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

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PATRAS



European Union
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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
MANAGING AUTHORITY



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The External Evaluation Committee

Executive Summary

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

A1. Curriculum of Undergraduate Studies: Early Childhood Education

APPROACH

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

IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS, IMPROVEMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EEC

- The School Practicum.

A2. Curriculum of Graduate Studies at the Masters Level: Early Childhood Education

A3. PhD Studies in Educational Sciences

CURRICULAR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EEC

B. Teaching

APPROACH & IMPLEMENTATION

Undergraduate Programme

- School Practicum
- Student Feedback

Postgraduate Studies

- Masters
- PhD

RESULTS & IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS

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 & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.
- Suggestions for new initiatives.

D. All Other Services

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

- Library

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

TECHNICAL STAFF

COLLABORATION WITH SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND PRODUCTION ORGANIZATIONS

- Kindergarden - May festival
- Science and Technology Museum
- Collaboration with the Arts Center of the Rio Municipality

E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors***F. Final Conclusions and Recommendations***

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

1. Helen Phtiaka, Associate Professor
University of Cyprus
(Coordinator)

2. Constantinos P. Constantinou
Professor, University of Cyprus
President, European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI)

3. Moschos Morfakidis, Professor
University of Granada

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.

Executive Summary

We visited the Department in the period 7-9 October 2013. Prior to our visit, we received the internal evaluation report, copies of the prior evaluations (from 2003 and 2006) and access to the Department’s website with all the information about past and on-going activities in research, teaching and community service, including CVs for all members of the faculty.

During our visit we met and interviewed 20 members out of a faculty of 21, 3 of the 5 members of the Secretariat, all 3 of the Specialist Technical personnel, one class of 60 undergraduate students (3rd and 4th year) and about 20 Masters and PhD students. In the same period we were able to visit all the Departmental buildings, the University Childcare Centre, the University of Patras Science and Technology Museum (both of which have developed collaborative actions with the Department) as well as the University library and the Rectorate of the University.

Before visiting the Department we had the opportunity to review a long range of documents that were made available to us by the Department, including all prior evaluations, as well as all the information that is accessible online on the Departmental website. The Department was very forthcoming with any information that we asked for and was also very accommodating with changes to the schedule that had to be made during the visit, which enabled the Committee to feel that we got to know the members of staff and had the opportunity to interact in depth with a representative sample of undergraduate, masters and PhD students.

Based on this review, the Committee is convinced that this is an exemplary Department, highly committed to serving the goals of excellence in educational research and authentic contribution to creative culture. It achieves this through having established (a) harmonious relationships amongst all its personnel, as demonstrated by the wide range of diverse, productive collaborations, (b) an emphasis on providing services to the rest of the University and the local society, in ways that make both the Department and the educational sciences visible, (c) a record of leadership by example rather than by hierarchical relationships, and (d) a genuine commitment by everyone involved to make maximum use of the human and material resources that are available in efforts to pursue opportunities for international collaboration, seeking external funding, publishing robust research findings and engaging with activities in innovation, teacher professional development and educational outreach in association with museums and libraries.

The Department fully subscribes to the goal of excellence in research and is persistent in its efforts to pursue this goal with success. The department has built a strong image within the University which has created opportunities for broader research and educational collaborative initiatives that are noteworthy as examples of good practice. In this case, it prepared the evaluation process well and, in practice, it was able to demonstrate to the committee that the department is managed fairly and very efficiently.

The main achievements of the Department are reflected in how attractive its Masters

programme has become amongst teachers and prospective teachers from all levels of the school educational system and also in its performance in internationally recognized research indicators: it currently ranks first amongst Educational Science Departments nationally on three main indicators of research output - the ratio of publications to members of staff, the mean number of citations and the mean H-index. The average number of citations per staff member in June 2013 was 161. The mean H-index for the Department has increased from 2.90 in May 2009 to 4.57 in June 2013. These are remarkable achievements in the domain of educational research.

Greece has built a model of distinctively emphasizing Early Childhood Education in its university structures. This organizational arrangement is in accord with the emphasis in early childhood education and its connection with wellbeing and lifelong autonomy that are highlighted in educational policy initiatives by both Unesco and OECD and also by established childhood research findings.

The Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education at the University of Patras is a very good ambassador of this paradigm for Greece to exhibit to the rest of Europe. It has retained a strong emphasis on early childhood research and teaching while at the same time making the necessary adaptations over the years to encompass foundational principles from the social sciences so that it can better serve the sciences of teaching, learning and human development. By doing so it has managed to serve the goal of excellence in educational research and is in a position to demonstrate substantial, internationally recognized contributions to research, innovation and creative culture of local relevance.

From an external perspective, we feel that the department will need to resolve three challenges if it is to remain competitive in the coming years:

- (a) The Department is currently under-staffed as demonstrated by the student : faculty ratios. There is a clear lack of expertise in Educational Research Methodology, Inclusive Education and Educational Assessment. The Department will also need additional faculty in a few other domains that are currently underserved in all three sectors, including Sociology, Mathematics and Language Education.
- (b) There is a clear need for additional funding in seed research activities and international networking, including for conference participation. We are convinced that a fairly modest increase in this budget line will make a drastic difference to the extent that the Department will continue to be in a position to compete successfully for international research funding.
- (c) The existing buildings infrastructure is stretched well beyond the limits of its initial design. There is a clear and long-standing need for new buildings to house all activities including research and teaching laboratories, office spaces but also networking and teaching infrastructure.

The Department has proven very resourceful in developing the complex network of collaborations that allow it to integrate new faculty successfully but also to make the best use of resources. It will need to protect and sustain the existing values culture internally in order to meet the challenges of the road ahead.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

We visited the Department in the period 7-9 October 2013, in our capacity as the appointed external evaluation Committee. Prior to our visit, we received the internal evaluation report of 2012-2013, copies of prior evaluations (from 2003 and 2006) and access to the Department's website with all the information about past and on-going departmental activities in research, teaching and community service, including CVs for all members of the faculty.

Prior to the visit, we had the opportunity to discuss the Department's internal report in detail and we were able to frame questions and priorities for the site visit.

During our visit we met and interviewed 20 members out of a faculty of 21, 3 of the 5 members of the Secretariat, all 3 of the Specialist Technical personnel, one class of 60 undergraduate students (3rd and 4th year) and about 20 Masters and PhD students. In the same period we were able to visit all the Departmental buildings, the University Childcare Centre, the University of Patras Science and Technology Museum (both of which have developed collaborative actions with the Department) as well as the University library and the Rectorate of the University.

Before writing this report we had the opportunity to review a long range of documents, including the Internal Evaluation Report, the student handbook available online, all the course descriptions, the faculty CVs as well as documentation pertinent to a long range of scientific research and cultural activities. We were given access to all the information from a series of prior evaluations and we also had the opportunity to carry out extensive faculty and student interviews.

Through this process, the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) is convinced that it has carried out a comprehensive review of the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The University of Patras has a very well organized internal evaluation process which has helped the Department in keeping a detailed track record of its activities and the corresponding output. The EEC met with the centrally organized unit overseeing the evaluation and quality assurance processes throughout the University and was provided with a copy of the handbook that departments use to develop their internal evaluation procedures.

The Department also benefited from prior experience with external evaluations and a long established culture of using external evaluation procedures as a mechanism for obtaining feedback for improvement. In addition, in-house expertise in website management and other online tools has proven demonstrably useful in enabling the department to present a coherent picture of its activities and also to make the corresponding information immediately and openly accessible through the internet.

