



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF IOANNINA



European Union
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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
M A N A G I N G A U T H O R I T Y

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION of the UNIVERSITY OF IOANNINA consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Associate Professor Dr. Charoula Angeli-Valanides (Coordinator)
Department of Education, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

2. Professor Dr. John Spiridakis
The School of Education, St. John's University, New York, USA

3. Associate Professor Dr. Timothy Papadopoulos
Department of Psychology, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

4. Associate Professor Dr. Petros Gougoulakis
Department of Education, Stockholm University, Sweden

N.B. The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department.

The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

This is the Report of the External Evaluation Committee for the Department of Early Childhood Education at University of Ioannina in Greece. The on-site visit took place from Wednesday, 23 October 2013 to Friday, 25 October 2013. Professor George Stamelos, Member of the Board of the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA), in a letter dated 25 July 2013, informed the following evaluators of their appointment by the HQA as members of the External Evaluation Committee for the Department of Early Childhood Education at University of Ioannina. The members of the committee are the following: Dr. Charoula Angeli-Valanides, Associate Professor, Department of Education, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus (Coordinator); Professor John Spiridakis, The School of Education, St. John’s University, New York, USA; Dr. Petros Gougoulakis, Associate Professor, Department of Education, Stockholm University, Sweden; and Dr. Timothy Papadopoulos, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus.

The Committee closely followed the schedule provided by HQA and University of Ioannina. A detailed plan with a list of participants was delivered to the committee by HQA, which also scheduled site visits to the various facilities, including the Department’s laboratories. The Committee had fruitful discussions with the Rector of the University, the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs, the Dean of the School of Education, the Chair of the Department, the faculty, students, and the administrative staff.

The evaluation reported herein is based on the internal evaluation report prepared by the Department of Early Childhood for the years 2007-2013. Furthermore, the Rector of the University of Ioannina presented and made available to the Committee the strategic plan for the University of Ioannina for the years 2007-2013. Finally, the Committee was provided with the curriculum of the two programs of study (Undergraduate and Ph.D.), and a set of presentations pertaining to all aspects of the evaluation.

The Committee had useful meetings with staff and students associated with the two programs (Undergraduate and Ph.D.) in the Department, during which a careful examination of the programs, research activities, and other scholarly work that is undertaken to further enhance the professional and scientific pursuits of the Department.

The Committee visited the facilities of the Department in the University Campus, and inspected all classroom and research spaces.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The information and material provided to the External Evaluation Committee by the Department of Early Childhood Education, which was used during the evaluation of the Department, was of high quality. A statement of intent prefaced all materials submitted in support of the evaluation. The statement delineated factors relevant to the review, including philosophy of teaching, research and innovation objectives, and when appropriate, any circumstances that would lead to consideration of future development. Finally, material that was important to the Committee but which was not directly available in the initial report became accessible to the Committee in a timely manner.

After a detailed quality assessment, the Committee concludes that the internal evaluation process was met by the Department in terms of both content and objectives.

A. Curriculum

To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.

1. Undergraduate programme

The goals and objectives of the curriculum are to:

- (a) Adequately prepare preprimary education students, so that they become competent early-childhood education teachers with a high degree of sensitivity and sensibility in terms of providing good service to children and the society in general.
- (b) Provide courses, which will enable students to become teachers as professionals as well as applied scientists in their respective field of study maintaining at the same time a high level of content expertise, pedagogical knowledge, and scientific competence for the education of young children.
- (c) Contribute to the enhancement of the level and the supply of the increasing demands of Education in relation to Pedagogy.
- (d) Contribute to the treatment and resolution of pedagogical problems in general.

The objectives were initially decided according to article 1, Paragraph 2 of the Law 1268/82 and article 2 of P.D. 320/83, even though the Department often revisits and rethinks the objectives through its General Assembly as a result of having insights formed out of its international affairs and collaborations and new faculty members. In an effort to better meet the above objectives, the restructuring of the existing curriculum was decided by the General Assembly, and a departmental committee was formed for the purpose of revising the curriculum. As a result of that, the committee worked closely with all members of the General Assembly to revise the existing undergraduate curriculum during the academic year 2007-2008, which was consequently approved by the General Assembly and was adopted and implemented in the academic year 2008-2009. In January of 2012, five faculty members joined the Department and new courses were added to the revised curriculum, such as, (a) Motor Education and Learning, (b) Introduction to Music Education, (c) Language Education at Preschool and Educational Approach, and (d) Sociology of Education. It is noted that the Department can perform small curricular changes every year in April, whereas major curriculum changes are only possible after a longer amount of elapsed time.

Currently, there are 1091 undergraduates in the Department. Students' grade point average has been more or less at about the same level during the last six years. On average, it takes students about five years to graduate. Undergraduate students are required to take 55 courses to graduate, of which, 20 are compulsory, 15 are compulsory elective, and 20 are elective, for a total of 165 credit hours or 240 ECTS. Students are allowed to pursue an undergraduate thesis in the place of two regular courses. In addition, students have the opportunity, at times, to take intensive courses as part of an ERASMUS programme. It should be noted that the Department since 2011 has introduced the role of the departmental advisor for the Erasmus program. The Department maintains a high participation rate in the ERASMUS program indicating that their students are well encouraged to experience educational mobility in their undergraduate studies.

The 20 compulsory courses include courses in the areas of general education and pedagogy, science education, math education, psychology (social and cognitive), history, literary theory, arts and fine arts, theatre, intercultural education, health education, philosophy of education, mythology, educational technology, educational administration, special education, and children's literature. No courses in music education, research methodology, the teaching of Greek language, or the teaching of Greek language as a second language are required. They are included however, in the list of compulsory elective courses and the list of elective courses. The vast majority of courses has extensive outlines (syllabi/course diagrams), which are listed in the study guide and are available to students.

