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HELLENIC REPUBLIC
H.Q.A.
HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN MACEDONIA**

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
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External Evaluation Committee

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

1. Dr Leonidas Kyriakides (Coordinator)
Associate Professor, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

2. Dr Petros Gougoulakis
Associate Professor, Stockholm University, Sweden

3. Dr Helene Papadoudi – Ros
Maitre de Conferences, University de Lorraine / Nancy, France

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

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) welcomed the opportunity to participate in this important evaluation instigated by the Ministry of Education of the Government of Greece. The EEC was warmly received by the Rector of the University of the Western Macedonia (UOWM), faculty, and staff of the Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) of UOWM who went out of their way to facilitate the efficient functioning of the EEC. The DECE contributed whole-heartedly to the evaluation process with professionalism, honesty and enthusiasm. The EEC felt well equipped to address the tasks assigned by the H.Q.Q.A. and was able to complete the review effectively. The conclusions described below were reached unanimously.

Description of the Early Childhood Education Department

The DECE is comprised of 2 Professors, 6 Associate Professors, 13 Assistant Professors and 1 elected Assistant Professor (waiting for appointment by the Ministry of Education and Religious. The Bachelor’s program at DECE of UoWM is comprised of 8 semesters of theoretical and practical study. The DECE accepts approximately 140 students into its undergraduate program each year and has approximately 550 undergraduate students currently enrolled across the 8 semesters of the program. Since the 2008-2009 academic year, the DECE of UOWM offers a postgraduate program entitled “Educational Sciences” with five different specialisations (a: curriculum development and teaching methodology, b: cultural studies (semiotics and practices), c: Educational Policy and Educational Research, d: Psychological and Educational Dimensions of Diversity, e: Language and Literature in Education) The main aim of the course is to provide the theoretical and empirical

background and develop skills which will enable graduates to engage in various occupational and research areas associated with schooling (inside and outside schools). For this master's degree, student applicants are drawn from graduates of departments of education as well as graduates of subjects related to education. This is a three semester long program requiring the completion of 90 ECTS, plus 30 ECTS for the completion of the master thesis (total 120 ECTS). The program attracts about 10 students to each specialisation per year.

Secondly, the department collaborates with the department of physical education and sports of the University of Thessaloniki and provides a master in educational studies with a focus on cognitive and psychomotor development of early year students. The program attracts about 20 students per year.

Thirdly, the department offers a master degree in Creative Writing and the program is financed by student fees. Each year, about 25 students are enrolled in this program. Finally, the department provides a PhD program. Currently, the total number of PhD candidates is approximately 50.

Throughout this report we limit our discussion to the activities at the bachelor's level, as it forms the bulk of the Department's effort. We only briefly refer to the Master and PhD programs towards the end of this report.

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- Dates and brief account of the site visit.
- Whom did the Committee meet?
- List of Reports, documents, other data examined by the Committee.
- Groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed
- Facilities visited by the External Evaluation Committee.

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) has visited the:

1. Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQA) (29/10/2013),
2. main campus of the Faculty of Education of the UoWM (30/10/2013),
3. library of the Faculty of Education (31/10/2013),
4. cafeteria of the Faculty of Education (31/10/2013),

5. restaurant of the Faculty of Education (31/10/2013),
6. science education lab of the DECE (31/10/2013),
7. biology education lab of the DECE (31/10/2013),
8. gym room of the DECE (31/10/2013)
9. theatre of the Faculty of Education (31/10/2013),
10. lab for book literacy and traditional printing methods (βιβλιολογεῖον) (31/10/2013)

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) has met:

1. the Chair and the Director of the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
2. the Rector of the University of Western Macedonia (UoWM)
3. the Dean of the Faculty of Education of UOWM
4. the chair and the academic staff of the DECE (the Internal Evaluation Group, the elected academic and scientific staff)
5. a group of undergraduate students of the DECE
6. a group of postgraduate and PhD students of the DECE
7. the administrative and secretariat staff of the DECE
8. the library staff of the Faculty of Education of UOWM
9. the Director of the postgraduate program
10. a group of graduates from both the Bachelor and the Master programs of DECE

The reports and the documents provided by the (HQA) and the DECE that have been reviewed by the EEC comprise the following:

1. External Evaluation of Higher Education Academic Units Guidelines for Members of External Evaluation Committees (March 2012)
2. The Internal Evaluation Reports (IER) of the DECE for the academic years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012- 2013.

3. The programs of undergraduate studies for the last five academic years
4. The program of postgraduate studies
5. The Guide for teaching practice (including the observation and evaluation instruments)
6. The Curriculum Vitae of the Faculty members of the DECE
7. A list of recent publications by the Faculty members of the DECE
8. Copies of selected recent publications by the Faculty members of the DECE
9. A list of recent research programs run by the Faculty of the DECE
10. Representative Publications by the Faculty members of the DECE
11. Course evaluation student-questionnaire
12. Samples of final exams
13. Samples of undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD theses
14. Protocols for teaching practice

The groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed by the EEC comprised the following:

1. the Academic staff of the DECE
2. special technical staff members
4. a group of undergraduate Students of the DECE
6. a group of postgraduate students of the DECE
7. a group of PhD candidates
8. a group of administrative / secretarial staff of the DECE
9. a group of graduates from both the Bachelor, the Master and PhD degree.

