



**ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ**  
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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# Accreditation Report for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

**Early Childhood Education**  
**Aristotle University of Thessaloniki**  
**Date: 16 October 2021**

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Program of **Early Childhood Education** 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 Program of **Early Childhood Education** of the **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki** comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

- 1. Prof. Panayota Gounari (Chair)**  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA*
  
- 2. Prof. Athanasios Gagatsis**  
*University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus*
  
- 3. Prof. Eleni Katsarou**  
*University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL USA*
  
- 4. Prof. Joanna Katsanis**  
*University of Arizona, AZ, USA*
  
- 5. Prof. Mary Koutselini**  
*University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus*

## II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The accreditation of the Early Childhood Education Undergraduate Program (TEPAE) at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) was conducted fully in a remote mode, using the Zoom teleconferencing, due to travel restrictions associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) provided the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) members with accreditation materials ahead of the review process that included: the Department's Accreditation Proposal, a Quality Assurance Policy document for the Undergraduate Program, the Undergraduate Student Guide in Greek, policy and program bylaws, course outlines and descriptions, Quality Goal Setting, and Quality Data for the period 2015-2019, as well as a wealth of supportive material and appendices, including presentations with detailed data, student and faculty demographics, sample student evaluations, a list of faculty publications etc. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel further examined the Department's [website](#) (both Greek and English versions) that contained information about the curriculum, coursework, enrolment, faculty profiles, announcements, a video with facilities, classrooms and buildings, and a substantial amount of useful content and links for students, faculty and visitors. The EEAP was also provided with HAHE's accreditation guidelines and was invited to attend an orientation session before the accreditation visit.

The EEAP met as a group on Zoom before the accreditation on 11/10 to plan, coordinate division of work and process to be followed, and to discuss any issues that emerged from the preliminary study of the material received by HAHE.

The virtual accreditation visit extended over three days, starting on Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup>. On the first day, we met with the Vice Rector for Academic & Student Affairs and President of MODIP, Prof. Dimitrios Kovaïos, and with Prof. Maria Birbili, Head of the Department of Early Childhood Education for an introductory session and an overview of Quality Assurance processes at AUTH. We, then, met with OMEA and MODIP representatives to discuss compliance with the Quality Standards for Accreditation. On the second day of our visit, we met with faculty members from a variety of ranks, followed by a group of current students who were at different points in their degrees. We, then, met with the head of the Department's secretariat and a group of faculty members who are heads of labs; during that same meeting we were given a virtual tour to the Program's facilities through a recorded video. Later that same day, we met with a group of Program alumni. On day three of our visit, we first met with social partners and then with the Department Head and OMEA and MODIP representatives who addressed our many questions and clarified different points for us. The meeting concluded with the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs joining the group and a brief discussion of our preliminary thoughts on the Program under accreditation. The Department welcomed us with collegiality and openness and faculty, staff and students were all eager to answer our questions. Their presentations were informative and detailed, highlighting the University's and Department's commitment to quality improvement in teaching, research, and community outreach.

From our interactions and conversations with representatives of the Department, leadership, faculty members and administrative staff, current students & alumni, as well as community

partners, we recognized that the Department is committed to quality assurance and is working in collaboration with MODIP towards more compliance to the HAHE quality standards.

### **III. Study Program Profile**

The Department of Early Childhood Education (TEPAE) was founded in the academic year 1984-1985 and has operated as part of the School of Education of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The Department was created with the goal of fostering and promoting the field of educational studies and developing education for Early Childhood teachers. Four overarching aims inform the undergraduate curriculum: a) improvement of the quality of studies and teaching; b) rational division of coursework along the lines of workload and respective ECTS; c) meeting particular learning goals and acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for the development of a contemporary scholar and educator who is able to meet the needs and challenges of early childhood education; and d) acquiring work experience through the Practicum (Field Experience). In addressing these aims, TEPAE has designed and developed a curriculum that extends to eight semesters (or four years) and is made up 240 ECTS or 34 courses. Of those 240 ECTS/34 courses, students can choose 20 core courses, 10 concentration courses, one additional concentration course or one elective, and one foreign language course. In addition, students are required to take two Practicum courses during their 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> semester respectively. Students must remain enrolled in 30 ECTS per semester.

The Department comprises four divisions: the *Division of Aesthetic Education*, the *Division of Language and History*, the *Division of Pedagogy*, and the *Division of Psychology and Special Education*. The Department also houses three Labs: *Training & Research in Learning Technologies*, *Child Psychology and Education*, and *Social Diversity and Lifelong Learning Research*.

The Department employs twenty-two faculty members, nine EDIP (Lab Teaching staff) members, three ETEP (Special Technical Laboratory Staff) members and one EEP (Special Research Staff) member; and one head administrator, three full-time and three half-time administrative staff members. It currently has 1,628 students enrolled, with approximately 300 new incoming students enrolling every year (150 through the National Examinations and 150 through transfer from other departments). As reported by the Department, the student/faculty ratio ranges between 52,5-58,82:1 on the total number of active students. The average cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) is 7.76 (based on data from the last three years).

The Department's facilities, including faculty and staff offices and classrooms are mostly housed in the central building, the impressive Tower of Pedagogy. However, the Department also makes use of rooms in prefabricated bungalows ('Iyomena') adjacent to the Tower.

