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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ & ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Η.Q.A.

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Department of Early Childhood Education

University of Thessaly

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The External Evaluation Committee
Introduction
    I. The External Evaluation Procedure
- Brief account of documents examined, of the Site Visit, meetings and facilities visited.

    II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure
- Comments on the quality and completeness of the documentation provided and on the overall acceptance of and participation in the Quality Assurance procedures by the Department .

A. Curriculum
APPROACH
- Goals and objectives of the Curriculum, structure and content, intended learning outcomes.

IMPLEMENTATION
- Rationality, functionality, effectiveness of the Curriculum.

RESULTS
- Maximizing success and dealing with potential inhibiting factors.

IMPROVEMENT
- Planned improvements.

B. Teaching
APPROACH:
- Pedagogic policy and methodology, means and resources.

IMPLEMENTATION
- Quality and evaluation of teaching procedures, teaching materials and resources, mobility.

RESULTS
- Efficacy of teaching, understanding of positive or negative results.

IMPROVEMENT
- Proposed methods for improvement.

C. Research
APPROACH
- Research policy and main objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION
- Research promotion and assessment, quality of support and infrastructure.

RESULTS
- Research projects and collaborations, scientific publications and applied results.

IMPROVEMENT
- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH
- Quality and effectiveness of services provided by the Department.

IMPLEMENTATION
- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).

RESULTS
- Adequateness and functionality of administrative and other services.

IMPROVEMENTS
- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

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

- Short-, medium- and long-term goals and plans of action proposed by the Department.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- The development and present situation of the Department, good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process, recommendations for improvement.

External Evaluation Committee

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

1. **Dr. Christos Panayiotopoulos**, Associate Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy, University of Nicosia, Cyprus(Coordinator)

2. **Dr. Helen Phtiaka** , Associate Professor, Department of Education, University of Cyprus, University of Cyprus, Cyprus

3. **Dr. Mary Andrianopoulos**, Associate Professor, Department of Communication Disorders, University of Massachusetts, U.S.A.

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

Background. The Department of Early Childhood Education was founded in 1984 and it was one of the first three Departments at the University of Thessaly with its current chair located in the City of Volos. The University was given its current name in 2000 with ΦEK number 200/18-09-2000. The first elections for Head of the Department and Associate Head were held on the 10th of June, 2003. The University of Thessaly is in its 23rd year of operation. The Department of Early Childhood Education has 23 faculty members and three (3) administrative staff.

The Department has a very good reputation amongst the nine (9) Early Childhood Education Departments in Greece. According to statistical data, it ranks second in that prospective students select it as an educational system, entrance exam scores, and its competitiveness as a postgraduate degree program that admits only 20 graduate students among an applicant pool of approximately of 100 candidates. In addition, students choose to travel or commute long distances (i.e. Ioannina, Thessaloniki, Lamia, Trikala, Karditsa) to be enrolled in the Department at the University of Thessaly, which supports its popularity and reputation of a Department of Early Childhood Education.

The External Evaluation Procedure. The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) was comprised of three members:

> *Dr. Christos Panayiotopoulos*, Associate Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy, University of Nicosia, Cyprus (Coordinator)

> *Dr. Helen Phtiaka* , Associate Professor, Department of Education, University of Cyprus, University of Cyprus, Cyprus

> *Dr. Mary Andrianopoulos*, Associate Professor, Department of Communication Disorders, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, U.S.A.

On the morning of December 2, 2013, the EEC met for briefing-in and orientation at the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQA) offices in Athens. The EEC departed the HQA headquarters on that Monday and traveled via van to Volos, Greece, where they met with the members of the OMEA, the Head of the Department, the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, and the representative member of the Department in MODIP.

On the 3rd of December 2013, the EEC met with the entire faculty members in the Department. The faculty provided the EEC a brief overview of the Department's composition across all three (3) areas of study. The EEC had the chance to exchange views and ideas on how the site visit can be improved or even strengthened so that it includes an adequate question and answer period, visit to the University's Library, and a set of meetings with current students and alumni.

During the site visits (2-4/12/2013), the EEC toured the Early Childhood Education

Department, the central University Library, classrooms, and staff offices in the Department. The two-day site visit included tours of all the laboratories (i.e. Language and Culture, practicum, etc.) in the Department of Early Childhood Education. In addition, the EEC met with administrative staff and the Dean of the School.

The EEC was provided the following documents for their review.

The *Internal Evaluation report* focused on three areas: 1) the objectives of the curriculum; 2) faculty research productivity and; 3) the Department's contribution to the community. This report concluded with a discussion of the Department's short- and long-term goals, which took into consideration the current difficulties facing the Department and University across all levels.

At the EEC's request, the Department provided updated faculty *curriculum vitae*; course syllabi and a flash drive for each EEC member of their power point presentations presented on 03/12/2013.

The EEC wants to thank the Department of Early Childhood Education for its generous hospitality and supportive nature during the entire site visit.

The Internal Evaluation Procedure. It was evident to the EEC that the Department invested much time in preparation of the site visit, the preceding Internal Evaluation report and all other aspects of the internal evaluation process. The EEC commends the faculty for their meticulous preparation of this evaluation, particularly in the context of demanding schedules, their limited time and resources. The Internal Evaluation report was well organized, appropriately formatted in structure and comprehensive in that it provided detailed information regarding the Department's operation and goals. This document, in conjunction with the additional documentation provided to the committee, enabled the EEC to gain a deeper understanding of content that was presented and discussed during the first day (03/12) of the visit.

Moreover, the presentation given by all faculty and the extensive tours of all the Departmental facilities provided the EEC a clearer picture of what has been achieved by the Department over the last few years. Furthermore, the interviews conducted with administrative staff helped the EEC to better understand the roles and responsibilities of the auxiliary staff and permanent faculty. In total, the documents, interviews and tours enabled the committee to visualize how the Department operates and the viability and applicability the EEC's recommendations.

Overall, the EEC believes that the objectives of the Internal Evaluation report and the Department's evaluation processes were met. The EEC achieved its charge and gained a good understanding of the Department's strengths and weaknesses.

| **A. Curriculum** |
| *To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.* |

APPROACH

Since the foundation of the Department in 1988, the undergraduate studies programme has been modified five (5) times. Moreover, the current curriculum programme has been based on the results of the Internal Evaluation of the Department, an extensive and comprehensive procedure that was completed at the end of the year 2010.

Goals and Objectives: The Department's Internal Evaluation report clearly helped to identify the overall goals and objectives of the programme. In particular, the Department's curriculum is providing its students with a variety of learning and critical thinking opportunities that will enable them to become more efficient, competent and reflective professionals. This site visit enabled the EEC to better understand the curriculum's goals and objectives, which the committee believes are consistent with the Department's stated objectives and the needs of the contemporary society.