The atmosphere during the site visits and meetings was collegial and receptive, while remaining on a professional level. Faculty members were very friendly and they facilitated the EEC's work by establishing a constructive dialogue and providing information and data, wherever possible. The EEC particularly enjoyed the constructive meeting with DECE students and the graduates of DECE.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

Please comment on:

- Appropriateness of sources and documentation used
- Quality and completeness of evidence reviewed and provided
- To what extent have the objectives of the internal evaluation process been met by the Department?

The DECE provided documentation that was of good quality; it was adequate and the evidence was up to date and fully informative for the EEC. The objectives of the H.Q.A.A. internal evaluation were met by the DECE and the EEC recognizes that a great effort was put into the process.

A. Curriculum

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

The content of the four fields in this section deals exclusively with the undergraduate program.

APPROACH

The goals and the objectives of the current undergraduate Curriculum:

1. are stated in the IER of the DECE
2. are adequate for a Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education
3. prepare students to become professional pre-primary teachers in contemporary multicultural society
4. provide graduates with the academic background necessary for postgraduate studies.

In general, the curriculum is consistent with European standards for teacher education. It also responds to the demands of multicultural education and the use of technologies in education. However, it does not fully cover the need for an in-depth understanding of contemporary theories of effective teaching that address generic and domain specific skills. The DECE has adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The EEC observed, however, that the program of study is overloaded with courses resulting in allocation of a relatively small number of ECTS per course (particularly to elective courses).

The curriculum has been structured to respond to the DECE objectives, and is

organized around four main academic areas taken into account research on teacher knowledge and teacher education:

- a) Pedagogical Knowledge and Research Methods
- b) Subject knowledge covering the areas of arts and literature, information technology, science and environmental education as well as physical education
- c) Pedagogical Subject Knowledge (Special Didactics)
- d) Humanities covering subjects such as Greek Literature, Linguistics, Introduction to Philosophy, History and Cultural studies.

Each student is expected to attend two types of courses: mandatory and limitedly elective (students are expected to choose certain courses through a list of compulsory courses). Therefore, the department does not offer any free election courses. The courses cover a relatively large number of disciplines (about 23). During the fourth year of study, students spend three and a half weeks observing and evaluating teaching (phase 1) and four weeks in teaching and reflection (phase 2). During these phases, students have the opportunity to develop their teaching skills through observing and providing a number of lessons to students. In addition, students are placed in several social, cultural and productive organizations to get experience in providing education in different settings. This area of the curriculum is linked with the job market through well-organized teaching training and other activities.

The EEC has also observed that multiple and transparent methods of evaluating students are used in most courses. It is also pointed out that there is a satisfactory structure and organization of teaching and learning material in the DECE. However, the EEC is concerned about the overwhelming number of compulsory courses required for graduation and the fact that teaching practice represents a relatively small part of the curriculum (compared with what happens in other departments of education in Greece and abroad) and thereby students are expected to attend the teaching practice course at the last year of their studies. Moreover, not enough emphasis is given to teaching of Mathematics which is a core subject in pre-primary education and to subjects such as curriculum design and development, and educational management. These subjects are usually

included in most curricula in departments of education around the world.

Both internal and external factors have influenced the development of the objectives and the curriculum development by the DECE. However, financial restrictions and regulations imposed by the Ministry of Education impede the ability of the DECE to design and implement a more balanced curriculum. For example, as a consequence of the fiscal situation in Greece, an Assistant Professor in mathematics education was selected by the UOWM but has not yet been appointed by the Ministry of Education.

The EEC believes that the curriculum objectives are consistent. Yet, responsiveness to some social issues (e.g. sex education, child abuse, school bullying, children's rights and gender issues) needs to be strengthened. The DECE should establish a committee for the evaluation and the revision of the curriculum. Student participation in curriculum development should be encouraged. In addition, a systematic literature review including an analysis of curricula offered in other departments (in the country and abroad) can help them revise and enhance their program of study. This needs to be done by taking into account the context and the special profile of the UOWM.

IMPLEMENTATION

The DECE's goals are implemented effectively by the curriculum. The curriculum is rational, clearly articulated and its structure is functional. It combines theory and practice well. However, the DECE gives less emphasis to teaching practice. Given that most graduates of this program are expected to work as pre-primary teachers, more emphasis in these areas should be provided.

Material, space resources and facilities are not always adequate. For example, it was acknowledged that the library of the Faculty of Education needs to be updated with new books and data banks. The EEC observed that the academic and scientific personnel is adequately qualified and spend a lot of time in teaching a relatively large number of courses and in guiding and supporting their students. The library and the science and computer labs are relatively small and it is, therefore, not always possible to serve the needs of students. However, the faculty tries very hard to respond to these needs by working extra hours to support large numbers of

students. The internet connection is of high quality and basic ICT facilities are available in lecture rooms.

