



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



Εθνική Αρχή
Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης
Hellenic Authority
for Higher Education

Αριστειδου 1 & Ευριπίδου 2 • 10559 Αθήνα | 1 Aristidou str. & 2 Evripidou str. • 10559 Athens, Greece
T. +30 210 9220 944 • F. +30 210 9220 143 • E. secretariat@ethaae.gr • www.ethaae.gr

Accreditation Report for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

Early Childhood Education
University of Western Macedonia
Date: 4 December 2021



Επιχειρησιακό Πρόγραμμα
Ανάπτυξη Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού,
Εκπαίδευση και Διά Βίου Μάθηση
Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Early Childhood Education** of the **University of Western Macedonia** for the purposes of granting accreditation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A: Background and Context of the Review	4
I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel.....	4
II. Review Procedure and Documentation	5
III. Study Programme Profile	7
Part B: Compliance with the Principles	9
Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance.....	9
Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes	12
Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment.....	15
Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	18
Principle 5: Teaching Staff	21
Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support	24
Principle 7: Information Management	26
Principle 8: Public Information	30
Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes	32
Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes.....	36
Part C: Conclusions	37
I. Features of Good Practice	37
II. Areas of Weakness	37
III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions	38
IV. Summary & Overall Assessment	39

PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Early Childhood Education** of the **University of Western Macedonia** comprised the following five (5) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

1. **Prof. Emerita Mary Ioannidou-Koutselini** (Chair)
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
2. **Prof. Emeritus Athanasios Gagatsis**
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
3. **Prof. John Spiridakis**
St. John's University, United States of America
4. **Prof. Emerita Eleni Katsarou**
University of Illinois Chicago, United States of America

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The HAHE provided a virtual training for the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (hereinafter referred to as EEAP) to prepare for the Early Childhood Education Undergraduate Programme of University of Western Macedonia, hereinafter referred to as DECE, online site visit.

The EEAP was assisted by HAHE to use Zoom to conduct online interviews and virtual site meetings by teleconference from November 29, 2021 to December 4, 2021. Prior to all meetings and interviews, the EEAP received from HAHE all documents from DECE related to its programme of study, operation and quality assurance initiatives.

The EEAP virtual site visit involved meetings and interviews with the following groups.

On Monday, November 29th, the EEAP members met virtually to discuss and plan the online site visit.

On Tuesday, November 30th, the EEAP met with the Vice Rector and President of MODIP, Prof. Nikolaos Sariannidis and the Head of the Department, Prof. Kostantinos Dinas. Prof. Sariannidis provided a Power Point presentation overview and discussion of the University's history, departments, Quality Assurance Processes and the Undergraduate Programme (UGP). Prof. Sariannidis elaborated upon the academic profile, status and compliance of the Department and University with the recommendations of its Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). Prof. Dinas introduced and elaborated upon the Department's goals and objectives, its curriculum and ways the department progressed and conducted its self-evaluations since the last external evaluation of 2013.

Thereafter, the EEAP teleconferenced with OMEA, MODIP, DECE faculty members and afterwards, teaching staff, who discussed ways the DECE was operating in terms of assuring compliance with standards and internal programme monitoring and evaluation. The EEAP and DECE faculty members engaged in in-depth discussion concerning the needs and concerns related to the effective implementation of the UGP for the students. The EEAP then teleconferenced with the teaching staff members. During this session, the faculty members discussed their views about the DECE's effectiveness in ensuring learning outcomes, links between teaching and research, activities related to faculty research, publication, conferences, and student engagement and student evaluations, possible areas of weakness.

The EEAP on Tuesday, December 1, met with current students from each of the four years of DECE studies. The EEAP sought to determine the level of satisfaction, their opportunity for providing input and receiving feedback, as well as their concerns and recommendations. The EEAP probed the students' curriculum experiences, practical learning, faculty engagement, opportunities for research and needs.

Afterwards, the EEAP was introduced to the several Laboratory directors and was provided with a video tour (link) of the various laboratories, their functions and resources provided by the DECE. The EEAP subsequently had the opportunity to obtain feedback regarding the operation and efficacy of the facilities and related research and conference initiatives.

Next, the EEAP teleconferenced with the DECE graduates. The EEAP received feedback concerning the experience of the graduates, their career paths, and their views regarding the effectiveness of their preparation and any issues or recommendations regarding their experience in the programme.

After a break for lunch, the EEAP teleconferenced with employers and social partners of the DECE from both public and private sectors to examine the collaborative activities at work. Each stakeholder was afforded time for a brief presentation followed by questions from members of the EEAP.

On Thursday, December 2, the final day of EEAP meetings occurred. The EEAP again participated in teleconferences with members of OMEA and MODIP, including the Vice-Rector and DECE Chair. The EEAP members, led by Prof. Koutselini, EEA Chair, provided their initial informal reflections regarding their key findings about the efficacy of the DECE's compliance and progress. The meeting included follow-up questions by the EEAP members and remarks by the participants concerning the proffered questions and comments of the EEAP.

Following this meeting, the EEAP began its deliberations and preparation of the EEA Draft Report for submission to the HAHE.

III. Study Programme Profile

The Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) was founded as a Pedagogic Academy and operated this way from 1941 until 1987; then as a department along with the Pedagogic School of Florina, in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 1993, and incorporated into the School of Education of the University of Western Macedonia (UWM) in 2003. DECE was created with the goal of fostering and promoting the field of educational studies and developing education for Early Childhood teachers. The five overarching goals that inform the undergraduate curriculum are: a) The continuous modernization, quality and improvement of the course offerings; b) the hiring of new academic/teaching and administrative staff in order to improve teaching and learning opportunities; c) reinforcing and upgrading learning goals for the development of a contemporary/innovative scholar and early childhood educator; d) establishing and embellishing areas of knowledge/expertise via the practicum/practice teaching component in kindergarten classrooms and other specialized spaces; e) providing students/graduates with life-long learning goals as well as addressing educational and sociocultural needs in educational settings and beyond.