Teaching practice is implemented and offered as part of some of the existing courses. Specifically, 12 weeks are devoted to early-field experiences, as follows: Teaching

Applications II (6 weeks), Teaching Mathematics II (2 weeks), Science Education at Preschool II (2 weeks), and ICT in Education (2 weeks). Teaching practice starts in the third semester with mere observation of teaching practice in local kindergartens. Then in the third year students have two weeks, one week for observation and one week for teaching in three content areas (ICT, Mathematics, and Science), and in the fourth year they have four weeks of teaching. The Department aims in implementing innovative teaching practices within the context of Teaching Practice, such as for example the model/approach “Dasiko Nhpiagwgeio” (<http://earlychildhoodpedagogy.gr>), Learning by Design, the use of social networking technologies for the development of online professional communities of practice, the use of online depositories of classroom lesson plans, and the program “Ameivomenh Praktikh Askhsh”. “Ameivomenh Praktikh Askhsh”, despite the title, is not a program that is directly related to real teaching in a kindergarten classroom; rather, it aims to broaden students’ professional experiences in general. The program runs on a competitive basis and students receive 300 euros a month as their compensation.

2. Graduate programme

There is not a graduate (Master’s) programme offered, even though the Department is in a process of engaging in systematic consultations regarding this issue with the Senate of the University.

3. Doctoral programme

The doctoral programme is solely based on the preparation of a doctoral thesis in close collaboration with a mentor (director of the doctoral dissertation), and it does not require taking any courses. In the case of a strong need to take courses, then the dissertation director suggests a number of courses offered by other Departments in the University that the doctoral student can take. The programme does not carry any fees. It is managed through an internal set of rules and regulations. No screening (comprehensive) examination is required to receive the status of the doctoral candidate – instead the Ph.D. prospective student, if he/she gets admitted receives the status of the doctoral candidate right from the start. Currently, there are 291 doctoral candidates in the Department. Only faculty members at the post of the Assistant Professor and above can supervise doctoral candidates. At the moment, no provisions have been made to make changes to the doctoral programme. However, the Department recognizes that the number of 291 students does not reflect the actual number of students who are active in their Ph.D. studies, even though they admit that due to university laws they have not been able to dismiss those students who have been inactive for years.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Undergraduate programme

While the efforts undertaken by the Department are worthwhile, justifiable by the documents the Committee examined, and feasible based on the available human resources (with the exception of Teaching Practice), at the same time it is evident (based on the documentation the committee received, interviews with undergraduate students, and comparisons with universally accepted standards) that the implementation revealed that: (a) the curriculum should be more closely related with universally accepted standards and evidence-based curriculum practices, (b) while the structure of the curriculum was clearly articulated, it was not completely functional, because important courses were missing from the curriculum, and (c) the Teaching Practice proved to be highly problematic and did not serve its purposes and objectives due to the lack of personnel.

2. Doctoral Programme

The department has no problems with the implementation of the doctoral programme in its current form, since in reality this is limited to how well a student works with the Ph.D. advisor.

RESULTS

1. Undergraduate programme

The new curriculum was put into implementation in the academic year 2008-2009. This means that it has only been recently that the first students graduated after the implementation of the new curriculum, and probably the Department needs more time to reflect on the results of the implementation. However, it is evident that the new curriculum has not been able to fulfil all of its predefined goals and objectives because of the weaknesses in some parts of the curriculum and the lack of adequate Teaching Practice (for the students). The Department does understand the weaknesses and it is planning a General Assembly meeting to discuss these issues. All in all, the results revealed several weaknesses such as:

- (a) Lack of a clear idea of the profile of the early-childhood educator that the Department aims in cultivating.
- (b) A multiplicity of problems arose related to the lack of adequate teaching practice during the third and fourth academic years. These problems are directly related to how well students feel they are prepared to teach all subject matters in a real early-childhood classroom.
- (c) A need to balance the courses students take during the first two years. It appears that there is too much emphasis on theoretical courses whereas the Department should strive to provide a balance between theoretical and pedagogical courses before students begin their teaching practice.
- (d) The fact that courses such as Educational Research or Educational Statistics are not mandatory courses in the curriculum created a plethora of problems related to how well students were able to face and resolve problems related to teaching and learning during their teaching practice.

2. Doctoral Programme

Faculty members stated that they were satisfied with the progress of their Ph.D. students and that some of them were able to receive awards and grants based on their research outcomes so far. In those cases where students had weaknesses, faculty members were able to suggest to them courses to take from other Departments. Lecturers also expressed their willingness to be able to supervise Ph.D. theses; however, this is an issue that has to do with the University Law at large and not the Department per se. An issue that requires an action immediately is related to the large number of Ph.D. students who have been inactive for years, but currently the Department has not found a way to dismiss them.

IMPROVEMENT

1. Undergraduate programme

The following suggestions are strongly encouraged for the improvement of the curriculum:

- (a) Reconsider the profile of the early-childhood teacher who is well prepared to teach in the 21st century classroom. For example a good start would be to look at the early-childhood program standards published by NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children www.naeyc.org).
- (b) Develop a curriculum that will closely match the early-childhood educator's profile in (a) so that graduates can be successfully prepared to cope with complex issues in the classroom related to, for example, teaching students with learning difficulties as well as teaching students whose first language is not Greek.
- (c) Rethink Teaching Practice (early-field experiences) so that graduates feel well prepared to teach young children, after graduation. This can be accomplished through establishing a stand-alone Teaching Practice Module (independent of the context of existing courses), which will start with classroom observations during the first academic year followed by some actual teaching practice in the second year, followed by extensive teaching practice

in the third and fourth years. It is imperative that the new conception of Teaching Practice incorporates all subject-matter areas including music, drama, and the teaching of language arts.

