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

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Department of Primary Level Education

DEMOCRITUS UNIVERSITY OF THRACE

SEPTEMBER 2013



European Union  
European Social Fund



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

Co-financed by Greece and the European Union



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### **External Evaluation Committee**

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

1. Dr. Evangeline Newton, Professor of Literacy Education, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio, USA  
(Coordinator)
  
2. Dr. Christos Panayiotopoulos, Associate Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy and Practice, University of Nicosia, Cyprus
  
3. Dr. Diether Hopf, Professor, Max Planck-Institute for Human Development, Berlin, and Department of Educational Studies, University of Potsdam ,Germany

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

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

### **Introduction**

**Background.** The Department of Primary Education at the University of Thrace was founded in 1986-87. Its chair is in Alexandroupoli. In recent years the department has accepted an increasing number of students, ranging in number from approximately 250-330. According to information provided by HQA, the total number of students served by the department from 2009-2010 was 910, but today that number has grown to 1,161. There are 23 permanent faculty members. Beginning in September 2013, the department will be accepting 180 students.

In 2003, approximately 17 years after the establishment of the undergraduate degree, the department introduced a master’s degree entitled, “Sciences of Education.” Until 2010, this master’s had three concentrations:

1. School Pedagogy and Diversity in Education
2. Didactic of Sciences, Environmental Education and New Technologies
3. Language and Culture: Theories and Teaching Approaches

Despite the fact that only one concentration is currently taught, the department has placed particular emphasis on the development of a new postgraduate degree related to research and professional practice in education.

**The External Evaluation Procedure.** The committee was composed of three members:

- Dr. Evangeline Newton (Coordinator), Professor of Literacy Education, The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio (USA)
- Dr. Christos Panayiotopoulos, Associate Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy and Practice, University of Nicosia, (Cyprus)
- Dr. Diether Hopf, Professor, Max Planck-Institute for Human Development, Berlin, and Department of Educational Studies, University of Potsdam (Germany)

On the afternoon of September 9, the committee met initially for a briefing with the Dean of the School, the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, the Head of the Department and the faculty members (OMEA) who had, together with other staff members, composed the internal evaluation report.

The committee met on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> with the majority of full-time (19-17 out of 23) and adjunct (i.e., Special Laboratory Teaching Staff [EETEP] faculty; Special Technical Staff [EDIP]) faculty, students, and administrative staff. The committee held both individual and group interviews with full-time and adjunct faculty as well as with students and administrative staff.

During this time the committee also toured the Primary Education Department, the library, classrooms and staff offices. Its tour included visits to a number of labs (e.g., Chemistry Lab, Educational Research) that operate under the Department of Primary Education.

The committee was provided with several evaluation documents, the most important of which was the *Internal Evaluation* report completed in September 2012; it referred largely to the years 2009 through 2011-12.

At our request, the department also provided updated faculty *curriculum vitae*, practicum and dissertation handbooks, and manuals for practicum placement and for dissertations. The committee appreciated the richness of the materials with which they were provided. Moreover, it thanks the Department of Primary Education for its hospitality and support at all times.

**The Internal Evaluation Procedure.** The department has submitted a detailed report (*Internal Evaluation Report*, Sept. 2012). The report is an impressive document because of its overall precision and sincerity. Neither the positive nor the negative sides of the curriculum, the teaching or the research processes are concealed. The report presents a wealth of information, which is delivered in reflective way.

A problematic feature of the internal evaluation procedure is the apparent lack of unanimity among the faculty. For example, the basic papers, the Internal Evaluation Reports in the last years, have been written by between 9 or 12 persons, mostly by the same individuals. It is an impressive achievement of the active members of the staff to have produced this and earlier reports. According to faculty who had participated in the internal evaluation, there was resistance by a number of their colleagues to the evaluation process, either through their absence in the meetings with the external evaluation committee or through their comments during the meetings. The committee would of course have preferred a report which was based on the full and collegial participation of all departmental members. The committee does, however, acknowledge the presence of the resistant faculty during the first meeting between the department and the External Evaluation Committee (EEC). It further recognizes that those members clearly articulated their objection to the process: They declared that they do not recognize the EEC's right to evaluate staff members' work.

