



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Α.ΔΙ.Π.

H.Q.A.

ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ & ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Department of Early Childhood Education

Technological Educational Institute of Athens

FEBRUARY 2014



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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Early Childhood Education of the Technological Educational Institution of Athens consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. **Professor Themistoklis Apostolidis (Coordinator)**
(Title) (Name and Surname)

Laboratory of Social Psychology, Aix-Marseille University, France
(Institution of origin)
2. **Dr Charoula Angeli, Associate Professor**
(Title) (Name and Surname)

Department of Education, University of Cyprus, Cyprus
(Institution of origin)
3. **Dr Lucas Amiras**
(Title) (Name and Surname)

University of Education, Weingarten, Germany
(Institution of origin)
4. **Dr Martha Apostolidou, Associate Professor**
(Title) (Name and Surname)

School of Education, Frederick University, Cyprus
(Institution of origin)

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

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

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) of the Technological Educational Institution of Athens during the period of February 24-28, 2014.

During, the first day, the members of the EEC met with the representatives of the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency at 12.30 pm for a brief presentation about the role of the committee. Then, the EEC visited the Department in its special campus, situated within the premises of the Institution “Mitera” from Monday 14.30 to Wednesday 17:00 o’clock. During the visit the members of the committee met with the chairperson and the other members of the Department, the administrative staff, and students. Finally, the EEC visited the central TEI campus and met with the President of the TEI of Athens.

Day 1:

The EEC :

- Met with Professor Efthymios Kakouros, chairperson of the DECE and of the Internal Evaluation Committee (IEC/OMEA) for a brief general presentation and confirmation of the final schedule for the visit.
- Met with the members of the IEC: Professor Efthymios Kakouros, Dr Agnès Zakopoulou, Associate Professor, Dr Trifaini Sidiropoulou, Associate Professor and Mrs Konstantina Tsaoula, member of the special teaching staff. The committee had a very constructive discussion with all IEC members concerning issues associated with the history and the specificity of the DECE, teaching, resources, and other administrative issues (e.g., the localization of the Department, situated far away from the central TEI campus). The discussion covered topics related to the Greek context of undergraduate programs on early childhood education and in the general context of the Greek Higher Education landscape during the last years (legislation changes and restructuring of the TEI in relation to austerity measures, budget cuts etc.).
- Visited the administrative staff offices, teaching classrooms, computer laboratory teaching laboratories performing arts, the DECE library and the students’ small restaurant.

Day 2:

The EEC :

- Attended a general presentation by Prof. Kakouros of the curriculum of the undergraduate program (DECE does not offer a post-graduate program), the research activities of the members, and other departmental matters and activities (e.g., student support services, Erasmus and international

collaborations, collaborations with professional associations and the community). All permanent members of the DECE participated and contributed to the general discussion with the EEC (6 members in total: thus, the four members of the IEC and two others members of the special teaching staff, Mrs Varvara Angeli and Mrs Maria Zerva).

- Attended a specific presentation of the practicum by Dr Sidiropoulou and Mrs Tsaoula.
- Met with the administrative staff of the DECE: Mrs Georgia Vogiatzi-Sfendili and Mrs Maria Schina.
- Met with students (approximately 90): a two-hour very rich, informative and constructive discussion with undergraduate students in the 4th year of their studies (almost 40% of them participated actively in the discussion).
- Met with the full and part time visiting staff (scientific and special teaching staff): 8 members of the 18 participated in an one-hour open discussion.
- Visited other DECE facilities (teaching laboratories for theater and music, halls).

Day 3:

Te EEC:

- Met with Dr Zakopoulou and Dr Sidiropoulou (individually).
- Met with the members of the special teaching staff: Mrs Angeli, Mrs Tsaoula and Mrs Zerva.
- Visited several facilities of central TEI campus (Health and social services, Athletic center, TEI central library, Conference rooms).
- Met with the President of TEI of Athens, Professor Michalis Bratakos.

We like to note the good atmosphere among colleagues, administrative staff and students during our visit. In particular, we were satisfied by the openness and the willingness of all teaching staff (permanent and visiting) to share with us information concerning their Department and its problems. It was also evident to us that there exists a co-operation among department members.

We had to note that it was not possible to observe any classroom teaching because our visit took place just before the beginning of the second semester.

Finally, the EEC would like to express its satisfaction to the DECE faculty for their cooperation and hospitality. The evaluation was conducted within a positive climate of outmost respect and collegiality.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The EEC received the Department's Internal Evaluation Report (IER) on February 5, 2014. The sources and documentation provided to the EEC were appropriate. We noticed that the internal evaluation report was extended (more than 200 pages).