Although it was evident to the EEC that there are no well-established procedures for monitoring the Department's curriculum, the Internal evaluation report (p.14) indicates that the Department has established a Curriculum Steering Committee, which consists of seven (7) faculty members, one (1) member of administrative staff, and one (1) student. The Curriculum Steering Committee meets on a regular basis (once a month). Faculty send proposals to this committee via email, the final proposals are discussed and agreed upon by the annual department council, and are implemented during the next academic year. While the program is currently measured by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the EEC believes that ECTS per module should be modified. For example, courses that count 3-4 ECTS should be changed to 5-6 ECTS. This change will allow room to restructure the Department's curriculum to consist of fewer modules with more credits (please the implementation section of this section).

Despite the above noted issues with the ECTS, there is ample evidence that the Department has designed a rich, comprehensive and student-centred program of studies that address a wide range of relevant topics (psychology, sociology, arts, pedagogy).

Furthermore, the Department's curriculum meets the related needs of the local community where the Department's graduates will be working in multicultural settings and environments. Of particular note are Department's efforts to develop a deeper understanding and effective instructional strategies for students who want to use arts in their educational practices and lesson plans (e.g., music, puppet, use of technology, etc.).

Postgraduate Programme

In addition to the undergraduate degree, the Department has a postgraduate degree programme entitled, ''Pedagogical toys and educational material in first age''. This

programme aims at providing specialised knowledge on designing, using and evaluating educational materials and toys.

It is important to note that this programme's concentration is the only one that exists in Greece, thus making it attractive to those who want to follow an applied orientation.

Goals and Objectives

The Department's goals and objectives are met as stated on the dedicated website. The EEC also believes that there is a clear concentration on the aster programme, which is reflected in the Department's curriculum too.

There is a strong research component in the postgraduate master's programme that includes two research modules and a postgraduate thesis. The postgraduate programme has produced 80 master's theses in the last 5 year. As a result, a number of innovative educational materials and toys are part of the classroom teaching.

In addition, the postgraduate programme has produced a plethora of scientific publications, conference presentations and a number of students who have graduated from this master's programme were admitted as doctoral students in other Greek Universities.

Similar to the Master's postgraduate programme, the **Doctoral programme** has no lessons taught in its curriculum or introductory bridge courses for those students who have no previous knowledge with early childhood education. The Doctoral programme currently has 52 students who have been enrolled since 2008.

IMPLEMENTATION

The EEC believes that the Department's goals and objectives are being implemented effectively, particularly in the following five areas:

1. There is a coherent academic rationale for the content and order in which courses are offered;
2. Technology and e-learning material in a number of courses (23) are effectively incorporated either into classroom instruction or through the e-class gate;
3. Particular faculty employ a wide variety of instructional methods to deliver course content such as making puppets, use of musical instruments and outdoor activities, etc..
4. Students are actively engaged in a wide range of learning experiences as noted above that require and enhance critical thinking skills and community involvement.
5. Students are assessed regularly using multiple methods (e.g., exams, written essays, portfolios) that demonstrate a deep understanding of the content.
6. The goals and objectives of the postgraduate programme are almost met through the implementation of the master's degree curriculum.

The EEC notes that while a course outline is provided at the initial class meeting, the template of the outline needs to be consistent across all courses and should include basic information for students (Please see Improvements section).

Practicum

The practicum section of the undergraduate curriculum begins during the 3rd semester and ends during the 8th semester. There is a break in practicum during the 7th semester. Throughout the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th semesters students complete two (2) direct observations and attend two (2) recorded teaching sessions. During these four (4) semesters, students are supervised and supported by seconded nursery teachers. The EEC feels that students' attendance and participation in class needs to be strengthened. For example, students can potentially spend a week per semester rather than a few hours during their practicum, as is currently the practice. Thus, students will have time to observe and address issues that will help them better understand and experience the difficulties and challenges of being a nursery teacher.

Moreover, the EEC was informed that in 2013-2014 this practice would not occur due to fiscal constraints. As a result, the Department must make adjustments and devote much of their time organizing, scheduling and supervising students. The EEC strongly recommends that the Department put in place a contingency plan to support student practicum experiences by either continuing their practice that is currently in place or by involving master's level graduate students on a voluntary basis to assist in this process.

It is important to note that the Department offers the students the opportunity to work in a nursery school close to their home residence on a paid basis (approximately 200€ per month). This opportunity is possible before the students graduate. This specific project extends from the 2009 to 2015 years and aims to employ approximately 355 students.

Postgraduate Programme

The Master's programme, which has a focus of designing educational materials, tends to attract students with professional educational experiences whom are more mature and have specific professional goals in mind. Based on information provided to the EEC by the Department's current and former master's students whom have completed this programme, they explored several other options before they chose to enrol in this programme. This speaks highly of the Department and its unique curriculum that is available to prospective graduate students in the community and within the Hellenic Republic.

The EEC believes that the Master's programme should offer their students the choice of earning a Master's degree with or without having to complete and submit a thesis. In the later case, students should complete two more modules to complete their programme. On the other hand, the EEC recommends that the Department's curriculum for the doctoral level degree programme should include additional courses in advanced

research methodology (e.g., Advanced Statistics, etc.), so that introductory courses can be bridged for those students who do not have an education or relevant background. The EEC anticipates that these curriculum changes may either reduce the number of prospective doctoral students who may be at risk of not completing their doctoral programmes or may increase the enrollment of doctoral students with academic promise since their degree programme will be more structured.

RESULTS

In general, the EEC believes that the Department is achieving its goals remarkably well and commends the Department for delivering high-quality instruction under challenging circumstances (e.g., lack of funding, resources, staff, etc.). The EEC also believes that the Department needs to plan carefully for its next steps (e.g., practicum, reduction of courses and the increase of ECTS per course) given reports of imminent austerity measures since more resources, such as staff and financial) will be reduced in size. In addition, the EEC offers in this document a set of suggestions that if implemented, the Department may run more efficiently and effectively given the current financial constraints on its service delivery, student monitoring, advising and mentoring, and dissemination of information on a larger scale.

IMPROVEMENT

Based on the EEC's observations, its examination of materials and discussions with faculty, staff and administrative personnel, they offer the following suggestions:

- While the EEC commends the Department for the great job that they are doing under these exceptional circumstances, the committee also recommends that an assessment process be implemented more often within the Department, which includes evaluation of **specific indexes** related to the number of scholarly publications, research involvement of students, student evaluations, external recognition opportunities via international collaborations and funding opportunities.

- Although it is clear that faculty use an outline to plan and deliver instruction, the EEC recommends that the Department create **a template** that will provide uniform formatting and assessment (e.g., aims, objectives, learning outcomes, content of subjects, evaluation measures that include the weight of each assessment measure, and current references).

- The **Master programme** needs to provide the opportunity to those who do not want to conduct a master thesis. In addition, in the **Doctoral** programme, it is recommended the insertion of advanced research methods' modules and bridge courses during the first 1-2 years that will be very beneficial to those doctoral students who do not have an educational or relevant background. It is anticipated that this will reduce the attrition rate of students by engaging them in more structured studies within the Department.