The Department aims at designing and delivering "excellent education programs," as stressed in Department's Accreditation Proposal, adhering to an orientation and policies that support continuous improvement and try to meet the educational and societal needs at hand. The EEAP feels that, despite the good intentions behind this aim and the work already done, the structure of the Undergraduate Program raises important concerns.

## 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 PROGRAMS. 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 Programs 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 Program, its purpose and field of study; it will realize the Program's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the Program'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 organization 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 labor 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 Program(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

### Study Program Compliance

The program's quality assurance procedures are monitored by the University's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). In general, the Quality Assurance Policy aims to support the academic content and scientific orientation of the undergraduate program, in accordance with international academic standards and the current national legislation. To that extent, there is a policy in place for improving the educational experience of undergraduate students, the quality and quantity of the overall research output of the department, as well as the introduction of innovative teaching and practical training approaches and strategies. Furthermore, such policy extends to the continual monitoring and improvement of human resources, curricula, outreach, mobility, and program visibility.

The Program has set three strategic quality goals that can be summarized as follows: i) academic development and improvement of the program of study and curriculum quality (this includes improving graduation and achievement rates, increasing elective course options, strengthening the quality of learning experience, internationalization/student mobility, support and development of faculty members ii) improvement of research output produced by faculty members iii) Improving the connections with society at large, and increasing the department's visibility.

As presented in the Department's Accreditation Proposal, the main dimensions of the Department's quality assurance policy revolve around:

- The design, development and implementation of curricula through a transparent and inclusive process that engenders and promotes quality and meets scientific and educational demands.
- The effectiveness of learning experience; exploring pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies that best meet the needs of the students; fostering student-centered and individualized learning; streamlining of the Practicum and support of students through the Practicum Office.
- Monitor and support student progress; providing student support and make resources available; encourage collaborations with students and participation in mobility programs.
- Recruit and retain highly qualified faculty and evaluate their work yearly; support and encourage the production of research work by members of the department that meets high academic standards; encourage and support faculty in attending scholarly activities such as conferences, research networks and grant projects.
- Connection between teaching and research and development of initiatives that disseminate research findings at all levels of public-school education; school and community outreach.
- Providing professional opportunities and lifelong learning to alumni.
- Ongoing evaluation and improvement by revisiting the Quality Assurance system in place building on the fruitful collaboration between OMEA and MODIP.

Overall, the EEAP finds the quality assurance action plan of the department satisfactory. It is evident that the quality assurance processes are coordinated and supervised by OMEA in collaboration with the MODIP of the institution, and feedback is being obtained on a continual basis from the program's relevant committees, the department meetings, and the analysis of student evaluation reports.

For the process to be commendable, it may be advisable to engage other important stakeholders to ensure that the quality of the action plan is more relevant, robust, and far-reaching. Program alumni and pre-school teachers and administrators, especially those in the public-school domain, would certainly add perspectives that appear to be largely missing in the current form of the action plan.



## Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 1: Institution Policy for Quality Assurance</b>	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## Panel Recommendations

The EEAP recommends that the Department, in addition to the OMEA and MODIP, be intentional and transparent (both in terms of policies and their implementation) in engaging alumni, practicing teachers/mentors and involving them in meaningful ways in curricular design. It is unclear whether TEPAE engages these two significant groups in tangible ways.

## Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programs

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

*Academic units develop their Programs following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the Program, the objectives, the subject areas, the structure and organization, 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 Programs 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 Program design should take into consideration the following:*

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labor market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the Program*
- *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 Program by the Institution*

### Study Program Compliance

The undergraduate program of the TEPAE, at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki was established as a four-year program during the reforms in the institutions of Higher Learning the early 1980s and was designed in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The program of study was formally revised in 2013 in response to the external evaluation. As specified in the documentation reviewed by the EEAP, the design of the existing program is based on the following considerations: a) reviewing other outstanding undergraduate programs, especially in European universities that are exemplary and have a significant tradition in pre-school education; b) following research developments and future trends in pre-school education, while taking into account the social conditions and challenges of the Greek context; c) evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the previous TEPAE program version, especially as assessed by the experiences of the teaching faculty; d) the feedback and evaluation from various discussions with students, as well as practicing teachers and advisors on the current challenges of teaching, and; e) the institutional and organizational/structural challenges within the higher education system, as these relate, for instance, to admission requirements, and as reflected in the large numbers of first year and transfer students.

Students attend classes at the university and conduct their fieldwork and student teaching experiences for a total of two semesters. Coursework must total 240 ECTS across four years of study, and that includes 34 courses out of a total 56 offerings, of which 28 courses comprise the *Core* course of study, and the other 28 are *Concentration* courses. The required fieldwork, the

Practicum must be taken in the sixth and seventh semesters respectively, and a foreign language course is also required, to be taken in the fifth semester.

The structure of the program allows students the freedom to design their own course of study because they can choose from two different groups of courses where there is no mandatory coursework. The EEAP notes that such an 'open-ended' curricular design seems to challenge the Department's ability to meet its stated [objectives](#), and especially "to provide graduates with the theoretical and critical tools necessary for research at a more advanced level, as well as qualify them for employment in education and other related fields of specialization in the public and private sector." The result is that without any mandatory courses, students end up graduating with different academic experiences and courses of study.

This raises some questions regarding the equivalence of students' degrees due to the unlimited choices and the possibility that students might miss out, for instance, on courses related to the main subject matters of the Kindergarten school curriculum.