The presentations by the department members were well organized and provided the additional clarifications needed. The faculty, the students, and staff were informative and cooperative. The Department members enthusiastically shared all requested documents (undergraduate thesis, exams papers, assessments conducted during school practicum and field experience, copies of slides of all presentations, books and other publications of the faculty members). All supplementary

information was provided on a timely matter.

We found that the internal evaluation report was in line with the EEC's observations and conclusions.

A. Curriculum

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

APPROACH

The goals and objectives of the current Curriculum:

The DECE's mission is to (a) promote the development and dissemination of knowledge in the area of preschool care and education through teaching and applied research, and (b) equip students with the necessary skills that will enable them to practice their profession effectively.

The objectives of the current Curriculum:

1. Are stated in the IER of the DECE.
2. Are adequate for a Bachelor Degree in Preschool Education.
3. Prepare students to become professional Preschool teachers in order to provide both care and education to infants and children (0 – 6 years) in a contemporary multicultural society.
4. Provide graduates with the academic background necessary for postgraduate studies.

The major restructuring of the curriculum that took place in 2000 was based on a child centred approach, as opposed to the medically orientated one that was adopted since the establishment of the Department, as part of the Institution MITERA, in 1955. This was mainly the result of the need to be in line with the requirements of contemporary society. Furthermore, the restructuring was influenced by the fact that the philosophy of the DECE shifted from that of providing care and treatment to that of providing care and education to preschool children. As a consequence, a number of courses - mainly medical ones – were removed from the curriculum and courses from the areas of education, psychology, technologies, arts, music, and theatre education were added. More curricular improvements were brought about as a result of a smaller scale restructuring that took place in 2010. The number of courses students had to take in order to graduate dropped to a more manageable size.

However, the EEC noted that the curriculum is still loaded with medically orientated courses (i.e., Paediatrics I, II and III, First Aid Theory and Practice and Epidemiology). Students and most of the members of the Faculty shared the same opinion. Furthermore, some discrepancies were observed in the description of subjects as regards to the content (e.g., in the subject of Paediatrics visits to museums, galleries and archaeological places are mentioned).

In general, the DECE curriculum can be considered as consistent with European standards for Preschool education. It also responds to the demands of multicultural education and the use of technologies in education. The Department has adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The curriculum has been structured to respond to the Department's objectives, and is organized around four main areas:

- a) Subjects deriving from general thematic areas (34%): Pedagogical Sciences (e.g., Introduction to Pedagogical Sciences, Research Methodology in Educational Sciences), Psychology (e.g., Basic Principles of Psychology), Medical Sciences (Paediatrics I, II and III).
- b) Subjects deriving from special thematic areas (35%), which provide basic

knowledge related to the area of study and, among others, include subjects such as Music-movement Education, Developmental Psychology, Psychopathology, Paediatrics II, Drama Education, Preschool education and Computers in Education.

- c) Specialisation subjects (15 in total), which offer knowledge on basic practical applications and, amongst others, include: Infant Education, Children and Play, Organisational Principles of Pedagogical Science, Child Care and Education, Modern Approaches to Preschool Education.
- d) Subjects of General Education (11%), including Management and Administration, Law and Humanities courses, that are considered necessary for the organisation and administration of work places (e.g., Management and Administration of infant and preschool settings).

Students are expected to complete 240 ECTS from the above four areas. These include 36 compulsory (194 ECTS), 4 elective courses (16 ECTS), one bachelor thesis (10 ECTS) and one semester of practical experience (20 ECTS). Students have no choices for free electives, a practice that exists in most universities and that could help transferred students to have subjects taken in other universities recognized. Finally, students go through phases of teaching practice that are included in their practical exercise. During these phases, students have the opportunity to develop their skills through observing and participating in early childhood and preschool institutions. In addition, students get experience in providing care and education in different settings (e.g., institutions for children with special needs and the institution MITERA).

This area of the curriculum is effectively linked with the job market through well-organized teaching training and other activities, involving both professionals and the community.

It is evident that both internal and external factors have influenced the development of the objectives and the curriculum development by the Department. However, financial restrictions and regulations imposed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs impede the ability of the Department to design and implement a more balanced curriculum. Updating of the objectives and suggestions for improvement of the program of study are included in the IER of DECE and were discussed during the meetings with academic and other teaching staff.

The EEC believes that the curriculum objectives are consistent. Yet, responsiveness to some social issues (e.g., sex education, child abuse, school bullying, cross-cultural and gender issues) is not very strong. Furthermore, repetition of subject matter is evident in some areas as noted both in the IER and during the meetings with both academics and students. A curriculum revision is among the goals of the Department. A committee for the evaluation and the revision of the curriculum has not been established as yet. Students have also noted that their participation in curriculum development is not adequately encouraged.