- (d) Reconsider the sequence of courses offered to students every semester, so that students can have the opportunity to take very early on in their program courses related to pedagogy in general as well as courses related to the teaching of the various content areas in particular. This will ensure that students will be well prepared for their teaching practice during the third and fourth years.
- (e) Rethink the mandatory courses in the curriculum so that Music and the teaching of Greek as a native and second language are included.
- (f) Rethink the mandatory courses in the curriculum so that Educational Research and/or Educational Statistics are included as mandatory courses. This will enable students to develop skills along the line of the teacher as a researcher in the classroom so that he or she can systematically engage in action research to resolve problems related to teaching and learning.

2. Doctoral Programme

The Department is considering taking a few actions for improving the quality of the Ph.D. program, such as for example, introducing a small number of courses, which can be delivered online, such as, for example, courses in educational research and other courses related to their respective fields of study. Besides this, the Department should also prepare a handbook for how to prepare a Ph.D. thesis, so that the structure of a thesis is the same across all areas and is not subjected to the preferences of each individual Ph.D. mentor. Also, it is good practice for a Ph.D. thesis to follow international writing and formatting standards, such as for example the APA (American Psychology Association) standards. Another suggestion for ensuring the quality of Doctoral Education would be to require from prospective Ph.D. students to have a master's degree in their respective field of study before applying for a Ph.D. This alleviates some of the problems that obviously arise in a Department which does not offer a Master's degree program and accepts Ph.D. students who may not have a Master's degree. It is also noted here, that other universities in Greece, such as for example University of Crete and University of Patras offer master degree programs in early-childhood education, and therefore, the University of Ioannina may learn from their experiences or find a way to collaborate with them. Within this context, it is highly recommended that the Department of Early Childhood Education systematically pursues the objective of launching a Master's program in Early Childhood Education.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

In this section, the Committee considers the defined pedagogical policy of the Department with respect to both teaching approaches and methodology. Since the goal of this Department is to prepare competent and professional teachers at the level of early childhood, the pedagogical practices of the faculty as they relate to the preparation of students for teaching are also examined. The practices discussed herein also relate primarily to those involved with the undergraduate level since no formal courses are taught at the doctoral level. Approximately 40 undergraduate students were interviewed along with about 10 doctoral level students.

The courses are outlined and are available for review in the Study Guide and are discussed in the prior Curriculum section of this report. The five sectors of unit within the Department include courses that focus on theory, research, practice or some combination of these foci. The courses include major textbooks and supporting materials and resources for which students are expected to study and learn. Many classes involve hundreds of students while others involve smaller sizes. In some classes, students must stand since there are not enough seats. According to the Internal Evaluation, several teaching methods are used by faculty including the classic lecture method as well as small group instruction and seminars, accompanying lectures.

The Chairperson had integrated the “learning by design” approach in several courses focused on early childhood pedagogy. The faculty discussed this area and its merits, and noted that the “teacher as researcher” approach was also taught, although it was unclear to what extent. Several courses involving content knowledge in mathematics as well as early childhood education pedagogy required field experiences according to our interviews with the faculty. Teacher-student collaboration seemed to be greater in courses that involved smaller class size, although such collaboration was also facilitated through the involvement of students in a rich variety of laboratory opportunities, extra-curricular and supplementary seminars, conferences, and education organization websites, and online resources. Students reported during interviews that when the faculty is available during office hours provides helpful assistance with questions and issues related to a better understanding of course work. Student achievement of course objectives is measured primarily through examinations, papers and, in some cases, projects. Courses are also evaluated through evaluations completed by the students.

The Internal Evaluation noted the need for better internet availability as well as the need to improve the classroom structures, and classroom resources for delivering instruction. Online resources were available to students in certain courses. Library resources were up-to-date and considered essential to the teaching-learning process. New publications of some periodicals, however, were not yet available due to the financial constraints wreaking havoc on the entire department as well.

A key component of the pedagogical approach of the Department for ensuring the preparation of competent and professional early childhood education teachers involved in course related field experiences in areas such as mathematics and science, laboratory tutorials, intensive student classroom observations, and teaching practice. The presence of laboratories such as early childhood, mathematics and science, along with a tutor for each, constitute an excellent adjunct of instruction for all students. Students have required hours of laboratory work as well as time out in the field. As noted in the previous section, the approach of the department is to have students in an early childhood classroom for two weeks observation in their third semester of study, one week of observation and one week of actual teaching in their sixth semester, and practical teaching experiences over a four week period in their fourth year of study. The students were given the opportunity to observe an early childhood classroom and to practice teaching lessons to the classroom students.

The students participate in seminars during the teaching experiences and have the chance to share and discuss their self-evaluations. Assessment of student teaching is conducted through the use of clinical assists (teachers on leave) and through, primarily, the self-reflections of the students themselves using guidelines provided to them. Another key

pedagogical approach for ensuring the professional and competent knowledge base of the students is the option offered for a thesis prior to graduation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The quality of the teaching procedures is discussed herein. The Internal Evaluation reported that faculty used a variety of teaching approaches. Interviews revealed this to be the case. The huge class sizes, of course, required a lecture method. This method has its strengths and weaknesses. An issue that emerged during interviews of the students, however, was the need for additional time with a professor, one-on-one, during office hours or after class. Faculty member accessibility seemed tied into more effective student learning outcomes as per the students interviewed.