During our meetings, students and graduates voiced their satisfaction with the program and teaching staff. However, the EEAP was troubled by the students' lack of awareness on the necessity to limit elective courses and to make sure that they cover a wide range of base/core courses, such as language courses for Kindergarten students as well as other core courses in mathematics or related to science and research. The phrase "We graduate not as Kindergarten schoolteachers but as scientists," expressed in various ways during the meetings with students and alumni, should become the starting point for discussions in the Department about student-centered teaching and learning and the consequences of an open-ended program structure, that is totally dependent on students' decisions – and sometimes on ease and comfort.

Coursework covers an array of core and concentration areas of study in the first three years that culminate into the fourth year of mandatory practice teaching. While the course offerings are varied and significant, a major concern is that students lack a) course advising to ensure academic rigor on major subject areas, i.e., mathematics and linguistic issues, and b) practice teaching that is coupled with the major subject areas in the first three years of study.

As the fieldwork experiences are introduced and conducted at the end of year 3 (6<sup>th</sup> semester) and in year 4 (semester 7 in a public school setting and semester 8 paid in a private school) it is important to commend faculty on the valiant efforts they make to ensure availability of the exceedingly large number of student placements and of schools and classrooms needed to accommodate fourth year students.

The EEAP notes that during accreditation meetings, some interesting projects addressing, for example, refugee populations and other vulnerable groups in Greece were identified. Worth noting are the *Diadrasis Project* (also praised during our meeting with students), *Polydromo* and its activities (the magazine produced by the Team on Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in Education and Society), and *Paedagogus Ludens*, a pedagogical theatrical group that addresses bilingualism, multilingualism, gender rights, environmental issues, as well as bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds). These are commendable initiatives, but they are not a core element of the curriculum.

Given that this is a large, public urban university program, and given the multiple and varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students in public schools, the EEAP encourages the Department to consider *three* central ideas that are, indeed ambitious themes in the mission of any urban program: *Multilingual/Multicultural Education*, *Critical Pedagogy*, and *Language Learning*, including notions of translanguaging, language development and biliteracy. These could a) be weaved across disciplines and courses in the later semesters and in designed field

experiences and b) have stand-alone courses in the early semesters to prepare student-teachers to teach the increasingly diverse population in Greek public schools. While the Department does offer three relevant courses, *Bilingualism and Education* (ΕΠ.2.055), *Minority Groups and Intercultural Education* (ΥΒ.1.023) and *Language and Society* (ΥΒ.1.025), given the loose structure of the curriculum, students could graduate without taking any courses in this area, thus making it peripheral to the overall curriculum.

### Panel Judgement

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

### Panel Recommendations.

- The Department needs to take sustained and bolder steps, so that the program of study becomes more rigorous. In this direction, the Department should consider revising the program’s structure to include a core of mandatory courses that all students are required to take. The EEAP strongly believes that the current ‘open-ended’ structure blurs the Department’s identity and mission, does not serve its curricular goals, and generates degrees with different courses of study for different students, raising issues of equivalence. Therefore, the EEAP recommends that the Department reviews and re-designs the curriculum implementing core and mandatory courses.
- Given the socio-political realities of the country and the world, it would be advisable a) to further strengthen the curriculum in the direction of preparing students/future educators to enter multilingual/multicultural classrooms and to be able to address their students’ linguistic, academic and sociocultural needs and b) to the extent possible, have students observe and engage with seasoned practitioners that teach in critical ways, as well as co-plan and co-teach cross-disciplinary units of study.
- It is very clear that many classroom/school challenges remain, even after many years of the program’s existence, but two are significant and are, therefore, recommended here: a) the identification, training, and engagement in sustained relationships, with qualified mentor teachers in public pre-K school classrooms that espouse and practice the central tenets and values of a rigorous and culturally responsive program; b) the observations and assessment in *significant* (i.e., the number of times per semester and qualified supervisors) and in *transparent* ways (i.e., the records of observations or protocols kept by faculty, students and mentor teachers). It may be prudent to establish a *locally determined evaluation*

*instrument/tool/protocol* that could also be shared across the Practicum/fieldwork semesters and across sites (i.e., both at the university and the Practicum schools).

### Principle 3: Student- centered Learning, Teaching and Assessment

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS 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-centered 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 Program's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.*

*The student-centered 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' complaints.*

*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 Program Compliance

The concept of student-centered learning and teaching is multidimensional and contains a number of processes and important safeguards for students' effective academic development, engagement in the procedures that affect their studies, participation in the institution's and the department's committees, and social and educational activities and events. Thus, student-centered learning and teaching refers to the program's design and delivery, the staff's scientific and pedagogical approach and methods, buildings and resources, students' opportunities for mobility, welfare and support services, facilitation of the smooth combination of family and student life, assessment and the learning environment, and opportunities for professional academic development.

Students are given feedback and advice on their learning, and they have the opportunity to meet and work closely with the faculty. Furthermore, all students have an advisor who is regularly available and who has the responsibility to guide students through the program's requirements. The Student Guide, the information on the web site, the e-class, e-learning opportunities, and the administrative and staff's support help students to feel safe and encourage their smooth progression in their studies.

Students with disability have the differentiated support they need during teaching and assessment. The Department has put together eleven internal committees (i.e., Studies support; Program and Student Affairs; Practicum; Erasmus; OMEA and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning; Webpage development; Evaluation and Review of the Program; International Relations) and it is supported by the Central Services of the University. In addition, the Student Advocate Office is an innovative resource in line with the student-centered approach. The Office handles students' complaints and appeals and promotes students' rights. All these departmental and central committees aim at serving the interests of the students and supporting the implementation of student-centered teaching, learning and assessment.

