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

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

FACULTY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

OCTOBER 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 Faculty of Early Childhood Education of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens consisted of the following three (3) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. **Associate Professor Chrystalla Mouza (Coordinator)**
University of Delaware, School of Education, USA

2. **Professor Jose Antonio Costa Ideias**
Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Faculdade de Ciencias Sociais e Humanas,
Portugal

3. **Associate Professor Antonis Tsakmakis**
University of Cyprus, Department of Classics and Philosophy, Cyprus

N.B. The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department. The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- Dates and brief account of the site visit.
- Whom did the Committee meet?
- List of Reports, documents, other data examined by the Committee.
- Groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed
- Facilities visited by the External Evaluation Committee.

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the School of Education, Faculty of Early Childhood Education (FECE) at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens during the period of October 7 – 12, 2013. The EEC received the Department’s Internal Evaluation Report (IER) on September 26, 2013. The EEC was pleased with the IER, which was meticulously prepared and provided a thorough and comprehensive assessment of FECE including strengths, weaknesses and future directions in all identified areas. The EEC extends its greatest appreciation to the IER committee for their thoughtful work.

During the first day of our visit, EEC members attended an orientation and briefing at the ADIP offices from 9:30-11 am to set the stage and provide contextual information on the role of the committee. During the rest of our visit we met with the following individuals.

Day 1: Meeting with the Internal Evaluation Committee (IEC/OMEA). The meeting took place at one of the FECE teaching laboratories. We started with a briefing from the president of IEC, Professor Vassilis Tselfes, followed by constructive open-ended discussion with all committee members on a range of issues associated with teaching, research, resources and other administrative issues in FECE. This discussion was situated in the general context of the Greek Higher Education landscape, which in recent years has been characterized by severe budget cuts and restructuring due to austerity measures and legislation changes.

FECE Internal Evaluation Committee (11:30 – 4)

- Professor Vassilis Tselfes, President of OMEA
- Professor Evgenia Flogaiti
- Professor Demetra Katis
- Associate Professor Evie Zambeta

Day 2: Marasleios Pedagogical Academy

- All FECE Faculty
- EEC attended presentations from the following faculty:
 - Professor Evgenia Flogaiti, incoming FECE president
 - Associate Professor Nelli Askouni (Undergraduate Curriculum)
 - Associate Professor Alexandra Androutsou (School Practicum/Field Experience)
 - Professor Athina Zoniou-Sideri (Postgraduate Programs)
 - Professor Thalia Dragona (Research Program)

- Professor Maro Malikiosi (Student Support Services)
- Professor Demetra Makrynioti (Erasmus)
- Professor Dimitris Chassapis (Collaborations with Community and Organizations)
- Professor Vassilis Tselfes (Conclusions and Strategic Planning Decisions)
- Meeting with Students (approximately 50 students)
 - Undergraduate students (primarily in the 4th year of studies)
 - Postgraduate students (Masters and Ph.D.)
 - Recent graduates

Day 3: Marasleios Pedagogical Academy

- Group meetings with FECE faculties organized around thematic areas
- Meeting with a group of administrative staff
- Meeting with Special Laboratory and Teaching Personnel
- Meeting with IEC for debriefing
- Meeting with two members of MODIP

In addition to the IER, the EEC requested and examined a number of additional documents including the following:

- Faculty CVs
- Program of Study (Study Guide), 2013-2014
- Course syllabi
- Sample student assessments including assessments conducted during school practicum and field experience
- Student artifacts (e.g., student projects, reports, etc.)
- Copies of slides of all presentations prepared by FECE faculty in anticipation of our visit
- Short video clips describing FECE facilities
- CD with audiovisual materials related to cultural activities and events organized by FECE students in collaboration with faculty

We visited some of the Department's facilities including:

- Faculty offices
- Administrative staff offices
- Laboratories (performing arts, music and physical sciences)
- Teaching laboratory and halls

It is important to note that our visit was conducted under strenuous circumstances in the midst of a University shut down. On September 23, 2013 the University of Athens announced suspension of all of its operations due to the strike undertaken by the administrative staff following a government decision to reduce the University's administrative staff by nearly 50% due to austerity measures. Given the strike of all administrative staff members and security guards, we were able to visit a limited number of classrooms and laboratories. Further, it was not possible to visit any library or observe any classroom teaching.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

Please comment on:

- Appropriateness of sources and documentation used
- Quality and completeness of evidence reviewed and provided
- To what extent have the objectives of the internal evaluation process been met by the Department?

The sources and documentation provided to the EEC were entirely appropriate. The FECE faculty enthusiastically shared all requested documents and willingly explained the nature of the artifacts shared with us. All supplementary information was provided on a timely matter.