## A. Curriculum

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

### APPROACH

It has been stated in the Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees that “The purposes of this external assessment is to define whether the diverse actions of a given unit and the ensuing results are consistent with its predefined plan. Also, whether this plan is appropriate for the accomplishment of the unit’s objectives; finally whether the plan is effectively implemented, thus ensuring the accomplishment of the academic unit’s goals and the improvement of its quality”. (p.3)

As we see it from our perspective as researchers in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, this can only be partly achieved. As far as the APPROACH is concerned, we are in a position to check on its feasibility and internal logic and rationality as well as determine its strengths and weaknesses in comparison to other approaches in different countries.

When it comes to IMPLEMENTATION, the information our judgements are based on is far from being complete, since we did not have the opportunity to see any implementation *in situ*. Therefore we must rely on indirect information like reports of the staff members and the students.

This is even more relevant when we get to the RESULTS section. In none of the areas –curriculum, teaching, or research – do we have direct observations or other data on which to base our judgements, nor to talk about casual connections between, for example, an approach and the results. Therefore our proposals concerning the IMPROVEMENTS are not based on complete evidence.

What we can do and what we did is : *to formulate our impressions in accordance with what we have seen, heard and read as objectively possible*. Our judgement should be therefore as plausible approaches to the situation.

**Goals and Objectives:** While the Handbook provides information about the sequence and content of courses, it does not articulate foundational goals and objectives. This may reflect what appeared to be dual and somewhat conflicting goals in the curriculum i.e. development of content expertise in subject areas versus development of pedagogical expertise in methodological courses.

The committee believes that offering course with content knowledge (CK) as well as courses with pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) to the students – and not restricting students to PCK as happens frequently in primary school teacher education – is to be commended. It also notes that these courses constitute the focus of the first two years of studies, whereas PCK of the final two years. For example, Modern Greek Language (2<sup>nd</sup> semester) and Language Teaching (5<sup>th</sup> semester).

The faculty notes that for the last 27 years, the Program of Study is discussed in the General Assembly at the end of each academic year (May). At that time, new course titles are added while older ones are removed. The faculty believe that through this process, new courses that meet the changing needs and challenges of education have been incorporated into the department’s curriculum.

To date, the department has not implemented any kind of systematic or formal annual review of the course of study before this. The committee urges them to consider implementing a formal annual review meeting. During such a meeting, faculty would have an opportunity to address the effectiveness of program content and identify goals and objectives which serve both purposes. In the process, they might gain insights that would result in programmatic or course revisions which would deliver a more integrated course of study.

The committee believes that faculty are aware of the need to clarify goals. In its internal evaluation, for example, the department notes the need to make the link between theory and practice in its undergraduate program more explicit. Similarly, they identify the need for a curriculum review to improve this link. This theme emerged again during the faculty interviews, with members commenting that they have not yet managed to focus on things that “keep us together rather than draw us apart” (interview notes, 9/10/13). Disciplinary differences therefore obstruct communication, although members noted that this has improved a bit in recent years.

## IMPLEMENTATION

**Course of Study.** The committee believes that overall the department has designed a course of study that is appropriate and meets universally accepted standards for teacher preparation. Given the duality of purpose (i.e., content and pedagogy), the sequence of courses generally reflects a coherent academic rationale for the content and order in which courses are offered.

There are a few required courses each semester which include both pedagogy and subject areas. In addition, students may choose from a vast array of elective courses on a variety of topics. In their interviews, students noted the multidisciplinary nature of the department as both a strength and weakness. One student observed, for example, that because there were so many course options students could “learn many things” (interview notes, 9-11-13). They also commented that they liked the mixture of content and pedagogy courses.

Given the growing number of students and faculty attrition, the committee urges the department to review and potentially reduce the number of electives it offers. Some of these courses, however, address important areas of teacher preparation (e.g., school assessment and effectiveness, children with special needs, children with advanced mental abilities and talents) that are not otherwise addressed in the curriculum. Perhaps some of the content of such courses might be incorporated into required offerings.

While individual courses may address issues of diversity as one dimension of course content, there is only one elective course devoted exclusively to multicultural issues. The committee believes that currently multicultural issues are not adequately represented in the curriculum. For example, we did not see the topic of “migrant and foreign children” represented in the compulsory courses, although about 10% of primary school children belong to this group (Sakka & Psalty, 2004). The specific needs of this large group of children must be studied in classrooms that prepare future teachers.

Furthermore, since all education today is global in nature and the department itself resides in an ethnically diverse community, we urge the department to consider requiring one course that only addresses these issues.