The Department uses a variety of teaching methods, including student-centered methods such as simulations, problem solving, and case studies. The fact that the Department has exclusively research laboratories, where the presence of graduate students is rare, deprives students of some rewarding experiences. Nevertheless, the [Quality Indicators](#) provided by HAHE for AY 2018-2019 note approximately 15% of laboratory courses. Student Erasmus mobility is very limited (1,20 %), with an even lower percentage of Erasmus students visiting the Department. Students might need some more guidance and support in the procedures required for Erasmus mobility and the Department should consider offering some courses in English so that external students and professors have the opportunity to visit the Department.

The University provides a large number of virtual services to the staff, the students and graduates of all the departments. Moreover, approximately 6,000 students eat at the University's cafeteria every day. There is also a fitness centre, a central office for student support, and the Centre for Students' Counselling and Psychological Support. Around 3500 migrant students are enrolled in the AUTh, and they are supported by the Office of Migrant's Support. Students were grateful for the supportive and encouraging learning environment of the department, the opportunities for personal support services, and the availability of rewarding extra-curricular activities, even during the pandemic.

The Department also emphasizes respect for diversity, and the program includes a few courses that focus on the concept of diversity and multiculturalism (see Principle #2). At the EEAP meetings, students expressed appreciation for faculty's support in meeting diverse teaching challenges in a multicultural school and classroom environment.

The percentage of students who answer the Student Questionnaire (course evaluation) while not particularly high (47% participation) indicates that students hold positive attitudes towards the program, the staff, and the teaching process. The comments on the questionnaires are very positive and refer to all the aspects of their experiences. During the EEAP meetings, the students expressed appreciation for the faculty's support in meeting diverse teaching challenges in a multicultural school and classroom environment. Staff members take into account the feedback from students' evaluations through student surveys, as an important part of the quality monitoring procedure.

Nevertheless, the high student/faculty ratio – approximately 56-58 students per instructor – reduces the opportunities for mentorship and personalized advice for students.

Finally, it is worth noting that the policy regarding student transfers has increased student/faculty ratio, which tends to seriously undermine student-centered learning opportunities for all students. The EEAP, however, understands that this is a broader issue and not within the Department’s control.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 3: Student- centered Learning, Teaching and Assessment</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

- Given TEPAE’s incoming and outgoing student Erasmus limited mobility, it is recommended that students are provided with more guidance and support in the processes required for Erasmus mobility. The Department should consider offering some courses in English so that external students and professors have the opportunity to visit the Department.
- The Department, in collaboration with MODIP should consider increasing the students’ period of service in MODIP from one year to two and appoint both BA and MA students.



## 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 Program Compliance

The mission of the Department of Early Childhood Education is to prepare educators who will teach in Kindergarten. In line with other Higher Education Institutions in Greece, the Department is governed by the standard regulations related to student admission and certification. With regard to admission standards and procedures, the majority of students are offered admission based on their performance on the National Entrance Examination. Alternative routes of admission also exist for foreign, expatriate, transfer, athletes, and special needs students.

For the transition from high school to college, the Department has a comprehensive orientation process in place. New students learn about the Program curriculum during a welcoming event for incoming students where information about the Department and its curriculum is being introduced. This is organized yearly by the Department. It familiarizes students of the program, the University and Department resources available to them. Expectations and requirements for graduation are also reviewed. The website provides information on the conditions that a degree is awarded. The students reported that they were aware of their duties and responsibilities.

Students are provided information relating to the various stages of their studies via course outlines, and through the Department and University website. In addition, there is a designated office that can assist students in course selection if they require guidance. Faculty also make themselves available to answer questions and provide career and academic guidance to interested students. Based on data provided and discussions with current students and graduates of the Department, it was concluded that students are making satisfactory progress in the program. The average graduation time is around four years.

A great number of students are being admitted yearly and many students transfer from other universities and cities over the years that follow. This has resulted in an increased number of students, challenging the resources of the Department, the faculty and staff and, ultimately, compromising their ability to sustain quality standards in the long term. This high student to faculty ratio limits the individual attention that each student can have at any given time.

Practical training in the form of Practicum is a valuable part of the program. Students reported finding it very helpful in providing them with experience and the tools needed to develop job-specific skills. Also, the Practicum placement options were limited for the number of students that need to enrol and train. As fieldwork experiences are not introduced and conducted until the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> semesters, and as valiant efforts appear to be made by the faculty in ensuring the exceedingly large number of student placements, it is very clear that many classroom/school challenges remain such as the identification, training, and engagement in sustained relationships with 1) qualified mentor teachers, and 2) Practicum sites in public school classrooms that espouse and practice the central tenets and values of an academically rigorous, urban/multicultural pre-school program.

The Department maintains student records of student participation and progression through their years of study. In addition, records pertaining to the various coursework. The regulations regarding student admission, progression, recognition and certification are clearly published in electronic format. The Department also automatically awards the Diploma Supplement to all graduates in Greek and in English.