The IER was highly informative and meticulously prepared and provided a holistic picture of FECE. Our committee found that FECE has completed the internal evaluation process following the required guidelines provided by ADIP.

A. Curriculum

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

APPROACH

- What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum? What is the plan for achieving them?
- How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?
- Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?
- How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted?
- Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?

Objectives

The FECE offers one Undergraduate Program and five Postgraduate Programs of Study (leading to a Masters or Ph.D). Ph.D. candidates are enrolled and supervised by the academic staff of the Department, whereas a new Program of Doctoral Studies according to the provisions of the Law 4009/2011, which places FECE within the newly created School of Education is under consideration.

The objectives of the academic programs offered by the FECE are articulated in the Law 1268 of 1982 and reproduced in the Internal Evaluation Report (p. 9). These objectives include:

- Provide future teachers with the tools to understand the complexity of educational phenomena using sociological, psychological and pedagogical perspectives.
- Promote conceptions of pedagogical practices that are interdisciplinary and theoretically driven.
- Provide foundational knowledge in the educational sciences, including the development of critical thinking skills and methods of scientific research in preparation for both postgraduate studies and life-long learning.

Curriculum Design and Decision Making

The Undergraduate Program in Early Childhood Education was first established in 1987 and aims at providing scientifically-based education for early childhood teachers. Additionally, the FECE has been offering Postgraduate programs since 1994 in collaboration with other Faculties and Universities, including a Joint Degree with the Institute of Education, University of London.

All Programs, as well as research carried by Ph.D. candidates, are consistent with the objectives of the Department and meet the whole range of its mission as defined by the law.

Undergraduate Program

The curriculum for the Undergraduate Programs is organized into 10 thematic areas. Within those areas, the curriculum includes a number of required courses, restrictive electives and electives. Both the restrictive electives and electives are selected out of a fairly large number of courses, thus offering the students the opportunity to structure an individualized plan based on their own interests, in the absence of formal specializations which are more appropriate for postgraduate studies. Specifically, the program includes: 19 required courses, 11 restrictive electives and 16-17 electives (depending on language proficiency requirement) for a

total of 46-47 courses. The majority of the required courses are in line with recommended practices in the education of early childhood teachers though the EEC witnessed a small number of instances where required courses were dictated by the FECE faculty's areas of expertise.

Curriculum Revisions

The EEC noted that the FECE faculty is sensitive to scholarly developments and contemporary societal needs. Thus approximately every 7 years the program of study undergoes substantial examination and revision where necessary. Additionally, the FECE faculty discusses the program of study and decides the specific number of courses offered every year on an annual basis. Decisions are made by the entire staff collectively, since there are no academic sub-divisions (τομείς) within FECE. As the Committee was informed and documented, informal input from students within certain interdisciplinary courses is taken into account in the design of each course (e.g., selection of topics for projects and papers).

Postgraduate Programs

FECE offers the following five Master's Programs:

- Education and Human Rights
- Special Education
- Political Science and Sociology
- Information and Education Technologies in Education
- Counseling Psychology and Counseling in Education, Health and Work Settings

The M.A. program **Education and Human Rights** has been developed out of a former joint degree established in 2001-2 entitled "Comparative Education and Human Rights" with the Institute of Education, University of London. It is coordinated by a Committee consisting of members of the two Universities. It aims at the mobility of students and faculty and endorses cooperative teaching with other educational, social and cultural environments. Additionally, it aims at the preparation of specialized professionals who can use their knowledge and skills to design, implement, and evaluate research-based curricula and educational policies through key employment positions in a variety of settings (e.g., academic institutions, early childhood classrooms, educational administration, private institutions, Non Governmental Organizations etc.). An overarching aspiration of the program is to raise awareness and constitute human rights of central concern to education.

An identical program is also offered solely by the Department and can be completed exclusively in Greece. This option was created in order to meet the growing need for postgraduate studies by professional teachers, who could not take a leave of absence from their job or afford living expenses for two semesters in London. The international dimension of this option is still maintained in the co-teaching of an interdisciplinary seminar.

The M.A. Program **Special Education** was originally established in the academic year 2001-02 as an option within the transnational Program "Education and Human Rights" jointly organized by the FECE and the Institute of Education of the University of London. It became independent in the academic year 2008-09. Since then it is offered solely by the FECE.

The Program aims above all at an in-depth exploration of issues regarding special education as well as inclusion settings in mainstream education. More specifically, it provides knowledge on: (a) disability, (b) contemporary approaches to the education

and social inclusion of people with disabilities, (c) research methodology on special education, inclusive education and disability. In addition, it provides students with the ability to teach in special education schools and inclusion settings. It exploits not only the academic staff of the FECE and its research and professional training activities, but also staff from other faculties, universities and research centers in Greece and abroad. The program is run by a Committee consisting of members of the Department and a member of the Institute of Education, London.