- The current programme provides a wealth of courses in a variety of subjects

(Education, Psychology and Sociology, History, Language and Literature, positive sciences and technology, Arts and Civilisation). Although the EEC committee recommends an increase of **ECTS** per course from 3-4 to 5-6, this new and more structured curriculum will be comprised of fewer courses and a more comprehensive plan of study that will be less analytical as it is currently.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

It is definitely an advantage to the students since the faculty and staff are whole heartily dedicated to their teaching, which contributes to the climate within the Department. The faculty have completely embraced the objectives of their programme that is focused on early childhood education. They have built around this plan of study a rich and well-balanced curriculum to serve the needs of their students.

The topics taught are highly relevant to the Department's aims and the skills required for teachers in early childhood education. The faculty and staff are approachable, willing, eager, and able to help students with their inquiries and needs at any time. The atmosphere in the Department seems to be very positive and comfortable between faculty, staff and students, despite the progressive increase in a large number of students. Here are some comments provided by the students during the site visit:

Ελένη: *Είναι ένα γεμάτο πρόγραμμα σπουδών. Έχουμε πρόσβαση σε πολλά διαφορετικά αντικείμενα. Επίσης έχουμε πρόσβαση σε εργασίες και συνεπώς επιτυγχάνουμε σε βάθος κατανόηση.*

Μαρία: *Οι καθηγητές χρησιμοποιούν βιωματικούς τρόπους μάθησης, κυρίως στις τέχνες. Έτσι επιτυγχάνεται μια συσχέτιση θεωρίας και πράξης.*

Νικολέττα: *Έχουμε μια δημοκρατική αντιμετώπιση από τους καθηγητές. Έτσι μαθαίνουμε κι εμείς πως να διδάξουμε τα παιδιά και να είμαστε το ίδιο κι εμείς.*

Αντωνία: *Οι καθηγητές μας δεν περιορίζονται μόνο στο διδακτικό κομμάτι. Κάνουν έρευνα και άλλες δραστηριότητες. Συνεργάζομαι με τον καθηγητή μου. Έχουμε μια ομάδα μουσικής που δουλεύει αυτοσχεδιαστικά. Έχουμε κάνει και κάποιες παραστάσεις στο Βόλο, έχουμε προσφέρει μουσική και σε άλλους ανθρώπους.*

Students also feel they can trust their teachers for everything that bothers them with respect to courses, choices for elective subjects, job prospects or the potential for post-graduate studies, including personal issues as they arise.

Such a climate is conducive to learning and teaching within the Department.

As much as the EEC was able to assess, each faculty member in the Department teaches 1-2 obligatory (required) courses. As a result, their classes are comprised of very large audiences, at least 160 students a class, based on student enrollment data. However, in actuality there are students from previous years that have failed classes since only half or even less of these students attend class for reasons mainly related to the

students' personal situation (e.g., place of living, current work situation, etc.). The student's failure of courses may also be due to the Greek tradition in higher education, which has historically accepted 'visitor students' by not enforcing obligatory presence in theoretical courses.

All things considered, the absenteeism of approximately half of the students enrolled in the large courses seems to better accommodate the remaining cohort of students who actually attend class on a regular basis since the physical size of the classrooms cannot easily accommodate the full cohort of students enrolled in the course. This situation enforces the concept of frontal teaching in these large introductory courses, which allows for very little opportunity for maneuvering.

However, the same cannot be said for the smaller elective courses. The smaller number of students in the elective courses makes it more manageable for faculty as this allows for the opportunity to use alternative teaching methods, such as team teaching, group collaboration, working in pairs, etc. The EEC acknowledges that the number of students enrolled in a course and the size of the classroom to seat every student enrolled in the course is crucial to teaching and that the attendance problem and drop out rate of some students is not due to the teaching staff themselves.

Apart from the large numbers of students, there are other practical concerns that need to be noted by the EEC, such as the actual infrastructure and shortage of available and appropriate classrooms, the poor condition of the desks, chairs and classrooms, and the scheduling of the large classrooms to accommodate large student numbers. There also seems to be a lack of flexibility in teaching arrangements, which discourages the use of alternative teaching techniques even when the student numbers allow for it.

Teaching Approach and Methodology.

Information technology is used increasingly more often, particularly by younger faculty, which is typical given the more recent boom in technology in the past decade. The students are familiar with e-learning and they receive an increasingly large proportion of their teaching material through the internet. Students also use these technologies, such as email and e-learning, for other purposes as well, such as to communicate with their teachers and ask questions and access assorted material related to their class, etc..

In terms of examinations, students in the large obligatory courses are evaluated through a final written examination. However, students in smaller courses are evaluated via project work, which on occasion also functions as preparation for an undergraduate thesis. In these cases, teacher-student collaborations are fostered; students are closer to faculty and more productive. Furthermore, students seem to also feel safe, the teachers are confident in the process and in their students' success.

All faculty assert that their research work feeds into their teaching in more than one way. Through research they update their own and their students' knowledge and they renew their material. Sadly this is not reflected in the general University Library

collection as the EEC witnessed first hand since we books have not been ordered for at least the past three (3) years due to lack of funds and resources. The current collections at the Library are old and tattered. Fortunately, the smaller departmental collections available in the Department's labs facilitate a quick and easy access and appear to fill this gap. One wonders; however, whether such small collections would be better utilised in the general University Library that has a multitude of excellent study areas, rooms and other resources that are under-utilised.

The creation and production of teaching material is one of the Department's strengths. Indeed, the EEC purports that these pieces of work and creations (that they saw during the site visit) are genuinely unique among Greek Universities. This is an example of how the graduate programme in the Department builds on its faculty's strength and trains and encourages students in this direction. The sheer quantity and quality of the material produced is impressive! It is, among others, this feature that defines the Department and its distinction as an Early Childhood Education programme.

It is the EEC's view that all the scholarly and creative works mentioned above need to be publicly known and appreciated by the professional and scholarly community-at-large. The EEC believes that the mechanism to achieve this is only with an increase in mobility. To date, mobility of faculty is rather limited, as is among the students. The reasons stated to the EEC for the lack of mobility are related to the knowledge of foreign languages and potential financial hardship on the students' family. Although the EEC feels that these are all valid reasons, the committee believes that an increase in the mobility among faculty and students needs to be encouraged and fostered, as this will be a valuable experience for all parties.

Students did not register negative feedback or concerns regarding about the faculty's teaching or teaching materials. On the contrary, students expressed that they were pleased and delighted with the teaching materials provided and the manner in which they were presented to them.

With respect to the undergraduate programme, the graduation rate of students is satisfactory since the vast majority of students successfully complete the program in approximately 8 to 9 semesters. However, the same cannot be said of the post-graduate programme in the Department.

In the Master's programme, the students' performance in course work is satisfactory, including high grades in courses; however, there is a significantly decline in the students' performance and their ability to complete the Master's programme once they begin their graduate thesis work. At this juncture, there seems to be a significant collapse in the continuity of the students' programme. Based on student report and the timeline noted in the Master's curriculum for completing the thesis, the breakdown seems to be due to the actual amount of time allocated in the curriculum for a conducting a thesis and the timeline required for its completion.