Throughout the evaluation procedure we were made to feel that we had the opportunity to ask for any documentation we required and also that there was ready willingness by the Department to provide access to all information we asked for.

We believe that in future the Department will find it useful to make a more consistent effort to state its scientific mission and to relate the various parts of its internal

evaluation documentation to the mission statement and also the external evaluation parameters. The Committee believes that this will further improve the internal evaluation process, the actual report and its usefulness as a management instrument.

A. Curriculum

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

A1. Curriculum of Undergraduate Studies: Early Childhood Education

The Department offers one undergraduate / first degree course in Early Childhood Education. Two major reforms have taken place in the structure of the curriculum, one in 2003 and one in 2013.

APPROACH

The Department seeks to offer its students a broad theoretical background in the Educational Sciences and create opportunities for some specialization in Social Theory, Policy and Educational Practices; Language, Culture and Arts Education; Didactics and Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Science Mathematics and New Technologies.

The Department offers a broad range of theoretical courses in the Educational Sciences, that aim to prepare a theoretically informed educator in early childhood who can also seek employment opportunities as a pedagogue in other domains, including instructional design, communication media, museums, journalism, public relations.

The Department has a strong and thoughtful leadership that has managed to establish harmonious relationships with all members of the faculty. The curriculum was designed through a process of synthesizing the available scientific expertise in the department with a view to meet the mission to prepare theoretically informed pedagogues. There is little evidence of use of external standards or stakeholder views in designing the curriculum.

There was a radical change in the curriculum in 2003. This change appears to have created a stronger sense of identity and ownership by the faculty. The dominant culture in the department is for the curriculum to reflect accurately the available expertise in a way that facilitates productive participation by everyone. There is no culture of meeting external standards or taking into consideration stakeholder views in (re) designing the curriculum.

The courses and their content are consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum as set by the department (and outlined above). The department is implementing a mission that is substantially changed as compared to how it started 30 years ago and has shifted away from teacher training in preschool education. We were informed that the current version of the curriculum is consistent with the societal reality that graduates of education departments are experiencing difficulties in finding employment in schools within a reasonable time interval.

The longstanding dominant expectations of society are very different: what we were able to confirm through our group interviews and discussions with undergraduate students is that they mostly anticipate to be trained as early childhood teachers, they expect to be

offered very practical on-the-job teacher training and would wish to find employment in the state sector within a reasonable time after graduation.

The curriculum reflects the teaching interests and the scientific expertise of the members of the department. The members of the faculty feel they know the students well and are in a better position to decide and plan what is scientifically appropriate and useful for them. There is some evidence that other stakeholders (e.g. practising teachers, consulting/resource teachers, educational policy makers or institutions outside formal education such as museums) have been consulted in an unsystematic and informal manner, usually through the existing collaborations between members of the faculty and such stakeholders.

We need however to add that members of the committee felt that there is too much emphasis on Science and too little on other subjects, much more common and much more important for Early Years education, such as Language, Children's literature, foreign languages, given that in the Early Years is clearly reflected the current multinational and multicultural character of Greek Society.

The Department places emphasis on internal discussion of its curriculum on a continuous basis. These discussions usually take place at the level of the General Assembly. The last revision was made in 2013. Prior revisions were made in 2003 and 2005.

In addition, the Department consistently carries out a self-evaluation every year. For a long time now, it has taken every opportunity that was presented to it, in order to go through an external evaluation process and seek feedback. This report is the third external evaluation report that the department is receiving over a period of several years. After each evaluation, the department did try to make changes to the curriculum and the faculty also made a recognizable effort to integrate the reviewer feedback in the rationale of the department.

IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EEC

The Department is a very efficient organization, a feature which facilitates the effective implementation of the curriculum. The Department Chair, the more experienced members of the department and the General Assembly are all well informed about the content and structure of all courses offered. This is facilitated by a very functional website and the online resources. It is substantially supported by a culture of collaboration, openness and participative ownership that seems to have been carefully cultivated over a long time and presents an admirable image of scientific commitment. As a result, we were able to witness a strong commitment to the department and to intra-departmental collaboration by the whole faculty, facilitated by the more experienced members who have managed to create a shared vision that leaves room for individual initiative and creative as well as group collaboration.

The curriculum is in line with programmes in educational science that place emphasis on pedagogical content knowledge. It has markedly less emphasis on the school practicum than is standard in teacher preparation courses. Other domains that need to be strengthened include Special and Inclusive Education, Developmental / Educational Psychology, Educational Assessment, Mathematics and Language Education.

The structure of the curriculum makes sense based on the available expertise in the Department and is clearly articulated. It serves as a coherent basis for providing students a theoretical grounding in pedagogical content knowledge with opportunities for

practising teaching in classroom contexts. For every individual course there is a detailed description that is accessible online through the departmental website. Course descriptions follow closely the structure proposed by the ECTS label.

There are currently 26 compulsory courses and 72 elective courses on offer. Each is assigned 5 ECTS. These numbers are changed from 20 and 87 courses, respectively, after the last curriculum revision in 2013. The number of elective courses seems large and seems to be partly driven by the faculty's desire to cover their course load requirements with undergraduate courses only and to teach the masters level courses as additional teaching load.

Student enrolment in seminars is sometimes constrained so that students need to obtain the prior approval of the instructor; in some cases they need to take an examination.

The committee would recommend that as part of the course structure the pre-requisite courses or other activities could be usefully coded more explicitly. This would make the process more transparent for the students but would also help the department in implementing its policies more consistently without having to make exceptions or last minute changes.

- School Practicum

Until last year the school practicum was a requirement for graduation without any ECTS assigned to it. This has now been changed with the new curriculum that is being implemented for the first time this year (i.e. Fall 2013). The school practicum is equivalent to two courses i.e. 10 ECTS. This programme of field experience starts in the 4th semester and finishes in the 6th semester.

The Department has been very resourceful in its efforts to achieve optimal field experiences. It has largely relied on a carefully developed and maintained network of collaborating teachers but has also taken advantage of available external resources such as the Paid Practicum Project that was funded in the period 2010-2013.

The EEC believes that the Department could benefit in its efforts to run effective Practica, administratively and pedagogically, from funding for Resource Teachers or Supervising Experienced Practitioners whose role could be instrumental in developing connections between courses and classroom observation and teaching, between theory and practice. It seems challenging to find placements for student-teachers. Students would also benefit from regular oral and written performance feedback from as many individuals as possible during the various phases of school experience.

The EEC would recommend the development of a detailed Practicum Handbook delineating clearly the goals, process and contact people for the benefit of students and hosting teachers/ mentors. The EEC would also recommend broader involvement by the faculty in the school practicum and the creation of possibilities for infusing various courses with practicum-related activities at a formative stage in the curriculum.

We also believe that 10 ECTS is too low for the school practicum and ways need to be identified to strengthen this if the goal of professional teacher preparation is to be served adequately. Presently, the Department's curriculum is falling short of the school experience that a certified pre-school teacher would need.

The undergraduate thesis is assigned 15 ECTS; students typically enrol for one semester. We would recommend splitting this in two parts (Undergraduate thesis I and II) and limiting it to 10 ECTS. The remaining 5 ECTS could be usefully transferred to the school practicum.

A2. Curriculum of Graduate Studies at the Masters Level: Early Childhood Education

The Department offers a Masters programme with three specializations, which are aligned with the three sectors of the Department and reflect the scientific groupings in the departmental staff. Students are admitted every second year and the planned duration of studies is two years. The three specializations are as follows:

- Social Theory, Policy and Educational Practices
- Language, Arts and Culture in Education
- Didactics of Science and Mathematics and New Technologies in Education

The programme runs to 120 ECTS (9 taught courses of 10 ECTS per course, 30 ECTS for the Masters thesis). Course participation is compulsory. Graduate students also have opportunities to participate in the department's undergraduate teaching as TA's, a practice that is followed routinely and provides additional training in the form of an in-house internship.