Updating the English version of the Department’s Website and offering some courses in English will enhance the participation of students from abroad. Also, for AUTh students educational and economic support may prove to be additional motivation for taking advantage of the Erasmus opportunities.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The EEAP noted lack of broader academic advising particularly in regard to the selection of courses so that all graduates meet the necessary major subject requirements. A better advising structure would further support students in ensuring they are meeting degree criteria.

## 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 recognize 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 Program Compliance

The Department comprises of twenty-two (22) faculty members (DEP), nine EDIP (Special Laboratory Instructional Staff) members, three ETEP (Special Technical Laboratory Staff) members and one EEP (Special Research Staff) member. Compared to 2013, when the last evaluation took place, the Department has six faculty lines less. Over the last ten years, 18 faculty members have retired or left the Department with six of them leaving since 2015. Some of these lines were replaced, with seven more lines pending. A new faculty member was hired just this past September. New faculty members are welcomed in the Department and receive informational material and orientation from the Dean. They further receive guidance from the Department Head and are officially introduced and welcomed in the Faculty Assembly. A variety of expertise is reflected in the faculty composition.

In order to meet the department's curricular and administrative needs at the undergraduate and graduate level, faculty seem to carry an overload with over 6 hours of instruction (with an additional 6–9-hour uncompensated teaching at the graduate level) every week (for regular faculty) and 8-16 hours for Special Laboratory Instructional Staff (EDIP).

The Department follows the current legislative framework for the recruitment and promotion processes of faculty members.

The faculty continue to develop academically, and a significant number of faculty members publish their research work in edited volumes, national and international peer-reviewed journals, and Conference Proceedings. The Department's very own Journal (*Dialogues: Theory and Practice in Educational Research*) serves as a platform for scholarly exchanges and hosts articles in Greek and other languages as well. Moreover, and despite the limited funding, faculty members participated in and organized conferences bringing more visibility to the Department and their research work. Additional funds need to be allocated for this purpose. Research is

carried out in three labs. The *Training & Research in Learning Technologies Lab* as well as the Social Diversity and Lifelong Learning Research have shown a rich output and activities over the last three years; the *Child Psychology and Education Lab* hosts courses for undergraduate and graduate students and supports research on child psychology.

The Department encourages external mobility of faculty and some members have participated in Erasmus Programs. The EEAP believes that the Department should consider alternative ways to increase the faculty's international scientific collaborations and research activity.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 5: Teaching Staff</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

The EEAP noted an imbalance in faculty expertise when mapped against both the Program's curriculum, as well as that of pre-school education. We would like to encourage the Department to carefully map existing faculty expertise and plan future recruitment aiming at better balancing the fields represented, as well as including more diverse fields of expertise.

## 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-centered learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organized 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 Program Compliance

Although the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel was not able to inspect in person the facilities due to the pandemic, a video tour was given of the building, three Laboratories, lecture halls and administrative offices.

The campus is housed in a building that contains offices, classrooms, laboratories and library services. The teaching areas are equipped with wireless internet connection and technological equipment, for example computers, projectors, screens, microphones etc. The availability of these resources optimizes teaching and learning. In addition, we were informed that the Department's technological equipment (tablets, cameras etc.) is made available for students to borrow and use as needed.

There is an adequate range of support services available to students (i.e. library, career counselling, a student welfare office, sport facilities etc.). There is a central University library as well as other smaller Departmental libraries with more specialized subject matters.

There is a designated office available to support students as well as an office designated to assist foreign students. Additional supports include an office designated for Students with Disabilities, a Student Cafeteria, a University Gym, and a Mental Health services office. The counselling services have a psychologist to attend to student needs.

There seems to be adequate student support both in terms of assistance and access, and in terms of career orientation. For example, there is a Career office at the University that assists students in their academic direction.

One issue that came to the committee's attention was that there is a large number of students and the available classrooms do not always have the capacity to accommodate the number of

students enrolled. The faculty has creatively addressed this by breaking down the enrolment of a given course to subsections thus enabling use of smaller capacity classrooms.

A strength of the program is the use of a variety of learning resources. Teachers use multiple methods of teaching including presentations, assigning individual and group tasks, and interactive training, analysis of books and journal articles, artistic endeavours and practical experiences. Optional projects are offered to students to undertake with a goal to enhance their learning. Students reported learning a significant amount by just participating and attending the classes.

Evaluation of students takes place through a variety of methods including exams at the end of the course, ongoing evaluations throughout via quizzes, group and individual assignments, student presentations, written assignments, and lab projects. Students mentioned finding these evaluation methods very helpful in keeping them engaged, and in leading to “effortless learning.”

Students describe the faculty as hard working, interested and motivated to teach and be responsive to students’ needs. In addition, students find the teaching environment at the Department friendly and respectful. However, students reported that the Department’s administrative staff were not as forthcoming or attentive to student needs. The EEAP understands that this is most likely due to the very heavy workload placed on them.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

None.

## Principle 7: Information Management

**INSTITUTIONS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING INFORMATION, AIMED AT THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS 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 Programs 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 Program(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 analyzing information and planning follow-up activities.*

### Study Program Compliance

The Department of Early Childhood Education of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki uses procedures and forms for collecting information proposed by MODIP. This is done through MODIP's unified electronic system which is used by both faculty and students and aims at collecting and analysing data and information coming from both the Department and the Institution. Core in this process is the role of OMEA, the internal evaluation committee made up of faculty members from diverse disciplinary fields within the Department. The OMEA follows the system of quality management established by MODIP. OMEA collects survey data – both qualitative and quantitative – from faculty and lab directors about the content and mode of instruction, research and teaching activities, and community outreach activities.

