy consensual under new law is slated to occur earlier. This is commendable, such prior knowledge can help students transfer and use such knowledge to the other more content-focused

Revised coursework modules to focus on helping students improve classroom pedagogy and teaching practices is very beneficial across sectors.

It should be understood that each sector subsumes its own specialization on several specializations. As such, faculty development needs to subsume the special teaching demands associated with each sector specialization and strand.

Sectors such as special education, arts, music, and theater involve creative methods and practices for practical preparation of all students to become teachers of ALL classroom students.

Consider structured and organized faculty development seminars, lectures and presentations. A special committee can organize regular, structured monthly meetings where faculty members can introduce their teaching practices and research related to teaching. Conferences and seminars available to entire school and faculty continue to be important and should be supported and encouraged

IMPROVEMENT

There is a highly commendable, stated concern among all faculty members to improve teaching and course pedagogy and content.

The demands of teaching today encountered by early childhood classroom teachers

in the field, as well in the new laws identifying the criteria for maintaining quality assurance, must be subsumed in coursework and teaching practices of faculty members. Students benefit immensely from instruction that models the practices expected of teachers in the classroom.

Faculty members have taken great strides already to learn and incorporate into their coursework up-to date research-based pedagogy and practices related to early childhood education.

The interviews revealed, as the Internal Report documents, the fact that the faculty members have continually updated their own knowledge and practice through various forms of research and writing, conferences and seminars. The publications sponsored by the Department and in association with certain professional education organizations and external institutions of higher education and their faculty members, augur well for rich, valuable professional development of the Department faculty and the students at all levels of academic study.

Faculty value good teaching: to make this important value system sustainable, certain initiatives for assuring quality of teaching, such as structuring more co-teaching opportunities and structuring bi-monthly faculty development seminars and sharing exemplary teaching practices, could be explored.

The Department's continued efforts to further refine courses and align them with revised objectives should also continue to enhance faculty teaching as well as Practical Training.

C. Research

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate levels, if necessary.

APPROACH

The Department has developed an approach for contextually rich and relevant research and innovation activities that seek to sustain, as a matter of priority, strong connections between theoretically informed researchers (often in the role of public intellectuals), the local community and the local education settings (including practising school teachers, undergraduate and graduate students and also citizens interested in lifelong learning in a multicultural context.)

The standards adopted by the Department appear to be driven by the faculty evaluation procedures and make reference to publications in international and national peer-reviewed scientific journals in the educational sciences, publications in the proceedings of national and international conferences following peer-reviewed presentation and as well as the number of citations for each publication. Additional standards mentioned include participation in externally funded research and collaboration projects and in educational development activities, such as curriculum design projects at national and international level.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department publishes two journals: Synergies (Greek, French and English) and Polydromo (emphasis on bilingualism and multiculturalism) both of which are openly accessible online and have an adequate readership as evidenced by the number of subscriptions.

In 2012-2013, the Department reported involvement in 25 research, innovation and mobility projects that are funded competitively either at national or European level. For the size of the Department, this is an adequate number of projects. The committee does not have information on the level of research funding but the number of projects is an indication that a number of faculty members have become active in seeking research funding and in participating in international networks that propose and implement collaborative projects. The Committee would encourage more faculty members to seek opportunities and develop proposals to secure international research and development funding. The Committee believes that making this a future priority could help the Department to further strengthen the existing research groups and also create new ones. Additionally, stronger connections can be achieved between the local research and education community with a greater number of active communities in Europe. Such a priority, if successfully realized, could create significant new opportunities for young and experienced researchers alike.

In the period 2007-2013, the Department reports 54 book publications, 3 edited volumes, 131 publications in peer-reviewed journals, 137 publications in peer-reviewed journal proceedings and 92 chapters in edited books. The Department acknowledges that the average number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals per faculty member per year is lower than it would wish for.

In the same period (2007-2013) the Department reports 780 citations to published work of faculty members. The mean h-index per faculty member in 2012 was 1.37.

35 students are currently enrolled in the Department's PhD program.

RESULTS

Over the years, the Department has developed two important strengths that are immediately apparent and make a lasting impression to any visitor:

- a. It has a very strong publications record in the form of books and monographs. These are theoretically and evidence informed books that synthesize existing knowledge perspectives, are available mostly in Greek and are routinely used in undergraduate and graduate teaching as well as in professional development activities for teachers. Equally significantly, this published body of work offers an important service to the teaching community, to educational policy making and to any citizen who has an interest in topics ranging from multilingualism, special education, creative writing, environmental education, mathematics education, history, children's literature and others.
- b. It has developed an impressive range of scientifically informed formative activities in collaboration with local communities. These range from educational partnerships with schools and childcare centres to a remarkable mix of drama/theatre, museological and archaeological activities of an educational nature and include focused interventions in language education for immigrant children and adults as well as a longstanding range of lecture and colloquia events on varied topics of local interest, which do attract strong participation from the local community. Apart from the obvious commitment of faculty members to community development work, and the opportunities that are created for contextually rich and relevant research that can be generalized to other communities, these activities also offer broader opportunities for scientists and Universities to demonstrate the relevance of scholarship to society and thereby broaden the constituency for scientific research in more authentic ways that are typically possible through information campaigns and science communication activities.