A set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum is not in existence.

The EEC is concerned about the discrepancy that appears to exist between the prospectus and the description of courses given to students. It was also noted that restrictions in changing the prospectus are often imposed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Subjects, such as Muppet Show, drama education, health education (with its modern approach and methodology) are missing from the program

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department's goals are implemented effectively by the curriculum. The curriculum is rational, clearly articulated and its structure is functional. It combines theoretical, practical and mixed courses, as well as, practicum. However, less emphasis is given to theoretical courses. It became evident both from the IER and the discussions that this issue has been taken into consideration and that efforts are made towards balancing the curriculum.

Human, material and space resources are not always adequate. The EEC observed that the academic and scientific staff members are adequately qualified, but, the number of courses and the student-teacher ratio requires additional staff, especially in areas that are covered by part time staff (e.g., arts, theatre studies, music). It appears that areas covered by the permanent academic staff of the Department are limited to education (including preschool education and psychopedagogy) and psychology.

There isn't a specifically designed science lab. The computer and art labs are very small and it is, therefore, not always possible to serve the needs of students. However, the faculty tries very hard to respond to these needs by working extra hours to support large numbers of students. The internet connection is of high quality, but there is a noticeable lack of personnel for the computer lab. Although students are encouraged to use every day material and used material for their experiments, more resources are also needed in the art and science lab.

RESULTS

There is a good alignment between the predefined goals and objectives of the curriculum and its subsequent implementation. The hard work of the faculty members of the DECE to achieve the aims and objectives of the curriculum under difficult circumstances is evident.

IMPROVEMENT

Several areas of the curriculum that need to be improved have been both stated in the IER and identified during the meetings with the faculty members and the students of the DECE. It is, therefore, recommended that the DECE needs to reconsider the balance between theoretical and practical courses. Moreover, despite of the fact that there is a compulsory course in Research Methodology, the EEC suggests that the curriculum should be enriched towards this direction, so as to enable students to develop research skills in the area of preschool education (e.g., specific methodologies and statistics).

Furthermore, enriching the programme with health education and courses that cover gender issues, sex education, child abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse it will be beneficial. Also, courses such as Intercultural Education, Museum Education, and Muppet Show that are offered as electives perhaps can replace some of the Pediatric courses.

In addition, the EEC recommends that the DECE should reduce the number of prerequisite courses.

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

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

Teaching Methods and Teacher/Student Collaboration

The EEC visited the department in the period between semesters, so they could not observe actual teaching. The EEC draws, therefore, all relevant information about teaching methods and teacher/student collaboration mainly from the discussion with students and the information provided during discussions/ interviews with the faculty members. Students reported about teaching procedures positively and there were no complaints. The EEC was given the impression that the teaching does not rely primarily on traditional, teacher-centered approaches, and uses non lecture-driven methods, which promote constructivist learning (including hands-on activities and above all practicum experiences). Both, for students and staff the practical experience is very important and it seems to be included in all semesters. The practicum at the end of the studies (8th semester) is well designed. Furthermore, there are several members of the staff acting in an advisory capacity in the practicum. Attendance is compulsory for practicum and most lectures. There is an impressive high percentage of attendance in the lectures and practical exercises.

Further, the staff instituted an open day of activities with children of infant schools in the department's area. It was apparent that most faculty members are passionate about their teaching, frequently going beyond of what is required of them. Students, for example, spoke about opportunities to work in small collaborative groups. The students spoke highly of the collaborative relationships they have with the faculty, as well as their accessibility both face-to-face and through email.

Use of Information Technology

The EEC would also like to note the use of the TEI e-class system by a number of faculty members. The faculty expressed the desire of adding another dimension to e-class, such as discussion forums and electronic submission of assignments. Every class is equipped with beamer and OHP. Wireless internet is available in the building where the department's lecture rooms and offices are situated.

Examination System

Both the faculty and students indicated that they are given a number of assessment choices including group projects, demonstrations, presentation of ideas, journaling and supplementary independent investigations especially in practical training. However, most courses are exclusively evaluated by one final exam.

In general, the EEC would like to comment on the faculty members' motivation and commitment to their teaching. They seem to create a supportive learning environment and cultivate a sense of community and belongingness, setting the stage for a useful and successful study. Evaluation by the students is managed electronically by the TEI, and every student can reach by code the evaluation sheet for a specific course.

Adequacy of Means and Resources

The teaching staff/student ratio is very high regarding the permanent staff and the demands emerging from mentoring students during their study and practicum. It is apparent that the faculty is under extreme pressure to maintain teaching quality standards despite deteriorating faculty/student ratios in recent years due to budget cuts that resulted in a decrease of the permanent and part-time teaching personnel.