It is a two-year program, which includes a dissertation as the capstone experience. It also includes a semester (the spring Semester of the first year) of supervised practical training at inclusion programs in mainstream schools, special education schools and units as well as day treatment centers conceded for this purpose by the Greek State.

The M.Sc. Program **Counseling Psychology and Counseling in Education, Health and Work Settings** was established in the academic year 2009-2010 through the collaboration of the FECE with the Faculty of Social Administration of the Democritus University of Thrace. It provides a joint degree by both Faculties and has a duration of two years. Two options of specialization are offered: Counseling Psychology and Counseling.

The Program's primary objective is specialization in Counseling Psychology and Counseling as applied in education, health and work settings. It provides not only theoretical knowledge but also high-level professional skills for those working in Counseling Psychology and Counseling. More specifically, it seeks to: (a) equip students with the necessary knowledge, experience and skills for careers in which Counseling Psychology and Counseling are considered necessary; (b) train specialists in Counseling Psychology and Counseling who will staff universities, schools, hospitals, health centers, organizations, businesses and other institutions in the public and private sectors; (c) prepare specially trained professionals who will eventually reinforce the teaching staff of higher education institutions and promote research and teaching in Counseling Psychology and Counseling; (d) train postgraduate students according to the scientist-practitioner model; a model requiring professionals to master both the practitioner roles and the methods of investigating science.

The M.A. Program **Political Science and Sociology** is a two-year program (with dissertation), which is hosted by the Faculty of Political Sciences and Public Administration. It is run by a Coordinating Committee of five members, three of which come from the FPSPA and two from the FECE. It aims at providing students holding a wide variety of undergraduate degrees with specialized knowledge on political science and sociology. It attracts a high number of applicants mainly from the social sciences.

The Program **Information and Education Technologies in Education** was established in the academic year 2005-06 in collaboration with the *Faculty of Communication and Mass Media Studies* of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the *Department of Architecture* of the *University of Thessaly*. It is run by a three-member coordinating committee, one from each collaborating faculty. The program provides a joint degree by the three Faculties.

The Faculty of Electronics Engineering of the Higher Technological Institute of Piraeus is an additional partner offering teaching space and staff. It principally aims at the following: to develop a critical stance towards the role of technology in education and professional training, to enhance knowledge on applications of information and communication technologies, and to bring students in contact with

experts on the use of such technologies in various sectors of education.

In addition to professional Master's Programs, the FECE offers opportunities for Doctoral work (Ph.D.). There are approximately 50 active doctoral students in the Department and every faculty member is currently supervising at least one doctoral thesis.

IMPLEMENTATION

- How effectively is the Department's goal implemented by the curriculum?
- How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study?
- Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated?
- Is the curriculum coherent and functional?
- Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient?
- Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum?

Undergraduate Program

The curriculum implementation for the undergraduate program is described in detail on pages 18ff. in the internal evaluation report. A key implementation point to mention is the shift from 3-hour to 2-hour courses (by eliminating the break) without causing shortchanges to the existing curriculum. This shift allowed faculty to break large classes (250-300 students) into two smaller sections of (125-150).

Standards Comparison

Curriculum objectives are comparable with best practices in the field including two important components: (a) the importance of cultivating *reflective practitioners* (Schon, 1984¹) – educators who are prepared and equipped with the knowledge, skills and methodological strategies needed to “learn how to learn” from practice; and (b) an exposure to early practicum and field experiences (beginning in year 2 and progressively expanding in years 3 and 4) as emphasized in contemporary literature which identifies field experience as the cornerstone of teacher preparation (<http://www.ncate.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zzeiB1OoqPk%3D&tabid=715>). Further, the Undergraduate curriculum is aligned with standards set forward by leading organizations such as the National Association of the Education of Young Children in the U.S. for initial early childhood preparation (<http://www.naeyc.org>).

Rational and Coherence

An advanced culture of discussion and collective participation evident among the FECE faculty helps secure internal coherence of the curriculum. Key concepts and skills are infused throughout the curriculum (e.g., reflective practice, critical thinking skills, creativity and intercultural learning). The EEC noted a strong emphasis on sociological and psychological approaches but raised some concerns regarding students' preparation for teaching language and STEM courses (Science-Technology-Engineering and Mathematics) within an early childhood context. There is currently an extensive discourse in the international literature on the teaching of STEM courses in early childhood education. Early childhood teachers typically focus on the literacy and social development of young children at the expense of STEM domains. Early interventions are essentials to promote positive attitudes towards these domains, particularly among females and under-represented populations. For example, the EEC noted that the course on the teaching of early childhood

¹ Schon, D. (1984). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith.

mathematics was not required – it was listed under restrictive electives, making it possible for a student to graduate without taking a single course on how to effectively teach mathematics in early childhood settings. This is partly explained by the shortage of staff in these areas but nevertheless requires further consideration. The teaching of science was addressed sufficiently.