The department has a good way of engaging every member of the faculty in teaching graduate courses while at the same time offering a coherent programme with very clear directions enabling specialization in clearly delineated areas in which the faculty has developed scientific strength.

Students are admitted based on the following criteria: prior performance as documented by the submitted dossier, performance in an examination that is administered by each sector separately and performance in an oral interview. The EEC was very impressed by the quality and the effectiveness of the specialized examination that has been developed by the Department for this purpose.

40 students are admitted to the programme every second year. Since it has been offer starting in 2005, about 5 students have applied for every one position that was available. In the current cycle, there are 256 applications for 40 place (ratio of more than 6:1). These are admirable numbers and demonstrate that the Masters programme has established a strong reputation amongst teachers and prospective teachers at all levels of the educational ladder from pre-school to lyceum.

The emphasis placed by the department on socializing the graduate students into a community of research practice is illustrated by the number of ECTS dedicated to the research thesis but also by the numerous published research collaborations that involve graduate students. The strong participation of graduate students in scientific conferences provides additional evidence that the programme is competitive and successful in its scientific productivity.

A3. PhD Studies in Educational Sciences

The Department offers a three-year PhD programme. There are no formal classes for PhD studies but some students reported that their supervisors asked them to audit classes that they all felt were important for their doctoral studies.

The programme emphasizes writing for international research journals in parallel with the development of the thesis work. The normal practice is for collaborative writing with one or more members of staff (usually the supervisor and other members of the committee) and for the student's name to appear first in the authors' list. Many of the graduate students we spoke to told us what they were currently writing and where they were aiming to publish.

CURRICULAR IMPROVEMENT

There is a strong lack in Statistics, Educational Research Methods and Educational Psychology expertise. This is relevant at all levels of the curriculum but is particularly crucial for graduate studies. Having recognized this gap, the Department has elected two new members of the faculty and they are waiting for approval by the Ministry.

The EEC could also identify additional gaps that the Department could usefully seek new faculty to fill, should the resources become available. Educational Assessment is a strong need as are Emergent Literacy and Reading.

The Department received external funding through a competitive process for a project on paid school practicum for 25 students per year. The students were in school for four months on a daily basis and they came to university classes in the afternoon. They received a stipend for 300 Euro for four months. The Department was able to use this project to develop an improved model for the school practicum. Given the resources, it is in a position to immediately implement this improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EEC

We copy below our recommendations for the Curriculum:

We would recommend that as part of the course structure the pre-requisite courses or other activities could be usefully coded more explicitly. This would make the process more transparent for the students wishing to enrol in seminars but would also help the department in implementing its policies more consistently without having to make exceptions or last minute changes.

The EEC would recommend the development of a detailed Practicum Handbook delineating clearly the goals, process and contact people for the benefit of students and hosting teachers/ mentors. We would also recommend broader involvement by the faculty in the school practicum and the creation of possibilities for infusing various courses with practicum-related activities at a formative stage in the curriculum.

We also believe that 10 ECTS is too low for the school practicum and ways need to be identified to strengthen this if the goal of professional teacher preparation is to be served adequately.

The undergraduate thesis is assigned 15 ECTS; students typically enrol for one semester. We would recommend splitting this in two parts (Undergraduate thesis I and II) and limiting it to 10 ECTS. The remaining 5 ECTS could be usefully transferred to the school practicum.

B. Teaching

APPROACH & IMPLEMENTATION

Undergraduate Programme

The Department Programme does not follow what would be considered a traditional pre-school education path. Indeed the programme appears to be based more on the expertise of the staff and less on what one would traditionally consider as the needs of a pre-school student. There is for example a lot of emphasis on Natural Sciences, while Language and Arts appear to be a secondary issue. It was explained to us that there have been developments within the Department in the last few years, with two changes in both the curriculum and teaching in 2003 and again in 2013. All in all, a few years ago the Department took a conscious decision to shift in this direction of serving the Educational Sciences more broadly and that is why their name was changed in a way that will no longer be confused with a pure pre-school teacher identity. If this is the case, which we have no reason to doubt, the message does not seem to have percolated through to the undergraduate students who are all planning to become pre-school teachers and expect -and requested in our meetings- a more conventional syllabus.

Allowing for this idiosyncrasy, the teaching is then structured accordingly. There are no specializations in the course structure and there is no obligatory thesis. There is an emphasis on the natural sciences and clear gaps in language, literature, psychology and special education. It was explained to us that this is mainly due to staff inadequacies as there are staff appointments which have been frozen due to financial restrictions.

Student audiences range from 8 to 250 students in a class. The large auditoria however hold a maximum of 150 students and it is not unknown for students to be standing in a class during a lecture, both on stairs and corridors. Usual attendance record is about 30 or 40 percent. Large enrollments and class scheduling in auditoria leave little room for interactive teaching or other forms of modern pedagogy.

Student numbers are determined by a complex set of factors and in this department they are routinely inflated well beyond the level of initial planning. Typically the department plans for 100 students and receives up to 200 every year. Given the circumstances, the situation is handled well by the faculty.

There are 22 members of the faculty. The ratio of teaching staff / undergraduate students is approximately 1:40. The department ranks 2nd at the University of Patras in terms of the absolute number of students; it ranks 1st in student/faculty ratio. Based on international standards, this ratio is enormous and it makes the task of teaching effectively and providing role models for teachers exceedingly difficult. The faculty : student ratio is 50% above the EU average, 20% above the national average and 12% above the University of Patras average.

In every course, there is a formal examination for the courses at the end of each semester, and a repeat examination, if necessary. Sometimes project work is used to replace examinations partially or wholly. The examination schedule in combination with high student numbers creates overtly heavy workload for the faculty for assessment and certification. In total, the department offers three examination periods per year: June, February and September. All courses are examined at each of these periods. This creates an enormous load for faculty with substantial requirements in terms of time investment; even more important, this arrangement creates a severe limit on the level of innovation that can be implemented in terms of assessment procedures and updating the course contents.

The department uses a questionnaire to systematically collect information on student perceptions of the quality of teaching and the teaching content. The committee had the opportunity to review this process and we are satisfied that it is followed diligently and the results are used to offer feedback to the instructional staff for improving their courses.

This is a national online resource for collating and distributing university textbooks (EVDOXOS). The resource is used consistently and extensively by this department. Both students and faculty recognize this as an important improvement on the previous system. The committee had the opportunity to review many of the textbooks that are offered to students through the EVDOXOS resource. We were very pleased to see a good balance of internationally recognized texts in translation, nationally recognized texts from other departments in the country and locally developed textbooks. The Committee believes that if a way can be found that students can be charged for their books at the basic cost level, then this would make the whole mechanism more accountable and it would help in saving resources.

The Department has invested substantially in new technologies for teaching and learning. The existing infrastructure includes the platforms e-Class and Moodle. It has also created infrastructure for open learning with development of openly accessible instructional material for 32 courses (It ranks second at the University of Patras and 1st in the ratio of open courses offered to the number of faculty members).

The Department uses the e-Class and the Moodle platforms to distribute notes and other learning resources in electronic form. Some students we spoke to reported finding this inconvenient as compared to a previous system where they would be given notes in printed form for free. The Committee believes that this change makes sense for environmental reasons, as a cost-saving measure but also as a step in the right direction.