More specifically, the teacher/student ratio for all students in the program (active and inactive) has been calculated at 6/790 or 1/131 (permanent faculty/students). If we calculate the number of students graduating within 4 years, the faculty to student ratio is 6/553 or approximately 1/92, which is very high. Calculating the teacher/student ratio including the part time teaching personnel would be inaccurate because of the part time employment of this group. The calculation would lead to better ratios but the problem of shortage remains.

The high ratio is due to reasons beyond the control of the faculty. For example, although every year the Ministry sets a number of students to be admitted into the program, an additional number of students is also admitted into the TEI through other legislated venues. In order to reach all students and cover all needs, the faculty is often teaching above the load that is required by the law. It was evident to the committee that the faculty finds teaching rewarding.

IMPLEMENTATION

Quality of Teaching and Adequacy of Course Materials

Especially in practicum the quality of teaching procedures is high and grounded in recommended practices advocated in the research literature. Nevertheless, the adequacy of teaching materials is often challenging. In the current legislation, students are only allowed one (free) textbook for each course. This practice severely limits the faculty's literature recommendations. In some instances, three books are listed on the syllabus and students can choose one based on their interests.

In the Department there is an overall access to the internet, so it is easy to get additional learning material or access the library resources. However, students seem not to use widely these resources. A computer laboratory is available, but it is used only for one semester each year, for a course on computers in education. The department's library is well-endowed with books. However, it is not always open as there is no librarian on the premises. According to faculty information the teaching material is brought up to date through electronic means (e-class or other electronic tools), or even personal material that students can borrow from the faculty.

Linking Research with Teaching

In the praxis-oriented courses there is an emphasis in linking research and teaching, so students frequently use research techniques, such as, observation, journaling and action research during their practicum experience in local preschool settings.

Mobility of Academic staff and Students

The TEI participates in the Erasmus program having formed connections with European Universities. The mobility of the department's students to European Institutions has increased over the past years. The DECE's policy encourages students to do their practicum (8th semester) abroad. Despite that, mobility of academic staff was recently limited primarily due to financial constraints.

Teaching Evaluations

During the discussion of the EEC with the students it became evident that students are satisfied with the teaching and the methodology used. Besides that, there is a formal evaluation process administrated to students at the end of each course in electronic format. The EEC was informed from the IER and the faculty that student

participation in the evaluation process was very poor in recent years. The faculty is aware of this problem.

In addition, there are some difficulties related to the accessibility of the results of the evaluation process by the faculty. This process reveals both strengths and weaknesses in teaching, which the faculty should continuously try to address. Thus, the TEI should smoothen the access to those data.

RESULTS

For the most part, students who register and get assessed in the courses are successful. According to IRE (p. 148), the mean grade point average during graduation is 7.74/10 with approximately 10% of students earning a grade point average between 8.5-10 (excellent). Time to graduation also varies given the flexibility that has been given to students by the Greek legislation up until today. Nevertheless, most students graduate within a reasonable timeframe with the great majority of students graduating within the “n+ 2” timeframe.

IMPROVEMENT

The main problem of the DECE is the rather small number of faculty members with the known consequences to the quality of teaching. Smaller groups of students and a closer tutorial assistance, especially in the practical exercises would be possible by a decrease of teacher/student ratio. Furthermore, additional staff, especially in areas that are covered by part time teaching staff (e.g., arts, theatre studies, music) will improve the quality of teaching.

A second problem is lack of material (paper, paints, textile materials). But, working productively with material is essential in a constructivist setting and can effectively improve the quality of teaching. According to faculty’s information, this material cannot instantly be acquired (in an easy, uncomplicated way).

These problems emerged in the discussion of the EEC with faculty and pointed out in the final meeting of the EEC with the TEI president.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

The DECE faculty are engaged in several research projects both in the field of Psychological (e.g., psychopathology of early childhood) and Educational Sciences (e.g., education and care of infant and preschool-age children). Much of the research undertaken by the DECE faculty is grounded in the context of their own practice (e.g., infant between 0 and 3 years old, psychological interventions, interaction between society and day-nurseries). Research projects are often undertaken in collaboration with colleagues of the DECE or with other colleagues of the TEI of Athens based on similar interests and related fields of study (e.g., psychopathology in juvenile delinquents). Most faculty members focus on research-action perspective in the field of early childhood by conducting educational interventions in the context of nursery. Most of the research projects are not externally funded.