Faculty members were involved in research and publication related to their fields and courses taught. Some faculty members also required students to participate in laboratory work and faculty projects and related research in the various fields of study such as science and mathematics for early childhood. Research is related to the practice of the faculty through their projects and involvement in the various educational organizations, conferences, and seminars attended or hosted by the faculty members.

The rich array of required and elective courses and laboratories is a unique and dynamic feature of early childhood education programs in the Department. Students can learn, for example, about that many specific medical aspects related to children as well as learn about the challenging characteristics of exceptional children that classroom teachers must be cognizant of. Courses in music and theater offer students tools for the effective classroom teaching of Greek literacy as well as the content areas of science, mathematics, history, and ICT.

In reviewing the course content, theoretical, historical, philological, philosophical knowledge was emphasized in addition to theories and practices associated with early childhood pedagogy. What were not articulated in the course content were the elements associated with the teaching of Greek as a first and second language. The courses related to Greek literature, for the most part, emphasized theory and knowledge of literary concepts rather than specific applied knowledge and practices based on current research in literacy development at the early childhood levels. During faculty interviews, it was noted that students taking a course in children's literature are also taught how to write stories. The nexus between learning about children's literature, learning how to write a story for children and applying what has been learned in this course in the early childhood classroom is unclear and perhaps worthy of more attention. Articulating a bridge between what is taught in what can be termed "liberal arts and science" background coursework and the teaching of literacy or language development in the classroom seems to be the exclusive province of the methodology courses and, of course, the students themselves.

The students, all prospective teachers, are left to synthesize and apply the highly multidisciplinary characteristic of the early childhood education department and the content and pedagogy taught by the faculty during their field experiences, laboratory hours, and observations and then teaching practice in the early childhood classroom. Clinical teachers hired by the department assist the students during observations and teaching practice. This year the clinical teachers were eliminated due to the budget cuts. As a result, the students were left to fend for themselves, as a practical matter. The faculty members, due to their own onerous schedules that include overtime work, are unable to visit and observe the students during their practical training. The teachers in the early childhood classrooms to which the students are assigned do provide feedback to the students during their practical training periods. Students primarily utilize the self-reflection instruments or guides provided by the faculty member teaching the two "Teaching Applications I and II" courses and are expected to employ approaches including the "learning by design" model of instruction.

The global experiences and multicultural learning of the students is a major focus of the Department's implementation of teaching practices. The ERASMUS program, offered by the University, provides an excellent opportunity for students in the Department to study and teach abroad in countries such as Sweden, Spain, and Cyprus.

The involvement of students in dynamic conferences and research and development organizations that faculty are involved with gave students the opportunity for extending their

knowledge in subjects such as mathematics, science, intercultural knowledge, bilingualism, and research-based pedagogy for the early childhood level. Faculty members have to seek for opportunities to translate this declarative knowledge into procedural for their students. Moreover, the technology now available in the modern, wired classrooms such as the Smart Board and the use of online platforms such as Facebook helped make lessons more engaging and helped reinforce and extend learning beyond the classroom.

RESULTS

Faculty members expressed a general contentment with their teaching practices. As noted in the course outlines and in the Internal Evaluation, the lecture method and certain collaborative groups are employed. Students interviewed indicated that the opportunity for more collaboration with certain faculty would likely enhance their learning of a given subject. Faculty members have engaged in curriculum and course modifications and have formed important committees to further develop teaching and learning.

The course outlines reviewed and extensive presentations by and discussions with most of the department faculty as a group and as part of their units or sectors helped illuminate the innovations and issues and challenges ahead articulated in the Internal Evaluation. Although the content taught appeared up-to-date, including exemplary practices that were based on current research, teaching in sub-standard, antiquated classrooms was the “elephant in the room” that compromised the effective and engaging teaching and learning process. Levels of faculty-student engagement differed for each faculty member, according to the students. Desired levels of such engagement were not reached in every case. It is easy to visualize the high level of discomfort in the antiquated classrooms observed distracting students unnecessarily during a normal lecture.

There was a consensus among the students interviewed that more preparation was needed to give them the knowledge and efficacy level of an effective teacher in the early childhood classroom. The time they were allocated for actual teaching was felt to be insufficient for becoming competent and confident. In addition, they felt that more direct supervision and feedback in the early childhood classroom was warranted. In other words, getting observed and getting feedback from the cooperating classroom teacher, a faculty member or representative, or the clinical associate, about their teaching performance would help them refine their confidence and professionalism. Students also voiced a desire for more optional textbook requirements in their courses.

The chance for seminars and meeting with the faculty member teaching or directing the “Teaching Applications I and II” courses was very valuable to the students. They had the chance to share their concerns and reflections about the teaching process with the Professor and their peers.

The diverse course work and dynamic experiential-based laboratories help support and enhance student learning. Students have opportunities to collaborate in faculty research and projects. The available network of early childhood centers and classrooms augurs well for the continued successful placement of student teachers.

Assessment is an essential component of the teaching-learning process. Faculty need to revisit their course content, pedagogy and assessment practices. All of these components together should be geared to reflect the needs of the students who will become classroom teachers. Assessment should be based on clearly defined goals, objectives, and research-based exemplary practices. For example, assessment related to student participation could engender more engagement. Webinars and digital videos should also become available for review and discussion as part of faculty professional development.

The students need to be given the specific tools for effective instruction and taught how to use them in the classroom. Greek as a first and second language teaching skills are as important as the content knowledge. In addition, prospective teachers need to know how to integrate Greek literacy and the content areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and technology. Demonstration lessons at the Department and in the early childhood classrooms should be extended and increased. Videos of exemplary Greek teaching and the teaching of the content are in order. Ways to increase faculty-student collaboration with the current, daunting financial impediments, and time constraints should be explored.