The committee also believes that the topic of assessment and/or pedagogical diagnosis is not adequately represented in the current curriculum. It is essential that prospective teachers understand the strengths and limitations of different assessment procedures used in the schools (e.g., grading, promotion, selection, recommendation).

In the "Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών 2011-12", which the committee received before the visit to Alexandroupoli, there is no compulsory course on educational assessment. In the "Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών 2013-14" which the committee received in Alexandroupoli, there is a course on educational assessment in the 7th semester. The committee affirms this new requirement but believes that this topic is so fundamental and complex that it should be required of students as a compulsory course in more than in one semester.

**Resources and Staff.** The committee observes that the faculty are to be commended for delivering a solid course of study in light of the large and growing number of students who are entering their program.

There are areas in which additional resources are sorely needed. Technology (e.g., e-learning; blended learning) provides many opportunities to effectively teach a large number of students. Furthermore, students mentioned the high cost of textbooks and other learning materials. While it is worth noting that Greek students are not required to buy textbooks or other learning materials as these are provided by the State, the committee notes that despite the limited availability of Greek language materials, Internet technology can provide instant access to high-quality free learning materials (e.g., scholarly articles, websites).

In order for technology to be a viable resource, however, the department must invest in both human and electronic resources. We recommend hiring a full-time e-learning expert whose chief responsibilities would include not only overseeing resources but also the education and support of faculty in the preparation and delivery of e-learning courses and supplementary materials. In fact, the committee feels strongly that this is an urgent need.

The committee similarly feels that additional human resources are needed to support the Practicum experience. In its current form, students are not assigned to schools until the 7<sup>th</sup> semester. Typically, about 250 students are assigned to 5 seconded primary teachers; each of these teachers has/supervises about 17 students in each of the three periods that the Practicum runs (8<sup>th</sup> semester). Also, about 7 staff members observe, guide and assess about 12 students in each of these three periods in aspects of the students' teaching related to their expertise.

The Practicum is implemented chiefly by one faculty member who provided a thoughtful and detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current structure. (See "Teaching"). Although the committee was impressed by his efficiency in placing and tracking such a large number of students, there are disadvantages to the current program that could be relieved with additional resources.

Since the Practicum is the only true opportunity in the current program for students to be in real classrooms, students find themselves trying to understand the sociocultural dynamics of a classroom setting while simultaneously developing and implementing lessons that require deep understanding of how to translate instructional theory into practice. This is a difficult task for all novices; some students make the discovery that they do not want to be teachers. If students were engaged with students in classrooms and community settings before the Practicum, they would have ample opportunity to understand how educational theory is translated into real world practice. In addition, some of them might realize teaching is not an appropriate career choice for them early in their university educations.

An expanded Practicum model is not viable, however, without additional support. It is therefore recommended that the Department hire another faculty member whose responsibility would be to identify new sites and help coordinate an expanded Practicum program. Moreover, an experienced practitioner (e.g., retired classroom teacher) would already have a deep understanding of the educational system as well as relationships with people at school and community sites.

## **RESULTS**

In general, from the evidence provided to the committee it appears that the department is achieving its goals well and we believe is to be commended for delivering a comprehensive program under challenging circumstances (e.g., lack of funding and resources).

## **IMPROVEMENT**

In its internal evaluation, the department indicated the need for a curriculum review process to improve the link between theory and practice. We concur with their recommendation, recognizing that this is a complex issue that requires continuous discussion. Moreover, we believe such a process should help them clarify their departmental goals and objectives. We offer the following additional recommendations:

- As part of a continuing review process, the department might consider implementing a yearly discussion to review the scope and sequence of its curriculum. At the moment, for example, only about 2 fifths of the compulsory curriculum is made up of content knowledge (CK) courses with the remaining 3 fifths made up of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) courses. While there is no evidence of the advantages or disadvantages of a specific sequence of courses, it is essential that methodological differences among subject areas (e.g., history, psychology, text hermeneutics) be clear to students. It is therefore important that the practica refer to the theoretical courses as often as possible. To that end, we recommend that staff members explicitly cooperate with the practica faculty.
- The department should create a template for syllabi that will provide uniform formatting (e.g., aim, objectives, learning outcomes, content of subjects, evaluation measures that include the weight of each assessment measure, and current references).
- The department must increase the presence of technology (e.g., e-learning) in their curricular offerings by hiring a full-time faculty member whose responsibilities would include education and support of faculty with electronic course development.
- We believe the department should expand the number and range of Practicum

experiences students undertake by hiring someone to develop, coordinate and help monitor placements in additional school and community settings.