RESULTS

There is a good alignment between the predefined goals and objectives of the curriculum and its subsequent implementation. The findings of student ratings show that the main objectives of the program of study are achieved. This is also supported by a survey illustrating that a relatively large number of the graduates of DECE managed to get a job after two years of graduation. However, the country's precarious financial situation is expected to affect the employment prospects for graduates in a negative way.

The hard work of the faculty members of the DECE to achieve the aims and objectives of the curriculum under difficult circumstances is evident.

IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?
- Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?

Several areas of the curriculum that need to be improved have been identified during the meetings with the faculty members of the DECE. The EEC observed that the allocation of teaching practice during the last year of study needs to be re-considered and a stage model for introducing students to the field needs to be introduced much more earlier in their program of studies. This was also stressed by the undergraduate students who also expressed their wish for a more extended field experience. In addition, the EEC suggests that the curriculum should be enriched in terms of providing courses in mathematics education and in educational evaluation and assessment.

Moreover, a laboratory for teaching practice should be established in order to help students generate teaching materials and organize lessons. This lab can also contribute to the development of students' teaching and reflection skills. To achieve this aim, seconded teachers supporting students should be offered.

Furthermore, the EEC recommends that the balance between theory and practice in every course (where possible) needs to be considered especially since students supported that most courses do not draw implications of theory for practice.

Finally, the effective functioning of the academic advisor practice will help students in selecting their courses and dealing more effectively with the demands of each course.

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

- Does the Department have a defined pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology?

The DECE has done a lot of work to create and advance a strong set of academic teaching policies and methodologies. This is evident from the IER, its formal and informal curricula and the discussions the EEC had with faculty members and undergraduate and postgraduate students. The results of these policies culminate in the production of graduates with a high level of theory and practice abilities that are adequately prepared for ongoing postgraduate studies and are well-equipped to work as pre-primary teachers. This is supported by the successful participation of graduate students in the master's and PhD program of the DECE.

The IER indicates that various methods of teaching are used in theoretical and practical courses of the DECE including lectures, discussions, group work, interactive workshops and skills acquisition. This variety of methodologies appears to cover learning objectives in all domains (cognitive, psychomotor, and affective). Students are also expected to collect data, analyse and interpret them. It is noted with great concern that the DECE student attendance is not compulsory due to the legislation enacted. This is a significant issue in a program such as pre-primary education where students are learning to become responsible, autonomous professionals aiming to contribute to the cognitive, social and affective development of children (in accordance to the main aims of the program study stated in the IER). However, the DECE takes record of student absenteeism and

encourages students to participate in all courses and laboratories.

- Teaching staff/student ratio

The IER identified an academic staff/undergraduate student ratio of about 1:30. By taking into account both undergraduate and graduate students the academic staff/student ratio increases to 1:47. Moreover, the EEC observed that a very large number of students (more than 100) are enrolled in certain theoretical courses. This is due to the fact that there is no systematic control of student registration in the courses offered by the DECE each semester. We recommend that a maximum number of student per-course is established. The practice of academic advisor will contribute towards this direction. With respect to courses offered in laboratories, the classroom ratio should not be more than 1:25 for quality teaching and learning purposes.

- Teacher/student collaboration

The teaching staff of the DECE is available to students before, during, and after each semester. Students and graduates of the DECE affirmed the willingness of the faculty staff to support them in their learning and in encouraging them to undertake further studies at graduate level. It was evident in meetings with the students that there is an excellent and respectful relationship between them and the faculty members, which creates an effective learning environment in the DECE. Students and graduates of DECE stressed that their relations with members of the academic staff are extremely good and this creates a friendly and productive learning environment facilitating the well-being of students (and staff) and promoting their overall social and academic development.

- Adequacy of means and resources

The DECE functions very well under very difficult circumstances. The teaching rooms comprise inflexible seating arrangements which do not enable effective group work. There is no easy access for disabled individuals. Office

accommodation at present is inadequate and the staff and students deserve much better. However, the lack of resources does not affect the effective implementation of the curriculum due to the development of supportive interpersonal relations among students and teachers which enhance learning motivation.

- Use of information technologies

Students have access to the internet throughout the campus. They also have access to papers in international journals through the Hellenic Academic Libraries Link database. The ECC found out that the DECE and students make an effective use of ICT. The DECE encourages the use of the electronic/digital platform for eLearning and study skills support. Students have access to the ECLASS and CoMPUs platforms and to teaching materials of various courses. Students can also get their assessment results electronically. It is not yet possible to register in courses through internet but actions are taken to provide such an opportunity to their students in the next few years.

The ECC encourages the DECE to use in a more systematic way the ICT and provides opportunities for flexible and interactive group learning though the web.

The DECE Web site needs to be further developed and updated with all the faculty CVs, research interests, and course descriptions. An English short version of the Web site of DECE has been developed but it needs to provide the mission of the department and the research interests and CVs of the faculty members. This version may contribute to the establishment of international research collaborations.

Finally, the EEC notes the lack of use of information technologies for administrative purposes such as the course registration and the announcement of the timetable of each semester in advance.