There is a symbiotic relationship between faculty and student professional development in pedagogy. Both need to be engaged in researching and modeling exemplary practices, to the extent possible. Graduates of the Department who have obtained teaching positions should be surveyed to ascertain what areas of knowledge and skills they felt they had enough preparation in and which areas they felt they needed more preparation in.

The classrooms that have not been updated yet need to, to support student motivation and engagement.

The “coral reef” mentality is found in many bureaucratic organizations. In today’s society with its many challenges, educators must find innovative ways to collaborate to ensure the most effective and innovative instruction. It is a universal challenge faced by educators in higher education and in classrooms from pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade. Schools and departments of education are increasingly being held accountable for the achievement levels of children in literacy, mathematics and science, especially. The department continues its mission of improving its curriculum and practical training through the collaboration of the committees and dynamic faculty noted in the Internal Evaluation and Department of Education Study Guide.

IMPROVEMENT

The Committee recommends the following:

- (a) It is noteworthy that the Department is engaged in reviewing and analyzing the current practices related to student field experiences in order to improve the quality of the educational and training services offered. A restructuring of the field experience of all students is the goal.
- (b) Based on the feedback provided by the students, it makes sense for the Department to seek ways to support faculty members interested in reflecting on the efficacy of their own teaching practices. A “faculty forum” could be arranged on a bi-monthly basis. Participating faculty could share their interests in research and teaching. There is an array of resources online that can be read and used as a springboard for discussion and modification of instructional approaches. Such meetings could also be used to find strategies to help students become more confident in the subjects as well as the style of their teaching. Faculty could look at the research on the characteristics of an effective early childhood education teacher and then share these findings with other members of the department to modify existing coursework to include new strategies and content. For example, it could be helpful for theoretical and research oriented coursework to be modified to include ways the content can be transformed into classroom applications. The “teacher as researcher” or “action research” approach could perhaps be included as a common paradigm running through all of the required courses, at least. Students could possibly then identify an action research topic or question that would enable them to synthesize the rich diversity of coursework content and pedagogy and report it in their thesis. Such a “capstone” goal of the department subsumed by the thesis requirement can be supported by various faculty members and a student advisor.
- (c) As noted above, in some classes, students must stand since there are not enough seats. In order to increase course accessibility to students and decrease course crowding, the Committee recommends that registration is determined by class level. Priority registration should be applied for continuing students, with the final year students registering first, followed by the third year students, and the earlier years.
- (d) An issue that emerged during interviews of the students was the need for additional time with a Professor, one-on-one, during office hours or after class. The faculty ought to make the necessary arrangements to provide these services to current and prospective students on a more systematic basis. It is also deemed necessary for faculty to serve as undergraduate advisors helping students with on-going academic advising issues such as major course requirements, as well as developing long term graduation and career plans, making, in turn, the rigors of university more comfortable and efficacious.
- (e) Faculty members should include, to the extent not already being done, engaging and collaborative lessons to translate declarative or informative knowledge into procedural knowledge since their students will be responsible to do this for their early childhood level students. In relation to language and literacy development, specifically, prospective teachers need to become aware of issues relating to the development of students’ listening and reading skills, means for introducing students to new vocabulary, pre-

writing activities, and phonological processing or linguistic activities. Generally, teacher preparation has to involve learning how to teach preschool students to learn to be more aware of print around them and to enjoy participating in routine literacy activities. Specific techniques need to be modeled for students.

- (f) Special handbooks should be developed for undergraduates for their theses and practical training requirements. Such a step by step handbook is also needed for doctoral students.
- (g) Finally, class teaching and lecturing should be informed by and supplemented with modern material, including webinars, videos, and other similar e-learning materials to enhance learning and discussion as part of faculty professional development. Likewise, students should be given more options with regard to required classroom readings and resources.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

The Department's policy and main objectives in research

The priorities of the Department of Early Childhood Education at University of Ioannina are to contribute new knowledge to the field of education and to translate research findings into practice. These priorities are reflected mainly in national and to a lesser extent in international publication records, some international research collaborations, external and internal research funding, and collaborations with the public and private sectors for the advancement of educational and social initiatives. Research in the Department of Early Childhood Education covers a broad range of research from basic to applied, and five (5) research laboratories have been established in order to advance and support research work. This has resulted in a considerable level of productivity across multiple domains, including research and teaching.

Internal standards for assessing research

No internal funds are included in the annual budget of the Department for the support of research. It is deemed necessary for the University to provide opportunities for internal funding on a competitive basis, contributing to the required growth of scientific research in Social Sciences, in general, and Educational Sciences, in particular, and to provide solid academic, research, and professional education.

IMPLEMENTATION

Over the last few years, the Department of Early Childhood Education aims to a research-oriented approach with students working closely with faculty mentors in specialized research programs. Despite of this, the research infrastructure and support is scarce. The Department does not get the required support from the University in the area of grant writing and preparation. Also, the faculty members do not receive any guidance regarding the available calls or grants, especially at the international level. It is of primary importance for the University to facilitate the development of research by introducing a team of well-trained and well-informed administrative members that could provide the necessary support to the faculty of the School or the Department for writing and submitting research grants.

Scientific publications

The Department places emphasis on monographs and edited volumes published in Greek. Some collective publications in English are also in progress or completed. Less attention is paid to publications in referred and top-tier journals.

Research projects

The research produced by the faculty members of the Department falls into five research groupings with rather distinct areas of interest and research projects. This is somewhat expected given the diversity of the subjects in the field. However, it is important to ensure that research activities and objectives do not discriminate against any individuals or groups within the Department.