In addressing these aims, DECE has designed and developed a curriculum that extends to eight semesters (or four years) and is made up 240 ECTS or 54 courses. Of those 240 ECTS/54 courses, students must take 31 Core/Compulsory courses plus 4 Practicum courses that amount to 128 ECTS; may self-select 23 Elective/Compulsory courses. The Elective courses, that amount to 92 ECTS, along with the Teaching Courses (Didaktikes) that amount to 112 ECTS, comprise the full ECTS requirements. If students opt to do a final Thesis, it is the equivalent of 3 courses and thus, their Elective courses are 20 and the total number of courses is 51.

According to the documents examined, the curriculum was re-designed based on the 2013 external evaluation recommendations. The re-designed curriculum was placed in effect in 2015-16 and catered on two areas: a) the number of Core/Compulsory courses are now fewer, whereas the Elective/Compulsory are now more; b) the Practicum/Practice Teaching component now begins much earlier (in year 2) in the students' course of study.

The Core/Compulsory and Elective/Compulsory courses cover all the key areas of study and include, *Research Methodology, History of Education, Psychology and Psychological Conditions in Education, Social Sciences and Research, Special Education, Pedagogy, Linguistics, Literature, Computing, Mathematics, Environmental Education, Natural Sciences Fine Arts that include Theatre and Music, and Teaching and Methodology in Practice Teaching*. There are 9 laboratories that students attend across the four years of study and include a wide array of study and engagement from *Language and Language Teaching to Mathematics of Nature and Life to Arts* and the most innovative *Book Science ("Bibliologeion")*.

The DECE employs 32 faculty members, of which, twelve are DEP (Academic) members and six are EDIP (Lab and Teaching staff) and ETEP (Special Technical Laboratory Staff); twelve Lecturers, and four administrative staff members. The programme admits approximately 150 students per year and currently has 562 active students. As reported by the programme faculty, the

student/faculty ratio is 20:1. Also reported by the programme, nearly 90% of the students graduate with *Very Good* or *Excellent* grades.

The DECE's facilities, including faculty and staff offices, meeting rooms, amphitheatres, laboratories and the staffed library, are very good and mostly housed in a set of buildings, only 3 kilometres from the city of Florina. The Practicum/Practice Teaching opportunities start in year two with some practical applications that culminating in a more involved year four set of experiences.

The DECE Programme aims at providing a high level of teacher education, with an emphasis on student-centred learning, and improvement of the programme of studies through institutionalized procedures by strengthening the role of the internal evaluation team and the student evaluations and feedback.

The EEAP have found that all these intentions behind this aim and the work that has already been done, have allowed the structure of DECE to adhere to national and international similar early childhood programmes. It is commendable that the programme faculty have remained vigilant in ensuring high quality instruction and innovative approaches to teaching and learning as well as having started to include Practice Teaching opportunities in the second year of the students' course of study. Nonetheless, the practice teaching that is introduced in the second year is attached to only one course.

The programme is very well articulated and there is a definite identity of the programme as to what constitutes a good beginning practitioner and future scholar/researcher. The promotion of "research" is central and a very important identity of what the programme faculty aspire to for their graduates; however, it appears to be a false dichotomy (which is quite common) of research versus practice, or a researcher versus a practitioner. It is our understanding that the notion of "teacher as researcher" or more specifically, the practice of *teacher inquiry* could be a wonderful addition/adaptation to the identity of DECE's graduates.

The curriculum is monitored and evaluated very methodically both within the DECE and programme faculty, as well as within the MODIP and OMEA committees.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit is in line with the Institutional policy on quality, and is included in a published statement that is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special objectives related to the quality assurance of study programmes offered by the academic unit.

The quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

In particular, in order to carry out this policy, the academic unit commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate:

- a) the suitability of the structure and organization of the curriculum;*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education;*
- c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching;*
- d) the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff;*
- e) the enhancement of the quality and quantity of the research output among faculty members of the academic unit;*
- f) ways for linking teaching and research;*
- g) the level of demand for qualifications acquired by graduates, in the labour market;*
- h) the quality of support services such as the administrative services, the Library, and the student welfare office;*
- i) the conduct of an annual review and an internal audit of the quality assurance system of the undergraduate programme(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings:

The programme's quality assurance procedures are monitored by the University's Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) and by the DECE's Internal Evaluation Group (OMEA). In general, the Quality Assurance Policy aims to support the academic content and scientific orientation of the undergraduate programme, in accordance with international academic standards and the

current national legislation. To that extent, there is a policy in place for improving the educational experience of undergraduate students, the quality and quantity of the overall research output of the department, as well as the introduction of innovative teaching and practical training approaches and strategies. Furthermore, such policy extends to the continual monitoring and improvement of human resources, curricula, outreach, mobility, and programme visibility.

The Programme has set three overall strategic quality goals that can be summarized as follows:

- i) continuous academic development and improvement of the programme of study and curriculum quality (this includes coursework offerings and research by faculty members, the quality of work conditions for faculty members, and the quality of processes in place and services provided)
- ii) promotion the work of research output produced by faculty members
- iii) protection of individual rights, personal data, and intellectual rights of faculty and students.

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

- Providing a high level of education, with an emphasis on student-centred learning, improvement of the programme of studies through institutionalized procedures, and standardization of the academic functions by strengthening the role of the internal evaluation team and the programme of studies committee.
- Promoting excellence and innovation that include strengthening and rewarding academic and teaching staff for teaching and research.
- Enhancing the mobility of academic and teaching staff and students and reducing graduation time as well as improving accessibility.
- Monitoring and supporting student progress; providing student support and make resources available; encourage collaborations with students and participation in mobility programmes.
- Recruiting and retaining highly qualified faculty and evaluate their work yearly; support and encourage the production of research work by members of the DECE that meets high academic standards; encourage and support faculty in attending scholarly activities such as conferences, research networks and grant projects.
- Providing professional opportunities and lifelong learning to alumni.
- Ongoing evaluation and improvement by revisiting the Quality Assurance system in place building on the fruitful collaboration between OMEA and MODIP.