The EEC has been positively impressed both by the investment in new technologies and the way this has been organized within the department in terms of high quality technical support but also the high level of commitment on the part of the faculty. Every course has resources accessible online including a detailed description following the ECTS model of analysing objectives. We believe that this is an example of good practice in the Greek context on which there is room to build robust infrastructure that will make the department comparable to resources offered in other European universities.

Course syllabi are provided online with a structure that reveals the objectives, the content and the time organization of the course. The structure also gives a description of the teaching approach, the course literature and the assessment commitments. Finally it provides links to the textbooks and the online content e.g. on e-Class. The department has now adopted this structure, which is a modified version of the Bologna model, throughout its courses. This adaptation reveals a high degree of commitment and ownership on the part of the department.

The vast majority of students manage to finish within the four years. The Secretariat's role in monitoring student enrolment in classes and following up via email and telephone for those few students who fail to register every semester is an important factor in sustaining this.

- School Practicum

The undergraduate School Practice is quite possibly the Department's Achilles hill, with very little time being allocated in the programme for school contact. The whole responsibility for the practicum does not seem to be shared equally among the members of the Department,

but rather rests on the shoulders of one member of staff. In recent years the department has gradually been deprived of teachers on secondment who undertook the responsibility to serve as supervisors in the school practicum. This is a major setback in the appropriate implementation of a very important part of the curriculum in any teacher preparation programme. Without the extra help of teaching assistants / resource teachers in the last few years, the school practicum cannot be properly and adequately implemented.

- Student Feedback

We had the opportunity to attend an undergraduate class. There were approximately 60 students, all girls, and they all stated quite clearly that they come here to become early childhood education teachers. In their view, the programme, as it stands, does not prepare them adequately in this direction, mainly because it lacks practical relevance. In addition, there are for instance no courses in special education. Only the older students have had some contact with such courses, while there seems to be a high demand for them. The same need was identified for other fields such as drama. The students asked in general for more practical training and less theory. They reported that they miss courses on instructional design and also on development of teaching and learning resources. They argued that there are not enough courses that help them design classroom materials and other artefacts for teaching. The technology course was offered as a good example of what would be needed to fill this gap. They also requested more contact with schools at an earlier stage of their studies. Students also stated that they were not consulted about the content of the new curriculum, they were simply asked to give their feedback on the courses they attend.

Some popular courses seem to be non compulsory, and there is a first come first served system, including for pre-requisite courses, so not everyone has the opportunity to take them. Past grades are also reportedly used as a way of selecting students for subsequent courses.

Lessons correspond to their descriptions and they are always completed. They never stay hanging. In the past, readings and other study materials were used for the courses and were distributed for free, but this seems to have stopped recently due to financial restrictions. Students are encouraged more and more to use electronic texts and web-based communication. Inevitably a few people are not happy with this change, partly because there seems to be limited access to the computer labs.

Some students feel left alone and without guidance and require more information about thesis work. Yet, staff office hours are known to them and students freely admitted that they do not use them adequately. Others reported that they have adequate access to members of the faculty. All agreed that the quality of collaboration is very good: staff are friendly and helpful.

Students feel that in general there is a fair evaluation system, which consists mostly of exams. Sometimes their essay grades are not known to them, and they reported that they would like more consistent feedback on written assignments.

Postgraduate Studies

We come now to the strong point of teaching in the Department, the graduate programme, which is related to the Department's research profile. We had the opportunity to converse with 18 graduate students, Master's students in their majority, five of whom were men. Their feedback was not simply positive about the Department in general and the graduate studies in particular. It was enthusiastic!

Masters

Despite the difficult circumstances the Department faces due to old buildings and financial restrictions, it has shown in later years an impressive blossoming in terms of graduate studies.

All three research divisions seem to be very active in this direction. Masters' positions are publicly advertised every two years. There is an entrance exam with many sections depending on the research division required. All those students who pass the exam requirements are called to an interview. The final grade is a sophisticated calculation of the various aspects examined: exam, interview, degree grade, foreign language, undergraduate thesis and possible publications. The total number of students accepted in all divisions every two years, is 40.

The formal presentation of the graduate programme, takes place during the 7th semester of the undergraduate studies. Not all students request such information, but it appears that those who seek it can very easily find it. As a result, a number of graduate students are graduates of the Department itself. What vouches for the quality and the reputation of the graduate studies here however is the fact that at this level the Department attracts students from a range of other Departments within the University, and also from other Universities. This includes students with different first degree backgrounds, usually aiming to work as primary or secondary teachers. Hence, the number of men increases here, while it is minimal among undergraduates. It is also interesting that there are a number of co-operations at this level; there seems for instance to be the possibility for a student from other Departments. to do a thesis with members of this Department, e.g. in Biology, and the other way around.

We were recipients of very interesting comments by the graduate students, some of which we wish to relate in this report:

'In 1992 there was no way the Department could keep me here to do anything! I just left and went into the job market. The Department underwent a transformation (metallaxis). I did not come back in order to get a job, I already had one, but I did it for myself, for my personal development, and I never regretted it.'

'The Dept. seems to be rejuvenated in recent years, with people who seem to place emphasis on research and graduate work. So, older students came back having left as first degree graduates, because they felt there was nothing here for them back then.'

'We have easy access to the schools and the teachers of the area for everything we need. And, why go to another Department when you have everything you want and need here?'

The Masters students appear happy with the correspondence between the title and the content, both in the courses, and in the programme as a whole. They consider their relationship with their teachers productive. Members of staff are considered supportive and warm towards the graduate students - students feel that they can contact them at any time for anything, even if they are not their personal supervisor.

The students reported that they make easy use of the Department, and the University Library, and they consider that they have adequate material for their work and adequate support and guidance, although some would probably appreciate financial help with the material they use in their projects. Present graduate students argue that as undergraduates they had research methods classes which pays off now. There appears to be a useful inter-exchange between practitioners and fresh graduates in the Masters classes.

Their studies place emphasis on both Greek and international research publications. These are usually joint publications, with the supervisor as a second name. Academic writing is also a good practice for research proposal writing, and it does pay off, as is apparent from the competitive research programmes the Department has secured in recent years, such as the Karatheodoris and the Fibonacci programmes.

PhD

In order for a student to become accepted for a PhD post, s/he has to communicate first with a professor who would be willing to supervise them. Once this informal contact has been achieved, the student needs to prepare and submit to the Department a research proposal. This needs to be accompanied by a signed agreement of the member of staff willing to undertake their supervision. The proposal is discussed at the level of a division committee, and then at the department general assembly, and a decision is taken. A committee of three people is assigned to advise the student.

There are no obligatory courses attached to the PhD studies. However, the supervisor is free to ask the student to attend such courses as s/he deems necessary to complete the background of the student. A yearly progress report is produced by the student and assessed by the supervisor, until the end of their studies. The minimum duration of the PhD is 3 years, but as can be expected, most people take longer than that. No maximum was reported.

PhD students are often based in the Department labs, where they work in the afternoon. In most divisions the students are required to publish in refereed international journals before they complete their PhD. An indicative number of two such publications was mentioned. The final presentation of the thesis takes place before a seven member committee.

On occasion there is no regular formal contact between the PhD students even of the same programme. There is also a number of PhD students who are not known to each-other because they do not live in Patras, studying from a distance and visiting periodically. There is no funding for working PhDs students to attend conferences. Funding exists for non working students for one national and one international conference a year, approximately 350 Euros each.