Despite the limited number of faculty, the EEC noted a long list of electives (for the year 2012-2013, 69 electives were offered). This trend is partly dictated by the large number of students in the program. Providing choice, helps break students into smaller groups, thereby making teaching more manageable and encouraging more progressive teaching approaches and student attendance. Also evident is the emphasis on the acquisition of cross cutting skills and experiential knowledge – yet, to some extent without an accompanied emphasis on content knowledge. As the literature indicates, effective teachers need three types of knowledge, notably *content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge* (Shulman, 1986²). The EEC recommends that FECE faculty members consider additional ways of infusing content knowledge across the undergraduate curriculum.

Postgraduate Programs

All postgraduate programs are reasonably structured so as to achieve their respective goals according to best practices in the field. The curriculum is coherent and functional. To facilitate the implementation of the curriculum, FECE has joined forces with faculty from other Departments both in Greece and the U.K.

RESULTS

- How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?
- If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with?
- Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results?

Undergraduate Program

FECE has a solid reputation evident by the high quality of the students it has been attracting during the National Entrance Examinations. The FECE faculty consistently praised the quality of their student body.

FECE faculty displays an awareness of the challenging market and severely limited employment opportunities of its graduates. At present, the graduates' prospects of working in the public sector in Greece as early childhood educators are almost non-existent. Nevertheless, the FECE faculty repeatedly informed the Committee that the current curriculum design takes into consideration the fact that a number of students will be employed in areas outside public education such as educational programs in Museums, after school programs, non-profit organizations and even other entrepreneurial venues. Further, FECE faculty emphasized that graduates of the program are well-prepared to engage in research activities to a degree unusual according to standard expectation from other undergraduate programs.

Postgraduate Programs

All Master's programs focus on innovative research and educational practices and accredit research and professional skills. The Committee met graduate students who

² Shulman, L.S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4-14.

expressed their appreciation for the quality of teaching, the competent supervision and the practical value of the acquired knowledge.

IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?
- Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?

Undergraduate Program

The FECE faculty acknowledges areas of improvement and has responded with creative implementation strategies. One such approach is centered around “Thematic Weeks”, which immerse students in specific topics using a workshop format during a one-week timeframe.

The flexible curriculum and the functional decision-making practices ensure that the FECE is prepared to respond to present and expected needs. Nevertheless, the EEC observed additional needs in faculty members given the number of students they are required to serve, particularly since the elimination of several categories of teaching staff and supervisors (επόπτες) for the practicum/field experience component of the program. Most notably, the ratio of field supervisor to student in the last academic year has been at 1/60-70 while FECE has determined that a more optimal ratio is 1/30. Minimizing non-essential elective courses could be a first step towards streamlining the curriculum without serious consequences in the coherence of the program. FECE faculty, however, should not be responsible for the field experience supervision (εποπτεία) of students during practicum experiences. There are certainly great staffing needs in this area.

The members of the Department expressed their readiness to discuss opportunities for shared courses with the Department of Primary Education, as both belong now to the same School.

Postgraduate Programs

The high number of applicants proves the postgraduate programs are attractive to a wide range of graduates. However, the Department is constantly reflecting on possible improvement following scholarly advances in the field and broader societal needs.

A new program of doctoral studies will be implemented after the proposed restructuring of the School of Education takes effect.

FECE faculty members repeatedly indicated that they are supporting the continuation of the in-service professional development programs, which are currently inactive.

FECE in collaboration with the Department of Primary Education and the Faculty of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology are also planning the development and implementation of a semester-long Teaching Certification for secondary education teachers due to a new legislative mandate that requires teaching certification for all high school teachers (e.g., those who graduate with a degree in Math, Physics, etc.).

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

Does the Department have a defined pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology?