Research collaborations

The culture of the Department is developing towards being research oriented and this not only extends towards the staff but also students, particularly at the doctoral level. Some faculty and student mobility is in place, but it is important for the Department to keep exploring opportunities that will assure high-quality collaborations and valuable learning experiences.

RESULTS

Faculty members have secured a considerable amount of funding from nine national and 20 international agencies. In eight of them they acted as principal investigators and partners in

21 of them. However, there are instances in which funding is rather limited and specific only to dissemination activities or travel expenses. As a result, the proportion of funding secured by the Department at University level is as low as 1.35%.

Regarding scientific publications, the faculty members have a satisfactory research record, but they do not seem all to share a good awareness of the relative status of journals in their respective fields. The Department is generating publications especially in monographs and edited volumes in Greek, in some international edited collections, in a disproportionately large number of conference proceedings, and in a small number of good quality journals across many of the areas of their activities. It is strongly suggested that faculty members continue to strive for more publications in referred and top-tier journals. This will provide the necessary groundwork for competitive research proposals at the national and, most importantly, at the international level.

In regards to the research projects undertaken, the faculty members fall into five research groupings which seem to create some barriers for collaboration and intellectual exchanges. As the Department grows, it should carefully consider not making these groupings excessively formalized and should encourage the groups to remain flexible in their intellectual character in order to avoid creating any hindrances to collaboration. Especially, when considering budget constraints, the faculty members of the Department have to aim for collaborative research applications, in order to be successful in securing sustainable grant funding. The University aspires to a strong research agenda and faculty members need to allocate appropriate time for conducting research. Also, it is recommended that young faculty members are protected from some administrative duties in order to concentrate on their research productivity.

As far as research collaborations are concerned, there are a few instances in which faculty members participate in large consortiums. It is very important to seek for opportunities to participate in consortiums that include partners who have a long experience in the relevant fields and application areas, and, thus, facilitate the process of securing sufficient international funding for research. In addition, only a small proportion of faculty members spent time in overseas research environments to their benefit. Additionally, faculty members are encouraged to apply for ERASMUS Staff Mobility grants for training purposes and for building up cooperation with colleagues from other higher education institutions, in their respective fields.

Regarding the efficacy of research work, the citation analysis provided in the report shows that there is a gradual increase of the number of citations for the work published by the faculty. Although this might be promising, there is only a small portion of the published work of the faculty that is cited in international citation indices that calculate the scientific value of a researcher (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus, or Google Scholar). It is important for the faculty to aim for more publications in referred and top-tier journals to improve the visibility of the individual researchers and the department accordingly. This becomes necessitating, as books and monographs do not get similar attention (there are only two book reviews for work published by the faculty over the last six years).

Lastly, there is evidence, that the Department has received some national and international recognition for the quality of projects that have been carried out in specific areas, leading, in turn, to securing doctoral funding for a small number of students (mainly doctoral students).

IMPROVEMENT

The Committee's suggestions for improvement are as follows:

- (a) The Department needs to actively encourage undergraduate and doctoral student involvement in research and support students' efforts tangibly through the allocation of funds for research and conference participations. In doing so, and also in terms of addressing educational and community needs, the Department of Early Childhood Education needs to establish first a Master's Program in Early Childhood Education for continuity purposes and as a preamble for the doctoral program. All programs need to be rigorous and solidly grounded in a researcher-teacher model, offering courses and training with both epistemological and methodological content.
- (b) For young researchers to be aspired to be employed in the Department of Early Childhood Education, faculty members need to continuously seek alternative ways for funding departmental research by external (European or international) grant programs,

and also in terms of allocating a proportion of its annual budget for the support of student researchers. These practices will result in aspiring young researchers to pursue research within the Department in a variety of research positions (graduate, doctoral, or post-doctoral level).

- (c) Also, it is considered necessary that faculty members in the Department of Early Childhood Education run research that facilitates interdisciplinary efforts. The Department's commitment to research needs to be strengthened by strategic recruitment in the areas of Methodology such as Qualitative Methods and Statistics.
- (d) It is also important to put emphasis on recruiting Ph.D. students who have typically spent time abroad, instead of recruiting mainly doctoral students who have been graduates of the Department or other similar department in the country. Also, it is important to recruit students who hold a Master's degree or a recognized equivalent from an accredited institution.
- (e) The Committee strongly recommends that the faculty members in the Department remain vigilant for securing external funding for their graduate students. The Committee also recommends that the Department considers the possibility of creating a small number of graduate scholarships.
- (f) The Committee recommends that the Department explores ways to involve and collaborate with faculty members from other departments (e.g., Department of Primary Education or Department of Philosophy, Education, and Psychology) who are interested in conducting international projects and research.
- (g) The Committee commends that the University supports administratively the Department with a well-trained team of officers who will give advice and assistance in the preparation and submission of proposals, ensuring full compliance and helping to increase success rates.

Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department

The Committee found no systematic overview of the nature and extent of the measures being used to support the development and expansion of international research collaborations. With the Department confirming that it is currently an active policy objective to further develop such collaborations, it is important to expand existing partnerships and develop mutually beneficial relations.

An attempt to formulate a graduate program at the Master's level has been initiated by the Department of Early Childhood Education. It is highly recommended that this goal will be systematically and strategically pursued as the highest priority. The new Master's program could be organized and run in collaboration with other universities, offering the possibility for offering online courses as well. Alternatively, the Department should consider the development of a self-funded graduate program on the basis of similar programs that are offered in the country in collaboration with other Departments from abroad.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

The administration of the Department currently consists of a director and two other administrators. As a consequence of the fiscal situation and the impending cuts of administrators in the country's higher education institutions, the External Evaluation Committee was informed that all three posts in the Administration Secretariat were in danger of elimination. This was presented as a real threat for sustaining quality and a severe challenge for the Department's leadership and overall management. Even before the latest changes in the higher education area, the Department estimated that the administrative personnel were insufficient to fully respond to the ordinary tasks. Apparently the administrative load is more urgent for reasons, such as, (a) the increased level of student admissions which is determined centrally, and (b) the transformation necessitated by a higher education reform including the University's administrative organization.