- System of written exams

Students are assessed through written exam at the end of each course at the end of the semester, as required by the Greek legislation. This appears to be managed equitably and effectively. The EEC has also observed that multiple and transparent

methods of evaluating students are used in most courses. However, in certain papers most test items focused on recalling information and presenting factual knowledge rather than critically evaluating the theories presented to them and using them for problem solving and reasoning ability. Some courses are assessed through various techniques including writing essays, oral examinations and completing reflective diaries.

The teaching practice is evaluated by asking students to assess their own teaching practice through completing questionnaires and reflective diaries. The ECC had access to the assessment instruments that are used which are of very high quality and encourage reflection in a systematic way. In this way, constructive feedback to students is provided.

For quality learning, the EEC recommends that students should be evaluated with diverse and ongoing assessment methods and should receive corresponding feedback. During the interviews with students and graduates of the DECE, it was found out that students have access to their final grades but evaluation feedback for formative purposes is not always provided.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Quality of teaching procedures

As previously mentioned, the DECE students have reported to be satisfied with the teaching procedures to which they have been exposed.

- Quality and adequacy of teaching materials and resources.

The EEC visited the library of the Faculty of Education which appears to be an adequate resource. The EEC also reviewed textbooks and teaching materials used in courses and found them to be relevant and appropriate. However, enriching the library with more up to date teaching materials, books and journals and developing on line facilities for the faculty staff and students is highly recommended. During the interviews with academic staff, it was

supported that instead of spending money for producing compulsory textbooks for each course, the budget can be used for updating the library and giving the opportunity to students to use more materials for their teaching. Students also voiced a desire for more optional textbook requirements in their courses. The ECC believes that other materials and resources, including the multitude of relevant readings, videos and resources both online and off-line, could be identified and promulgated to students to study and reflect upon.

- Linking of research with teaching

The EEC observed that the faculty staff of DECE somehow applies research findings in teaching and learning and affirms the importance of linking research and practice for improving the quality of education. This is partly achieved through asking students to be engaged in action research projects which can help them to find out how research findings can be used for improving practice.

- Mobility of academic staff and students

The DECE values European exchange programmes such as ERASMUS which provide important opportunities for both staff and student exchanges. Although the DECE managed to establish links with 10 institutions, the student participation in such programs is very poor due to restricted financial support offered by the Ministry of Education to the DECE. It is also noted that financial support of staff's participation in international and national conferences is limited. Specifically, during the past years a budget of 3.000 Euros was available for conference participation for members of the staff. However, most of the faculty members attend such conferences covering partially or totally their own expenses. The EEC strongly believes that students should be encouraged to participate in the ERASMUS program as this will enrich their experiences and help them further develop. Moreover, the faculty as well as PhD students should be financially supported to present their research findings in international conferences, something that will give them the opportunity to receive feedback and improve the quality of their work. In this way, research collaboration with other universities

and colleagues can also be developed.

- Evaluation by the students of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content and study material/resources?

A common student questionnaire is used to evaluate the quality of each course and the teaching and academic staff. Students are expected to complete the electronic version of the questionnaire. However, the DECE is aware of the fact that response rates are low and takes actions to increase the response rates. Nevertheless, feedback with results emerged from a statistical analysis of this survey are provided to the faculty members. The EEC strongly believes that staff evaluation is of great importance and the DECE should find the means to encourage students participate in this process. Hence, EEC recommends the DECE to consider the development of suitable forms of student evaluation, even during the courses, as part of a formative evaluation.

RESULTS

- Efficacy of teaching
- Discrepancies in the success/failure percentages between courses and how they are justified

The EEC believes that the teaching staff of the DECE is effective. This was documented statistically in the IER-based evaluative surveys of courses and staff, and was confirmed by the DECE students during the interviews. The goals and objectives of the curriculum are met both through carefully constructed formal and informal curricula. The formal curriculum is described in the IER. Furthermore, extra-curricular activities are offered to students. For example, students are encouraged to offer volunteer work in centers for supporting children with special needs.

In regard to the student learning outcomes, for the last three years the mean value of students' grades was above 8.1 (using a scale from 0-10) In addition, the EEC noticed that there are no discrepancies in the mean grades (based on those who

participated in the exams) between courses. Specifically, the mean grades ranged between 5.0 and 9.5. This might be seen as an indicator of the effectiveness of the teaching provided to students of DECE. It could also be an indication for the need of faculty members to increase their expectations from students. For example, they may increase the degree of difficulty of their final exams by including more items measuring creative and critical thinking.

- Differences between students and the time to graduation and final degree grades

The minimum time required for degree completion is 4 years and this is held by the majority of the students. Specifically, as indicated in the IER (see table 7), 67% of students managed to complete their studies in four years and 84% of the students need less than 10 semesters to graduate. The number of DECE students graduating after excessive years of studies is decreasing. To some extent this can be attributed to the efforts of the DECE.

- Whether the DECE understands the reasons of such positive and negative results

The ECC believes that students strive to graduate on time due to the fact that their financial situation does not allow them to stay longer at the DECE. This can also be attributed to the fact that the DECE has worked hard to improve student success and effective completion.

IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department propose methods and ways for improvement?