For example, the current curriculum in the Master's programme only has one semester allocated for conducting and completing a thesis. It is the EEC's opinion that two (2)

semesters are necessary at minimum for students to realistically conduct and complete a thesis. The Department recognises this short-coming in their Master's programme, including the fact that fees are not charged for the loss of a 5th semester. However, from the 6th semester onward, students are required to start paying fees again to complete their Master's programme. Although this may appear logical in some respects, the EEC purports that the loss of the 5th semester upsets the balance and continuity between the student and the Department and their ability to complete the Master's programme. This set of circumstances sets a precedence and conveys to students that it acceptable for rules to be broken and deadlines not to be kept by not completing their thesis in a timely order. The EEC believes that this grace period, which absolves students from paying fees during their 5th semester, systemically frees students of their obligation to complete the thesis in a timely fashion and contributes to such a culture among students and the University. As a result, a number of students in the Master's programme neither complete their thesis nor the master's degree. This contributes to an attrition of masters' level graduate students that are so close to the completion of their academic program. If the number of these students would increase, the graduation rate in the Master's programme could decline with possible dangers for both the Department's and the University's reputation.

A similar situation, yet of greater magnitude, is evident of the Doctoral programme. The lack of scholarships, funding and resources available to faculty for research and doctoral studies, including restrictions as a result of geographical factors support that: 1) doctoral students frequently live a long distance away from the University and have great difficulty attending meetings with their faculty advisors and mentors, including seminars and meetings intended for doctoral students; 2) they typically need to work full time for practical reasons; and 3), they have very little time available for study and research.

The lack of a formal structure in the Doctoral programme suggests that the students are very much isolated from the start to the end of their journey as doctoral students. This situation is not a factor attributed to the faculty and their role as mentors (per doctoral student report during the site visit), but more a function of the three (3) items stated in the previous paragraph.

As a result, doctoral students experience a significant delay in completing their dissertation and the Doctoral programme in the Department. Departmental statistics reported in the Internal evaluation report and in tables presented in a PowerPoint presentation during the site visit, indicate that there were approximately 51- 52 'active' doctoral students enrolled during the 2012-2013 academic year. However, the number of graduate students that successfully complete the doctoral programme annually is significantly less. Moreover, there are indicators that a large number of doctoral students are no longer really active in the pursuit of completing their doctoral degree and indeed, many do not ever complete their doctorate degree. There is a significant attrition of doctoral' level graduate students that are so close to completing their academic programmes, yet never do.

Of note is an example of doctoral student who managed to complete her doctoral degree in an expeditious manner. During a meeting comprised of a cohort of

undergraduate, post-graduate (Master's) and Doctoral students and the EEC, a doctoral student reported that she had just completed her doctoral degree over a course of three years. The doctoral student indicated that she received a three-year scholarship and that she attributed the promptness of completing her doctorate to this reason. She spoke very highly of the scholarship program and the fact that it enabled her to concentrate full-time on her research work without any distractions and interruptions. This example exemplifies that funding opportunities and scholarships to support doctoral students is a strong prognostic indicator for the timely completion of the doctoral thesis.

The Department reported in their Internal evaluation report that this is one shortcoming in the area of educating and teaching doctoral students and that they are currently taking measures in this direction. We commend the faculty for their efforts in rectifying the current situation. In the section that follows, we provide a set of suggestions:

IMPLEMENTATION

Undergraduate studies

The EEC's rationalization to re-examine the number of courses offered in the Department, including the content of these courses, with a parallel increase if 3,5 to 5 or 6 ECTS, is one mechanism to address the issues noted in previous sections. This will produce courses, which reflect better the needs of the students (including both the content and pedagogy of courses). In addition, a decrease in the number of course will free up faculty time for graduate teaching and research.

Better use of e-learning opportunities will allow for: a) better and quicker access to course and supplemental materials by the students, especially for those who live far away; and b) more flexibility and redistribution of time commitments for academic faculty and administrative staff time from the current routine procedures to more creative methods that yield productive outcomes. Based information provided to the EEC during the interview session with the graduate students, a number of graduate students do not undertake the thesis as they are neither fully aware on the procedures and mechanisms to conduct a thesis, nor are they familiar with research methodologies to execute and complete a thesis.

Postgraduate studies

Masters' degree

The EEC recommends an alternative scenario so that students can have the option to execute and complete a Master's thesis or not. This will allow the majority of graduate students the option for the all-course scenario (and no thesis), thus allowing those graduate students who are truly interested in undertaking the thesis option. The prognostic outcome of this modification to the Master's degree is that it will ensure that these motivated graduate students are more apt to complete the thesis. Moreover, this

will decrease the number of graduate students who do not complete their degree on time within the 1-2 year period.

In addition, allowing for two semesters rather than one semester for the completion of the Master's thesis in the programme will also ensure that the graduate students will stay abreast of the timelines and deadlines for completing their Master's degree. This change will make the whole process more efficient. Faculty time will also be freed from trying to meet the demands of graduate students who do not have the potential or time of completing the thesis requirement of the Master's programme.

Moreover, these structural changes to the curriculum will provide faculty more time and opportunities to offer of a second, and possibly more theoretical Master's courses. At present, it appears that many faculty members are rather under-utilised in the Master's programme.

Doctoral programme.

At the current time, the Doctoral programme appears to be the weakest link in the Department's teaching mission and programme. This is clearly apparent due to the poor completion and graduation rate of doctoral students.

A more structured doctoral programme comprised of some more required courses in the first two or three semesters of the Doctoral programme will enable be instrumental in keeping the students in closer contact with the Department, especially during the early portion of the degree program when students feel lost and isolated. This change will not only keep the doctoral students more grounded, but it will provide them the encouragement to continue in their degree programme. This will allow for better mentoring of doctoral students by their faculty advisors and will also assist in better monitoring and ensuring a higher rate of success and completion of the doctoral degree. Moreover, this will also enable the doctoral students to stay in touch with other doctoral students and will foster a stronger sense of belonging to a peer group. Doctoral students will be able to network and support each other and thus, this will alleviate their feelings of loneliness and isolation. This networking system will also assist them with any questions they have about research and suggestions for getting their work done.

An oral examination in the form of a presentation of their theoretical work is an absolute must in the doctoral student's degree in that it will provide both the student and the supervising faculty member, as well as the Department, the opportunity to opt out of this relationship if it simply is not working. Occasionally, this can happen either because the student has changed their mind about their degree programme, or their life conditions have changed. As such, doctoral students are unable or unwilling to invest the time needed to complete the degree. The oral presentation can be offered in the presence of a three member doctoral committee and can also be attended by other doctoral and Masters' graduate students as a learning experience.

These procedures and milestones are the building blocks needed to slowly, but steadily engage students into a research culture that is very much required in the Department.

These activities and milestones will not only improve the completion rate of the doctoral degree, but will also foster greater efficiency and efficacy in the Department's mission in teaching and research. This will also provide members of the Department the opportunity to participate in research with their doctoral students and reduce the inefficient use of faculty time in chasing students that have disengaged a long ago. In addition, research publications, scholarly products, grant proposals, and conference presentations are deemed to increase since faculty will have the opportunity to build on active, dedicated and motivated doctoral students.