Please comment on:

- Teaching methods used
- Teaching staff/ student ratio
- Teacher/student collaboration
- Adequacy of means and resources
- Use of information technologies
- Examination system

Teaching Methods and Teacher/Student Collaboration

The EEC was impressed by the teaching approaches used by the FECE faculty both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Instead of relying primarily on traditional, teacher-centered approaches the FECE faculty model the kinds of teaching practices they expect their graduates to use. More specifically, it was evident that most courses are not lecture-driven but include a range of constructivist teaching approaches including collaborative learning, experiential practice (e.g., hands-on activities, field trips, practicum experiences), and approaches that cultivate higher order and critical thinking skills as well as metacognitive reflection. Further, at the undergraduate level the FECE faculty instituted an innovative teaching approach called Thematic Week, during which students are immersed into a topic through a “workshop” format for a one-week period. During that time, they participate in seminars, engage in discussions with guest speakers, take field trips and prepare projects. The FECE faculty is justifiably proud of this innovation, which other programs around the country are now looking to adopt.

Throughout our visit and the interactions we had with the FECE faculty and students it became evident that FECE faculty teach exclusively in their areas of expertise. Further, it was apparent that most faculty are passionate about their teaching, most frequently going above and beyond what is required of them. Students, for example, spoke with enthusiasm about opportunities to work in small collaborative groups within their coursework despite the initial challenges and lack of preparation in undertaking this student-centered model. Most students acknowledged that their high school education does not encourage this type of constructivist, student-centered approach which requires them to play an active role in the learning process and not simply be passive recipients of information. Further, students spoke highly of the FECE faculty abilities to improvise teaching on the fly based on the number of students attending a class as well as the restrictive nature of the facilities, which are mostly comprised of lecture halls. Indeed, our committee witnessed that first hand as students re-organized the room we met with them on the fly to create a learning environment conducive to discussion and open-ended exchange of ideas. Further, the students spoke highly of the collaborative relationships they have with the faculty, as well as their accessibility both face-to-face and through email.

Use of Information Technology

Our committee would also like to note the use of the University system e-class from a large number of FECE faculty. E-class allows faculty members to distribute course syllabi, materials, PowerPoint presentations and other printed and audiovisual materials online, thereby making course materials and resources accessible to students at anytime, anyplace. In the future, the Department might consider adding another dimension to e-class, such as discussion forums and electronic submission

of assignments.

Examination System

In addition to modeling theoretically grounded practices in their teaching, the FECE faculty implements a wide range of assessments strategies that go beyond the standard end of the term examination. Both the FECE faculty and students indicated that in many courses they are given a number of assessment choices including group projects, demonstrations, presentation of ideas, journaling and supplementary independent investigations/literature searches/reports. Whenever feasible, students are assessed more than once throughout the course of a semester. Such opportunities, however, are more commonly used at the postgraduate level.

By and large, our committee would like to applaud the FECE faculty on the quality, motivation and enthusiasm they exhibit in their teaching. They have managed to create a respectful and supportive learning environment and cultivate a sense of community and belonging, which sets the stage for a successful academic experience.

Adequacy of Means and Resources

One of the greatest challenges noted by our committee is the teacher/student ratio. It became apparent that the FECE faculty is under increased pressure to maintain teaching quality standards despite deteriorating faculty/student ratios in recent years due to budget cuts that eliminated all limited term teaching personnel, and field experience supervisors (επόπτες). Specifically, the teacher/student ratio for all students in the program (active and inactive) has been calculated at 23/1564 or 1/68. Even if we only calculate the number of students who are within the nominal time of four years of graduation the faculty to student ratio is 23/917 or approximately 1/40, which is high. This is due to reasons beyond the control of the FECE faculty. For example, although every year the Ministry sets a number of students to be admitted into the program, an unsupervised number of students could also transfer into the FECE through other legislated venues.

In order to reach all students and cover all needs, the FECE faculty is often teaching above and beyond what is required by current legislation. Further, the FECE faculty often undertake additional teaching engagements in other departments outside the School of Education because of needs, without additional compensation or incentives. It was evident to the committee that the FECE faculty find teaching rewarding. Nevertheless, the EEC thinks it might be prudent to attempt to streamline teaching engagements to balance teaching and research.

IMPLEMENTATION

Please comment on:

- Quality of teaching procedures
- Quality and adequacy of teaching materials and resources.
- Quality of course material. Is it brought up to date?
- Linking of research with teaching
- Mobility of academic staff and students
- Evaluation by the students of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content and study material/resources

Quality of Teaching and Adequacy of Course Materials

Overall the quality of teaching procedures is high and grounded in recommended practices advocated in the research literature. Indeed, the EEC concurs that the FECE faculty “walk the walk” when it comes to teaching. Nevertheless, the adequacy

of teaching materials is often challenging. In the current legislation, students are only allowed one free textbook for each course. This practice severely limits the FECE faculty's literature recommendations. In some instances, two books are listed on the syllabus and students can choose one based on their interests. The FECE faculty, however, noted that most students simply pick one randomly.