Analysis of judgment:

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

Conclusions:

It was not evident how and to what extent the programme faculty make deliberate efforts to acknowledge the opinions and feedback of the graduates/alumni about the curriculum and course of study, especially as this pertains to the efficacy and satisfaction with the Practicum/Practice Teaching Component. As an example, of the 1639 graduates between 1998 and 2019, only 234 questionnaires were returned (that is 12,4%) of which, most respondents rated the “professional or work-related application of the Practice Teaching component ”below 3” on a scale of 1 to 5. This aspect of the work should be addressed.

Additionally, it may be advisable to engage other important stakeholders to ensure that the quality of the action plan is more robust and far-reaching and that social/cultural and other organizations that collaborate with DECE, become instrumental. As an example, one external partner lamented that the programme no longer places students for their Practice Teaching in the adjacent to Florina villages, as was customary in the past.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

It is advisable that programme alumni and pre-school teachers and administrators, especially those in the public-school domain, add perspectives that could appear more central in the current form of the action plan. The EEAP recommends that the DECE, in addition to the OMEA and MODIP, be intentional and transparent (both in terms of policies and their implementation) in engaging alumni, practicing teachers/mentors, involving them in meaningful ways in curricular design and enhancing their overall participation.

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

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

Academic units develop their programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the objectives, the subject areas, the structure and organisation, the expected learning outcomes and the intended professional qualifications according to the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. The approval or revision process for programmes includes a check of compliance with the basic requirements described in the Standards, on behalf of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Furthermore, the programme design should take into consideration the following:

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
- *the option to provide work experience to the students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings:

The undergraduate programme of DECE, is under the aegis of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, at the University of Western Macedonia and was established as a four-year programme after numerous iterations and designs, but more recently, it was re-designed in 2003 in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. As specified in the documentation reviewed by the EEAP, the design of the existing programme is based on the following considerations: a) reviewing new and innovative areas of expertise and knowledge in order to modernize and add new courses of study and avoid redundancy among courses; b) following research developments and future trends in pre-school education, hire new faculty that will further enrich teaching and learning; c) evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, especially as assessed by the experiences of the teaching faculty and the evaluations by the students; d) reinforcing and improving the management of

infrastructure and services of the institution to better serve the needs of the students, and; e) supporting the production of high level of research including the utilization and distribution of data and conclusions for the benefit of society at large.

Students attend classes at the university and conduct their fieldwork and student teaching experiences for a total of two semesters. Coursework must total 240 ECTS or 54 courses. Of those 240 ECTS/54 courses, students must take 31 Core/Compulsory courses plus 4 Practicum courses and may self-select 23 Elective/Compulsory courses. If students opt to do a final Thesis, it is the equivalent of 3 courses and thus, their Elective courses are 20 and the total number of courses is 51.

Analysis of judgment

During our meetings, students and graduates voiced their total satisfaction with the programme and great accessibility to the teaching staff. Coursework covers an array of core and concentration areas of study in the first three years, as well as introducing a limited *practicum/practice teaching* component that is attached to one course in the second year of study. The practicum is somewhat more involved in the fourth year and it is mandatory. Even with the severe limitations of the pandemic and the students' accessibility to practice teaching opportunities, the EEAP found the number of days and hours that students are afforded is simply insufficient in comparison to international practices. For a deeper and more sustained time in planning and executing lessons and units of study this aspect of the programme needs rethinking. This is especially true when comparing the DECE practicum approach to education programmes and *best practices*. It is the opinion of this Panel that practice teaching opportunities might be best when they are coupled with a selected number of major subject areas. These would be ideally done in the first three years of study. Equally critical may be the fourth year re-conceptualized and longer practicum that would allow students a sustained and deeper sense of the work in classrooms and other contexts. In both redesign approaches, observation protocols could be most helpful for all—students, practicing teachers that host the students in their classrooms, and university observers.

Given that this is a small, public university programme that also serves multilingual and multicultural students and families, the EEAP encourages the DECE to consider three central ideas that are, indeed ambitious themes in the mission of any urban programme: Multilingual/Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Language Learning, including notions of translanguaging, language development and biliteracy. These could a) be weaved across disciplines and courses in the later semesters and in designed field experiences and b) have stand-alone courses in the early semesters to prepare student-teachers to teach the increasingly diverse population in Greek public schools. Additionally, re-engaging with the smaller, rural/village kindergarten classrooms may be a great opportunity for both the students and the student/family populations of those communities. In our interviews with social partners, this desire to have DECE students enter these educational settings arose as a suggestion.

Conclusions

Given the socio-political realities of the country and the world, it would be advisable: a) to further strengthen the curriculum in the direction of preparing students/future educators to enter multilingual/multicultural classrooms and to be able to address their students' linguistic, academic and sociocultural needs and b) to the extent possible, have students observe and engage with seasoned practitioners that teach in critical ways, as well as co-plan and co-teach cross-disciplinary units of study

Panel Judgement

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Consider enriching three themes in the mission of the programme that have become important in most international programmes of teacher education: Multilingual/Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Language Learning. These themes could be stand-alone courses in the early semesters to prepare student-teachers to teach the increasingly diverse population in Greek public schools. Additionally, the same themes could be weaved across disciplines and courses in the later semesters the students' course of study.
- Plan the re-engagement of DECE with the smaller, rural/village kindergarten classrooms. In our interviews with social partners, this desire to have DECE students enter these educational settings arose as a specific suggestion, and indeed, it may be a great opportunity for both the students and the student/family populations of those communities.
- It may be prudent to establish a locally determined evaluation instrument/ tool/ protocol that could also be shared across the Practicum/fieldwork semesters and across sites (i.e., both at the university and the Practicum schools).

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES ARE DELIVERED IN A WAY THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CREATING THE LEARNING PROCESS. THE ASSESSMENT METHODS SHOULD REFLECT THIS APPROACH.

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. The above entail continuous consideration of the programme's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.

The student-centred learning and teaching process

- *respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;*
- *considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;*
- *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;*
- *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement;*
- *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys;*
- *reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff;*
- *promotes mutual respect in the student - teacher relationship;*
- *applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.*

In addition:

- *the academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;*
- *the assessment criteria and methods are published in advance;*
- *the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process;*
- *student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible;*
- *the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;*
- *assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;*
- *a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The Department of Early Childhood Education of the University of Western Macedonia has successfully applied multi-faceted student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. The Policy of Quality and Governance is effectively supported by OMEA and MODIP securing inclusive education where all students feel valuable and important.