RESULTS & IMPROVEMENT

We need to start here by saying that although we feel it our duty to report all these large and small comments received by students, as we committed ourselves to them to do, it needs to be stated here that this is a Department with a small number of staff and a very large yearly student intake, which is completely beyond the control of the University. This is not uncommon in Greece, as the system stands today, but it would be -of course- completely unreasonable on our part to request student-teacher teaching relations that one meets in Universities with much smaller student-staff ratios. The committee feels that under the circumstances, given the numbers of students involved and the classroom spaces available, the staff are doing the admirable work.

Furtherome, It would appear that the Department is already doing everything possible and within their power in this direction. Improvements that will facilitate more intensive research production are possible, but they do not seem to be within the juristiction of the Department. They relate for instance with the infra-structure (buildings, research labs, research student offices), or financial aspects of research, such as equipment or support staff

hours, and also staff shortages in specific domains. The lack of a good team of psychologists and special/inclusive education specialists is indicative here, and all the sadder as this Department used to have one of the first established special education laboratories in the country. Naturally, should these obstacles be removed, the Department will be in a position to increase the output of its research production in areas where it is not very active now.

As becomes apparent, for any further improvement to take place here, the students numbers need to decrease, the staff numbers to increase, and the available buildings infrastructure for undergraduate teaching needs to improve significantly. It has to be said here that the point on buildings was one that was made by the committee to the University leaders during our visit, as not all Departments are subject to such deprivation. Indeed, our first impression of the buildings, both offices and classrooms, was so disheartening, that we were in the event even more impressed with the level of work that takes place inside.

What is also important to note here is that given the considerable amount and the high quality of research carried out in the Department, the teaching, in some areas at least, benefits considerably. Students' mobility (e.g. through the Erasmus programme) at undergraduate level is extremely limited, but this is not surprising given the numbers involved. Staff on the other hand is much more mobile and productively so.

It is important to say that the Department is aware of all these limitations, as became apparent during our closing session, and is working towards their resolution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department is very strong in offering Pedagogical Content Knowledge courses in disciplines like science, mathematics, language, and Arts as well as in new technologies in education. In this aspect, it compares favourably with some of the best departments of Educational Science in Europe.

The ERASMUS programme could be supported better and developed more. In our interviews, it emerged that students were not aware of where to look for information on opportunities for mobility; those few students who had actually been on an ERASMUS visit felt that they had not been given adequate information or support in a timely manner.

We also felt that undergraduate students could benefit from a more formal and more structured approach to academic advising from an early stage. We believe that the department could productively broaden its priority of seeking excellence to encourage the students to share in this same value system for their own development. In our interactions with undergraduate students, there was little evidence of a vision that might include assuming the responsibility to develop professional competence and to advance to the stage where they can aspire to make a positive contribution of global relevance.

There seems to be no regular formal contact between PhD students even in the same specialization. On the whole, the committee felt that there is inadequate communication between the PhD students and we would recommend that the department creates additional mechanisms to attain this. We note that there seems to be a lack of community among doctoral students. While the research domains might be disparate, a scholarly community of learning could foster a culture of research, collaboration, apprenticeship to specific academic discourses and expectations. This would be to the benefit of the students themselves but also of sustaining good quality research as a collaborative effort within the department.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

The Department seeks to establish itself as a centre for research in early childhood education with an emphasis on (a) Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Mathematics, Science and ICT education, (b) Social Theory, Policy and Educational Practice and (c) Language, Arts and Culture in Education. The Department enters into international collaboration efforts and participates successfully in EU-funded projects that fit into its scientific priorities and its intent to promote early childhood educational research.

In addition, the Department has developed a range of initiatives for contextually rich and relevant research and innovation activities that seek to sustain, as a matter of priority, strong connections between theoretically informed researchers (often in the role of public intellectuals), the local community and the local education settings (including practising early childhood teachers, school advisors, undergraduate and graduate students).

The standards adopted by the Department appear to be driven by a commitment to a continuous effort for sustaining excellence in internationally recognized and locally relevant research. These efforts are supported by the faculty evaluation procedures and make reference to publications in international and national peer-reviewed scientific journals in the educational sciences, publications in the proceedings of national and international conferences following peer-reviewed presentation as well as the number of citations for each publication. Additional standards mentioned include participation in externally funded research and collaboration projects and in educational development activities, such as museum education and development activities, educational technology innovations and curriculum design projects at national and international level.

IMPLEMENTATION

Over a period of several years, the Department has developed a number of strengths that are apparent to any visitor:

- a. Strong, thoughtful and committed leadership, that is shared across many people, has worked mostly by example in establishing excellence in educational research as the department's characteristic trait, and continues to mindfully seek continuity and sustainability in this goal.
- b. The Department has developed an impressive and admirable peer mentoring system that encourages experienced members of the faculty to support early career researchers in developing their own scientific voice and research profile through international publications; this system includes a range of proactive initiatives for internal collaboration and a model for engaging Masters and PhD students into on-going research activities.
- c. A consistent effort to seek excellence in the combination of internationally recognized research (through funded projects and publications in cited peer reviewed journals) of relevance to the local educational system (through collaboration with teachers and other professionals in the educational sciences).
- d. A commitment to continue to provide substantial services to other Departments within the University (including teaching in a diverse range of other programmes and collaborative initiatives with various outreach activities such as the Science and

Technology museum, but also sustained contributions to the University administration), thereby enhancing the internal visibility of the educational sciences but also sustaining input to the University's efforts to remain thoughtful, resourceful and modern in its efforts to promote quality teaching and support active learning.

The Department has established a harmonious model of internal collaboration that encourages academic solidarity in a non-threatening and equitable manner, partly because the experienced members of the faculty have the sensitivity to avoid hierarchical relationships and power arrangements but also the early career faculty have the strength, the commitment and the interest to respond to the challenge of continuing a remarkable trend.

- Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support.

Funding for participation in conferences by the University of Patras is currently around 400 Euro per faculty member for international conferences outside Greece and 200 Euro for conferences in Greece. This is an example of the chronic underfunding for research that the department and more broadly universities in Greece have had to cope with.

Such severe constraints on resources, especially money for seed and demonstrator research activities but also funding for networking, mobility and conference participation, places a severe restraint on the faculty's opportunities to compete for internationally funded research projects.

Faculty members and associate staff have proved very resourceful in continuing to operate four laboratories and also managing to take a pioneering role in promoting the use of new technologies in teaching and learning. The Department has a strong presence on the internet and also provides a range of online materials and utilities for supporting its students.

The Departmental buildings are in severe need of renewal and create an impression of severe underfunding for buildings infrastructure over many years. Due to the resourcefulness of the staff the buildings and networking infrastructure is used in a way that far exceeds its potential.

RESULTS

- Scientific publications.

In 2012 the Department published 5 books and 47 paper publications in peer reviewed journals. Over the period 2008-2012, the Department has published 23 books and 209 paper publications in peer reviewed journals. Over this period, there is a stable production of publications and a steady shift towards more international peer-reviewed journals with higher impact factors. There is also a steady increase in the number of publications every year for the last ten years.

The average number of citations per staff member in June 2013 was 161. The mean H-index for the Department has increased from 2.90 in May 2009 to 4.57 in June 2013. This is a remarkable improvement. The Department currently ranks first amongst Educational Science Departments nationally on three main indicators of research output: the ratio of publications to members of staff, the mean number of citations and the mean H-index.

These indicators confirm the judgment of the Committee: the University of Patras has developed in this Department an international recognized center of research excellence in the Educational Sciences with a record of research output that has been of interest to the international scientific community and of demonstrated relevance to the local society and the Greek educational system.

- Research projects.