Evidently absent is also the use of other contemporary digital technologies, such as mobile computer labs, tablets, Smartboards or other digital tools that facilitate student engagement and interaction. As an example, student response systems (i.e., clickers) widely used abroad in large lecture halls to engage students are not available anywhere in FECE. Further, besides the computer laboratory there is no access to a Smartboard or to other digital tools. Certainly, there is a severe lack of appropriate resources, even in basic Internet connectivity in most classrooms.

Linking Research with Teaching

There is a strong emphasis in linking research and teaching – both among faculty and students. Faculty for example, typically engage in the study of their practice, or what we call scholarship of teaching, while students frequently use research techniques such as observation, journaling and action research during their practicum experiences in local preschool settings.

Mobility of Academic staff and Students

The FECE participates in the Erasmus program having formed connections with 14 other European Universities (11 involve both faculty and student exchanges while 3 involve only faculty exchanges). Despite that, mobility of academic staff is quite limited primarily due to financial constraints. In the last five years the number of faculty who participated in the program ranged from 0-2 (total of 7).

At the student level, mobility levels are higher for outgoing students but not for incoming students (foreign students coming at the University of Athens). In the last five years the number of students who participated in the program ranged from 12-18 (total of 67 students) while the number of incoming students ranged from 0-4 (total of 6 students). Again, financial and language barriers are the two larger inhibitors in student mobility.

Faculty and student mobility is also encouraged through the Education and Human Rights Postgraduate program which is offered in collaboration (joint program) with the Institute of Education, University of London.

Teaching Evaluations

Informal responses by students during the open-ended discussion with the EEC were positive. Besides that, there is a formal evaluation process through two structured questionnaires administered to students at the end of each course either in a hard copy or electronic format. Results from this formalized process are also positive – overall, students are satisfied with their experiences. This process reveals both strengths and weaknesses in teaching, which the faculty continuously tries to address.

RESULTS

Please comment on:

- Efficacy of teaching.
- Discrepancies in the success/failure percentage between courses and how they are justified.
- Differences between students in (a) the time to graduation, and (b) final degree grades.

- Whether the Department understands the reasons of such positive or negative results?

For the most part, students who register and get assessed in the FECE courses are successful. Success rates vary but the number of courses where a large percentage of students fail is rather small. There are however, a couple of courses where failure levels approached 50%. Those are typically required courses with large numbers of students and using only one method of assessment. The mean grade average during graduation is 7.73/10 with approximately 19% of students earning a grade point average between 8.5-10 (excellent).

Time to graduation also varies given the flexibility that has been given to students by the Greek legislation up until today. Nevertheless, most students graduate within a reasonable timeframe with the great majority of students graduating within the “n+2” timeframe recommended by the new law.

IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department propose methods and ways for improvement?
- What initiatives does it take in this direction?

The FECE is eager to maintain the excellent teaching quality evident in the program by continuously monitoring course evaluations and being responsive to students' input.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

- What is the Department's policy and main objective in research?
- Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?

Research Objectives

The FECE faculty are actively engaged in a range of research projects related to teacher education, development of instructional material and educational interventions. Much of the research undertaken by the FECE faculty is grounded in the context of their own practice (e.g., teaching). These lines of research often parallel those found in other leading Universities in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. Research projects are often undertaken in collaboration with colleagues or within research groups and centers based on similar interests and related fields of study. The primary objective is research work of scientific quality that can be presented in National and International Conferences and published in both Greek and International peer reviewed journals.

The research activities of the Faculty take the following forms:

- Postdoctoral research
- Programs of research and educational interventions funded by various sources
- Centers of research and intervention in education.

The Faculty actively promotes and engages in research activities, especially at the postgraduate level. The Department invites Ph.D. holders to continue as postdoctoral researchers in topics aligned with the research interests of its academic staff.

Two ongoing large –scale projects are worth mentioning:

- The Program for the education and care of preschool-age children, funded by the Ministry of the Interior for the purpose of contributing to the educational programs of day-care centers run by the Ministry
- The Program for the education of Muslim children in Thrace, funded by European Union and the Ministry of Education, Greece.

In addition to large-scale projects there is also a number of smaller funded projects as well as research projects that are not externally funded.

In addition, FECE coordinates the following centers of research and intervention in education:

- The Greek branch of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)
- The Centre for Environmental Education Research
- The Centre of Applied Pedagogy
- The Centre for research, Assessment and Implementation of Inclusive Education Programs
- The Centre of Intercultural Research and Educational Intervention

Standards for assessing research are set implicitly. There seems to be a consensus that faculty must engage in research of high quality although the form of that research varies. More explicit standards are set through the postgraduate programs as well as for faculty members applying for promotion.