The EEC noted that the DECE does not have a systematic strategic planning policy concerning research. It does not have a research laboratory either. Standards for assessing research are not set implicitly. It is clear that research activity is not a priority of the Department's policy. Apart from the fact that the TEI traditionally does not have a strong research infrastructure, in particular in the field of Social Sciences, factors such as faculty shortages and the need to cover courses, hinder research activity.

IMPLEMENTATION

The DECE's faculty has a very critical size (1 full professor, 2 associate professors and 4 special teaching staff). It is evident for the EEC that the department has no sufficient faculty members to engage actively in research. In this context, the DECE doesn't have a clear policy for promoting research activities among faculty members (e.g., research productivity). As previously stated, over the last years, the Faculty has been involved in various research projects, especially research-action ones, and educational interventions in the context of preschool settings. The EEC noticed that efforts were being made to connect teaching with research and encourages faculty members to further develop this line of work.

The research activity of the faculty members is not generally supported by grants. The extremely heavy teaching load and the very limited resources have hindered faculty's full development of research productivity. However, the EEC noticed several effective research collaborations with members of other Departments of the Faculty of Health and Social Care of TEI of Athens (co-authored papers, research projects). Furthermore, the DECE's faculty is visible at the Greek scholarly community, in particular within the context of affiliated professional associations.

One way of encouraging research activity for the DECE's faculty is to participate in large research projects connecting with other departments of TEI of Athens. However, the location of the DECE makes difficult faculty's members active involvement to such activities, which are generally carried at the main TEI campus.

RESULTS

Despite strong inhibiting factors, the DECE faculty makes efforts to be productively engaged in research. The DECE faculty publishes their research results nationally and to a lesser extent internationally (books, chapters of books, articles and conferences proceedings). Until 2006, faculty members produced 9 books (1 in English), 12 book chapters (50% in English or in French), 40 articles in peer-reviewed journals (25% in high visibility international outlets) and 59 conference proceedings. They also participated in national and international scientific world conferences presenting their research work. The Department's research in child psychology is visible and acknowledged both at the national and international level (e.g., consequent number of citations concerning articles on the area of juvenile psychopathology).

On the other hand, the DECE faculty promoted interventional research and published important articles for practitioners in local national and international newspapers (French and Portuguese) and on a number of sensitive educational issues in order to contribute to spearhead changes in the preschool educational landscape of Greece. Furthermore, faculty members are recognized scholars within the Education community in Greece and at the international (e.g., members of scientific international committees, invited speakers). It is interesting to note that these results are accomplished without laboratory infrastructure and support for research.

However, during the last three years the productivity of the faculty decreased due to its critical size (e.g., significant reduction of the permanent staff) and to the increased number of students. At the same time, the EEC also noticed that research productivity, and especially publication of scholarly works in peer-reviewed journals, varies considerably among the faculty. The committee regrets that the very interesting research works undertaken by several members of the faculty are not sufficiently valorized through scientific publication in refereed journals. The remediation of this problem should be a goal for the DECE to accomplish in the future.

IMPROVEMENT

The IER and the EEC identified main structural factors that inhibit the undertaking of research in the department. Some of them include the small number of the faculty, heavy teaching load, lack of research infrastructure and support at all levels, location of the department, and absence of post-graduate and doctoral programs. The central TEI and the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs should support the DECE faculty in developing a more active and coherent research policy.

The Department has acknowledged the need to better monitor and support research activity (e.g., definition of the main lines of the department's research program, creation of an applied research laboratory). The DECE faculty plan to discuss ways of promoting research objectives (e.g., definition of the main lines of the department's research program, improving research output in international outlets, and engaging in interventional research).

In this perspective, the DECE should encourage international collaborations and publications and support the effort of those faculty members who do not have a publication record so far toward this direction. Creating a supportive research culture would stimulate all faculty members to engage in conducting and valorizing

research work. More explicit standards are set for faculty members applying for promotion. The DECE faculty has to better value the realized research-action works, which are not sufficiently visible in peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, the department has to promote a more intensive collaborative research strategy with members of other departments of the central TEI in order to find grants for supporting research.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

- **How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students).**

The Secretariat of the DECE consists of two full-time members, who according to the Faculty of the Department offer valuable services both to the Faculty and the student body, despite the large number of registered students (about 785 students). The tasks undertaken and managed by the two secretaries are well-defined and executed. It was mentioned by the Faculty that it would be beneficial if the DECE could have a third administrative person to undertake more administrative tasks, such as, for example the preparation of the schedule of classes and final exams, which are managed by the Faculty of the Department at present. Students stated that they would like to have more access to the two secretaries, especially to the secretary who is dedicated to support those services that are directly associated with them (i.e., grades, registration, etc.). Students also stated that the available time devoted by the Secretariat of the Department for dealing with student affairs is limited to six hours per week, and expressed a need for more time considering the large number of registered students.