- We recommend a required course in multicultural education.
- We feel strongly that a compulsory course on educational assessment and/or pedagogical diagnosis is critically needed and should be added to the list of compulsory courses.

## B. Teaching

### APPROACH

**Teaching Approach and Methodology.** There is a high correlation between a faculty member's subject area and the courses he or she teaches, suggesting that most of the faculty are teaching in areas where they have scholarly expertise. Most faculty members teach 4-6 courses per year and are available to students for 2-5 office hours per week.

Currently, the department has 66 students studying for a PhD. Most of them work full-time so they are pursuing the degree on a part-time basis. The department accommodates them by offering its graduate courses at night.

The faculty developed an evaluation tool which they administer to students at the conclusion of their courses. For the internal evaluation report, the department analyzed data from the evaluations to determine students' overall satisfaction. According to their analysis, students generally believe that the teaching staff is good and do meet their professional responsibilities. This claim was also supported in comments made by students during their interview with the committee.

The internal evaluation also noted that students found the faculty often had low expectations for student productivity. Attendance in most courses is not required and perhaps not surprisingly, student participation is higher at the beginning and end of each semester. Attendance is generally more frequent in elective courses (60-80%) than it is in compulsory courses (40-60%).

**Teaching Methods Used.** The committee found little evidence that most faculty drew on a variety of teaching and/or assessment methods. During their interviews, for example, several students commented that most instruction is delivered in a traditional lecture format. They pointed out that one result of this is that too few courses establish an explicit link between theory and practice, in part because students have too few opportunities to see "Best Practice" (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012) instruction modeled. Similarly, as noted earlier, the use of digital technology as an instructional tool is almost non-existent.

Furthermore, students noted that additional issues which impact teaching and learning (e.g., gender, crisis management, special needs populations) are not integrated into courses in a way that deepen their understanding of the complex influences that impact the relationship of theory to practice.

**Teacher/Student Ratios:** The number of staff members reached 27 (2009), it was then reduced to 25 (2012) and at the time being is 23: 8 professors, 6 associate professors, 5 assistant professors and 4 lecturers. Overall, there are 23 active faculty members for 1,300 students. The faculty consists of 8 professors, 6 associate professors, 9 assistant professors and 6 lecturers. Of the 25, only 16 completed a self-assessment.

As noted earlier, it will be difficult for faculty to sustain a high level of teaching and research without additional resources. For example, many faculty members teach more than the required workload in order to deliver the program. While this enables the department to meet programmatic needs, it limits the amount of time faculty members can devote to research, their own professional development, their service to the university and local community, and might potentially result in staff-burnout.

The committee found little evidence of extensive faculty-student collaborations. As noted earlier, most of the doctoral students are pursuing their degrees part-time and may be unavailable for scholarly collaboration. Perhaps if faculty employed more variety of instructional technique (e.g., small group projects), teacher-student collaborations might result in new ways to mentor students as future teachers and researchers.

**Examination System.** The current examination system is very traditional; faculty and students agree that it has significant limitations. One disadvantage of the current system is that instructors must evaluate hundreds of exams, all of which are administered at the same time. Students commented that sometimes instructors took several weeks to complete grading exams. In addition, because students are not required to attend class in most courses, many of them only appear at exam time. One positive result of introducing new instructional approaches and increasing collaborative experiences between faculty and students might be discovering new ways of assessing student learning.

The committee believes it is, however, important to acknowledge the notable individual attempts to depart from the traditional examination system through a variety of alternative examination assignments: essays, production of educational materials, presentation of research articles and books, short research projects, and so on. More information on this matter can be found in e-class (e.g., Childhood history) or in individual subjects' sites (e.g., <http://utopia.duth.gr/~xsakonid>, <http://www.amarkos.gr/courses/qda/>)

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

**Quality of Teaching Procedures.** While students found that most courses do not adequately link research and many faculty rely chiefly on a traditional lecture format, students praised several aspects of teaching procedures with which the committee concurred. For example, students praised several instructors who they believed promoted critical thinking and linked theory with practice effectively in their classes.

The committee was further impressed by some of the innovative methods being used to teach English language and fine arts. The theatre instructor explained how the department had secured funds to enable a basement room to be transformed into a kind of acting studio. He demonstrated how he might present students with a scenario from which they would collaborate on a performance. He also shared a website he had developed that provided students with a plethora of resources they could draw on to enhance their learning.