In conclusion, improving the structure of the Doctoral programme will significantly improve the Department's Research profile in many ways.

Evaluation Measures

Most of the courses in the graduate program are assessing students through a variety of evaluation methods. A number of faculty are using examinations, assignments, classroom presentations, and a portfolio for practicum experiences, including student feedback.

RESULTS

Overall, the faculty's clear commitment to their students reflect solid results that attest to the effectiveness of some of the methods that they are currently employing to assess student performance and outcomes.

IMPROVEMENT

The EEC feels that there are a wealth of examination measures across the whole spectrum to evaluate student performance and outcomes. Nonetheless, the EEC recommends that students be made aware of the thesis project earlier in their curriculum, so that they can plan ahead and adjust their academic course load and personal commitments accordingly to meet the demands of the master's thesis.

The committee recommends that the Department organize clear guidelines on how to write and complete a thesis project that includes the number of words that are allowed in the thesis (e.g., 13,000) on an individual basis or when in pairs (i.e. 18,000). In an effort to create a research environment, the EEC suggests that the Department organize an "Inter-Departmental" event where a number of thesis projects are presented amongst school faculty and students, so that the work being done is shared and disseminated with other students and faculty in other disciplines and departments. This will also foster a research culture within the Department.

The committee also recommends that faculty implement a more systematic means to better advise and stay in contact with students on an ongoing basis, including the use of more effective and efficient electronic mechanisms (e.g., website resource pages, email listservs, etc.) to better disseminate basic advising information and resources for their student body.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

One important objective of the Department is to support and promote research. According to the Department's Internal evaluation report, there are no structured policies in place on a Departmental or Institutional level regarding research expectations of faculty on an annual basis. However, faculty recognize the importance of being active in research on several levels via refereed and non-refereed journal publications, conferences presentations and proceedings, books, book chapters, quarterly publications, and interdepartmental collaborations. Based on the information provided via a PowerPoint presentation during the site visit, the statutory authority governing the work of faculty members, the Department is supposed to conduct scientific research and submit publications of their scientific work by implementing both funded research programs or non-funded research projects of small and medium scale (at local and/or international levels).

Faculty try to utilize any resources available to them through the University and on a national level to support their research. However, most research that is conducted is unfunded. There is no structured mechanism in place to integrate post-graduate masters and doctoral students in research; however, a subset of faculty have been successful in recruiting and engaging masters and doctoral students in their research agendas with and without funding. The Department strives to link teaching to research and research to practice; however, this process is implemented on an individual basis.

Internal Standards for Assessing Research

As previously stated, there are no formal Departmental or Institutional requirements or mechanisms in place regarding expected annual requirements or milestones for research productivity. However, faculty summarize their research accomplishments on an annual basis, which is reviewed centrally by the Research Committee. The Department's research accomplishments are disseminated on their website at the University of Thessaly.

IMPLEMENTATION

Research is promoted through dissemination of research and other scholarly activities on the Department's website, through informal emails sent to faculty by the Research Committee at the University of Thessaly and through informative emails sent to faculty by the Research Committee and the State. According to data presented in a PowerPoint presentation during the site visit, faculty pursue the following funding agencies to support their research agendas: 1) Research Committee of the University of Thessaly; 2) General Secretariat for Research and Technology (GSRT); 3) National

Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF); 4) Community Support Framework; 5) Comenius Lifelong Learning Program; 6) Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, and 7) Foundations/Institutes

Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support

Research opportunities in the Department are significantly compromised due to the economic situation on local and national levels. The lack of research funds for faculty has been significantly cut over the past several years, which requires that the faculty conduct their research agendas with no funding or use of their own personal money or resources. Infrastructure for research is limited and outdated. Not all faculty have laboratories in the Department. There are only six (6) laboratories as follows: 1) Department of Literature and Culture (Language Direction and Literature of Children's Books; 2) Laboratory of Developmental Psychology and Psychopathology; 3) Laboratory of Theoretical and Applied Pedagogy; 4) Laboratory of Science and Technology (Unit in Education in Science and Environment, Unit in Learning and Technology in Education Mathematics, and Unit in Technologies of Information and Communication; 5) Laboratory of Sociology of Education; and 6) Department of Museum Education and Research. There are no scholarships or research funds to support Master's or Doctoral students to assist faculty with their research or to spin-off graduate student theses.

Scientific publications

According to the Department's Internal Evaluation report and information presented during the site visit, a total of 878 of publications and presentations have been produced during the 2008 to 2012 period. A breakdown of these scientific activities include: Books / monographs (n=40); Papers in refereed journals (n=180); Papers in journals without referees (n=6); Papers in refereed scientific conferences (n=185); Proceedings of scientific conferences without judges (n=13); Chapters in edited volumes (n=105); Other works (n=92); and Conference Presentations not issuing Minutes (Conferences, n=224, Conferences without judges, n=33). Approximately 50% of all these publications and research activities were in foreign languages. This translates to an average of approximately 1.5 refereed journal publications per faculty member annually. It is not clear to the EEC if the Papers in refereed journals (n=180) include published refereed conference proceedings, which a closer examination of the bibliography suggests of the Department's scholarly works. Papers presented in scientific conferences (n-185) are numerous; however, the mobility of faculty to present at scientific conferences is limited due to economic factors and limited resources that support professional travel among faculty.

A subset of faculty members have been more prolific in disseminating their research findings in refereed scholarly journals and other scholarly venues. Of note is that there has been an increase by approximately 10-15% in research publications and faculty participation in research activities over the past two (2) years. In addition, during the past two (2) to three (3) years, there has been an increase in published refereed journal

articles.

Research projects

The faculty have participated in competitive international research programs mainly as participants (n=13) during the 2008-2013 period. In addition, faculty members with funding from international bodies or research organizations increased significantly over the past two (2) years. A total of four (4) faculty or four faculty collaborations in funded research were noted during the 2011-2013 period.

Research collaborations

According to the Department's Internal-evaluation report and PowerPoint presentations during the site visit, faculty engage in inter-departmental collaborations with both Pedagogical Departments and the Department of Architecture at the University Thessaly. In addition, the faculty engage in inter-collegial research collaborations with approximately 24 international institutions from around the world. Please see Table 2 in the Appendix Section.

The Department also collaborates with various Greek institutions. For example, during the academic year 2012-2013 the Department has collaborated with the following institutions: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Department of Music, Department of Theatre), University of the Aegean (Department of Cultural Technology and Communication, Museology Laboratory), University of Athens, Greek Open University, Democritus University of Thrace, University of Patras, University of Peloponnese, University of Crete, and the University of Ioannina.

RESULTS

Scientific publications

According to the information provided in the Department's Internal evaluation report and during the site visit, the number of publications by year per faculty in the Department are listed in Table 1. (Please refer to Table 1 in the Appendix section for details.)