Regarding the library services offered at the main TEI campus, students mentioned that the main library has books in their area of study, but they find the number inadequate. Another serious problem, that is directly related to the physical location of the DECE (i.e., located 30 to 40 minutes away from the main premises of the central TEI), is that students do not have direct access to the library due to this physical separation between the Department and the central TEI. To remedy for this difficult situation, the DECE allocated one of the rooms in the Department to be used as a small library, and despite the fact that they were able to equip this room with four computers and a satisfactory number of books, the Department library cannot remain open at all times due to the lack of personnel. The Department library is open only when a Faculty member is in the Department and is willing to open the room. This creates a lot of problems for the students since in reality they have nowhere to go between classes.

Both Faculty and students are satisfied with the small restaurant that is found in the Department offering a variety of drinks and food. This restaurant also provides free meals for eligible students. Students mentioned that often, this small restaurant becomes their meeting point for working on group projects.

The computing services are highly regarded by both students and Faculty since there is wireless internet access in the Department, and access from home to electronic scientific databases through VPN. However, the existence of VPN and the right of every student to have access to these databases through VPN was only known to a very small number of students (about ten) out of about 90 students the EEC interviewed. This is regarded as somewhat problematic, and it needs attention, despite of the fact that all information is available through the Departmental website and the central TEI website.

The EEC also found, during the student interviews, that the majority of students was not well informed about the various student services offered by the central TEI, such as for example, health services, psychological and social support. The EEC has confirmed that all related information regarding student services is readily available on the departmental website and the central TEI website, but, still, for some reason students miss out on important information for them.

Regarding the research support offered by the central TEI to the DECE, the Faculty stated that they get announcements about research calls, but often they need to personally visit the main campus in order to get the information they need. In addition, the President of the TEI informed the EEC that the Faculty members are informed about research programs/calls but no support is provided in terms of helping the Faculty prepare their research proposals. However, in those cases where a research proposal is granted, the TEI assists with the financial management of the project.

Concerning the physical spaces of the DECE, the Faculty stated that they are limited, and often the same space is used for both teaching and laboratory purposes. There are in total only ten rooms that are used for theoretical and laboratory courses. In addition, the computer lab is open only during class time and remains closed during all other hours. Regarding office space, all seven permanent staff members have their own office space, but three of them share the same office. Also there is space for the Secretariat, and a common office area for the special teaching staff (both part time and full time). In addition, the Department is in urgent need for a conference space that can be used for all sorts of meetings.

- **Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically?**

Most procedures related to student affairs are processed electronically and are handled by the central TEI. Thus, the departmental Secretariat is directly connected with these electronic systems and handles all student affairs effectively. All other procedures that are not directly related to the student body are handled in more traditional ways with the exception of making use of email for electronic/mass communication, and or electronic processing of documents.

- **Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?**

The presence of students in the Department is very satisfactory due to the fact that 36% of the course work is practical taking place in various laboratories. According to the Faculty, the attendance of students in the labs is very high. It was noted that students' attendance in theoretical courses was also very satisfactory. Despite of this, the Faculty have undertaken efforts to ensure that students spend time in the Department, through group work, attending the lectures of invited speakers in the context of various courses, participating in activities through student clubs, such as the theatre club, activities with the institution "Mitera," and activities with the "Grand Lessive" initiative, which constitutes an international project.

IMPLEMENTATION

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

The organization and infrastructure of the DECE is well-defined. The Secretariat

consists of two full-time employees with clear-cut responsibilities and tasks. Most of the documents related to students can be accessed and processed electronically. The departmental website is updated regularly, however faculty members do not have their own web pages and there is an urgent need for developing them. There is also a need for creating emailing lists for mass communication, so that notices and in general announcements reach all students, faculty, and special teaching staff (full time and part time) on time. In addition, the Secretariat expressed a need for on-demand training especially for matters related to major changes in the university rules and regulations that are difficult to be understood.

- **Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g., library, PCs and free internet access, student counseling, athletic- cultural activity etc.).**

The central TEI offers a wide array of student services, but students mentioned that the lack of a general orientation at the beginning of their studies (for example first semester of first year) prohibits them from becoming aware of all available services to them. The EEC found that both the departmental website and the central TEI website are well developed, however, it is still a good idea for the central TEI and the DECE to investigate ways of how to provide substantial orientation to both students and special education staff.

In addition, it would be beneficial to offer orientation about the services offered by the main library at the central TEI. What's more, the library in the Department does not really function as it should, and the central TEI needs to attend immediately to this crucial issue by employing a librarian for the department's library. In addition, the student counselling services need to strive for a better visibility on campus and branches, and while the EEC understands that this service is understaffed, it is important that students know at least of its services.