The art, music and English language teachers also shared impressive projects which they had designed to teach content. These project-based learning assignments linked theory and practice in creative ways that enhanced critical thinking (e.g., books that students had written and/or illustrated; musical instruments they had created). We believe the contribution of these faculty members to student learning should be recognized and valued.

The committee is confident that there are many other examples of commendable instruction. Consequently, it wishes to note that in recognizing the positive contribution of these faculty members the committee is not disparaging the work of other faculty.

The committee met with students in order to explore the mobility of academic staff and students through the Erasmus exchange program. It appears that students participate more frequently than the teaching staff, although even the number of students participating was small. The committee met with two female students who had the experience of attending a Spanish and a Portuguese University. Each described her experience as very useful, explaining that she had enjoyed new experiences educationally, socially and culturally. Although not all of the courses they took had been accredited by the Department of Education, the students agreed that their experience had been very worthwhile.

**Quality of Teaching Materials and Resources.** From a cursory visit to two laboratories, syllabi descriptions of courses and evidence of scholarly productivity, the committee believes that overall the faculty have developed teaching materials and employed resources that suggest they have current expertise in their disciplinary areas. As noted earlier, the committee believes that the department must increase its use of digital technologies and resources.

**Evaluation by Students of Teaching, Course Content and Materials.** It is important to

note that the evidence we drew on in this section stems largely from the student interviews we conducted. During those interviews, the comments of students about staff members were continuously positive. For example, students often expressed satisfaction with the quality of instruction they were receiving. They liked the variety of course offerings and felt that on the whole the course of study offered a balance between content and pedagogy.

The two students who had been on the Erasmus exchange said they found that departmental instructors “go into more depth” (interview notes, 9-11-13) and consequently stimulated deeper understanding when compared with the instruction they had received in Spain and Portugal. Another student said he valued the “freedom of speech” he felt in most of his classrooms (interview, 9-11-13).

Yet one student noted that departmental faculty assigned little homework to extend what had been learned. Moreover, even those assignments did not always provide an opportunity to demonstrate what had been learned. Instead, evaluation relied solely on the traditional end-of semester test.

Students found that the labs stay open until late and staff provided them with materials. They noted that while some faculty take advantage of electronic articles and resources, others appear to lack basic skills.

Many students noted the need to introduce real-world classroom experiences earlier in their course of study. For example, they cited the need for more opportunity to work with students with special needs. All agreed that while the Practicum experience was a tremendous amount of work, they felt that had received good support and assistance and had grown in their understanding of how to teach.

Other issues raised by students focused on the financial burden of expenses they had to incur (e.g., cost of books, rent), overcrowded classroom facilities and buildings that were poorly heated in winter.

## **RESULTS**

Overall, the committee found clear evidence of the faculty’s commitment to teaching. In their interviews, several students provided specific examples of what they considered excellent instruction. Furthermore, in their strategic plan faculty identified areas for future growth. They recognize the need to review their program, figure out how to involve everyone in the process and find new ways to integrate differing visions into a coherent set of goals and objectives.

## IMPROVEMENT

The committee was impressed by the identification of strengths, areas of need and improvement initiatives undertaken by the faculty who participated in the internal evaluation. Similarly, as the committee listened to presentations and conducted interviews it became apparent that the department has faculty who are conscientious teachers and scholars despite difficult circumstances.

In addition, it appears there is a broad range of expertise among faculty. With some additional resources (e.g., technology) and opportunity to collaborate on curricular development, teaching and research, the committee believes the department will continue to grow.

Following are suggestions which might contribute to future growth:

- Some of the junior and EΔΠΠ faculty have expertise in areas (e.g., computers, the fine and language arts) that could enhance the instruction of faculty teaching content or methods courses. These faculty members could collaborate and reduce the gap between content and pedagogy. Such collaborations might also generate research studies that would result in publication.
- The department might consider additional ways of enlisting the talents of PhD students. They could, for example, be of great help in delivering and assessing specific parts of the taught material. Since many of them are also classroom teachers, they could be enlisted to create additional school and community-based experiences in which students could work with children.
- The committee notes that while a course outline is provided at the initial class meeting, the outline template needs to be consistent across courses and include basic information.
- The committee observed that at present there is only one chief evaluation measure. Since it is difficult to capture a full picture of student learning through one end-of-semester evaluation, we urge the department to explore and implement a variety of measures, including portfolios, essays, multiple choice tests and project-based assignments.