Research projects

As previously mentioned, faculty have engaged in a number of internally and externally funded and unfunded research collaborations and projects. For example, based on data reported in the Department's Internal evaluation report, during the 2011 – 2012, faculty participated in 20 national or international programs, six (6) institutional or departmental scientific programs and as members on research committees and programs for 29 venues. The Department's Research Committee's website provides a list of funded research projects, activities and educational programs that have been

implemented or have been evolving during the last five years. The Department engages in three strands of research as follows: 1) the study of diverse learning contexts from different perspectives; 2) pedagogical approaches to issues of everyday school life; and 3) understanding of childhood and youth through a variety of scientific approaches.

Research collaborations

As noted previously, the Department has engaged in a number of collaborations on a University, national and international level. (Please see Table 1 and previous sections.)

The Department has been instrumental in organizing scientific workshops and conferences that are open to both the public and professional groups, including parents, teachers, professionals in Mental Health, Education, and other disciplines.

Efficacy of Research and Application of Results

Based on information disseminated at the site visit, the Department utilizes are variety of research designs and methodologies to empirically assess the efficacy and evidence-based practice of their research. Research approaches include both Qualitative and Quantitative methods. Qualitative research approaches include: Content Analysis; Experimental methods; Relational and Correlational Contextual Analyses; and Technical surveys. Quantitative and more empirically approaches include: Critical Discourse Analysis; Content Analysis; Archival research; Arts-based research; Single Subject Case Studies; Ethnographies; Action Research; and Experimental Research Design Experiments.

To date, the Department does not have any patents.

Impact and Visibility Outside the Department

The faculty have been recognized for their research and professional contributions to their professions and community-at-large with respect to citations, specific and scientific reports, book publications, participation in scientific committees at conferences, editorial boards of scientific, scholarly journals, invitations to lecture, patents, and reviewers of scientific journals, awards, and honorary titles. The ratio of citations per faculty member is approximately 11 per year. It is impressive to note that the Department's scholarly publications have been cited in 1259 instances. (Please see Table 1 in the Appendix Section.)

With respect to funding resources, due to economic factors, research awards and research funding are meagre to non-existent at the Departmental, University and within the Hellenic Republic. Funding is typically disseminated to faculty-at-large based on the Department's annual budget, which is minimal.

The Department organizes scientific workshops and conferences that are open to social and professional groups, such as parents, teachers, professionals in mental health, etc. In addition, faculty members collaborate with social institutions to disseminate their research findings and increase public awareness of scientific issues that have a broader social interest (i.e., environmental education,

racial/ethnic issues) using the social media such as the national press, media and radio broadcasts.

IMPROVEMENT

As noted in the Department's Internal evaluation report and information disseminated during the site visit, faculty indicated that greater involvement of Masters and Doctoral graduate students is necessary to better mentor student scholars through their research. Faculty also indicated that despite the lack of incentives through grant funding, the Department should undertake a more initiatives.

Despite the significant lack of research funding and research infrastructure, the Department has shown a 10-15% increase in research publications and scholarly products in the past two (2) to three (3) years. Moreover, during the past two (2) years, a larger number of publications have been refereed journal articles. In addition, during the past two (2) years faculty have participated in 20 domestic and international programs, 6 institutional or departmental programs, and 29 research programs, to name some.

The EEC recommends that the level of productivity in research, especially in refereed scientific journals, should be an emphasis among all faculty in the Department that educates and graduates Masters and Doctoral students in a University setting. The implementation in those suggestions provided by the EEC in the previous sections (e.g., 2-semesters for Master's thesis, the Inter-Departmental research day and seminar series for Doctoral Students, etc.) will foster a research culture in the Department.

The EEC also recommends that Master's and Doctoral theses include spin-off research studies that are an extension of the faculty member's research agendas. This will allow for the natural proliferation of research studies conducted in the Department.

It is also suggested that faculty in the Department develop a mentoring system amongst themselves and their graduate students, including networking with colleagues at other universities on an international level, so that the Department builds on its strengths and has a greater impact on the scientific community-at-large. For example, some faculty are more active and successful in publishing refereed journal articles and serving as participants on inter-collegial grant awards. This will enhance the research culture in the Department and increase scientific deliverables.

It is suggested that faculty members seek out any resources available to them, such as through the University or other scientific clearing houses that may help them target potential grant competitions to which they can submit grant proposals. Despite the low success rate due to intense competition for landing a grant, the EEC encourages faculty to persevere and not become discouraged since the judges' (reviewer's) feedback is very valuable.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

Administrative Procedures

It appears that the Department has not yet developed a policy to simplify all procedures. Such a measure would reduce the enormous workload of the few administrative staff (3) that are responsible for meeting the unit's needs. This creates problems with students regarding academic matters and the dissemination of handouts and other materials.

The EEC felt that despite their limited resources and financial restraints, the administrative personnel have been efficient at managing an enormous workload. The secretaries all expressed concern about the possibility of losing a staff member because of the current cut backs in administrative personnel. It is important to note that the Master's programme is supported by a doctoral candidate. Moreover, the doctoral studies do not have any administrative support of any sort.

Student Presence on Campus

There appears to be no active policy to promote the students' presence on campus. The EEC observed that the physical structure itself does not create an attractive environment that might encourage a student presence on campus. The committee understands that this is due in large part to the limited resources for students (e.g., computer labs, student classrooms, etc.). Moreover, it appears that many of the classrooms do not lend themselves to interactive activities that would bring students to campus more often for a variety of purposes (e.g., lectures, clubs, athletics, etc.). The committee observed in once instance the lack of an Art and Music Lab where students can potentially play and perform in an environment that is conducive in the implementation of such courses.

IMPLEMENTATION

Administrative Organization and Infrastructure

The Department's current administrative staff seems to support the daily activities of the academic unit, which is operating in a borderline manner. The modernization of procedures, such the registration of courses, the use of electronic applications for the reimbursement for conferences, declaration and withdrawal of courses per semester and other day-to-day procedures, need to be provided in an electronic format. This will provide a more efficient, less time consuming and cost-effective mechanism for the Department and the University. The implementation of these changes will also foster a user-friendly environment.

With respect to serving the needs of their students regarding job opportunities, career development (e.g., resume workshops), student advising information, doctoral

dissertation guidelines, semester abroad opportunities (e.g., Erasmus), and other academic and professional resources, the EEC were informed by the undergraduate, post-graduate (Master's) and doctoral students that resources in this area are limited or disseminated in a limited capacity. It should be noted that the Department holds a seminar at the start of the fourth (4th) year for undergraduates in this capacity (e.g., resume writing, job opportunities, etc.); however, this information is not centralized or available electronically. To the knowledge of the EEC, neither a student handout nor guidelines for doctoral students for writing dissertations exist. However, there is a detailed guidelines text for master theses, which is available electronically on the Department's site. Opportunities available through the Erasmus organization are not disseminated in a centralized or organized fashion and as such, students do not benefit from these opportunities to study abroad. Most information disseminated regarding Erasmus opportunities is by word-of-mouth by students: many times this information is not accurate and distorted.

Infrastructure for Students

Despite the fact that the Department has a computer lab, students have limited access to this facility since there are significantly few resources to support staff to open and oversee the operations of the computer lab. Currently, a seconded teacher is managing the computer lab from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.; however, he has not been seconded due to economic constraints at the current time. The computer lab and the University are Wi-Fi accessible.