During teaching and assessment, a variety of student-centred methods are used such as cooperative investigations, self-assessment simulations, visits and observations, work in the

laboratories, dissertation writing, written exams, portfolios and the keeping of reflective diaries. Moreover, the structure of the programme favours student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment, due to the balanced availability of elective and obligatory courses.

The department acknowledges the importance of students' active participation in the Central and Departmental Committees and encourages their participation. The staff is also aware of the necessity to receive students' feedback and increase the low percentage of students' responses concerning the programme and its delivery.

It is important to refer to the DECE's Services and Programme for students with disabilities, which are broadly acknowledged as specialized and innovative. The DECE is proud of having a graduate with disabilities. Moreover, a number of services facilitate students' studies, such as the Students' Association (<https://nured.uowm.gr/fititikos-sillogos/>) and the Unit of Vulnerable Students' Support (<https://myfeo.uowm.gr/>).

The DECE offers courses in English so as to promote the visibility of the DECE and facilitate the Erasmus incomers. Additionally, it encourages students to participate in the Erasmus mobility programme. EEAP had the opportunity to meet with Erasmus students, who expressed their satisfaction and appreciation towards the DECE for the opportunity they had either to continue their studies abroad or to work in the country they had visited through the Erasmus programme. Although students prefer studies in Finland, Cyprus, Italy and Portugal, the DECE collaborates with 32 departments abroad through the Erasmus scheme. In the years 2015-2020, the DECE had 19 outgoing students and 5 incomers. The Special Erasmus Student Guide with all the information needed eases students' decisions. Increasing the participation of students in the evaluation of teaching is one of the strategic goals of the DECE.

Students have an opportunity to make appeals and submit complaints when necessary at the Student Advocates Office through email or in person (<https://nured.uowm.gr/sinigoros-tou-fititi>). Usually, grievances are resolved in face-to-face interactions.

Analysis of judgement

The president, the staff and the Quality Assurance bodies of the DECE facilitate the smooth progression of students' studies. The comprehensive Student Guide, the information on the web site, in both Greek and English, the e-class and e-learning opportunities, the laboratories and students' central and departmental services and cultural and educational centers cultivate students' sense of autonomy and safety, a state of affairs that was verified during the EEAP meetings with students and graduates. Students are very satisfied with the programme and the staff's support and pedagogical approach within and outside the classroom. The EEAP verified during the meetings with students and graduates that the DECE prepares them well for the world of work and provides a good connection between practice and research. Students were thankful for the caring and encouraging learning environment of the DECE and the opportunities for personal support services and inclusion.

The newly established alumni will allow graduates to participate actively in the Department's plans and events.

Conclusions

The extraversion policy of the Department for students, graduates, social, educational and municipal partners increases students' cognitive, social and emotional development and contributes to mutual understanding and productive collaboration. Students and staff have the choice to participate in a number of interesting groups and thematic centers and social activities. Theatrical schemes, art performances, trekking, municipal events and festivals promote student inclusion in artistic and social groups and the Department's extra-curricular activities. The external stakeholders had very positive attitudes towards the students' work in the community that welcomes their presence in schools and informal learning settings.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Consider the allocation of a number of students to each academic staff member so that he or she can act as academic advisor during their studies.

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP AND APPLY PUBLISHED REGULATIONS COVERING ALL ASPECTS AND PHASES OF STUDIES (ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION).

Institutions and academic units need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, manage and act on information regarding student progression.

Procedures concerning the award and recognition of higher education degrees, the duration of studies, rules ensuring students progression, terms and conditions for student mobility should be based on the institutional study regulations. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Graduation represents the culmination of the students' study period. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed (Diploma Supplement).

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

This section draws from the following material: The DECE's Accreditation Proposal, the Student Handbook/Study Guide, the DECE's website, and our virtual meetings with faculty, students and alumni. Students are enrolled in the programme through the "Panhellenic" examinations given at the end of each school year and/or through a placement test if they are already enrolled in a different department.

The head of the DECE presented an example of the repartition of the incoming and outgoing students and of the graduates in the academic year 2014-2015: the total number of enrolled students was 197. Among these 170 students were enrolled in the programme through the "Panhellenic" examination, 2 belong to a special category defined by a law of Greece, 20 are enrolled by qualifying exams, 2 are enrolled by internal transfer, 1 was an expatriate student and 1 was an Erasmus student. On the other hand, 101 students were deleted (90 were transferred, 10 entered another Department, via the regulation of 10% and 1 as an ex-Erasmus student).

New incoming students are supported from the beginning of their studies through an informative welcome orientation session offered by the DECE Head and faculty members and staff, where the organization and operation of the DECE and its support services, the Curriculum, course of study and Practicum are presented in detail. Students are also informed about the structure of their studies per academic semester, the evaluation process, e-services, the Programme Erasmus+ and other available programmes. Students are further informed at the

beginning of every academic semester about the evaluation process in their courses by the course instructor.

The EEAP noted that the DECE has established collaborations with a large number of universities from various countries. Agreements concluded with different countries to enhance the mobility of teaching staff and / or students, 32 in total and in particular 12 the last five years (England, Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Northern Macedonia, France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, Czech Republic, Finland). According to the OMEA presentation the countries of preference for students are Finland (due to the appealing Educational System), Cyprus (due to common language), Italy and Portugal (due to approximate cost of living). According to the OMEA presentation. In particular, according to the above presentation, the mobility of teaching staff and students in the years 2015-2020 is the following: moving teaching staff 16 (4 canceled due to COVID 19 pandemic), incoming teaching staff 3, moving students 19, incoming students (+1 canceled due to COVID 19 pandemic). However, financial support of staff and students is limited and other ways to support the Erasmus staff and students should be identified.