Faculty should consider reducing the number of elective courses for students. Such a change might allow a reduction in the number of students in compulsory courses i.e., large classes could be divided into two sections creating parallel courses taught by different instructors. For example, a section of mathematics could be taught by two lecturers, each of whom has a background in mathematics.

### **C. Research**

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

#### **APPROACH**

##### **Policy and Main Objectives.**

As far as we could detect (internal evaluation report 2011-12, page 24) there is no explicit research policy in the department. Furthermore, there are also no clearly formulated objectives concerning research. Both the research which has been completed and that which is underway follow the traditional lines of research at European universities; each individual pursues his or her scientific interests with the consequence that research occurs on subject area topics (as in mathematics) as well as Social Science - including Education - topics.

The department states very clearly in the student Handbook (p.98-101,2003-2006) when a student can undertake a dissertation, what the student is expected to achieve and what time schedule must be followed.

Similarly, in the documents provided the committee found no evidence of any kind of Research Ethics Committee. Because issues of plagiarism and research ethics are of utmost importance, the committee believes that there should be a comprehensive “ΟΔΗΓΟΣ ΠΤΥΧΙΑΚΗΣ ΜΕΛΕΤΗΣ,” along with an updated student handbook where all the above issues and issues about plagiarism, presentation of dissertation supervisors’ and supervisee duties would be clearly stated.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

**Quality and Adequacy.** According to the material provided, the committee noticed that overall only 15 self-assessment reports out of 23 faculty members were completed. Thus the committee assessment is limited to the data provided, without taking into consideration research of the faculty who refused to complete the forms. It is worth noting that some of those who refused to complete the forms were present in the Tuesday meeting and reported their objection directly to the committee.

**Infrastructure and Support.** The promotion of research, either amongst the faculty or the students, is achieved in various ways:

- Teaching research courses (I,II) or the completion of assignments as part of course assessment;
- Completion of dissertations where group of students have the opportunity to explore, observe and study various issues related to primary education in the local context;
- Publication of articles through the establishment of a copy journal that enables both faculty and students to exchange research findings related to educational research.

Overall the committee agrees to a great extent with what has been written in the internal

evaluation document as far as equipment and modernization of labs. The committee recognizes the need for the purchase of additional equipment and recruitment of research staff.

## RESULTS

**Scientific Output.** In addition to the above activities, 15 members of faculty have produced the following scientific output:

- **Books (monographs, edited/chapters):** 9
- **Publications in peer reviewed journals:** 20 in international journals and 9 in Greek journals
- **Conference presentations:** 26 conference presentations (peer review procedure) and 2 without peer review procedure.

N.B.: The majority of the above data refers to the year 2012. However, the internal evaluation document indicates that, in terms of publication, the numbers are similar to the previous year (2011-12).

Beyond the objective difficulties in producing scientific work (e.g. large numbers of students, lack of funds to participate in international conferences), impact is difficult to assess: The internal evaluation report of the DEP (2012) presents tables with the number of quotations as an indicator of impact. The bases for these tables, however, are numbers the authors themselves have reported in which they claim to have been quoted. There is no standard procedure employed, such as using the SSCI or the SCI for this reporting. In addition, the committee recognizes that many educational areas, such as, mathematics education, have only recently have been included in SSCI or SCI. Moreover, some areas have yet to be included.

**Research Projects and Collaborations.** In addition to these scientific scholarly publications and presentations, and given the circumstances the university is operating under now and has for some years, a number (9) of faculty members from those who completed (15) the self-assessment report is actively seeking funds and project collaborations with other International institutions (USA, Cyprus, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey). As a result, faculty have managed to participate in 9 projects in the past few years. The department also has close links with other Greek universities through its implementation of common projects. It is important to note that in some cases the faculty is trying to carry out research projects without any funding. Moreover, such projects may also produce scientific knowledge relevant to teaching material and daily practice.

The department has also developed 2 labs for science education, environmental education (ecology, marine biology) and a lab where students are practicing micro-teaching. There is also a lab that provides special education resources. These labs under appropriate circumstances and the use of contemporary resources could develop a research and educational mindset, particularly amongst students and faculty. The aim of these labs

would be the promotion of research procedures, innovative practices and the dissemination of research findings amongst the academic and student community.