The EEC observed that faculty offices are well appointed and nearly every faculty member has his/her own office. This creates a positive academic environment that promotes research and academic productivity and encourages students to consult with individual faculty.

The committee was happy to see that the department has taken the initiative along with other departments to establish a service for supporting students with special needs (e.g., visual, cognitive and physical impairments). This service "ΠΡΟΣΒΑΣΗ" also provides these accommodations for the University-at-large. This is a progressive approach to promote the physical and educational access of students with special needs and it should be noted. What was particularly interesting to the EEC, is not only that this service is offered by the Department to the University through appointment of faculty and personnel, but that in this department help was provided to students with special needs before the establishment of "ΠΡΟΣΒΑΣΗ" as a University-based service. In the absence of funds, the Department uses student volunteers as assistants for students with special needs. They are assigned to a student with special needs and assist them in every respect of their academic life to help provide the accommodations needed, such as academic support, mobility, and socialization. This fosters friendships between students with and without special needs and helps them mature and acquire the skills necessary to work as educators. The Department has been fortunate to have access to the University Library, which is located a short distance from their buildings. The Library is a beautiful historical building that has been especially renovated for use within the University complex.

The physical structure of the Library building is indicative of a relatively young

University establishment that is proud of its heritage and history. It was evident to the EEC that there has been investment in the physical structure of the Library: its renovation and organization seems to be well planned and comprised of ample work stations that are conducive for studying, including rooms for seminars, conferences and teleconferencing. In addition, there are ample computer facilities in the Library with easy internet access. Indeed the Library is ideally located; a major asset to the University, and it is designed to be the epicenter of the thriving University of Thessaly.

However, it is important to note that there are some significant issues that are affecting the general operation, growth and development of the library. For example, the staff and all the other administrative staff at the University have been on strike during the last three months. As such, there is a systemic feeling of abandonment when one visits the Library in the current state of the economy.

The Library inventory, especially in the area of Education is impoverished, outdated, and unnecessarily duplicated with a multitude of copies of the same periodicals and books. The EEC was informed at the outset that the students at the University were not provided free books. Therefore, the Library was forced to provide a large number of copies to accommodate the students' needs. This explains the large number of duplicate copies that exist in the library and why they have not been reduced or replaced. Many of these duplicate copies are situated in the Library storage rooms. It is important to note that the Library has not received any funding or resources to update its books, periodicals and journals for the last three (3) years.

It was apparent to the EEC that the financial crisis has affected the University Library in many aspects not only for the investment in books, but in the number of staff to run its operation. To date, the Library has already lost four (4) staff members and the loss of another 17 staff are imminent throughout the University Library system on all four (4) cities where the University of Thessaly campuses are located. The EEC were also informed that such a significant loss in staff, the library will not be able to keep the current hours of operation. The library will have to function with only one shift as a result. The general cut in the Library resources also accounts for the lack of new printed material, specifically books, including other factors not described in this section.

The Department has a total of (6) laboratories. Each lab maintains its own equipment, usually purchased through research and other funds, including out-of-pocket expenses by faculty. The laboratory inventory and equipment includes a large number of books, which in contrast with the central University Library, are new, up-to-date and in single volumes. Following the EEC's inquiry, the committee was informed that these books need to remain in the Department's laboratories for student use. However, that if all these books were stocked in the central University Library: 1) the overall composition on the shelves would be entirely different; 2) the books would perhaps will be more accessible to the students as the central Library is currently open twelve hours a day (9 a.m. to 9 p.m.), while the labs in the Department are only open if and when there are faculty are available; 3) the books would be open and accessible to the students from all

three Education Departments at the University (this situation is not in place now; and 4) academic faculty would be freed of their present obligation to 'run' the labs in the absence of assisting staff.

If one considers that there are two more Departments of Education at the University, and if they too have approximately 4-5 labs each stocked with books and other materials, it appears that a large number of books and educational materials have very limited use due to their location within the University system.

In conclusion, the central Library at present appears to be very vulnerable due to a number of factors, which the EEC deemed to be completely unacceptable if it is serve its key purpose within the University system and the Department.

The EEC suggests that Library staff not be reduced any further in order to secure the current hours of operation and a high level of service. As such, the library will be in an excellent position to support both the Department of Early Education, the rest of the University system and the community-at-large in Volos.

IMPROVEMENTS

While services in general do appear to be minimally adequate, the EEC suggests that changes in a few areas within the Department will enhance the delivery of its services. The EEC acknowledges; however, that these suggestions can only be implemented with additional investment of funds and resources from either the University, external sponsors or the Hellenic Republic.

The EEC suggests the following improvements:

- During the EEC's meeting with students, it was clear that the Department has produced a number of enthusiastic alumni who are also effective communicators. We recommend the Department consider developing an official organization of alumni who can become "ambassadors" for the program and other undergraduate and graduate students. Not only will this be an effective recruitment tool, but it will also enable graduates to remain in contact with faculty and peers. As a result, graduates will also have a way to network and grow professionally.

- While the central Library currently has adequate hours of operation (9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.), it appears not to be well-equipped with textbooks and journals, especially updated materials. Therefore, the EEC recommends an increase in the number of Greek and English language texts and journals. We further recommend that the central Library expand its journal collections to include more of a focus on relevant educational and teacher preparation topics.

- The EEC also recommends the use of modern equipment and infrastructure within classrooms to promote an academic environment and facility that is conductive to classroom teaching and learning.

While the EEC has offered a number of suggestions to enhance the quality of the students' educational experiences, the committee commends the faculty and staff for their diligent and voluntary efforts to face the challenges of serving their students under these extraordinary circumstances and hardships. Furthermore, the EEC believes that some of the suggestions provided are the result of circumstances that cannot be resolved only at the Departmental or University level. These issues are largely in part due to a highly centralized educational system, both at the level of the University and Ministry, and the state of the economy.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

During interviews on the days of the site visit, both faculty and students described their involvement and link within the local community. In particular, the Department has organised a series of conferences (international and local) seminars and interventions within the community. More specifically the Department is collaborating with the following organisations:

- Local Orphanage,
- Schools and the Greek company for the support of children with special needs in Volos
- Institution of minor delinquents
- Roma and Migrants communities/unaccompanied minors
- Municipality of Volos/Local radio station
- Museums

The committee applauds the Department for all the above efforts to involve members of the local community through social and cultural activities.

Additionally, the Master programme is working closely with publishers and other organizations on projects that may enable the University to become a leader or resource of educational materials for nursery schools.

The Department acknowledges and appreciates, however, the difficulties (financial, lack of organisational structure, lack of space and lack of time) that may impede in all the above actions.

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.

Potential inhibiting factors at State, Institutional and Departmental levels, and proposals to overcome them

With respect to research, the Department noted the following hindrances that have had a negative impact on research productivity and growth and development as a unit: a) finances; b) unequal contributions of members in the Department in the dissemination of research scholarly products and deliverables; c) minimal participation of post-graduate (Masters0 and doctoral students in faculty research; d) support staff; e) inadequate research infrastructure (many faculty do not have laboratories and use their offices as laboratories); f) lack of resources to purchase library books and procurement of electronic databases; g) poor dialogue between doctoral candidates, and inadequate incentives, yet there is an adequate supportive framework for participation of female students and student research teams.