The IER indicates that teaching at the DECE can be improved through establishing clear student evaluation criteria. It was also supported that

enrichment of the library will also contribute to the improvement of teaching resources and aids available to students. Moreover, increasing student participation in research projects can have a positive impact on improving the student learning outcomes and helping students develop research skills. In the IER, it also is noted that improvement of computer labs and technical-electronic facilities is necessary for quality teaching. The DECE also acknowledges the need to offer more optional courses and courses on foreign languages. Finally, the DECE believes that there is a need to develop modes of electronic learning as a complement to on campus courses. This will provide students with greater flexibility in their learning and could improve student participation in theory learning.

- What initiatives does it take in this direction?

The DECE is continuously demanding the upgrade of teaching facilities and resources. However, financial constraints do not always allow the UOWM to provide these facilities to the DECE. The DECE has developed criteria for student evaluation and is planning to use them in a pilot project. Moreover, the faculty of the DECE mentioned that they are taking actions to upgrade e-learning facilities.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

- What is the Department's policy and main objective in research?

The priorities of the DECE are to contribute new knowledge to the field of education and to translate research findings into practice. Research in the DECE covers a broad range of research from basic to applied, and four (4) 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.

The Department's policy for research reveals three main ways of supporting faculty

members to undertake projects. First, faculty members are supported to establish research labs and work in groups to develop research proposals in their areas of interest. Second, the DECE encourages faculty members to participate in research projects and provides support to academic members to develop their research proposals. Third, the DECE supports the organisation of international and national conferences in Florina.

- Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?

The EEC did not scrutinise any internal standards, described through collective agreement/action for assessing either the quality of research projects or their alignment with improving the quality of education. This can partly be attributed to the fact that no internal funds for supporting research are available. 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. The DECE and the Rector of the UOWM acknowledged the need to provide internal funds for research projects but the available budget does not make possible to offer such support.

IMPLEMENTATION

- How does the Department promote and support research?
- Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support.
- Scientific publications.
- Research projects.
- Research collaborations.

The DECE promotes and supports research among students through offering research methodology classes throughout the curriculum both at undergraduate

and graduate level. In the IER, it is mentioned that a large number of undergraduate and postgraduate students are currently involved in research projects of the faculty members. PhD students are also expected to act as members of the main research team in these projects.

As already mentioned, the DECE faculty receives an insufficient budget to cover participation in national and international conferences. However, the great majority of the faculty participate in conferences on their own expenses.

It is important to note that there are currently more than 50 PhD candidates in the DECE. The EEC believes that PhD students should receive financial support to present their papers in international conferences and receive feedback in order to improve the quality of their studies.

RESULTS

- How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented?
- Scientific publications.
- Research projects.
- Research collaborations.
- Efficacy of research work. Applied results. Patents etc.
- Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department? Rewards and awards.

The IER provides a list of research projects and publications of the faculty members of DECE. The faculty members of DECE published a significant number of books/monographs, papers in journals with referee system, chapters in books and papers in conference-proceedings. This implies that the DECE encourages research and supports its faculty members to publish their work. From the list of publication, it also appears that during the last three years the percentage of publications in international journals with referee system has increased substantially. Moreover, the DECE encourages the academic staff to publish in top journals in the field. Furthermore, it appears that there is collaboration among faculty members in publishing results of their research projects in journals.

Some information about citations of the faculty publications is also provided.

For example, it is mentioned that in 2012 faculty publications were cited approximately 460 times. It is, however, not clear where these 460 citations come from. It would have been helpful if the citation record of academic members of DECE was provided in the web of science and/or other databanks.

From the list of research projects provided in the IER it is noted that the faculty members participate in a significant number of projects. The EEC believes that more emphasis should be given to basic research that can have a significant contribution to the theory development and testing and to the upgrading of the research status of the DPE.

The EEC observed that the Department's research objectives are achieved to a great extent. The research of the DECE is both acknowledged and made visible outside the DECE through scientific publications, conference presentations, and professional meetings and through the departmental website. As has been noted above, however, international dissemination of research findings should be encouraged.

IMPROVEMENT

- Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary.
- Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department.

The EEC agrees with the improvements in research proposed by the DECE and corresponding initiatives that are described in the IER and are well structured (see pages 95-96). Moreover, the EEC recommends that the faculty members in the Department remain vigilant for securing external funding for their graduate students. It is also recommended that the DECE explores ways to involve and collaborate with faculty members from other departments of the UOWM (e.g., Department of Primary Education and Department of Applied and Visual Arts) as well as departments of other universities (e.g., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) who are interested in conducting international projects and research in education. The ECC commends that the UOWM 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.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

- How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students).
- Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures?
Are most procedures processed electronically?
- Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?

The administration of the Department currently consists of a director and three other administrators. The EEC believes that the DECE uses the available institutional resources in an appropriate and effective way. The services provided are consistent to the operating needs of the DECE.