The EEC also visited the athletic centre, which was found adequate, but unfortunately the distance between the DECE and the central TEI prevents students from making good use of its services.

RESULTS

- **Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?**

Most administrative services related to the student body are computerized, thus a large volume of work is performed adequately. Students would like the secretariat to be available for more hours (more than the six hours per week that are currently offered) so that students could go and ask for individual help. In general, all computerized services including the system that handles students' records are found satisfactory, but students mentioned that at the end of each semester the system becomes overflowed making the system access slow or impossible. The special teaching staff would also like to receive orientation and better information from the Secretariat.

Due to the large student body, the permanent academic personnel also undertake time-consuming administrative tasks, such as for example finding pre-school settings around Athens for students' practicum on early childhood education. Obviously, the Faculty members are overloaded with tasks that are not always academic, and if one also considers their teaching load, it can be easily deduced that the number of academic personnel in the Department needs to increase.

• **How does the Department view the particular results?**

The Department is well aware of the current situation and during the meeting with the EEC they proposed ways of how to overcome some of these problems, taking into consideration the economic crisis that the whole country is currently facing.

IMPROVEMENTS

The Department has identified ways and methods for improving the services provided and a number of initiatives are about to be undertaken towards improving the current situation. Some of these short-term initiatives include:

- (1) Finding ways of how to improve the laboratories of the Department, which, at present are over-crowded.
- (2) Finding ways of how the Faculty can be offloaded from time consuming administrative tasks so that they invest serious efforts in research and funded research projects.
- (3) Opening new academic positions and hiring new academic personnel.
- (4) Hiring a librarian for the Department's library.
- (5) Hiring a lab assistant for the Department's computer lab.
- (6) Further developing the departmental website with the profiles of all faculty members.
- (7) Finding ways to better support the Erasmus students, through the offering of courses in the English language.
- (8) Finding ways to assist their alumni (graduates) in seeking employment.
- (9) Finding ways to improve the collaboration between those who teach the theoretical part of a course with those who teach the practical part (laboratory), so that common goals are established.
- (10) Establishing the role of the academic advisor.

Of course, it is imperative for the central TEI to rethink the location of the DECE so that all of the above can be most effectively met at a minimal cost.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The DECE is undertaking serious efforts in collaborating with social and cultural organizations. For example, for twelve years, the Department through the initiative of "Open Laboratories" was sharing good practices through its different laboratories with nurseries, preschools, and families.

The Department co-operates closely with several Municipalities and pre schools, especially for students' practicum. Furthermore, a member of the Department participates in the pre school's Council of Athens Municipality as well as the Committee for curriculum development of pre schools of Athens Municipality.

From 2000 onward, the DECE is collaborating with museums for the purposes of better meeting the needs of both theoretical and practical courses. In addition, for

years the Department has been organizing the “Paidiko Festival” and informed the community about the role and the initiatives undertaken by the Department. Recently, Faculty members are engaged in the world-wide initiative of “Grand Lessive”, which aims at sharing good practices with the rest of the world. In addition, the DECE organizes a number of small conferences and seminars about important topics relevant to the goals of the Department and the interests of the academic staff.

Also, in collaboration with ELEPEPA (The Greek Scientific Society for Pre-school Education) the DECE has organized seminars for students and alumni. In addition, the Department has collaborated with a number of other well-known organizations such as EADAP, PERIVOLAKI, and others. Also, members of the Faculty, in collaboration with PA.SY.BN organized seminars addressing the needs of professionals in the field and contributed to the preparation of the journal published by the organization (see research section). In addition, members of the Faculty serve the boards of several nurseries and contribute significantly to their success.

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.

The conclusions of the IER could serve for DECE as a first step toward a more systematic strategic planning effort. These concern, in particular, the difficulty of placing the DECE, both from the point of view of the research and from the point of view of the training related to the early childhood education, in higher education settings. The DECE faculty should create opportunities and challenge possible drawbacks for supporting a restructuring process of a new academic structure for preschool education in the Athenian university landscape (e.g., a new unified School of Education). The DECE faculty has certainly expressed concerns over the fact that these challenging perspectives were not taken into account by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

A major inhibiting factor identified by the IER and the EEC is the critical size of the faculty. Since 2006, 6 permanent faculty members had left the DECE (e.g., retired) and until now they have not been replaced. On the other hand, the EEC also noted that the number of non-permanent scientific and teaching staff has significantly decreased during the last four years due to budget cuts (from 40 to 18). These threaten the viability of the program of study and unless there is a provision to hire additional faculty the situation remains critical.