Analysis of judgment

It is clear to the EEAP that one of the DECE's strengths is the collaboration of faculty and students. Students and alumni referred to the DECE with enthusiasm, commenting on the humanity and accessibility of their professors and their respect for students' personalities as well as their willingness to support students in their careers and academic pursuits. Students and alumni commended faculty's efforts to include them in research projects, conferences, co-authored papers, opportunities for European programmes, etc. Finally, students seemed satisfied with information provided to them on their progress in the programme, and access to professors with academic and other questions. A good number of students from the Programme have been participating in European mobility programmes such as conducting their Practica abroad and the Erasmus+. Some of the students who met with the EEAP were Erasmus participants and greatly appreciative of this unique experience.

EEAP believes that the above-mentioned satisfaction is closely related to the following two dimensions of the DECE's quality assurance:

- Enhancing the mobility of academic and teaching staff and students and reducing graduation time as well as improving accessibility.
- Monitoring and supporting student progress; providing student support and make resources available; encourage collaborations with students and participation in mobility programmes.

Conclusions

The DECE follows the admission policies and procedures of recognition and certification that are regulated by the Ministry of Education of Greece. On the other hand, all the students receive the Diploma Supplement, both in Greek and in English, explaining the qualification gained,

including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued. The EEAP members confirmed, through their review of documents and interviews, that the DECE has in place mechanisms, processes and tools to collect, manage and act upon information regarding student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 5: Teaching Staff

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCE OF THE TEACHING STAFF. THEY SHOULD APPLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING STAFF.

The Institutions and their academic units have a major responsibility as to the standard of their teaching staff providing them with a supportive environment that promotes the advancement of their scientific work. In particular, the academic unit should:

- *set up and follow clear, transparent and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff and offer them conditions of employment that recognize the importance of teaching and research;*
- *offer opportunities and promote the professional development of the teaching staff;*
- *encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;*
- *encourage innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies;*
- *promote the increase of the volume and quality of the research output within the academic unit;*
- *follow quality assurance processes for all staff members (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training etc.);*
- *develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff.*

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The total number of the teaching staff is 32 and includes 12 DEP members (6 professors, 3 associate professors and 3 assistant professors), 6 associates and specialized staff (EDIP-ETEP), 12 lecturers under contract and 4 administrative staff members.

The scientific disciplines of the instructors correspond to the subject matters of the programme and contribute to the realization of its aim to develop scientists and professionals in the field of Educational Sciences. Despite the need for further teaching staff in the DECE (due to the large number of students), instructors of DECE manage to cover (in teaching and research) a variety of scientific subjects. Basic information about the instructors (subject matter, contact details, courses taught, academic and research expertise) is available on the DECE's website.

The Programme's aim is in line with the DECE's mission and identity and the staff is very well-qualified and research-oriented, able to supply students with the necessary theoretical and practical education for their scientific and professional careers and development, and to provide graduates with appropriate expertise so they can be appointed as educators in kindergartens.

The teaching staff of the DECE has been research-oriented and has participated in 51 national and European research programmes. Examples of these programmes are: T-Story: Storytelling Applied to Training Action - KA3 Multilateral Projects; Sirius: Education of Children and Young People with a Migrant Background Programme - Centralized Lifelong Learning Programme; WeAreEurope: Creating a Cohesive Europe - Erasmus+KA201; EI-EDUROBOT: Educational Robot

with Emotional Intelligence - DRASI.b.1.2-a2; MiCreate – Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe - Horizon2020).

Analysis of judgement

Although the staff's participation in research projects is satisfactory, the European competitive programmes of the DECE with high budget hold the 11, 11% of the whole research activity.

The faculty members participate in international and national conferences and publish their work in scientific journals and conference proceedings. It is important to mention the significant increase during the last five years of staff's reference in the Scopus citation database. Moreover, staff members participated in the development of the secondary education curricula. As evidenced by the organization of seminars even for secondary education teachers, the local educational bodies and organizations have recognized the professionalism of the DECE's staff. The DECE also offers programmes/courses leading to the award of Certificate of Teaching for graduates of other departments.

Students' engagement in research projects and the 9 laboratories of the DECE cultivate students' research skills and give them the opportunity to participate in scientific conferences in collaboration with their instructors. The DECE's stakeholders expressed their satisfaction and appreciation of events organized by the laboratories (i.e., seminars on creative writing, the activities of the laboratory 'bibliologio' and its openness to the community).

Through the application of student-centred methods and personal assistance to each student when necessary, the staff respect the diversity and the different needs of the students, and enhance teacher-student communication. The collaboration between the educational, municipal and social centres of Florina are exemplary and based on the partners' appreciation of the DECE's innovative and research-led activities and educational seminars. According to their voices, 'the DECE gives life to the community' and the students' work during practica in public services and institutions facilitates and upgrades the performance of the institutions.

Conclusions

The DECE promote the advancement of their scientific work and encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education- teaching and research, as well as between teaching and technology.

The DECE reflects on shortages in academic, technical, and laboratory staff and the increased workload for academic staff and considers the situation as a threat against the smooth development of the DECE and the fulfilment of its mission.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Teaching Staff	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER TEACHING AND LEARNING NEEDS. THEY SHOULD –ON THE ONE HAND– PROVIDE SATISFACTORY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT AND –ON THE OTHER HAND– FACILITATE DIRECT ACCESS TO THEM BY ESTABLISHING INTERNAL RULES TO THIS END (E.G. LECTURE ROOMS, LABORATORIES, LIBRARIES, NETWORKS, BOARDING, CAREER AND SOCIAL POLICY SERVICES ETC.).

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counselling services.

When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities) and the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

Regarding the infrastructure, the DECE has offices for academic and other staff, 21 teaching rooms, conference/meeting rooms and amphitheatres, rooms for art and music, a computer workroom, reading rooms in the library, 7 rooms for laboratories, a gym, and facilities for people with mobility needs. The library has been connected with a number of European libraries providing students and staff with a rich database for navigation.

The DECE's website is continuously updated and includes useful and well-structured information, in Greek and English, including information about studies and courses, the teaching staff, news and announcements.

Students' teaching experiences are supported through practica in local preschools and other informal settings, where their work and contribution has been extremely appreciated by partners, teachers and stakeholders.

Analysis of judgement

The virtual visit included visit to the library, the study rooms, amphitheatres, and laboratories and EEAP had the opportunity to discuss with the persons responsible.

Student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of teaching, assessment and participating in the community's events and activities have been achieved (principle 3).