The DECE is very concerned about the lack of space for students, staff and infrastructure, and the EEC shares this concern. The permanent academic staff as well as the instructors lack of private office space. The EEC acknowledges the urgent need for office space for academic and administrative staff. Furthermore, the library needs to be updated with more recent books and access to international journals and data banks in order to give the opportunity to students and staff to use search engines and identify relevant resources for their studies. Finally, the security system of the library must be improved. The DECE took actions to improve the functioning of library since the library infrastructure fails to serve sufficiently the needs of their students and faculty member (see IER, page 109).

Administrative procedures have been simplified recently (see section 8 of the IER) but more actions should be taken in order to encourage academic and administrative staff to make systematic use of information technology (e.g., electronic student registration, staff minutes).

Attendance during teaching practice is compulsory. However, attendance of all other courses is not compulsory. Nevertheless, most academic staff keep

attendance records for student evaluation purposes. The staff of the DECE recognizes that low student attendance in some courses is due to several reasons (including the fact that regulations do not make attendance obligatory). The DECE pointed out that the classrooms are small to accommodate the large number of students registered in some courses. This implies that improving building facilities and monitoring the number of students registered in courses may have an impact on increasing attendance. Since a written policy to require compulsory attendance at university courses is restricted by law the EEC is highly concerned about student attendance in classes. The DECE should examine means and methods to encourage students to attend classes.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department)
- Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g. library, PCs and free internet access, student counseling, athletic- cultural activity etc.).

The Secretariat of the DECE is staffed by 4 persons who have to provide administrative services to 23 academic staff, about 550 undergraduate students and 425 postgraduate students. The EEC believes that the infrastructure is limited. Moreover, the EEC considers that the library facilities are not completely adequate and there is a need to enrich the catalogue with more recent books, international journals and other educational electronic material. Student access to the library, PCs and free internet access is considered to be satisfactory with improvements necessary.

The EEC visited a multipurpose room for theatre education and movement which was found to be adequate for teaching purposes but it might not meet the national security standards especially since emergency exits are missing. The EEC visited the athletic facilities of the UOWM which need to be improved in order to facilitate teaching. At the moment, the athletic facilities are used by various athletic associations and academies of the region. Finally, the EEC found the restaurant and the cafeteria to be adequate.

RESULTS

- Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?
- How does the Department view the particular results?

Based on students' and graduates' comments during the interviews, it appears that the administrative services are adequate. During the interviews with the staff, it was however noted that no systematic counseling services for students is provided by the UOWM.

IMPROVEMENTS

- Has the Department identified ways and methods to improve the services provided?
- Initiatives undertaken in this direction.

The work of the administrative staff is vital for the effective functioning of the DECE. The EEC believes that the administrative support provided to the DECE is sufficient.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Please, comment on quality, originality and significance of the Department's initiatives.

Overall the EEC found that the quality, originality and significance of the Department's initiatives in this field is satisfactory. Among the most significant of the DECE's initiatives that is worth mentioning is the support that the DECE students provide to children with special needs and old people, and the collaboration of faculty members and students of the DECE with museums.

The EEC found out that the DECE has effectively built close collaboration with various social and productive organisations. These relations are strengthened due

to the fact that students are offered the opportunity to get practice experiences in various fields.

Relationships of the DECE with schools should be strengthened. DECE students could be encouraged to participate in the activities of these schools and conduct studies that contribute to their professional development.

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

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

- Please, comment on the Department's Potential inhibiting factors at State, Institutional and Departmental level and Proposals on ways to overcome the above inhibiting factors.
- Short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- Plan and actions for improvement by the Department/Academic Unit
- Long-term actions proposed by the Department.

Strategic Planning is stated in section 7 of the IER. It mainly focuses on establishing close relations with neighbouring universities in FYROM and Albania through student and staff exchanging programs and conducting relevant research projects. It also includes an account of inhibiting and potentially inhibiting factors at all levels and ways of dealing with them. Perspectives for improvement are also mentioned.

The EEC considers the potential inhibiting factors to include the following:

At State level

1. Lack of educational funding (for example, no budget is allocated to the DECE)
2. Poor infrastructure
3. The impact of confounding legislature on standards of education (for example, no limit on the number of times a student can repeat a course).
4. Lack of adequate research funding within the DECE
5. Delays in appointing academic staff (see the case of Mathematics Education

and foreign language).

At Institutional level

1. Disproportionate numbers of academic staff in some domains (especially low number of academics in the area of pedagogy)
2. Allocation of inadequate facilities and premises (lecture rooms and faculty offices etc.).
3. Lack of research infrastructure, support and funding.

Departmental level:

1. Lack of structured Research Plan, which exclusively addresses pedagogical issues and aims to the contribution of the DECE to the theoretical development of the field internationally.
2. Limited use of an electronic platform for teaching and eLearning.

During the interviews with the faculty, it was mentioned that the DECE is less attractive for faculty members compared to other departments of education in centrally located universities. However, the DECE managed to employ younger faculty members who are strongly motivated to support student learning and undertake research projects. As a consequence, a productive and supportive academic environment has been established which is likely to attract highly competent academics to the DECE.

Proposals on ways to overcome the above inhibiting factors are outlined in the final chapter of this report concluding with recommendations of the EEC.