## **IMPROVEMENT**

The committee acknowledges the effort that is being undertaken by those who completed the Self-Assessment Report and would like to commend them for their work in aiming to promote research. We believe that the following recommendations should be taken into consideration as a way to expand and strengthen the scientific output of the department:

- We urge all faculty to publish in peer-reviewed journals and attend conferences to the extent they are able to do so.
- We encourage the dissemination of findings to the wider academic community (e.g., conference presentations within and outside the university, publication in international journals). It would be useful if the department could turn the hardcopy journals into e-journals to facilitate wider access and dissemination.
- We recommend organization of joint seminars with other university departments (i.e., Early Childhood Education, Social Administration and Political Science) in order to promote dissertations and share faculty research output. In that way the department will be a source of knowledge not only for the University of Thrace but also for the local and the international community.
- We recommend the development of a Research Centre in collaboration with the Department of Early Childhood or other academic departments, one that would provide support to faculty (e.g., help with writing a proposal, statistical analysis, etc.) and disseminate information about available grants and funding. The department could involve PhD candidates, Master students and graduate students who may want to work on voluntary basis. In addition, European funds could be used to employ graduates in order to conduct research projects.
- We further suggest that the Research Ethics Committee (see Research: Approach) we recommend be established at the school or university level to ensure that the workload of faculty not be increased. We do believe such a committee is needed, even if it meets on an occasional basis, particularly because the department offers graduate degrees. Such committees are standard practice at most research universities.

We believe that research work could be strengthened in various areas (e.g., venues of publication; equipment of labs; use of modern technology; and strengthening the link between research and teaching). Overall, however, the committee is impressed by the intense research activity of faculty members who have reported their work, and recognizes that their commitment to research has been sustained under very difficult conditions.

#### ***D. All Other Services***

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

#### **APPROACH**

**Administrative Procedures.** It appears that the department has not yet developed a policy to simplify procedures, perhaps because the administrative staff and the EETEP are currently able to cover both administrative and students' needs. Three members of EETEP are providing faculty and student support services (e.g., contacting students to provide information as needed) in addition to the supporting and organizing of conferences within the department, generating minutes of divisions' assembly etc.

The Department of Primary Education has four highly skilled and educated secretaries (3 out of the 4 are master degree holders) who seem to be meeting the unit's needs to a great extent. They seem very friendly and approachable to students and they show empathy to students' difficulties in relation to housing needs.

The committee felt that despite their limited resources and financial restraints, the administrative personnel have been very efficient at managing an enormous workload. The secretaries all noted the lack of technical support and their concern about the possibility of losing their jobs because of the restructure of Higher Education.

**Student Presence on Campus.** There appears to be no active policy to promote students' presence on campus. The committee observed that the physical structure itself does not create an attractive environment that might encourage a student presence on campus. We understand that this is due in part to the limited resources for students (e.g., computer labs, reading rooms, student societies etc.). Moreover, it appears that many of the classrooms do not lend themselves to interactive activities that would bring students to campus for a variety of purposes (e.g., lectures, clubs, athletics). The lack of heating and a well decorated environment may be one reason for the absence of students from the campus.

We were told that students were supported after their graduation, provided with information about postgraduate studies or finding a job. This was happening through the "Γραφείο Διασύνδεσης." The same person was providing psychological support to students too. However, this service is not in operation anymore as funding has stopped.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

**Administrative Organization and Infrastructure.** The department's current administrative staff members seem to support the daily activities of the academic unit very

well. In particular, the EETEP staff members appear to play a crucial role in the organization of labs, the contacting and sometimes even tutoring of students and the development of field activities at a local community level.

**Infrastructure for Students.** Library facilities seem adequate but there is ample opportunity for improvement, both in terms of material acquisition and expanded space. The person in charge of the library has done a superb job of sorting and filing books, journals, and student theses. The planned production of digital versions of the theses - doctoral, master, and bachelor - is an important development and should be emphatically promoted.

In addition, the committee also feels it imperative to implement Wi-Fi access across the entire campus community. In particular students noticed the lack of internet throughout the campus and the need for new computers. Despite the lack of studying rooms for students, there was an office with a small library and a printer for postgraduate students.

We observed that faculty offices are well appointed and many faculty members have their own offices. This creates a positive academic environment that promotes research and academic work and encourages students to consult with individual faculty.