Conclusions

Improvement of teaching conditions, infrastructure and services that support teaching is an important declared strategic goal of the DECE. Sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, is an essential aspect of the realization of the DECE's goals.

All resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and students are informed about the equipment, support and counselling services available to them, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counselling services.

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

Sharing the resources and infrastructure with the Programme of Primary Education needs thoughtful and careful organization in order to safeguard equal accessibility for all students.

Principle 7: Information Management

INSTITUTIONS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING INFORMATION, AIMED AT THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AND RELATED ACTIVITIES, IN AN INTEGRATED, EFFECTIVE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE WAY.

Institutions are expected to establish and operate an information system for the management and monitoring of data concerning students, teaching staff, course structure and organisation, teaching and provision of services to students as well as to the academic community.

Reliable data is essential for accurate information and for decision making, as well as for identifying areas of smooth operation and areas for improvement. Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on study programmes and other activities feed data into the internal system of quality assurance.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the Institution. The following are of interest:

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

A number of methods may be used for collecting information. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analyzing information and planning follow-up activities.

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The Department of early childhood education of the University of Western Macedonia aims to provide students with theoretical knowledge, research and critical thinking skills, and practical training in early childhood education, in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. This is evident from some of the strategic aims of the DECE, which are:

- Providing high-quality education, with emphasis on student-centered learning, improving the curriculum through the institutionalized annual review process, and updating and standardizing academic functions by strengthening the role of the OMEA and the Curriculum Committee.
- Promote excellence and innovation by enhancing and rewarding the achievements of members of the academic community in teaching and research.
- Enhancing staff and student mobility, reducing graduation time and improving accessibility all over the Faculty.
- Enhancing the production and the recognition of the scientific work of the academic staff

In fact, the DECE:

- Based on its capabilities, proposes the appropriate annual number of enrolments to be able to offer high-quality education to its students and appropriate student welfare benefits.
- Ensures the quality of the administration services and other forms of support provided by the DECE.
- Informs the central administration about the shortcomings in the infrastructure and the operation of the support services of the PDM, while making proposals for their improvement.
- Conducts internal inspection of the quality assurance system and ensures the good cooperation of the DECE's OMEA with the institution's MODIP.

It was reported that internal evaluations take place regularly and students are asked to provide feedback on their courses and teaching staff every semester. Concerning the assessment of courses in the Undergraduate Curriculum, we could distinguish two periods: in the first (2016-19), 2395 questionnaires have been used for the assessment of 281 courses and in the second, (2019-21), 3998 questionnaires have been used for the assessment of 218 courses. Two distinct questionnaires have been used: in the first period the questionnaire was based on 43 items while in the second period on 27 items. Concerning the new instrument of assessment, information is collected and examined on a variety of quality indicators, including the following: the teaching materials (1 item), the teaching methodology (3 items), the educator (9 items), the educator (9 items), Learning outcomes (4 items), the student's effort (4 items) and the difficulty of the course (1 item). Based on the data that have been presented by OMEA, a growing culture of evaluation has been observed.

The DECE's website presents the management of data for students, teachers and courses offered. It contains general information such as structure and organization of the programme, course statistics, course syllabi, and statistics on graduates from each academic year. Through this platform, students have access to their grades, both for courses they are currently taking, as well as from past semesters. The students, respectively, can confirm their enrollments and monitor their progression in the Programme.

One of the strengths of the DECE is the satisfactory ratio of students/academic-teaching staff: for the academic year 2021-22 it is 1/20, while the corresponding average national index seems to be 1/40. Moreover, the percentage of stagnant students is 8% that is consider as a very low one.

According to the website of UoWM (<https://alumni.uowm.gr/>) the alumni community aims at:

- monitoring graduates' careers
- connecting graduates with the alumni community and strengthening relations with the University
- creating bonds between graduates and companies as well as professional bodies
- providing scientific, professional and social support to graduates (e.g. opportunities for lifelong learning programmes, seminars, workshops, conferences, postgraduate courses, etc.)
- facilitating graduates' access to the labour market.

Analysis of judgment

Core in this process of information management is the role of OMEA, the internal evaluation committee made up of faculty members from diverse disciplinary fields within the DECE. The internal evaluation group (OMEA) collects data through surveys, quantitative and qualitative information from faculty and lab directors regarding the content and instruction mode, research and teaching activities, and community outreach activities. Information collected via all these avenues is used to revise the curriculum, implement novel teaching methods, improve infrastructure and department facilities, facilitate the use of ICTs, the organization of conferences, workshops, invited lectures and so forth

The students gave feedback to the EEAP indicating that they value and rate very highly the DECE information. They also feel the courses prepare them well for the job force and provide a good connection between practice and research. They expressed satisfaction with the variety of the topics offered.

The graduates who participated in the review with the members of EEAP expressed a strong connection with the DECE and noted that they felt welcomed to participate in educational opportunities (e.g. symposia, conferences, seminars, co-authored papers, PhD programmes). They also expressed their enthusiasm for their training in a theoretical, practical and research direction, as well as their study at Universities abroad under the ERASMUS programme. As a matter of fact, some graduates continue their careers in Universities abroad, while others work as teachers in public or private schools outside Greece. This was regarded by all interviewed as important since it increased the bond and sense of community among students, as well as faculty and graduates with the potential for future collaborations, teaching opportunities and availability of practical experiences.

Conclusions

The EEAP has determined that the DECE has established a multidimensional process about its information management that informs internal evaluation as well as external evaluation and accreditation processes.

Overall, the EEAP believes that the frequency of satisfaction surveys and the decisions being made following the analysis of these data are satisfactory.

Panel Judgement

Principle 7: Information Management	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The DECE should consider establishing methods for collecting information related to their graduates' job placements and academic careers.

Principle 8: Public Information

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH IS CLEAR, ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE.

Information on Institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions and their academic units provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students, as well as graduate employment information.