Postgraduate studies

The DECE offers three master courses and a PhD course. First, the DECE offers a master's program in "Educational Sciences" with five specialisations (a: curriculum development and teaching methodology, b: cultural studies (semiotics and practices), c: Educational Policy and Educational Research, d:

Psychological and Educational Dimensions of Diversity, e: Language and Literature in Education). Second, the DECE collaborates with the department of physical education and sports of the University of Thessaloniki and provides a master in educational studies with a focus on cognitive and psychomotor development of early year students. Third, the department offers a master degree in Creative Writing. Finally, a PhD program in Education is also offered by the DECE.

All three Master programs offered by the DECE are interdisciplinary and students are not only drawn from education but also from other related disciplines. The main goal of these programs is to help students develop research skills and deep understanding of the literature in the specific area that their program is focused. For example, students who participate in the program concerned with the cognitive and psychomotor development of children have the opportunity to study in depth theories of cognitive psychology whereas those who attend the master program in educational studies and follow the specialisation on language and literature in education have the opportunity to study applied linguistics and theories in teaching language. However, the EEC noticed that the master in Educational Studies offered by the DECE needs to have some common courses across the five specialisations in order to become more coherent. In this way, interaction among students who attend different specialisations could be promoted and the common identity of the program will be made more visible. Moreover, the EEC noticed that at the moment faculty members have to offer a relatively large number of courses and this creates a huge teaching overload to the staff. Beyond introducing a common core of courses across the five specialisations, the DECE could consider the possibility to offer other modes of studying beyond the traditional on campus interaction by using e-learning technologies in order to reduce the teaching workload and the special needs of graduate students who may not be able to attend on a regular basis. It is finally important to acknowledge that the faculty members work very hard and with enthusiasm to keep these programs up to high standards. The EEC's discussions with the postgraduate students clearly showed that they are very satisfied with the Master programs offered by the DECE. Yet, students

reported a desire for increased opportunities to collaborate with each other in an interdisciplinary manner and with students and professors from other Universities in Greece and from other countries.

The research conducted from the master students is disseminated through various channels which range from faculty-wide announcements to presentation of relevant papers in national and international conferences. According to the IER, the research objectives of the master's program are successfully implemented.

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. 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 about 50 doctoral candidates in the DECE.

A selection procedure for Master students based on competitive exams is used by the DECE. The EEC believes that the DECE should also develop a procedure for selecting PhD students similar to Master applicants. In most universities around the world, Ph.D. posts are announced and prospective students apply by submitting their CV and an initial research proposal. The prospective students may also be interviewed by the committee responsible for selecting Ph.D. students. The EEC strongly recommends the importance of developing a transparent and meritocratic admission system for selecting PhD students.

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 (e.g., courses in educational research). Besides this, the EEC believes that the DECE should also develop 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. Finally, the EEC believes that Ph.D. students should be supported financially in order to present research papers in international conferences with a review system. They should also be encouraged to publish paper(s) based on the findings of their thesis to international journals with review system. This, among other indicators, may contribute to establishing a quality assurance mechanism of the PhD program of study.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

1. the development of the Department to this date and its present situation, including explicit comments on good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process and recommendations for improvement
2. the Department's readiness and capability to change/improve
3. the Department's quality assurance.

In the IER and during the site visit the EEC found the following to be strong elements of the DECE :

1. The DECE prepares students to become effective pre-primary teachers in a multicultural society.
2. The considerable number of graduates of the DECE who successfully participate in the Master and the PhD program of the DECE as well as in graduate programs of other Universities in Greece and abroad.
3. The considerable number of academics and graduate students participating in national and international conferences irrespective of the lack of financial support.
4. The development of strong collaborations with a wide range of

social, cultural and productive organisations in the region as well as in the neighbouring countries.

5. The collaboration of the academic staff of the DECE in running research projects and publishing joint papers in international journals disseminating the results of these projects.
6. The establishment by the Faculty of Education of a journal (MENON) for publishing its own research papers in education as well as papers of academics in other universities.
7. The fact that a relatively high number of undergraduate and graduate students are involved in projects run by the DECE.
8. The hard efforts of the faculty to respond to the needs of large number of students, irrespective of deficient infrastructure.
9. The continuous efforts to improve the facilities for e-learning methodologies.
10. The establishment of an innovative lab for literacy education and traditional printing and book binding (βιβλιολογεῖον see above) with the perspective to establish a relevant museum to be used for educational reasons.

The EEC found the DECE to be challenged in terms of:

1. Being situated in a remote area the DPE should find ways of attracting academics and students;
2. The lack of requirement for compulsory attendance of students for all theory and most practice components makes it more difficult for the DECE to achieve its learning goals regarding the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains;
3. The inadequacy of facilities, is not conducive to quality teaching and learning;
4. The budget constraints relating to staffing, resources, and teaching and learning materials requires additional effort to produce the expected learning and research outcomes of the DECE
5. The lack of seconded teachers makes it difficult to use a stage

model in offering the teaching practice courses gradually develop professional skills of pre-primary students.

We thank the DECE for their contribution to this evaluation and wish them well in their future development.

Accordingly, having completed this review and given due consideration to the findings, the EEC recommends the following for the attention and address by the Ministry of Education.