## IMPROVEMENTS

While services in general do appear adequate, we suggest a few areas where the department could enhance its delivery of services. The committee acknowledges, however, that these suggestions can only be implemented with additional funds, either from the university or external sponsors.

We suggest the following improvements:

- During our meeting with students, it was clear that the department does not have an alumni service. This would help the department know the employability of its graduates and identify possible areas where skills (academic or practice) may be lacking. We recommend the department consider developing an official organization of alumni who can become “ambassadors” for the program. Not only will this be an effective recruitment tool, but it will enable graduates to remain in touch with faculty and peers. As a result graduates will also have a way of continuing to grow professionally. A *conditio sine qua non* is the establishment of a website (or a part of the general website) especially for the alumni, so they can follow the development of their university and the needs of the students and the faculty.
- Currently, the department does not offer services to students who have personal difficulties that could be overcome with the professional guidance of a counsellor. We urge the department to establish an office where students can go to consult with a qualified counsellor.
- While the library has generous operating hours (7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.), appears well-equipped with Greek language texts and has expanded its electronic

offerings, we recommend increasing access to English language texts and journals. The library also needs a data engine that records and catalogues dissertations.

- We strongly recommend that the library expand its journal collection through the acquisition of e-journals and e-books which focus on relevant educational and teacher preparation topics (e.g., “Measurement and Assessment”, “Educational Leadership”, “Teacher Development”, “Multicultural Education”, “Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties”, “Child Development”). Electronic journals and e-books would be easily accessible to both students and faculty and provide them with instant access to the best research available. In addition, purchase of these materials would be cost-effective.
- The committee observed a lack of technical support, including opportunities to train faculty and administrative staff using new equipment and software programs. We urge the department to find ways for all personnel to receive continual professional development (e.g., seminars, tutorials). Some administrative staff commented particularly on the lack of knowledge among the faculty about how to use basic electronic resources such as power point, Word and email.
- Although there is currently a copy center available on campus, it is supported by only one person. With expanded resources, the copy center might more effectively facilitate the professional work of both students and faculty.

The committee commends the administrative staff of the department (EETEP and secretaries) for their diligent and voluntary efforts to face the challenges of serving students with limited resources. We believe that some of the suggestions we have made are the result of circumstances that cannot be resolved only at the departmental or school level. They are in fact the result of a highly centralized educational system, both at the university and ministerial level.

#### Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

#### ***F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC***

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

The External evaluation committee has specific recommendations for the improvement of the department.

- **Reduction in the number of newly registered students to 200:** The committee

acknowledges the large number of students the department has and the obstacles that are caused due to this fact. A reduction in the number of students in the near future will make the workload of academics more manageable

- **Review of the curriculum:** The committee observed that the curriculum has not been reviewed since 2006. Some courses may need to have a better sequence. In addition, we recommend adding courses such as pupils' assessment, teaching in multicultural environments, educational leadership and management.
- **Increase the length of practicum:** To deepen their understanding of the link between theory and practice, we believe students need additional experiences in school and community settings. Furthermore, those experiences need to begin much earlier in the curriculum. Throughout this report, we have made suggestions about potential ways to extend the practicum experience through shorter opportunities to engage with students in diverse settings.
- **Strengthening of the publication portfolio:** The committee recommends that all faculty members become involved in research projects. In addition, we urge all faculty members to improve their publication records mainly in international journals. They are also encouraged to develop strong links with European universities through Erasmus and other European funded projects. Dissertation study results should also be published in either local or international journal
- **Development of a solid master's degree:** The committee believes that the development of a master's degree addressing contemporary educational needs can be supported electronically with the use of modern digital technology (e.g., distance learning with blended methods) would enhance research and teaching in the department.
- **Purchase of books, journals and modern equipment (e.g. labs, wifi):** In order to support master's and PhD candidates the department should enrich its library with English textbooks (preferably e-books and e-journals) and equip the buildings with wireless access as to bring students closer to university building.
- **Facilitation of Teaching and Learning:** Teaching, learning, grading and other everyday activities and procedures during the courses should be enhanced by basing them on an electronic program (like MOODLE). This enables, free-of-charge, enormous enrichment in the preparation and conduction of everyday learning for all courses on campus and reduces the workload for the staff members considerably.

Overall the committee believes that not all improvements can be achieved at the personal and departmental level, since many of the challenges identified are related to the **central governance of the University and the Ministry of Education.**

### References

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## The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
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