The Department draws information on a daily basis from the following:

- The information systems developed and operated by MODIP - AUTH in collaboration with the AUTH e-Government Centre through which the data required by the implementation of the Institution's Internal Quality Assurance System is managed
- A variety of other online resources of an academic or institutional interest including Evdoxos system for the distribution of textbooks, the academic identities, the online platform APELLA for the election and development of faculty members, the Hellenic Statistical Service, etc.
- The general databases relating to Department meetings, as well as the databases relating to decisions of the different bodies of the Department.

Moreover, the Department keeps a physical and digital records and processes of data documenting internal department procedures and include accountability reports from different committees and units of the Department concerning:

- Students: undergraduates, postgraduates, PhD candidates, students who participate in exchange European programs and graduates
- Graduates of the Two-Year School of Teaching Pre-School Education of Thessaloniki and the simulation programs of the two-year degrees
- The staff of the Department and Courses Census Bulletins
- The Department's, Services' and Institution's Report.
- Statistical data, such as the number of students, their Grade Point Average, as well as data along with course statements made by students, key performance indicators and student population profiles, course of study and rates of early completion or dropout rates, student satisfaction of the programs of study they attend, availability of learning resources and student support, future careers of graduates, etc.

Additional information is collected upon request from the educational staff and from literature related to studies in schools of education or to the graduates of pedagogical departments. Finally, data are collected, as mandated by existing legislation and any amendments or changes relating to educational studies or to the vocational rights of graduates. Information, collected via all these avenues, is used to revise the curriculum, implement novel teaching methods, improve infrastructure and department facilities, facilitate the use of ICTs, the organization of conferences, workshops, invited lectures and so forth.

Students feedback to the EEAP indicated that they value and rate very highly the educational experiences provided by the Department. They expressed satisfaction with the diversity of the course offerings and stated that the curriculum: (a) provided them with a good understanding of the connection between practice and research; (b) prepared them well for the job market/workforce.

Some graduates continue their careers in other universities in Greece or abroad as postgraduate students, while others work as teachers in public and mostly private Kindergartens.

The Alumni noted their strong connection with the Department and added that they felt welcomed to participate in educational opportunities offered by the Department (e.g., events, symposia, conferences, seminars, etc.). They also expressed their deep appreciation for their training across theoretical, practical and research directions, as well as their study at Universities abroad.

However, the Department does not seem to be presently collecting data on student employability and the career paths of graduates. This data can not only help the Department gauge its ability to position its graduates in the workforce, but also has the potential to foster future connections and collaborations.

The EEAP has determined that the Department has established an information management process that informs both internal and external evaluation efforts as well the accreditation processes. Overall, the EEAP concludes that the adopted processes, the levels of satisfaction expressed on surveys, and the decisions being made following the analysis of these data are sufficient.



## Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 7: Information Management</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## Panel Recommendations

It would be useful for the Department to further develop the Alumni Network so that it can serve a dual purpose: a) keep graduates informed about the Department's events, workshops and activities; and b) maintain contact in order to collect targeted alumni information through surveys, questionnaires, etc.

## 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 Programs 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 Program Compliance

The EEAP finds that the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Department of Early Childhood Education have put in place a comprehensive public information system. This determination is based on reviews of printed and electronic sources, as well as interviews with the Head of the Department, members of MODIP, OMEA, faculty, secretarial staff and students. The EEAP examined materials that exhibited evidence of critical information sharing with students, faculty members, external partners, and the community at large. The University is committed to social accountability and to the proper and impartial information-sharing with all stakeholders. The publication of notices, decisions, activities and actions of the University at all levels of its operation were an integral part of the Foundation's operation, in accordance with relevant legislative provisions. The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki main [website](#) is user friendly and easy to navigate. It provides a wide variety of information about the University, including announcements and press releases of a general nature, publication of scholarships, competitions & supplies, and jobs. The website is frequently updated and incorporates all the actions of the Institution resulting from strategic planning such as special interest clubs for students, internal regulations etc.

The Department has developed an organized and accessible [website](#) in which the regulations and the content of all the Department's undergraduate and postgraduate curricula are displayed in an easy-to-understand and user-friendly manner. On the website all the information about the Department and specifically: the structure of the Department, the Student Study Guide, the final exam schedule and the material and technical infrastructure are posted. At the same time, all human resources are listed with their responsibilities and contact information: the Assembly and the Department Head, the Teaching and Research Staff, the Special Technical and Laboratory Staff and the Administrative Staff, retired faculty members, research and academic activities of faculty members with CVs, and the scientific and research programs that are carried out under their responsibility. In addition, basic information is being provided on all levels of study (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral), as well as information that is particularly important information for students, such as student support (food - housing - medical care), transfers, internships, lifelong learning, etc. The Department updates this information at regular intervals, taking all the necessary measures to ensure that the information is accurate, up-to-date, clear, and objective. News about awards, as well as the activities of members of the academic community (conferences, workshops, announcements, distinctions, trainings) are also posted on the Department's website. Information of interest to the general public such as invited lectures, workshops, conferences and other events that connect the Department with the community is posted on the Department website and published in the press.

In addition to the website, the members of the Department are also informed about activities through e-mails sent to their personal addresses as well as from the AUTH's central e-mail platform. All undergraduate courses are supported by the AUTH e-courses service (<https://elearning.auth.gr>), through which there is constant communication with registered users, disclosure of the structure and flow of the courses and communication of material related to the courses.