It is recommended that:

1. Extensive work needs to be done in restructuring the curriculum and the program of study (at undergraduate level)

- 1.1. The curriculum should fully cover the needs for an in-depth understanding of contemporary theories of effective teaching that address generic and domain specific skills (especially in Mathematics and in foreign languages).
- 1.2. Responsiveness to some social issues (e.g. sex education, child abuse, school bullying, gender issues, and human rights) needs to be strengthened.
- 1.3. The number of compulsory courses required for graduation should be reduced and optional courses should be provided.
- 1.4. More emphasis to teaching practice must be given (by representing a larger percentage of the curriculum) and this should be in line with what happens in other departments of education in Greece and abroad.
- 1.5. The program of study should be organized in such a way that teaching practice courses are offered at an earlier stage.
- 1.6. The DECE should establish a committee for the evaluation and the revision of the curriculum. A systematic literature review including an analysis of curricula offered in other departments can help them revise and enhance their program of study. This review can also help DECE takes decisions on which courses

and why should be offered in laboratory settings.

- 1.7. Student participation in developing the new curriculum could be encouraged.

2. Extensive work needs to be done in restructuring the curriculum and the program of study (at graduate level)

- 2.1. The master in Educational Studies offered by the DECE needs to have some common courses across the five specialisations in order to become more coherent.
- 2.2. The DECE should offer graduate courses in educational research methods to all Master students which will help them develop skills in conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies.
- 2.3. The DECE should offer taught courses for Ph.D. students (e.g., courses in educational research methods) to improve the quality of the Ph.D. program.
- 2.4. The DECE should develop a handbook for how to prepare a Ph.D. thesis and guidelines for writing a thesis following international standards, such as for example the APA (American Psychology Association) guidelines.
- 2.5. The DECE should develop a transparent and meritocratic admission system for selecting Ph.D. students.

3. The Ministry of Education has to provide the financial means to the DECE for appointing academic and teaching staff and for supporting research.

- 3.1. The number of courses and the student-teacher ratio requires additional academic personnel. This is especially true in areas that are included in the program of study but the DECE has no academic personnel with such specialisation. For example, in the area of Mathematics Education a candidate has been

selected by the UOWM but the Ministry of Education has not yet approved the selection.

- 3.2. Academics and Ph.D. students should be entitled to financial support in order to present their research findings in well-respected international conferences.
- 3.3. It is deemed necessary for the Ministry of Education and the UOWM 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.

4. The DECE has to develop mechanisms to monitor the effective implementation of the curriculum

- 4.1. The DECE should develop a mechanism to control student registration and reduce significantly the number of students enrolled in certain theoretical courses.
- 4.2. A maximum number of student per-course should be established. In the case of courses offered in labs the maximum number should be in line with the available facilities of the labs.
- 4.3. Academic advisors should be actively involved in guiding students in selecting their courses and dealing more effectively with the demands of each course.
- 4.4. The DECE should use in a more systematic way information technologies for administrative purposes as well as for supporting the effective functioning of the curriculum (e.g., for helping students to register in courses and for encouraging interaction among students, academics and the partner organizations of the UOWM)
- 4.5. The teaching of graduate courses should be counted in faculty

teaching load.

5. The inadequate facilities are addressed as a matter of urgency.

- 5.1. Although the computer and the science labs have been renovated we think that the DECE should take further actions in order to update equipment for these labs (including software).
- 5.2. The DECE should encourage the systematic use of an electronic/digital platform for e-Learning and study skills support.
- 5.3. The DECE should enrich its library with more up to date teaching material, books, international journals and other educational electronic material. On line facilities for the faculty staff and students should also be provided.
- 5.4. A laboratory for teaching practice should be established in order to help students generate teaching materials and organize lessons. This lab can also contribute to the development of students' teaching and reflection skills. To achieve this aim, seconded teachers supporting students should be offered.
- 5.5. The security system of the library, common rooms, gymnasium, labs and offices must be improved. Actions should also be taken to improve the facilities and the materials used including the physical conditions (e.g., heating during winter time).

6. The DECE should develop a policy and take actions to improve the quality of student assessment.

- 6.1. For quality learning, students should be evaluated using diverse sources and ongoing assessment methods and should receive

corresponding feedback.

6.2. It is recommended that examination papers evaluate students' creative and critical thinking and problem solving ability.

7. The DECE should take actions to promote research in education.

7.1. The EEC believes that more emphasis should be given to basic research that can have a significant contribution to the theory development and testing as well as to upgrading of the research status of the DECE.

7.2. International dissemination of research findings to top journals with referee system should be encouraged.

7.3. The DECE should collect information on the publication and citation record of each academic and upload them on its web page.

7.4. The DECE Web site needs to be further developed and updated with all the faculty CVs, research interests, and course descriptions. An English short version of the Web site of DECE with the mission of the department, the research interests and CVs of faculty members should be developed. This version may contribute to the establishment of international research collaborations.

8. Budget constraints on staffing are addressed.

8.1. Seconded teachers must be appointed in order to support teaching practice and the teaching of foreign languages.

8.2. The number of auxiliary staff supporting the labs must be increased.