Taking in consideration that research strengthening is an issue closely related to time and resources, the EEC committee would like to highlight the need for the following changes (short-long term) in order for the strategic planning of the Department to occur in the years to come:

- **Restructuring** of the curriculum following the Bologna process (modules of 5-6 ECTS). The EEC is not necessarily suggesting that a totally new curriculum be considered, but supports the merging of courses that otherwise may offer less in depth knowledge. This will alleviate the time commitment and existing burden that electives (compulsory and free) put on the existing staff. (short term)
- The EEC feels there is a need for a **stronger theoretical** grounding across the curriculum. In particular, the committee believes that there is a need for students to be provided with a good theoretical background in order to develop critical thinking and skills.
- Strengthen the **practicum system** by using auxiliary staff and allow students to have more school experience in terms of participation.
- Both **postgraduate programmes** (Master's and Doctoral) need to explore better avenues for engaging students in research and in the culture of the Department daily, if possible. The committee recommends the insertion of advanced research methods courses in the Doctoral programme and bridge courses that will help students with no educational background to adapt to the new academic field. (short term)
- **Space** (classrooms, labs) needs to be better organized and equipped for the classroom needs. The space to be student and teaching friendly. (long term goal)

- Strengthening the collection of **journals and books** in the Library. (short term)
- **Maintain** the existing links with the community and use community resources (i.e. Roma community, Εταιρεία Προστασίας Παιδιών με Ειδικές Ανάγκες) for the benefit of the Department. (short-long term)

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC
For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

Conclusions. Overall, the EEC applauds the Department for their hard work, especially in the last few years to establish a presence in the local community. The committee further commends the faculty for the student-centred environment it has created.

Similarly, the EEC was impressed by the candidness and receptive attitude of faculty members, who were also receptive to new ideas and the EEC's suggestions.

In general, the EEC can state that the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Thessaly is a successful Education Department that fulfils its role as established.

The Department of Early Childhood consists of a very large undergraduate population of early childhood educators whose student body numbers are completely controlled by the government in the last few years, despite concerns expressed by the Department. Nevertheless, based on the EEC's observations the Department does its best to meet the needs of the Educational system, and it does so in an elegant and successful manner. The EEC's interviews with students, faculty and staff validate the committee's observations.

The students face no conflict between the career goals with which they enter the Department and the professional identity they acquire within the Department at the University. Indeed the undergraduate curriculum is well balanced with an emphasis on the practical aspects, as one would expect to find. In the event of a future programme reconstruction, it will be helpful to consider whether a more solid theoretical course background will be useful.

The Department's practice faces a serious challenge given the number of students it has enrolled in their programme and their constant management. However, students to not have enough exposure to school practicum experience. Paid school practice compensates for this inadequacy, but only a very small number of students will benefit from this paid practicum experience. The EEC suggests the following: a) to expand to larger numbers in their program, and b) that the paid externship be used as a model and mechanism that serves all school practice, if possible.

On a Postgraduate level, both Master's and Doctoral programmes, require structural changes that are necessary in order for the faculty and the students to maximise their potential, as suggested in section B.

Teaching methods are adequate and often innovative, with a respectable use of information technology. Approximately one third of all courses offered are e-courses, and the tendency appears to be for these numbers to be increased.

Faculty and student mobility is low and further encouragement needs to be offered to both students and faculty to utilise existing opportunities, such as Erasmus. This will not add to the Department's or the University's budget. The Eramus opportunity will mobilize a number of possibilities for both participating programs with Eramus. This opportunity is also expected to have a direct, positive effect on research and publications, as well as student job opportunities.

Research is a well established tradition within the Department, with faculty members using a vast spectrum of research methodologies, as outlined in their Internal evaluation report, covering a range from hard-nosed quantitative approaches, to full blown ethnography.

The publication output has increased in recent years among faculty members in that approximately 1,5 publications a year are produced by faculty in the Department. Considering that there is a heavy teaching load with minimal assistance, this can be considered a very satisfactory number annually.

Support facilities, such as the University Library, have a lot to offer, but they are not used to their fullest potential at this time due to the number of reasons outlined above. The EEC believes this needs to be rectified, especially in the face of recent budget cuts in the Departmental assisting staff. The EEC purports that the lack of basic funds for the central Library are having dire consequences for the quality of studies in the Department and University as a whole. This situation is not under the Department's and University's control, but due to economic factors/

The Department infrastructure as a whole is rather poor; however, many members of faculty have comfortable offices, some times with breathe-taking view to the sea or the mountain. Classroom facilities are more problematic and the students often have to attend classes with their coats on, as heating is poor. The size of the existing laboratories is small and they are often located in faculty offices in absence of a more suitable space and infrastructure. This situation needs to be rectified. By assisting faculty in securing space for all their labs, even on a part-time basis, will allow them to function in a more conducive manner that benefits students and their work. As a temporary measure, voluntary support from postgraduate students (Masters and Doctoral) seems like a logical solution for the Department under the current circumstances.

The Department secretarial staff is at the moment reduced to two (2) regular members. This restricts the work of the secretariat at a time when much of administrative work is still dependent on these individuals. This situation also affects the only remaining member of the Department's technical support staff to be occupied as a secretariat. This is a problematic situation both for the secretariat and for the one member of the staff, which is not fulfilling the role they were hired to fulfil.

In summary, it is the EEC's opinion is that the Department of Early Childhood Education has several strengths and assets in the calibre of its faculty, staff and students. The Department is lively and the teaching and research agendas are unique. It is the EEC's opinion, that the Department faces a number of challenges; however, most of these challenges are obstacles that they cannot augment due to University or other structural problems. However, the EEC believes that there are systematic changes that the faculty in the Department can make that will improve its efficiency and effectiveness. The EEC believes that this Department is one that will thrive and blossom to its fullest potential and of epic proportions with more resources and further investment. Faculty and staff should be rewarded for their work and efforts given the excellence in their teaching, research and service to Department, University, local community, and to the Hellenic Republic.

On behalf of the EEC, please let us know if you have any additional questions for us. We are happy to serve in this capacity as needed and upon request.

The Members of the Committee

　　　Name and Surname　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Signature

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Appendix A

Table 1. Department's Research Outcomes and Impact

Research - Impact on Scientific and Educational Community	
Citations (citations)	1259
Reports of special or scientific formula on research in faculty / OP Department	113
Book books faculty / OP Department on scientific journals	15
Participation in committees of scientific conferences	121
Participation in editorial boards of scientific journals	92
Calls from other academic / research institutions for lectures / presentations	50
Judges in scientific journals: almost all the members of the Faculty	115 past 3 years

Table 2. Departmental International Collaborations

Research collaborations with the International Scientific Community	
Aalborg University (Denmark)	Università Milano-Bicocca (Italy)
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