IMPLEMENTATION

- How does the Department promote and support research?
- Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support.
- Scientific publications.
- Research projects.
- Research collaborations.

As previously stated, faculty has been involved over the years in various research projects and educational interventions. These projects have been funded by a variety of sources, including the European Union, Greek national funds from the Ministry of Education and the Secretariat of Research and Technology, as well as the University of Athens Research Fund.

The FECE faculty is encouraged to participate in large national and international research projects (especially European Union projects, such as the Program for the Education of Muslim Children in Thrace, funded by the European Union and the Ministry of Education in Greece), connecting with other departments and scientific world conferences. The extremely heavy teaching load and lack of funding, however, has hindered faculty's full development of research productivity.

The Department's research is visible and acknowledged outside the department at a national level. Many faculty members are recognized and respected scholars within the Greek scholarly community. Yet, because of reasons identified in the IER (heavy teaching load, funding, language barriers, lack of solid research infrastructure and support at all levels, and difficult access in public kindergartens/schools) they have not been as visible at the international level.

One way of encouraging research productivity is the one-semester sabbaticals granted to full time faculty every three years. However, those are not always taken advantage because of faculty shortages and the need to cover courses.

RESULTS

- How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented?
- Scientific publications.
- Research projects.
- Research collaborations.
- Efficacy of research work. Applied results. Patents etc.
- Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department? Rewards and awards.

Despite heavy teaching loads and limited resources, the FECE faculty is productively engaged in research often made possible through inter-disciplinary/cross-disciplinary collaborations. The FECE faculty publishes their research results nationally and to a lesser extent internationally (books, chapters of books, edited volumes, journals, and conference proceedings). It should be noted that instructional and pedagogical practices are, again according to the research principles of the Department, *per se* object of scientific interventions and investigation.

In the last 5 years, the FECE faculty produced 14 books, 23 edited volumes and have published 400 articles – 122 in international outlets and 278 in Greek scientific outlets. Further, a comparison with other similar programs across the country demonstrated that the FECE faculty has been more productive than faculty in their

peer programs (ranked as the most productive program in Greece). FECE faculty also sits on the editorial boards of 7 journals- 2 international and 5 Greek - while a large number of faculty serves as ad hoc reviewers on a number of scientific publications (both Greek and international). In addition to scholarly works in peer reviewed journals, the FECE faculty publishes important articles for practitioners and in local national newspapers on a number of sensitive educational issues important to the society as a whole.

FECE has a good record of research projects and collaborations ranging from small funded projects (1,500 Euros) to large-scale funded projects (3.5 millions). Funding sources include the European program ESPA, FP6, Herakleitos (for Ph.D. students), Pythagoras (for Post Doctoral Researchers), ARISTEIA program, and the European Program Daphne III for the elimination of violence.

Results from scientific programs are not only used to improve the preparation of future teachers (a key objective of FECE) but to also spearhead changes in the educational landscape of Greece. In this sense, FECE faculty have developed some innovative programs that helped raise awareness on key societal issues (e.g., inclusion practices of disabled students, environmental awareness, etc.).

IMPROVEMENT

- Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary.
- Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department.

The Department acknowledged the need to improve research output in international outlets. They plan to shift some of their scholarly efforts in that direction. The Department has also acknowledged the need to better monitor the success of their Ph.D. graduates, some of whom have been successful in securing academic and other research positions in leading academic institutions in Greece. They plan to discuss ways of accomplishing this task, which does not require an extensive amount of effort.

Further, FECE faculty envisions a more coherent research program in response to the new University policy, which will align research funds to Departments instead of individual faculty. This policy will require pockets of faculty working collaboratively on research projects.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

- How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students).
- Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically?
- Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?

The Department's administrative services are efficient and serve the needs of the students. However, services provided by the central administration of the University of Athens are evaluated by the faculty as insufficient (especially services provided by the International office, research support, student counselling). For example, at present there is no central Research Office that assists faculty in identifying funding opportunities within their areas of study, form collaborations with other units within the University, and successfully prepare grant proposals, including budgets and administrative paperwork in an efficient manner.

Electronic processing of procedures is dictated by the central administration of the University of Athens. Whenever such services are available they are utilized (e.g., student enrolment). Other procedures are still processed manually by the administrative staff (e.g., analysis of course evaluations when done on paper, processing graduate applications, graduate course registration, etc.). The presence of qualified and trained administrative personnel has certainly enhanced electronic processing procedures often adding a safety net to ensure smooth operation of various services. For example, the system currently used cannot calculate the grade point average of individual students' records until graduation. Therefore, this must be done manually wherever such information is necessary.