The Department's different students groups in collaboration with the students of the Department of Primary Education of AUTH contribute to outreach activities to different communities. For example, noteworthy is the Theatre Group "Paedagogus Ludens" which addresses issues of bilingualism, multilingualism, human rights, gender, and environmental awareness. The aforementioned student groups meet with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and provide their support. The music-pedagogical Group "Playmakers of Pyrgos" ("Paichnidiatoures tou Pyrgou") aspires to consolidate its creative artistic and pedagogical production and its contact with the wider public, inside and outside the University. In addition, within the framework of the Department, the inter-university group 'Polydromo' (<http://polydromo.web.auth.gr/index.php/en/>) operates, since 2009, and has supported four International Conferences ('Crossroads of Languages and Cultures') and multiple scholarly and social actions inside and outside the University.

Overall, the EEAP believes that the variety of ways of public information used by the Department of Early Childhood Education is very satisfactory.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 8: Public Information</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

- The EEAP encourages the Department to consider creating an e-Newsletter as a way to maintain contact with students, alumni, schools, social partners and other stakeholders.
- The English language version of the website should be addressed, it is too underdeveloped as it stands. Enriching it has the potential to improve the international visibility of the Department.

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

**INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRAMS, 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 Programs 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 Program in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the Program 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 Program;*
- *the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the Program*

*Programs are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analyzed and the Program is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised Program specifications are published.*

### Study Program Compliance

The Department has adopted a strategic direction based on the external evaluation report of 2013 and developed a Strategic Plan for Continuous Improvement. In the years since the 2013 External Report, MODIP has continuously gathered and analysed a host of data (Quality Indicators) in order to remain loyal to the mission and goals of the Department, i. e. to see well-prepared students through to graduation and ensure that after four years in the program they will act as teachers in kindergarten schools.

The Department is regularly evaluated, and program revisions are made with the participation of students (through course evaluation feedback) and of faculty members. The teaching process and the delivery of the courses, as well as the practical training, are regularly evaluated with the aim of a more effective educational experience and to meet learning objectives. It is important to note that the quality assurance efforts, along with the quality of the Department's academic staff, have ensured good pedagogy and practical experiences for the students and their overall welfare at the University and the Department. Evaluation questionnaires are given to students and graduates, and they are thoroughly analysed for further actions.

The Department and the pre-Kindergarten school program try to take into consideration the changing needs of the society and reinforce the program review processes. In this context, new courses have been added in order to educate students on how to deal with migrant students in a multicultural and multilinguistic environment (see Principles # 2 & 3).

EEAP interviews with the students, alumni, and external stakeholders provided evidence of an overall high level of satisfaction with the program, as implemented.

One of the Department's objectives is the cultivation among students and staff of a 'culture of evaluation' as a mechanism of continuous feedback and improvement. The Department conducted a SWOT analysis underlining internal and external strengths and weaknesses, such

as the lack of adequate human resources, limited student mobility, and insufficient buildings. The OMEA's presentation was very well-structured based on the evaluation principles and their interconnection, and it provided the members of EEAP with an overview of the plans and challenges in the Department that affect the Early Childhood Education program.

The five-year (2021-2026) strategic plan of the Department includes "excellent education" regarding the program's content and methodology, research enhancement, development and increase of local, national and international collaborations.

Among the issues that the Department needs to address, with the collaboration of MODIP, OMEA, and the Early Childhood Education faculty, is the challenge of creating a tighter and more structured program of study with smaller audiences in the classrooms.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programs</b>	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### Panel Recommendations

- The EEAP, consistent with the recommendation outlined in Principle #2, proposes that the Department should include in the 5-year Strategic Plan the revision of the curriculum/program of study and include mandatory courses and electives so as to give students the qualifications needed to develop flexible careers and strengthen the Department's identity and mission.
- The EEAP, consistent with the recommendation outlined in Principle # 8, proposes the development of a user-friendly webpage in English so that potential visitors are able to find useful information about the Department. The English webpage, along with the appropriate links to the Central Services of the University will make the Department visible and increase the reach of its program.
- The Department should consider increasing the students' period of service in MODIP from one year to two and appoint solely graduate students.

## Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programs

**PROGRAMS 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 Program accreditation process which is realized as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of Programs, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the Programs acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the Program 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 Program Compliance

Institutions of higher education in Greece achieve compliance by demonstrating that they meet the QA principles and the principles established by HAHE. The committee reviewed all the available documentation, including the 2013 External Evaluation Report, the website, and conducted extensive online interviews with key members of the university community such as the Vice-Rector for Academic and student Affairs, the Head of the Department, members of the OMEA and MODIP, faculty, secretarial and laboratory staff, students, graduates and external partners and employers. The Department of Early Childhood Education draws on the Quality Policy and the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) of the University, giving particular importance to the internal evaluation of courses. There is continuous monitoring and periodic internal evaluation of the Program, as was evident during the interviews with the faculty and internal evaluation committee (MODIP and OMEA) members. OMEA meets regularly and systematically monitors quality data on an annual basis. Finally, it draws up annual and periodic evaluation reports and recommendations to the Program Committee and the General Assembly of the Department.