The quality of the administrative services is so far acceptable according to the Department, but there is still room for improvement. Transparency in decision making is considered an important quality indicator along with a readiness to match the Department's mission to the challenging societal conditions and current education policy decisions. In case of availability, according to University regulations, the Rector is obliged to appoint another Secretary (administrative manager) and at least one administrator. In the event that the Senate, for any reason, cannot provide the entire administrative staff management, the Department is obliged to employ existing staff. Employees who are recruited on the basis of other occupational standards/requirements, such as ETEP and EEDIP, will be assigned to undertake some administrative duties. Although there might be complications due to present labour law, the Department notes that it could strive to redefine the matrix of roles and responsibilities of administrative personnel and reformulate their job description in a manner to support academic professionalism that encourages effectiveness and innovation.

The Department is pursuing an on-going transformative process that is a prerequisite for establishing a culture of quality assurance in teaching and knowledge production. The Department needs to create regular forums for collegial deliberation including preferably the entire academic staff, i.e., teachers, researchers and administrators. Furthermore, new and more flexible forms of ICT-based communication must be introduced to facilitate student participation in the Department's academic and social life. The large number of students at the Department, with an average of 250 entrants per year, along with re-registered students every year and with students from other departments such as the Department of Philosophy, Psychology and Pedagogy who attend various courses, create a faculty-student ratio beyond what is academically acceptable for successful learning activities. Many courses are overcrowded and are exclusively based on lectures in large auditoriums. Such conditions hardly increase students' motivation to participate in a meaningful way, and neither encourages students' presence to the courses. This problem is reduced by the many creative and productive extracurricula activities sponsored by many of the faculty members.

IMPLEMENTATION

Along with the three administrators who constitute the Secretariat, the Department also employs two research and teaching assistants (professional category: E.E.D.I.P) and four persons serving as Special Technical Laboratory Staff (E.T.E.P.), one of which has been transferred to the Department to serve as secretary to the Vice Rector. All of them carry out administrative tasks of various kinds, not always different from those conducted by the members of the Secretariat. These employees are concerned since their competence is not fully utilized today. The leadership of the Department is aware of some ambiguity over how

the Department's administrative resources are used. This ambiguity is partly due to centralized employment regulations which, in fact, counteract the University's autonomy. Also, there is an unwillingness to adapt to changes through re-prioritization of activities and effective rationalization of existing resources. Thus, a new division of responsibilities between the central level (University) and the local (Department) on all functions has to be implemented in a timely manner.

All faculty members have private offices with access to telephone, computer and wireless Internet. The students are served effectively by the University's central library, as well as from the Department's smaller libraries, which are housed in the various "laboratories". The students and the staff have also free Internet access and access to library's electronic resources throughout the day. Additionally, as of early October 2013 the departmental spaces and facilities are equipped with free wi fi/internet access for all staff members and students. Also the departmental new website (<http://ecedu.uoi.gr/>) was available to the public since early October 2013, but the strike of the administrative personnel at the university-wide level hindered its availability through the official website of the university.

RESULTS

The cooperation of the administrative unit of the Department with those of the central administration of the University is reported as satisfactory. Even the Department's overall infrastructure is considered adequate for its purpose. All educational and research structures of the Department of Early Childhood Education are housed in a functional building at the Campus. Public transportation services are satisfactory for meeting the mobility needs of the academic community.

However, the supply of necessary equipment and the upgrading or repairing of existing electronic and other classroom apparatus often requires lengthy bureaucratic procedures which, in conjunction with underfunding of the Department, generates unnecessary irritation and structural ineffectiveness. The working environment is seriously impaired because of underfunding in the maintaining and upgrading of the existing material infrastructure. Investment in skilled technical staff with supportive ICT functions towards students and staff is a prerequisite for the quality improvement of the Department's teaching, research and other activities.

IMPROVEMENTS

The external evaluation committee has ascertained that the Department understands the necessity for the ongoing development and training of the administrative staff in order to be able to meet the demands of the Department's tasks as these are defined by the needs of the Department.

The Department should work out tools for early detection and analysis of bureaucratic dysfunctions. To the extent that they are caused by internal factors they should be analyzed with the intention to elaborate effective solutions to facilitating the Department's activities and, ultimately, better serve the students.

Given the state of affairs created by restraint measures, which impacts the administrative functions, the Committee strongly recommends expediting the website platform to optimize and simplify existing burdensome administrative duties. The digitization implementation should be extended to all activities of the Department, including but not limited to, registration, courses and research activities. The administrators will be empowered to respond more effectively to the needs of the students and faculty.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The Department's cooperation with civil society and other bodies, both in the region of Ioannina and Epirus and the entire country, is multifaceted and highly regarded. Members of the faculty are often invited to co-organize conferences or participate in several social-educational events, such as lectures, in-service programs for school teachers of all grade levels, etc. The cooperation with the surrounding society is often promoted through the press and media and spread further through various forms of documentation and publications. The Department's extensive international network also enhances the quality of cooperation with the society by means of disseminating to the local community outcomes and findings of the research and work carried out in the Department and in their international projects. Lastly, perhaps a committee for external affairs could be formed to undertake the responsibility of coordinating and connecting the Department to the society in a more systematic way. Such an effort would undoubtedly strengthen the strategic role of the Department as a center of culture and knowledge for the sake of the local society's development and innovation.

