

Strategic Goals and Planning
Undergraduate Study Program
Department of Early Childhood Education
Academic Year 2019-2020

The Department of Early Childhood Education of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Ioannina has completed 30 years of operation and it offers a dynamically developing Undergraduate Study Program (USP) in Educational Sciences, focusing on Early Education. The USP of the Department is compatible with international theoretical perspectives and practices regarding early education and the USPs implemented by similar departments worldwide. The quality of the UPS is ensured by the individual and collective expertise of the Faculty Members of the Department. Indeed, Faculty members serve as coordinators or members of expert teams for the development, implementation and evaluation of curricula for early and elementary education; participate in interdepartmental, interinstitutional, and transnational co-operations; focus on inclusive education, targeting socially vulnerable groups of children. The academic expertise and activity of the Faculty members ensure the quality of UPS and, consequently, the perspective kindergarten teachers' education.

The key objective of the Department is to ensure that perspective kindergarten teachers acquire advanced knowledge and competencies, so that they are highly effective in implementing instruction aiming at the holistic development of young children. The UPS addresses all key aspects of the Educational Sciences that are organized in four thematic units, as follows: Pedagogy; Social Sciences in Education; Science, Math, and ICT in Education; **Logos**, Arts and Education. These units correspond to subject matter areas of the national Kindergarten curriculum. At the same time they create the possibility for graduates to continue their studies in cutting- edge post-graduate programs.

The laboratories of the Department serve the pillars of Pedagogy and Psychology as well as the horizontal axes of teacher education emphasizing 21st century teaching skills (**logos**, arts, social issues and digital learning). Workshops for students and teaching internship in kindergartens are implemented as good practices of applied pedagogy, which are

complemented by strategies for managing diversity, addressing social inequalities, and ensuring human, in particular, children's rights. The USP is relevant to various institutions so that the graduate can work at kindergartens, museums, environmental centers, support structures (e.g., refugee support structures) and other social services.

The educators that the Department envisions are autonomous, dynamically evolving teacher-researchers that, inquire, study, plan and organize instruction; and reflect on their practice with a view to improve it. The UPS verges on this vision, complementarily to the two Post-Graduate Programs of DECE, and the doctoral and post-doctoral studies. Students of the Department apply for and often succeed in receiving competitive grants.

Taking into consideration current perspectives on Educational Sciences, but also the ongoing economic crisis that affects the profile and also the participation of the incoming students, the Department monitors the quality and effectiveness of the UPS, via students' evaluation, internal and external evaluation of the Department, and also according to the Quality Policy of the Department. The Department updates UPS annually, consistently with developments in educational research and also in the educational context, and taking into consideration students' changing needs.

DECE has set three strategic goals regarding UPS for the academic year 2019-2020, namely:

1. Strategic Goal 1: Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of teaching

1.1. Improving the structure and organization of the UPS

The Department lacks at the moment 5 academic positions, due to Faculty members' retirement. At the same time, the number of incoming students is increasing, due to governmental decisions. As a consequence, the Students/Faculty Member ratio has more than doubled compared to the one in the previous decade. The Department tries to counterbalance this situation by offering workshops and tutorials assisted by members of the Laboratory Teaching Staff and also Academic Scholarship holders, while continuing to apply for more positions to the University administration.

1.2. Enhancing student mobility at national and international level and increasing opportunity for access to the labour market

The Department aims at increasing the sponsored internship positions. In addition, it aims to increase student participation in ERASMUS+ programs via increasing the number of international inter-institutional agreements; via ERASMUS+ KA2 programs that include short intense courses for students; and also via the summer schools organized by the Department.

1.3. Capitalizing on the Department's national and international visibility to create more opportunities for students

The Department is outward-looking, visible and respected within the educational community and the local community. It organizes many activities pertaining to formal and informal educations such as conferences, seminars, festivals, visits at schools, consulting, summer schools, and summer camps for children. The Faculty Members maintain international research and teaching collaborations and also collaboration with many social operators. The Department attracts students through international exchange programs, and its Program Studies are highly demanded by candidate students. The Department plans to make full use of its human, scientific, and cultural capital.

1.4. Streamlining the number of doctoral students

The Department aims at reducing the number of PhD candidates per Faculty member. This number is inflated due to a large number of PhD students assigned to retired Faculty Members. The Department has developed a set of internal regulations for PhD students with explicit provision for deregistration. It does, however, keep the balance between deregistration and supporting the PhD candidates to accomplish their dissertation. The Department plans to offer doctoral courses.

1.5. Maintaining/decreasing the student/ teaching staff ratio

There is great discrepancy between the number of undergraduate student positions offered by the Department, and the number of students assigned to the Department by the Ministry of Education, with the latter being considerably higher. At the same time, there are many positions due to Faculty Members retirement that are not being re-opened.

The Department makes every effort possible to hire new Faculty Members, and also teaching staff on contract, however the decision lies with the Ministry of Education.

2. Strategic Goal 2: Enhancing the research activity of the Department

2.1. Increasing research productivity and visibility of research outputs

Despite their many teaching and administrative duties, the Faculty Members make every effort possible to increase the quantity and quality of their research work. The Department strives towards a) more effective management of these duties, so time can be saved to invest on research, b) enhancing research collaboration among the Faculty Members, c) increasing staff mobility and d) attracting highly competent post-graduate and doctoral students as well as and post-doctoral researchers.

2.2. Increasing participation in research projects

The Department makes effort to increase the participation of its Faculty Members in research projects, via providing a) information on relevant calls, and b) support for the preparation and submission of research proposals.

3. Strategic Goal 3: Staff development and funding

3.1. Staff development

It must be clear already that there is a great need for supporting teaching as well as research in the Department and thus hiring new Faculty Members is necessary. In fact, compensating for retired members is necessary but not sufficient: New positions are needed, so that the Department maintains the quality of education that it offers while also increasing its research productivity.

As far as the professional development of the Faculty Members is concerned and the enhancement of their connections to the international scientific community, the Department, in addition to individual mobility, aims at enhancing collaboration among its laboratories and distinguished laboratories at national and international level. To this end, the Department has established new laboratories, re-established its postgraduate program and founded, together with the Department of Medicine and the Department of Biological Applications & Technology, a new postgraduate program. The Department also supports the development of international collaborations through ERASMUS+ and other bilateral agreements for research collaborations and mobility. It also encourages and facilitates its staff to participate in research proposals and to visit Universities and Research Centers abroad.

3.2. Increasing funding

The Department aims at increasing its financial resources through a) documenting and pointing out its needs to the University of Ioannina, so that its budget is adjusted accordingly; b) submitting proposals for funded research and other projects, as and when opportunities arise. The Department also seeks sponsorships to support the organization of conferences, seminars and other events.