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

EEAP believes that the DECE provides important information about its activities. This determination is based on reviews of printed and electronic sources, as well interviews with the Head of the Department, members of MODIP, OMEA, faculty, secretarial staff, and students. The EEAP examined materials that exhibited evidence of critical information sharing with students, faculty members, external partners, and the community at large. The main website of the UOWM, is user friendly and easy to navigate and provides a wide variety of information about the University, including announcements and press releases of a general nature, publication of scholarships, competitions, and jobs. The website is frequently updated and incorporates all the actions of the Institution resulting from strategic planning such as special interest clubs for students, internal regulations etc. On the other hand, the website of UoWM (<https://alumni.uowm.gr/>) gives a variety of information concerning the alumni community.

Analysis of judgement

During our meetings with the students and the graduates of the department and with its various social partners, very flattering comments were expressed about the multidimensional nature of the information disseminated by the DECE. In fact, this information includes the programme and the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the seminars and the conferences organized by the University from one hand, and information concerning studies abroad, research projects, as well as graduate employment information from the other.

Conclusions

It is obvious that the UOWM and the DECE have put in place a comprehensive public information system. Nevertheless, the EEAP believes that it would be useful to improve the e-publishing activity of the DECE by creating an e-Newsletter. In this way, the hundreds of students and alumni of the department, the numerous collaborators and school partners, social partners and the community in general could have direct information about important educational, research and other cultural activities of the Department.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Public Information	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The EEAP encourages the Department to consider creating an e-Newsletter as a way to maintain contact with student, alumni, schools, social partners and other stakeholders.

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

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRAMMES, SO AS TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET FOR THEM, THROUGH MONITORING AND AMENDMENTS, WITH A VIEW TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. ANY ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED.

Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to maintain the level of educational provision and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.

The above comprise the evaluation of:

- the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;*
- the changing needs of society;*
- the students' workload, progression and completion;*
- the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students;*
- the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;*
- the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme*

Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The EEAP verified through the documents and interviews that the department has in place requisite mechanisms to regularly review essential aspects of programme implementation. This practice ensures the highest quality self-evaluation that generates viable plans for future changes. Clearly articulated and transparent online resources and technology such as websites helped facilitate the ongoing monitoring of the programme's changes and implementation.

The EEAP had the opportunity to review documentation and conduct interviews and meetings with the administration, MODIP, OMEA, faculty, students, graduates and external partners to ascertain compliance with quality assurance objectives. Per HAHE guidelines, the DECE engages in an annual self-study that results in an IER and is reported to the MODIP level for feedback and action. The annual internal evaluations are based on monitoring and assessing several critical programme objectives subsumed by the overarching goal of preparing well-rounded, professional, competent and globally aware early childhood educators. Relevant meetings of the OMEA and faculty were convened each year to ensure the warranted feedback was received, shared, analyzed and discussed with an eye on programme modification and improvement.

Changes to laboratories also occurred based on the internal evaluation process in order to improve the experience and research capabilities and collaborative research opportunities of students.

The IERs were developed and recommendations made based on the collection of data in accordance with the Accreditation Certification process rubrics.

It was noted during the site-visit that curricula and course revisions were made based on the OMEA's analysis of the course evaluation items.

Analysis of judgment:

The DECE has instituted a laudable, rational and reliable multi-tiered programme compliance process that addresses its stated goals and objectives.

The OMEA members as expected represent the department's several academic specializations. Annual internal reports seemed systematically prepared and shared with the general assembly of faculty members. The EEAP found a vital *collaborative culture* among faculty members and the department chair who met several times during the year to respond to the challenges and realities facing the department. Student satisfaction with the teaching and learning process was gauged through elaborate course evaluation. The students are provided the opportunity to reflect on pedagogy, methods and practices and the curriculum.

In addition to the vital results of student evaluations, modifications to the programme curriculum were also implemented based on the faculty's awareness of new regulations as well as the needs of society.

Changing trends in STEAM, for example, generated a more interdisciplinary biology and sciences laboratory.

Conclusions

With MODIP oversight, the OMEA and DECE faculty then have put in place not only excellent evaluation mechanisms but also clear reporting systems that ensure data, results and recommendations are accessible.

Faculty members capitalized on using the results of the student evaluations to ensure proper attention was paid to connecting theory with practice and other relevant pedagogical and practice related course modifications.

In addition to promoting and enabling rich field experiences and current societal realities, stakeholders appear to have provided helpful insights to inform curriculum/course modification.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

PROGRAMMES SHOULD REGULARLY UNDERGO EVALUATION BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HAHE, AIMING AT ACCREDITATION. THE TERM OF VALIDITY OF THE ACCREDITATION IS DETERMINED BY HAHE.

HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.

Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.

The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Study Programme Compliance

Findings

The EEAP's reviewed the pertinent provided documents and notes/feedback from meetings and interviews with the University administration, MODIP and OMEA members, faculty, students, graduates and external stakeholders.

In accordance with the Quality Assurance evaluation mandate, the DECE completed its internal evaluation just prior to the then external committee evaluation of 2013. The 2013 external evaluation generated observation and recommendations related to the DECE's operation and effectiveness based on the range of quality assurance rubrics in place at that time.

It was evident that the DECE began in 2014, and through 2020 to the present time, to develop and implement certain action plans in order to make the pedagogy more responsive to the social, psychological, academic and cultural needs of young learners as well as the undergraduate students.

Programme compliance in terms of overall student programme satisfaction was quite evident in the progress of the DECE students at different stages of their undergraduate education. Alumni from Greece and around the world expressed their pleasure with the pedagogy and practice that they felt fully prepared them for their variety of employment. They also made clear to the EEAP that their opportunities to provide feedback to their professors resulted in some useful modifications to the courses and programme.

The EEAP also observed that the DECE faculty were quite involved in expanding existing and new collaborations with certain external agency partners. These partners provided opportunities to provide feedback concerning various aspects of the programme such as student teaching. A high level of satisfaction was evident from interviews with current students and alumni regarding the overall programme. Notably, there was unanimity among these respondents

regarding a feeling of efficacy in teaching and confronting new situations and challenges in the classroom *and* in their professional lives upon completion of the DECE programme.

Analysis of judgment

The 2013 report included key recommendations that have been addressed. The needs of the department students were addressed in several respects, including, but not limited to, a revamping of the early childhood curriculum. Curriculum modifications were made that dovetailed with regulatory changes. In addition, elective course opportunities were expanded along with research and pedagogy subject specialization laboratories. Mathematics offerings and courses were strengthened, including opportunities for STEAM-related research and scholarship.