Students evaluate the content and the objectives of the courses, the organization and quality of teaching (methods, communication, motivational participation of students) and the achievement of course objectives through a survey (course evaluation) every semester. A new tool in the evaluation toolkit has been the recent addition of student evaluations through mobile phones. Finally, students complete an exit survey upon their graduation that also provides feedback on their learning experience.

The Department has further implemented SWOT analysis as an ongoing monitoring tool. SWOT looks at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Based on the prior external evaluation recommendations, the Department has attempted to address as many as possible. In our meetings we were told that the Department has addressed 75-80% of the recommendations of the 2013 report, as the remaining really fall outside the Department's control, but we thought otherwise, and we enumerate below.

- 1) The building infrastructure has improved since 2013 with better use of the available space and the addition of more rooms, offices for hosting the Labs, as well as the creation of accessible classrooms for students with disability in the Blue Building (Lyomeno). A well-equipped and spacious music room was also created in that same building hosting music/drama events of the Department. The need for more space stands and the University's upper Administration must attend to this matter.
- 2) The Department has been working on revising the curriculum, since the external evaluation. The External Evaluation Committee had suggested that the "Department considers further articulating an appropriate course sequence with prerequisites in order to further enhance student academic development and learning." The EEAP notes that the Curriculum has somewhat improved since 2013, but serious issues still loom as delineated in Principles #2 and #3 of this report.
- 3) The 2013 evaluation report further highlighted the need on the part of the Department to "reflect on its mission and examine how the latter is served through the curriculum, courses, outreach, and MA research and dissertations produced." In response, the Department has developed a Strategic Plan built around three axes a) excellent teaching b) research integrity and c) community outreach. While these are positive steps in principle, the EAP is unclear as to how they embody the mission of the Department in more concrete terms, how they translate into curricular content and faculty expertise and the kinds of pedagogical and social commitments embedded in them.
- 4) 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.

### Panel Judgement

<b>Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programs</b>	
Fully compliant	
Substantially compliant	<b>X</b>
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

### **Panel Recommendations**

- As noted earlier, the Department has been working for many years on revising the undergraduate program curriculum. From the EEAP's review, we found no evidence that the Department has yet articulated an appropriate course sequence with prerequisites, as suggested in the 2013 report.
- The Department's strategic plan does not seem to address neither conceptually nor practically a reflection on its mission and in what ways it is served through the curriculum, courses, and community outreach. The EEAP encourages the Department to critically revisit its strategic plan and mission.



## **PART C: CONCLUSIONS**

### **I. Features of Good Practice**

- There is a high degree of satisfaction for the Department among students, alumni, and external partners and stakeholders. The EEAP has received very positive feedback from all the groups.
- The Department was steadfast and effective in its response to the COVID pandemic, continuing to deliver its curriculum in an efficient way.
- The Department fosters Interactive teaching and student involvement.
- The different student groups (Paihnidatores, Paedagogus Ludens & Polydromo) led by faculty and their activities (such as music/drama events, conferences etc.) are noteworthy. They bring visibility to the Department and forge connections with social partners and society at large.

### **II. Areas of Weakness**

- The Department's underdeveloped vision about the kind of pre-K teacher preparation program they want to be.
- The curricular structure with its 'open-ended' concept creates curricular, student preparation and department identity issues. The current curriculum blurs the Department's identity and mission and generates different degrees for different students in the Program.
- Faculty work overload that, while needed for the functioning of the department and the delivery of the curriculum, at the same time impedes undertaking new initiatives at the department level and/or affects faculty's scholarship engagement.

### **III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions**

- The TEPAE Program needs to continue working towards a coherent and accessible vision and identity as an institution to serve public pre-K education, situated in a broader sociocultural context. Since the program evolves with the times and appreciates the needs of its graduates as they enter the workforce (as pre-school teachers), the questions that arise are: Is the program addressing the sociocultural and socio-political realities of the Greek context, both in the coursework at the university and in the selection of the students' Practicum opportunities? Does the program aspire to be primarily one of teacher training? If so, this may mean that it would adhere to the most recent trends of teacher education, including the notion of *teachers as researchers*.
- In order to develop a coherent identity and meet students' and the nation's educational needs, the Department must rethink its open-ended curriculum, as elaborated in Principle #2. The EEAP recommends revising the program's structure to include a core of mandatory courses that all students are required to take.
- The current approach to the Practicum has major issues, ranging from the selection and training of mentor teachers (who host practicum students in their classrooms) in the kindergarten classes/contexts, to the design and implementation of hours of involvement/planning/teaching/co-teaching in the earlier years of the students' course of study. Observation protocols during the fourth year Practicum are recommended as a way

to establish *standardized* and *objective* assessments of students. The EEAP strongly recommends rethinking and revising the Practicum along the lines proposed in Principle #2.

- As TEPAE is within the IHE systemic concerns, the perennial challenge of faculty-to-student ratio applies here. Certainly, the number of faculty needs to increase, but also more diverse faculty expertise should be hired to reflect both sociocultural issues, as well as critical subject area demands. Doing so might meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century concerns of public education and pre-school pedagogy.

#### IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **2 and 10.**

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: **None.**

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: **None.**

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	<b>X</b>
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

## The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

**Name and Surname**

**Signature**

- 1. Prof. Panayota Gounari (Chair)**  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA*
  
- 2. Prof. Athanasios Gagatsis**  
*University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus*
  
- 3. Prof. Eleni Katsarou**  
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- 4. Prof. Joanna Katsanis**  
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