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.

There are several factors at the Institutional and Departmental level that can potentially inhibit the productivity and the functioning of the day to day departmental operations. These inhibiting factors are related to the lack of the following:

- (a) Support services offered by the University in terms of helping faculty members to prepare research proposals.
- (b) Internal funding for which faculty members can apply for at a competitive basis.
- (c) Adequate administrative support offered within the Department.
- (d) A Master's degree program.
- (e) Practical training.
- (f) A robust research-oriented culture in the Department.
- (g) An electronic system that can ensure a systematic way of handling student registration and other student-related issues.
- (h) While in the department there is in force a committee which deals with all student affairs, the role of the academic advisor must be officially introduced. The department is actually in the process of officially introducing the role of Academic Advisor for students.

While it is unlikely that the Department will be able to undertake all of the above as short term goals, they have already set an agenda for dealing with the following urgent matters related to:

- (a) Preparing a proposal for launching a Master's degree programme.
- (b) Restructuring of the existing curriculum in order to include courses related to educational research methods and statistics in the list of mandatory courses that students have to take.
- (c) Developing a plan for awarding a scholarship to the undergraduate student with the best undergraduate thesis.
- (d) Rethinking Teaching Practice on the basis of engaging all faculty members and in terms of both increasing its duration as well as improving its quality.
- (e) Turning "Epetirida" into a regular research journal.
- (f) Revisiting the perennial problem related to the "limnazontes" Ph.D. students and taking a course of action for resolving it.
- (g) Clarifying and sorting out the duties of the secretarial staff so that smooth daily operations are ensured without delays, risks, and mistakes.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

The Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Ioannina has developed an undergraduate curriculum composed of an expansive, rich array of courses taught by a dynamic group of faculty members. Students have the opportunity to choose courses in music, art and theater, for example, thus enriching their professional “toolkit” for teaching after graduation. The essential ingredients of a diverse curriculum that addresses the knowledge base of an exemplary early childhood education professional are evident in the Department. Many of the courses reflect up-to-date readings and the courses include theoretical, intellectual, and research-based content. Department faculty members are involved in many highly relevant and dynamic local, national and international projects involving collaboration with other universities and educational organizations involved in ground-breaking initiatives and research. These creative and dynamic initiatives engender important seminars and conferences beneficial to students, all faculty members, as well as parents and the community. Students and faculty alike seemed quite positive and content with the social environment, resources and overall functioning of the Department environs. Faculty members, as noted in the Internal Evaluation, have adequate office space and technological resources at their disposal. The Department has structured important committees to review and improve the various sectors of the Department.

The Internal Evaluation Committee working with the entire Department faculty held critical meetings and prepared a comprehensive self-study document that represents an excellent start for curriculum and other modifications that have already been implemented in some cases.

The following is a summary of specific recommendations:

- (a) The goal of graduating a competent, professional and confident early childhood educator is paramount. The curriculum, courses, teaching practices and laboratories need to be further reviewed and modifications, if any, recommended, to assure that students graduate with the requisite skills and knowledge. This effort has already begun and should be continued.
- (b) The Curriculum and coursework should be reviewed by faculty members with an eye on expanding options for required readings beyond typical required textbooks. Other materials and resources, including the multitude of relevant readings, videos and resources both online and off-line, should be identified and promulgated to students to study and reflect upon.
- (c) The current vehicles or processes of identifying and addressing the strengths and weaknesses of course content, assessment practices and teaching practices need to be reviewed. The current course evaluation system needs to be bolstered to obtain more input. Since there is no existing structure within the regulations requiring peer or supervisory observations of faculty teaching practices, a voluntary system aimed at helping foster student engagement, for example, should be explored.
- (d) A continuing obstacle for achieving a satisfactory level of faculty-student collaboration in the classroom, are the large class sizes, in some cases. The Department must take steps to reduce class size by consolidating certain courses and providing students more sections of the remaining ones.
- (e) Alumni who become teachers should be interviewed to obtain opinions and beliefs about the efficacy of their preparation. Such data can then inform curricular decision-making.
- (f) The Department or School/University level should offer faculty support and resources to help make their teaching practices more engaging and motivating.
- (g) The Department should find ways to support and encourage collaborations within and without the Department to bolster the research and grants activities leading to publications in high quality, peer-reviewed journals. In this vein, junior faculty should be assisted and enabled to initiate and structure high quality research and related projects.
- (h) A “faculty forum” can be established by the Department (but which could include the entire School of Education) in which interested faculty members can take turns sharing their research interests with their colleagues, as well as innovative and motivating

teaching practices, including but not limited to uses of technology. Such a monthly or bi-monthly forum can lead to productive collaboration, ideas for research, and even helpful comments on drafts of papers and ideas.

- (i) The practical training component of the curriculum needs to be restructured, as planned, to meet the preparation needs of the prospective teachers.
- (j) Based on our review of the Internal Evaluation, documents provided, site visit, and the Committee's extensive and intensive meetings with the Rector, Vice-Rector, Dean, Chair and all of the faculty of the Department of Early Childhood, the External Evaluation Committee is confident that the Department can assure the level of quality it has set as its goal and which is required under the controlling laws.
- (k) The Committee recognizes the daunting financial impediments to achieving the goals, as noted in the Internal Evaluation. Nonetheless, the motivation, talent and energy of the existing faculty members, and the excellent leadership of the current administrators, augurs well for a continued fidelity to the goals and objectives of producing a Department of high quality with exemplary, professional graduates.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. Charoula Angeli-Valanides, Coordinator	
2. John Spiridakis	
3. Timothy Papadopoulos	
4. Petros Gougoulakis	