The DECE also responded affirmatively to the 2013 recommendations by expansion of student field experience opportunities early in the curriculum, enhanced opportunities for use of the e-class platform, strengthening online learning technology. Recommendations to improve faculty-student research and collaborative faculty research and conference opportunities were also effectively addressed and extended by the DECE after 2013.

Action planning was set to the international stature of faculty research, projects and partnerships. A vital partnership with the University of Middlesex, for example, has resulted in a panoply of meritorious research, scholarly publications, conferences and seminars. Other notable productive collaborations involved the Harvard Project Zero and the Hellenic Association for Intercultural Education.

Notably, course evaluation responses by students have risen dramatically since 2013. In addition, the evaluation items have expanded to include critical areas of pedagogy and practice that have contributed to the data used to modify the programme curriculum and individual coursework. Applicable technology has been tied to the more effective processing of course evaluations. During interviews with students and alumni, there was intense satisfaction with the pedagogy and preparation, including enhanced field experiences since 2013. The revisions to course evaluation form during the past few years has undoubtedly contributed to the perceived overall effectiveness of the programme.

External partners were also able to effectively contribute valuable information regarding the changing needs of society in the region and world, as well as ideas related to pedagogy and programmes.

Moreover, accessibility to advisement and registration efficacy has been bolstered by technology improvements.

Conclusions

It was clear to the EEAP that significant programme changes and improvements have occurred to the DECE since 2013. The DECE, with the dynamic support from the administration, involvement of MODIP and other relevant committees, has successfully implemented action plans resulting in key modifications to the curriculum and course requirements, practical training, external funding partnerships, international collaborations including grants, publications and conferences, and enviable enhanced course evaluation mechanisms. In sum, a vital, well-conceived “sea-change” occurred for the DECE since the external evaluation in 2013.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

A central office to support external grant proposals was recommended in the 2013 Report. Although grant success has continued during the years since 2013, the creation of such an office or centre could *further* enhance research and grants development by the DECE faculty. If feasible, such a centre could also provide a venue for faculty development in terms of enhancing in-person and online classroom pedagogy and practice and student engagement.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

- DECE Programme is well articulated
- The programme clearly identifies the characteristics and addresses the needs of a pre-service practitioner and future scholar/researcher.
- The DECE's promotion of "research" as crucial department goal.
- Methodological and effective monitoring and evaluation of the department and the programme by the President and the faculty, MODIP and OMEA
- Student – centred and inclusive education
- Acknowledgement of the importance of students' active participation in the Central and Departmental Committees
- Specialized and innovative Programme and services for students with disabilities
- Offering of courses in English and promotion of the Department's visibility
- Acknowledgement and Inclusion in the Department's strategic goals and action plan of the necessity to increase students' feedback
- Innovative laboratories of the Department
- Extraversion policy of the Department
- Satisfaction of students, graduates, and stakeholders with the DECE and a cultivation of a collaborative culture
- Newly established alumni
- Increase during the last five years of staff's reference in the Scopus citation database.
- Comprehensive public information system
- Effective response to the recommendations included in the 2013 accreditation report.

II. Areas of Weakness

- Limited number of days and hours allocated to Practica- school experience in comparison to the international practice, as a systemic deficiency of the Higher Education System in Greece.
- Mentoring/Practicing teachers that host DECE students in their classrooms do not have special training in the ways in which they mentor provide students with written feedback. On the days students conduct their lessons/activities, a standardized protocol must be filled out and communicated with the students and the university faculty.
- Limited percentage of European competitive programmes with high budget and coordination by the Department's staff.
- Increased number of retirements of the academic staff as a threat to the Department's and programme's fulfilment of their mission.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions

- It is advisable that programme alumni and pre-school teachers and administrators, especially those in the public-school domain, could certainly add perspectives that appear to not be central in the current form of the action plan. The EEAP recommends that the DECE, in addition to the OMEA and MODIP, be intentional and transparent (both in terms of policies and their implementation) in engaging alumni, practicing teachers/mentors, involving them in meaningful ways in curricular design and enhancing their participation.
- Consider enriching three themes in the mission of the programme that have become important in most international programmes of teacher education: Multilingual/Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Language Learning. These themes could be stand-alone courses in the early semesters to prepare student-teachers to teach the increasingly diverse population in Greek public schools. Additionally, the same themes could be weaved across disciplines and courses in the later semesters the students' course of study.
- Plan the re-engagement of DECE with the smaller, rural/village kindergarten classrooms. In our interviews with social partners, this desire to have DECE students enter these educational settings arose as a specific suggestion, and indeed, it may be a great opportunity for both the students and the student/family populations of those communities.
- It may be prudent to establish a locally determined evaluation instrument/ tool/ protocol that could also be shared across the Practicum/fieldwork semesters and across sites (i.e., both at the university and the Practicum schools).
- Consider the allocation of a number of students to each academic staff member so that he or she can act as academic advisor during their studies.
- Sharing the resources and infrastructure with the Programme of Primary Education needs thoughtful and careful organization in order to safeguard equal accessibility for all students.
- The DECE should consider establishing methods for collecting information related to their graduates' job placements and academic careers.
- The EEAP encourages the DECE to consider creating an e-Newsletter as a way to maintain contact with student, alumni, schools, social partners and other stakeholders.
- A central office to support external grant proposals was recommended in the 2013 Report. Although grant success has continued during the years since 2013, the creation of such an office or centre could *further* enhance research and grants development by the DECE faculty. If feasible, such a centre could also provide a venue for faculty development in terms of enhancing in-person and online classroom pedagogy and practice and student engagement.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **None**

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

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

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	x
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

Signature

1. Prof. Emerita Mary Ioannidou-Koutselini (Chair)

University of Cyprus, Cyprus

2. Prof. Emeritus Athanasios Gagatsis

University of Cyprus, Cyprus

3. Prof. John Spiridakis

St. John's University, United States of America

4. Prof. Emerita Eleni Katsarou

University of Illinois Chicago, United States of America