Over the last five years the Department has attracted 1.0512 million Euro from external funding sources. The Department has just completed a large and well recognized EU-funded project in inquiry-based science education. This was one example of the international collaboration initiatives that have engaged the faculty and have provided opportunities for research activities but also for collaboration with teachers and other educational practitioners. Much of the research activity fits well with the Departments supplementary role as a provider of Professional Development programmes for teachers and as an accredited Center for Training the Trainers.

- Research collaborations.

The EEC was particularly impressed by the range and diversity of collaborations in published research work, both from within the department and with faculty from other departments of the University of Patras.

The Department also hosts a Unesco Chair on Learning, Evaluation and Didactics, since 1993, and is an active participant in the Science 7 Technology Education teachers International Network, a very productive activity funded under Erasmus Mundus.

The Sector on Language, Arts and Culture has developed a noteworthy range of local collaborations with substantial contributions to theoretically informed creative culture.

- Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department?

The Department publishes a successful international scientific journal *Review of Science, Mathematics and ICT Education (ReSMICTE)*, with articles in English and French continuously since 2007. The journal is indexed in many scientific databases.

The Department has also created the international Group on Energy Education, which maintains an active blog of interest to science education researchers around the globe.

In the domain of Educational Technology the Department has been active in developing software for modelling-based learning that has been used broadly in Europe.

IMPROVEMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department recognizes the need to continue to re-negotiate its priorities and activities to sustain this high level of productivity in international scientific publications and to attain greater international visibility for its scientific output. The efforts in recent years to achieve greater involvement in externally funded research projects, the efficacy of an increasing number of faculty members to publish internationally in those peer reviewed journals that are listed in the social sciences citation index and the very explicit steps taken by the leadership to facilitate productive internal collaborations indicate that the Department is also taking concrete steps in this direction.

In these efforts, the Department faces two severe constraints:

- a. The constantly changing legal framework creates a sense of uncertainty and a feeling that there is no trust on the part of the State that Universities can respond to their role. This is a strong Department with a long track record of substantial contribution to research, society and culture. It would benefit greatly from the necessary stability in the legal framework, the resources and the funding mechanisms so that it can continue to make substantial contributions to science and culture and to better

compete for competitive funding at international level.

- b. The lack of minimum seed funding, e.g. for participation in international conferences, places a severe barrier to any effort to network with communities that develop consortia and proposals for competitive funding at international level.

Striving for a balance between rigorous, reliable educational research that can be of interest globally and can add value across specific contexts on the one hand, and serving the needs of a local educational community that could benefit from coherent input from scientifically established ideas and practices is an enormous challenge for Greece in the coming decade. This Department has strong expertise, talent and many examples to offer in how this can be achieved harmoniously and effectively without sacrificing capacities for formative university-school and university-community collaborations that can make science visible internationally and relevant to local society.

D. All Other Services

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

Educational outreach

Departments of Education have a responsibility to make a contribution (a) to international science through publications that need to be credible and can be evaluated using standard bibliometric indicators, (b) to the local formal and non-formal educational system and community actions, (c) to the institutional efforts for updating teaching and learning processes. In an ideal world all three of these aspects should be informed as scientific actions and should be identified and valued as genuine examples of scientific output. The same value system could apply to all three (validation though credible peer-review, theoretically informed activities...). However the research products differ in nature (e.g. publications, community events, theoretically informed instructional materials and processes....). The first category of research output makes a contribution to international science and has the added benefit that it adds value to cumulative knowledge and accessible scholarship and expertise at the local level. The last two categories of outcomes for educational research are equally important in making a visible contribution to the local communities while at the same time adding evidence and context for theory building, in ways that can be of value to international science.

Looking through the various documents in relation to activities that provide services to society, we formed the impression that the Department concentrates entirely on state institutions. The department needs to devote more attention in building communication and collaboration bridges to the private sector, industry and innovation actors. Workplace learning, company training and other professional learning contexts may present a set of opportunities for the Department to identify additional resources that may be accessible for supporting its future development. The department will need support from the University and the state in order to develop expertise and also contribute substantially in taking advantage of these opportunities that are currently underserved. It will need access to the funds for human resource development, which currently it cannot access.

Library

The University library was closed due to industrial action during our visit. However the acting director was kind enough to open it for us to look around. We had about ninety minutes to walk through the empty building and to ask questions to which we received forthcoming and complete responses. We also looked through the documentation that is available to library users and we had the opportunity to look closely through the shelves that host books and other materials on the educational sciences. We recognize that this was a difficult time for the University administration and we are very grateful that specific arrangements were made to accommodate our requests. Our sadness to witness an empty library building was obviously shared by the administrator we spoke to and the whole group that walked with us readily reflected on the circumstances under which external conditions can disrupt valuable work of very committed staff members.

We are very pleased to report that the University seems to have an large new library building-opened in 2003- which seems to host one of the largest University collections in the country (200.000 volumes, approximately 100.000 titles), and gives work -alongside the Department Libraries- to 32 people in all. This number is expected to be reduced if the government plans for dismissal of University administrative staff go ahead.

The library presents an impressive picture of organization and professionalism that we were very happy indeed to witness. This cannot but be a strong supportive facility for the Department. We are also very happy to report that the Department under review is one of the few at the University which has consented with the University Library policy to transfer all the Departmental Library resources to the central building. This is a well known popular international library practice which at once rationalizes resources, saves funds by avoiding unnecessary extra staff or duplication, and most importantly provides greater efficiency as the Department collection is now available to more people for more hours a week and is combined with internet and other facilities that are more conducive to student -and staff-library work.

It needs to be added here that the Library has initiated nationwide library software and data bases which allow the students access to all greek and cyprriot library catalogues. It also works in close collaboration with other libraries to achieve speedy and efficient distribution of texts through inter-library loan services.

All these add to an invaluable resource for bibliographic and archival research work.

In conclusion, the University Library is a very powerful and very efficient support tool for the Department, which seems to be fully embraced and utilized.

Department Administrative Staff

The Department administrative staff consists of 5 women, most of whom have been working there for over 10 years, some up to 20, and feel very attached to the Department and its academic staff and students. The secretariat seems to be responsible for a number of activities, including student registration every semester, graduation ceremonies, book distribution, grades, scholarships, free bus ID cards, and provision of information to students and parents, as well as central University administration.

A characteristic quote given to us was: *«it is a paradise for us here! We have a good time, we enjoy the work and we love what we do!»*

The team leader is the Department secretary who seems to have established a very good collaborative working relationship with the other four ladies. All three women present at our meeting agreed that they work well together and they shift through a lot of phone, paper and face to face work on a daily basis. This indeed seems to be the case, as the Department has approximately 1000 undergraduate students, 80 Masters' students, and 45 PhD students. The Department Secretary works in close collaboration with the head of the Department, and the work is distributed among them clearly so as to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings. There appears to be no formal structure of weekly or other meetings, amongst members of the secretariat. However each person seems to know what to do, and where to find information and approval if necessary.

The secretary was very emphatic that she and the other members of administrative staff greatly appreciate the close and good collaborative relationship with the department Chairperson, especially his openness and the fact that he is quick with disseminating information to other staff but also that he is very accessible. We were convinced that these were important features of a very effective relationship that contributes to the harmony amongst all faculty members.

In terms of the services offered to students, we were characteristically told that although the office hours are formally restricted to three hours a day for three working days, their door is always open and they see approximately 50 people a day, giving priority to students and

parents who come from far away. They also appear to receive a large number of phone calls, and to also use the phone to trace students who have registration or other problems. The Department secretary also attends the Department meetings and is responsible for keeping the Department archive.