Because the Department has managed to integrate seamlessly these strengths with its undergraduate programme of studies, they have become an integral part of its identity and through that they offer a sustainable service to students and collaborators.

IMPROVEMENT

The Department recognizes the need to realign its priorities and activities to promote greater productivity in international scientific publications and to attain greater international visibility for its scientific output. The efforts in recent years to achieve greater involvement in externally funded research projects and the efficacy of some faculty members to publish internationally in those peer reviewed journals that are listed in the social sciences citation index indicate that the Department is also taking concrete steps in this direction.

In these efforts, the Department faces two severe constraints:

- a. The lack of minimum seed funding, e.g. for participation in international conferences, places a severe barrier to any effort to network with communities that develop consortia and proposals for competitive funding at international level.
- b. The distinctive needs of an educational system in a relatively small country, which is at a very different phase of development as compared to many of the larger systems in western and northern Europe, are not always taken into consideration in efforts to determine funding as well as mobility and educational priorities at European level. This creates a context for disparate expectations from any University Department of Educational Sciences that genuinely cares about promoting both educational change and scientifically

informed interactions that add value to the local culture.

In the current trend to promote more comparability and more generalizable research, the existing indicators do not cover all that is valuable in science, especially as relating to the formative value of interactions between scientists and communities. Faculty members involved in scientific policy development initiatives need to be aware that it is possible (and, in some contexts, very common) for researchers to be publishing citable applied work in very competitive international journals, even though the work might be far from relevant or real in the societal context in which their university is operating.

Striving for a balance between rigorous, reliable educational research that can be of interest globally and can add value across specific contexts on the one hand, and serving the needs of a local educational community that could benefit from coherent input from scientifically established ideas and practices is an enormous challenge for Greece in the coming decade. This Department has strong expertise, talent and many examples to offer in how this can be achieved harmoniously and effectively without sacrificing capacities for formative university-school and university-community collaborations that can make science visible and relevant to society.

The Department also has developed many active contexts from which to abstract evidence and ideas that can be formulated and published in forums where it will receive greater international visibility and more attention by researchers with an interest to promote community development and educational change more effectively in their own contexts.

D. All Other Services

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate levels, if necessary.

The Department feels that it provides adequate services to the academic community and beyond. The EEC concurs. However, during our visit it became obvious that the Department is trying hard to remain operable administratively given both the scarcity of funds (its operational budget is currently at about 30,000 Euros) and the layoffs of administrative staff and special supporting staff.

The EEC wants to commend the Department on their new Website and to encourage them to keep it up-to-date and add more information regarding different Department policies. The Website can also be used to enhance more effective communication with students and to alleviate the time constraints and paperwork associated with advisement and registration.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The Department runs an extremely impressive outreach program through different events as well as through the organic relationship with the schools through dynamic practica, workshops, theatrical events and so forth. The Committee wants to commend particularly the Aesthetic Education Concentration that seems to be very active in organizing artistic events and theatre plays that raise awareness; these events are pedagogical at their core, create role models for school education and

offer a visible role for pedagogical science in authentic interaction with teaching and lifelong learning communities.

The Committee considers a great loss the discontinuation of funding for the “Didaskaleio,” an institution that provided for years professional development and intellectual stimulation to in-service teachers. The “Didaskaleio” served as an important academic structure that provided a rich intellectual environment for educators and contributed in innovation, exposure to new knowledge, and reflection on teaching practices. The EEC recommends the reopening of this important institutions and its upgrading.

E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate levels, if necessary.

The main factors that inhibit a more sound and sustainable functioning of the Department are:

- a. Chronic lack of adequate funding
- b. Lack of resources and infrastructure, including buildings
- c. Shortness in support and administrative staff
- d. Uncertainty, continuous change and over-centralized legal stipulations.

Despite these constraints, the Department has already initiated improvements both in the undergraduate and graduate programs. These should do also be carried out for the PhD Program. The EEC’s recommendations are delineated in the next section.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate levels, if necessary.