Another important inhibiting factor is related to the isolation of the DECE in two levels:

- First, in relation to the other preschool education faculties or departments, especially the one of the University of Athens, and
- Secondly, in the context of TEI of Athens, not only because of the physical location of the Department outside of the TEI campus, but also due to the fact that DECE belongs to the Faculty of Health and Social Care.

The third important inhibiting factor concerns financial support for teaching and other activities. Centralized decision-making processes over budget and other legislative issues not only limit the DECE's autonomy, but also affect the viability of the curriculum. Although the relation of the DECE to the TEI central administration appeared to be positive, there are some indications that the relation can be improved.

The EEC also noticed many other related limitations:

- Lack of funding for qualified personnel who can supervise students during practicum experience in day-nursery settings.
- An increasing number of students admitted in the DECE.
- Insufficient teaching/laboratory classrooms and instructional resources.
- Lack of funding for teaching and research assistants.
- Absence of research laboratories and infrastructure.
- Insufficient dissemination of funding opportunities and support for reliable proposal preparation and submission.

The EEC aims to highlight that in the midst of a great economic crisis across Greece,

substantial austerity measures, legislation instability and a climate of great uncertainty, strategic planning becomes difficult. The TEI of Athens and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs must reconsider their teaching workload policy. Strict austerity measures that include non-replacement of retiring faculty members and hiring of new faculty result in unreasonable teaching and administrative work loads for faculty. At the moment, the teaching load of the DECE faculty exceeds largely what is common practice internationally. The increased teaching load, number of students served and administrative responsibilities in conjunction with lack of resources and support does not help faculty balance teaching and research and upgrade its profile.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

The DECE represents an historical and significant actor in the Greek context of early childhood and preschool education. The Department has a long and charged history (about 60 years of existence) and enjoys recognition both at the national and the international level. This seems especially relevant concerning the professional training proposed by the curriculum or the research work on infant psychopathology. As mentioned above, the curriculum provides a solid and acknowledged basis for the professional development of the graduates of the Department.

The EEC committee would like to note the circumstances under which the evaluation took place. Due to the deep financial crisis, funding to academic institutions has been reduced, new hires have been frozen, further cuts are proposed, and legislative initiatives are continuously revised often taking retroactive effect. This practice creates great uncertainty among academic institutions. Therefore, the EEC's recommendations are considered in the light of this overall social and policy context.

Recommendations to the TEI and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs:

- The TEI of Athens and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs should encourage and support DECE in a tangible way by providing resources and support in order to decrease the teacher/student ratio. The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs should be in close contact with the Department about the number of students that can be admitted to the program, taking into consideration all limitations.

- The TEI and the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs should support the DECE faculty in the effort to improve a more active research policy (opening new academic positions, hiring new academic personnel, supporting research infrastructure). A central office must be created at the TEI to help faculty with grant proposal preparation.

- The TEI of Athens should support the DECE curriculum by:

- Finding ways of how to improve the laboratories of the Department, which, at present are over-crowded.
- Finding ways of how the Faculty can be offloaded from time consuming administrative tasks so that they invest serious efforts in research and funded research projects.
- Hiring a librarian for the Department library.
- Hiring a lab assistant for the Department computer lab.
- Facilitating the material availability (paper, paints, textile materials).

- It is imperative for the central TEI to rethink the location of the DECE so that all of the above can be most effectively met at a minimal cost.

Recommendations to the Department:

In terms of other short and long-term goals the EEC encourages the DECE to:

- Better monitor and support research activity.
- Create a supportive research culture that would stimulate all faculty members to engage in research work.
- Encourage international collaborations and publications and support the effort of those faculty members who do not have a publication record so far toward this direction.
- Better value the realized research-action works, which are not sufficiently visible in peer-reviewed journals.
- Promote a more intensive collaborative research strategy with members of other departments of the TEI in order to find grants for supporting research.
- Increase the Department's research output in national and international outlets and securing collaborative funded projects with other European Universities, in particular in relation with the Erasmus program.

- Find ways to assist their alumni (graduates) in seeking employment.
- Find ways to better support the Erasmus students, through the offering of courses in the English language.

- Reconsider the balance between theoretical and practical courses.
- Find ways to improve the collaboration between those who teach the theoretical part of a course with those who teach the practical part (laboratory), so that common goals are established.
- Enrich the curriculum with further courses on Research Methodology and Statistics, Health Education, Child Abuse and Neglect and more courses on creative Arts.
- Reduce the number of prerequisite courses.
- Reduce the number of medically orientated courses.
- Establish the role of the academic advisor.

- Further develop the departmental website with the profiles of all faculty members.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
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