Some students we spoke to felt that there is no easy access to the secretariat, reporting that the office is not open on some afternoons. Perhaps a better communication between secretariat and students would be desirable on some occasions.

According to their own judgment, there seems to be room for improvement of communication between the Department and the University administration, as they often lack, at Departmental level, information about new legislation for instance.

Finally, it has to be added here that the secretarial staff was also on strike for threats of dismissals, and only three out of the five were present in our meeting. We are very grateful to them all for making this allowance for us, especially to the member of staff who knows she is on the dismissal list. This undoubtedly indicates their devotion to the Department, and the important role they play in it. We fully understand the reasons that kept the two other members of the secretariat away and we hope for a speedy and workable exit from this deadlock.

The interview with the secretarial staff was very helpful, and provided us with a lot of information which helped us understand how the Department operates administratively. We also know that they provided all the material requested for our visit beforehand, even though they were on strike.

It is obvious to us that the secretariat will have a difficult time fulfilling its role if three out of the five people are dismissed as planned. From their perspective, the secretary told us that they might be able to cope with three people, but it will be impossible to cope with two. We also feel that the issue of technology is very important here. Present staff seems to have little knowledge of how to use it effectively and efficiently in order to eliminate bureaucracy. Further training might be necessary here. All this needs of course to be co-ordinated to University wide policies regarding efficient use of technology. We understand that such an effort is currently on the way.

Technical Staff

The technical staff consists of two women and a man. They have all been in the Department for over ten years now, and they too are very happy with their job and the Department atmosphere despite the ongoing difficulties with strikes.

The two women deal with the Department's finances, and the various secretarial needs of the research divisions. The man is the IT administrator of the Department and deals with everything relating to the infra-structure, computer and other electronic equipment, and everything electrical and electronic.

All three seemed very knowledgeable and also very resourceful in working with the University administration and the constantly changing legal procedures to help the Department organize and efficiently run its activities.

Invited to identify problems which make their life difficult, they all reported unnecessary bureaucracy and old buildings as two major constraints, but none of the problems mentioned initiates from the Department or can be easily amended by it.

Indeed the networking infrastructure of the Department buildings seems to be working well past its limits, and it is no wonder that it often presents problems. If action is not taken,

these problems can be expected to increase in the immediate future. It already is quite an issue that the members of staff need to worry over as to whether a radiator will explode over the weekend and they will find their office flooded on a Monday morning...

Indeed, such worries or incidents are not conducive to staff productivity! The state and the University need to take care of these problems if they expect the Department to retain its teaching and research output, let alone increase it!

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Kindergarden - May festival

The Department rightly prides itself on its collaboration with the kindergarden which is situated near its premises.

It used to be a University owned establishment which has lately come under the auspices of the local municipality. It is a large, bright, colourful and well lit building, which contains three groups of children from 3 to 5 years of age. It is staffed only by three nursery teachers and one head, all women, without any class assistants, or any other staff assisting with class work. This is rather surprising, as the groups of children are as large as 25, a very large class number for these ages. Due to the large class groups, the head of the kindergarden is often forced to provide class assistance and support, at the expense of her administrative duties. We were informed that just as new legislation was passed which would provide class assistants, the crisis ensured that no money was available for such 'luxury'! The teachers therefore have to cope on their own. Despite all these difficulties and their considerable work pressure, the nursery teachers appear to be open to collaboration as well as teaching and research projects by the academic staff. The kindergarden has a nice dining room for small children, and food is provided by a young chef and his male assistant.

In the school there are a number of classes for use by the Department, both for meetings with nursery teachers participating in in-service courses, and for observation and experimental work by students and staff. The rooms are yet to be furnished and used properly for these purposes. In the school premises there is a beautiful piece of rich lawn where the children play at break time during the summer months and when the weather is fair.

On this very lawn the Department holds its May festival, which is an end of (academic) year activity for the Department students. Nursery schools from the whole area visit, while students run a number of different educational activities for them for 5 days on a voluntary basis. This is a valuable tradition. The organization of the event involves most members of staff in the department. The division of Art and Culture are largely responsible for it, with the member of staff teaching drama and physical education bearing the chief responsibility. We did not meet her as she was on maternity leave, but the Department assured us that she is 'the soul of the whole activity'.

This event, apart from being a very important part of the student calendar, is an exceptional activity of social contribution. We were very happy to note that by organizing events such as these, the Department makes an important social contribution to the community, which is received well by local teachers, parents and children as well as students.

We consider that this is a manifestation of the Department's realization of its very important role in its own community. This cannot but be a positive sign as it indicates that the

Department is aware of its social responsibility on a local level.

The enrichment of the kindergarden by more assisting staff would help improve the facilities and possibly the collaboration, teaching and research here, but this is not the responsibility of the Department, or indeed the kindergarden itself.

Science and Technology Museum

The Science and Technology museum is part of the University of Patras campus since 1998 and, from the start, it has developed a good collaboration with the Department.

In the first place, members of the department use its beautiful amphitheatre for lectures, thus bringing the students in close contact with the museum building and its exhibits.

Another activity relating with the museum is carried out in the auspices of the museum education courses offered by the Natural Sciences division. The students are encouraged to undertake museum related projects, and this covers all levels from undergraduates, to postgraduate and doctoral students.

Department students also work on a voluntary basis in the museum, thus acquiring experience and skills which prepare them for other forms of educational employment, outside the formal school system structure, a goal ascertained by the Department as vital in its identity and preparation of students.

The Museum is a fair sized and very comfortable establishment, staffed by three persons, one of whom has only just retired. It has a very limited budget of around 10.000 Euros a year from the University, and it relies heavily on donations and voluntary work for developing its exhibits and maintaining its exhibitions.

The Museum staff reported that the Department under observation is one of its best collaborators in the University setting. Naturally the museum is open to school visits which are often executed in collaboration with this Department.

A more reasonable budget would certainly help improve the quantity and the quality of exhibitions. Providing voluntary student and staff work as well as exhibits is an important contribution that the department is making

Collaboration with the Arts Center of the Rio Municipality

We had the opportunity to review three booklets from recent collaborative activities with the Rio Municipality Arts Center. These included work from a Theater Workshop, a Drawing Workshop and a Creative Arts Workshop. These are examples of what faculty in Art and Culture Education can impart on the community and how University – community interactions can add value to creative culture but also introduce new opportunities for education and development. We highly commend the department on these initiatives which highlight a strong potential for using theoretically informed initiative to the benefit of science, innovation and community development.

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

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

The committee is pleased to report that it was very favourably impressed by the Department's overall work and activities. We were particularly impressed by the long-standing efforts of the department to utilize every opportunity for internal and external evaluation for self-improvement.

The Department appears to be doing an exceptionally good job, especially considering the difficult financial, staff and building conditions under which it operates. Its research, publication and citation record compares very favourably with similar Departments in Europe, albeit departments equipped with much better facilities, larger numbers of staff and much more extensive budgets.

It is indeed important to state that when University Departments in Greece achieve such high international standards, they should be awarded in some way by their University or the State as holding high the name of Greek tertiary education.

For a Department of Education it is not enough to achieve an international name. Much as it is judged by publications and citations, it is crucially important that it should also be evaluated on the basis of its social contribution to its local community. The Department in question serves its local community in a multitude of ways. Not only does it provide the local youth with a very high quality qualification and professional title, opening opportunities beyond the formal school educational system, it also serves as an academic and intellectual hub for the community via its school practicum and its research activities which provide in-service opportunities for local schools and teachers. The department has established a track record of service as an educational resource for local teachers, parents and mostly children through other activities (May Festival, Fibonacci project, e.t.c.) as has already been outlined.