- (a) As a matter of priority, the University and the State need to find ways to improve the buildings, the overall infrastructure and the funding resources that the Department has access to. Despite chronic shortages, the Department has done everything possible to illustrate that it has the potential to continue to contribute very substantially to the local educational system and the local community in terms of expertise, events and interventions that add cultural and educational value. In this sense, it has already proven that it deserves the necessary material support for sustaining its basic operation. The deficiencies that we could readily identify are specialist teaching rooms in Art Education, Music Education, Theater Pedagogy, Sports Education and Science and Environmental Education as well as the need for improved and more accessible facilities in New Technologies in Education. The EEC concurs that the renovation of the Archeology Museum Building and the completion of the remaining buildings around “the Tower”, for which architectural plans already exist and which seems to be long overdue, would satisfy these needs.
- (b) The EEC formed the impression that the Department has strong potential in research and needs the necessary seed financial support to be able to unleash this potential. We strongly feel that adequate funding for faculty members’ participation in international conferences is critical for international

- collaborations and obtaining external research funding.
- (c) Support academic staff members (ΕΤΕΠ) are an integral part of the faculty and offer valuable services in teaching and research as well as in the Department's contributions to the community. We strongly believe that there is a need for additional resources to create opportunities for the professional development of support faculty teaching, including seminars and a "faculty forum" to facilitate Departmental networking for research, writing, teaching and participation in community activities at national and international levels.
 - (d) The Department deserves great credit for successfully and dynamically embracing the difficult task of redesigning the curriculum. This yeoman restructuring effort brought faculty members together, under the excellent leadership of its Chair, Dean and Vice Rector, to engage in a lengthy, comprehensive self-reflective process that has had powerful positive results. *The Department should continue its commendable collaborative work.* The EEC encourages the faculty to find ways to keep the communication channels open between different Sectors, supporting educational staff, Chair, Assistant Chair and Dean. The EEC proposes that the Department re-organize Department Committees to make them functional, and to give them specific responsibilities. The Department should consider further articulating an appropriate course sequence with prerequisites in order to further enhance student academic development and learning.
 - (e) The Department should reflect on its mission and examine how the latter is served through the curriculum, courses, outreach, and MA research and dissertations produced. Strategic planning should be connected to this mission as well. Overlapping course content across the curriculum should continue to be creatively addressed.
 - (f) The PhD Program should continue its mission of seeking to create a scholarly community of learning that fosters a culture of research, collaboration, apprenticeship to specific academic discourses and expectations.
 - (g) The EEC was disappointed to learn of the suspension of the Professional Development School for Teachers (Διδασκαλείο). There was clear evidence that in prior years this was a valuable mechanism for supporting practical training in which the Department has developed strong expertise. We would encourage the state and the University to work together in restoring a sustainable mechanism for the Departments of Educational Sciences to offer quality mentoring and teacher professional development needed to prepare high quality professional educators. A Practicum (Practical Teaching) Handbook is also recommended.
 - (h) The New Technologies infrastructure has been used to its limits in supporting all Departmental activities in teaching, research and teacher professional development. In addition, it has been used to support (a) the work of a network of teachers who collaborate with the Department and also participate in action research activities on specific topics; and (b) the engagement of undergraduate students in faculty research activities. This goes beyond what the existing infrastructure can support in the long term. We strongly recommend that the University commits increased ICT resources in order to sustain these valuable activities in the long term and also in order to improve the level of access of students and teachers in the community to the Departmental resources and activities.
 - (i) The Department has dynamically addressed the vagueness of the legal framework in education, such as the pending changes in teacher certification, and the uncertainty created as a result, and the lack of funding and other obstacles that arise from governmental and legislative mandates. We suggest that the Department implement a "Department agency," to apply its viable

and creative strategies and practices to surmount the above-noted challenges. It would be useful in this effort if the Department could be granted greater administrative autonomy to make better use of its secretariat, for example.

- (j) Faculty research and publications are richly diverse and include relevant and up-to-date practices for students and practitioners in the field of early childhood. Research publications could become more global, connecting research to international progress in the field. One suggestion is to identify a small number of refereed international journals to submit articles to. Along the same lines, it is important that the Department should continue to encourage its PhD students to learn and engage in international research and practice.
- (k) The Department offers a significantly rich and commendable array of early childhood focused courses, including but not limited to, those focusing on children's literature, writing, the humanities and pedagogy. The interdisciplinary connections among theoretical courses to pedagogy and the connection of faculty research to exemplary pedagogic practices should continually be explored, as the Internal Evaluation Report notes, to enhance the connection of pedagogy and research in student teaching practices as well as course content and delivery.
- (l) There is a growing global initiative in higher education to promote more comparability and more generalizable research and more effective teaching. Striving for a balance between rigorous, reliable educational research that can be of interest globally and that can add value across specific contexts, can enhance the research and teaching practice of the Department as well as critically inform the educational community in Greece. The Department faculty's reservoir of diverse talent and expertise in key education disciplines related to early childhood education augur well for even greater accomplishments in research, publications and teaching practices. Faculty members have the ability and tenacity to increase their output of research based publications and grants while continuing the dynamic, timely and creative university-school and university-community collaborations that currently support faculty-student engagement, and enrich student learning and the society at large.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. _____	
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3. _____	