Finally, the Department contributes to greek national research and teaching in Education in a most efficient and effective way. If supported in the ways outlined in the various sections of this report, it has the potential to achieve an even better national and international profile and lead the way of preschool education in Greece and Europe.

Through the documents that we have reviewed and through getting to know the faculty during our visit, we witnessed an ambitious department that seeks to serve the educational sciences on a scale that is comparable to the best departments internationally. It is currently held back by poor buildings infrastructure and chronic underfunding.

The main factors that inhibit a more sustainable functioning of the Department are:

- a. Shortage of staff in certain scientific domains that are crucial to an Educational Sciences department.
- b. Lack of seed funding for research activities and for international networking. This places a severe constraint on the opportunities that the department has in competing for international research funding.
- c. Lack of resources and infrastructure, including buildings which is a major constraint.
- d. Shortage in support and administrative staff.
- e. Uncertainty, continuous change and over-centralized legal stipulations.

Despite these constraints, the Department has already initiated improvements both in the undergraduate and graduate programs. These should also be carried out for the PhD Program. The EEC's recommendations are delineated in the next section.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

The department identifies the value of independent external feedback and has always sought to be evaluated. It has voluntarily carried out external evaluations twice in the past. This, in addition to its internal procedures, have helped it to thoughtfully reflect on its history and also have a shared vision of how it would like to develop in the future. It is held back by its infrastructure, by underfunding but mostly by the over-centralized administrative and legal environment, as well as the longstanding uncertainty in higher education in Greece.

Despite chronic shortages, the Department has done everything possible and has been able to demonstrate excellence in research through publications in established scientific journals and through international recognition in the form of citations. The department also has a demonstrated potential to continue to contribute very substantially to the local educational system and the local community in terms of expertise, events and interventions that add cultural and educational value.

We believe that in future the Department will find it useful to make a more consistent effort to state its scientific mission more explicitly and to relate the various parts of its internal evaluation documentation to the mission statement and also the external evaluation parameters. The Committee believes that this will further improve the departmental reflection mechanisms and the usefulness of the internal evaluation process as a management instrument.

Based on our review of the documents, the website and also our interactions with the department, its students and the University leadership during our visit, we would like to make the following recommendations:

- (a) As a matter of priority, the University and the State need to find ways to improve the buildings, the overall infrastructure and the networking resources that the Department has access to. The faculty have done a remarkable job of stretching the resources to their limits and using everything to full capacity, often times going well beyond what would seem possible from a first glance. The Department urgently needs new buildings for all its activities, including research, teaching and office spaces. Through its track record to date, the department has already proven that it deserves the necessary material support for sustaining its basic operation. The deficiencies that we could readily identify are specialist teaching rooms in a range of disciplines as well as the need for improved and more accessible facilities in New Technologies in Education. The EEC concurs that a new building for the Educational Sciences in Patras is very long overdue.
- (b) The EEC formed the impression that the Department has strong potential in attracting even more research funding and needs the necessary seed financial support to be able to unleash this potential in order to compete more equitably on the European stage. We strongly feel that adequate funding for faculty members' participation in international conferences is critical for international collaborations and obtaining external research funding.
- (c) The Department deserves great credit for successfully and dynamically embracing the difficult task of facilitating collaborative efforts on a broad scale both within the department and with the rest of the university. Existing collaborations range from service courses offered to other departments, many joint cross-disciplinary publications, joint supervision of Masters and PhD theses as well as a range of outreach activities including the Festival and the Museum innovations. Its Chair, and

the whole faculty, have had the courage to establish comprehensive self-reflective processes as part of the departmental culture with powerful positive results. *The Department should continue its commendable collaborative work.* The EEC encourages the faculty to find ways to keep the communication channels open between different Sectors, supporting educational and administrative staff, but also continuing to mentor and support younger faculty in serving the established goal of excellence in research.

- (d) In its teaching programme, the greatest challenge that the Department could take on is to find ways to extend the strife for excellence to its students. In our interactions we formed the impression that students enter university as a matter of natural course without much reflection on developing a scientific or professional identity or a vision for becoming competitive on a global scale. The department does have the culture to create a vision of excellence amongst the students participating in its undergraduate programmes following on from its achievements in this direction with its Masters level studies. Creating more robust structures for more consistent academic advising would help in this direction. On a more technical level, we also believe that the undergraduate course of studies could benefit from further articulating an appropriate course sequence with prerequisites in order to further enhance student academic development and learning. We also believe that the school practicum needs to be extended and to involve closer connections with the taught courses and interaction with all the faculty. A student handbook specifically for the School Practicum would help everyone involved.
- (e) The Department should more explicitly reflect on its mission and examine how the latter is served through the curriculum, courses, outreach, and MA research and PhD dissertations produced. Strategic planning should be explicitly connected to this mission as well. Overlapping course content across the curriculum should continue to be creatively addressed.
- (f) The PhD Program should continue its mission of seeking to create a scholarly community of learning that fosters a culture of research, collaboration, apprenticeship to specific academic discourses and expectations. Specific initiatives need to be undertaken to enhance the collaboration amongst PhD candidates and create opportunities for more interaction on a regular basis.
- (g) The New Technologies infrastructure has been used to its limits in supporting all Departmental activities in teaching, research and teacher professional development. In addition, it has been used to support (a) undergraduate and post-graduate teaching and learning; and (b) the engagement of undergraduate students in faculty research activities. This goes beyond what the existing infrastructure can support in the long term. We strongly recommend that the University commits increased ICT resources in order to sustain these valuable activities in the long term and also in order to improve the level of access of students and teachers in the community to the Departmental resources and activities.
- (h) The Department has dynamically addressed the vagueness of the legal framework in education, such as the pending changes in teacher certification, and the uncertainty created as a result, and the lack of funding and other obstacles that arise from governmental and legislative mandates. We suggest that the Department implement a “Department agency,” to apply its viable and creative strategies and practices to surmount the above-noted challenges. It would be useful in this effort if the Department could initiate a series of exploratory activities building collaboration with entities in the private sector that could benefit from its expertise in instructional design and professional development.

- (i) Faculty research and publications are richly diverse and include relevant and up-to-date practices for students and practitioners in the field of early childhood. Research publications have achieved a high standard of recognition, connecting research to international progress in the field. The major challenge that the department faces in this area is how to sustain the level of excellence in research that it has achieved by continuing to integrate graduate students and new faculty in collaborative research activities in the way that it has managed to do so impressively for several years. Along the same lines, it is important that the Department should continue to encourage its PhD students to learn and engage in international research and practice.
- (j) The Department offers a significantly rich and commendable array of educational science courses, including but not limited to, those focusing on science education, educational technology, mathematics education, the humanities and pedagogy. The interdisciplinary connections among theoretical courses to pedagogy and the connection of faculty research to exemplary pedagogic practices should continually be explored, as the Internal Evaluation Report notes, to enhance the connection of pedagogy and research in student teaching practices as well as course content and delivery.
- (k) There is a growing global initiative in higher education to promote more comparability and more generalizable research and more effective teaching. Striving for a balance between rigorous, reliable educational research that can be of interest globally and that can add value across specific contexts, can enhance the research and teaching practice of the Department as well as critically inform the educational community in Greece. The Department faculty's reservoir of diverse talent and expertise in key education disciplines related to the educational sciences augur well for even greater accomplishments in research, publications and teaching practices. Faculty members have the ability and tenacity to seek international funding and to continue to strengthen their output of research based publications while continuing the dynamic, timely and creative university-school and university-community collaborations that currently support faculty-student engagement, and enrich student learning and the society at large.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
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