Despite the dispersion of the Department in three buildings and no official University policy on the matter of attendance, student presence is more frequent than expected. The Department organizes teaching in a way that enhances active participation. Supervision, regular collaboration in workgroups, study in the library and practical activities in laboratories are firmly integrated in undergraduate students' weekly program. Graduate students often pursue their programs on a part-time basis but all spoke about being on campus regularly for classes, meetings with faculty and use of library and other facilities.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).
- Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g. library, PCs and free internet access, student counseling, athletic- cultural activity etc.).

Organization

The administrative staff is distributed in various areas in a functional way. However, there is a culture of flexibility and collaboration, which serves the particular needs of both faculty and students and ensures timely and reliable access to academic services.

Infrastructure

- Library. The EEC was unable to visit any library due to the University strike. However, our interactions with faculty, administrative staff and students noted needs in this area. For example, the Department library has access to a small number of computers, does not provide wireless Internet access, and is only open 9-4pm and closed on weekends. Limitations are also noted in access to scholarly works, which inhibits smooth operation of teaching and research. Because the Ministry of Education often fails to pay electronic journal subscription fees on time, The Department is denied access to electronic journals sometimes for months at a time. During that period there is literally no access to scholarly works beyond faculty's individual library collections. The lack of a central University library is also hugely problematic.
- Study Halls. An educational resource center /study room exists with the capability to check out board games and other educational resources during practicum experiences. Internet access is also limited there and hours remain 9-4pm. While some other study areas also exist (e.g., science, art and computer laboratories), needs are noted in access to study halls, particularly after 4pm and possibly over the weekends.
- Digital Tools/Internet. Access to computers and other digital technologies is severely deficient. Besides the computer lab, which is used for instructional purposes, students have access only to a small number of computers in the library and the education resource center (2 in each place).
- Facilities. The number of lecture halls is adequate but noticeably absent is the availability of problem-based learning classrooms or other "smart" classrooms that can facilitate group work and student interaction.
- Infrastructure. The building infrastructure is desperately out-dated and in great need of renovations with some buildings posing life-threatening safety concerns. The space where classes for visual and performing arts are held, for example, has no fire escape and therefore no license from the fire department of Greece. Yet, at the moment there is no alternative space for holding those classes. The EEC was impressed with the ingenuity of the faculty to overcome infrastructure limitations but they can only go so far without parallel central support and access to resources.
- Peer Counselling Group. The Department has organized a group of qualified undergraduate, postgraduate and recent graduates who offer limited academic advising and counselling support to other peers. A central counselling office is also available but it was noted that it can not serve all interested students due to high demand.

RESULTS

- Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?
- How does the Department view the particular results?

To date, administrative services have been adequate and functional. The responsibilities of administrative staff were clearly delineated and distributed among the secretarial staff. There was good morale and a willingness to work above and beyond regular work hours to get the job done. The EEC and the Department expresses serious concerns about the future, as drastic reduction of administrative personnel is under way due to the new legislation.

The Department expressed concern over the inefficient response of central offices to teaching/research issues (e.g., disbursing of funds, timely decision-making including budget announcements and other support services).

IMPROVEMENTS

- Has the Department identified ways and methods to improve the services provided?
- Initiatives undertaken in this direction.

The Department used funding from research programs to meet acute administrative needs. Further, it has been efficient in soliciting external funding which has a positive impact on all operations.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Please, comment on quality, originality and significance of the Department's initiatives.

A Department like FECE is asked to play a dual role within the University of Athens. First, the Department needs to prepare the next generation of highly-qualified early childhood educators. Second, the Department must help current educators and those working within early childhood settings to advance their professional knowledge and skills and utilize theory-driven practices and instructional materials in a variety of early childhood/education/community settings. This latter role sets the stage for a wide range of collaborations with a variety of social, cultural and production organizations including among others: museums, municipalities across the broader Athens area, non-profit organizations, organizations that serve people with disabilities (blind, deaf, etc.), environmental organizations, and rehabilitation centers to name a few. The nature of the collaboration varies but often involves assistance in program development, instructional material development, presentations from faculty, consulting services (without pay), and in some instances FECE student volunteers. Up until last year, the Department was also responsible for the "Didaskaleion" – which was charged with the continuous professional development of practicing early childhood teachers. Funding and legislation for this program is currently uncertain. Without doubt the Department serves an important role in community involvement and contributes greatly to the society as a whole.

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.

Please, comment on the Department's:

- Potential inhibiting factors at State, Institutional and Departmental level, and proposals on ways to overcome them.
- Short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- Plan and actions for improvement by the Department/Academic Unit
- Long-term actions proposed by the Department.

In the midst of a great economic crisis across Greece, substantial austerity measures, legislation instability and a climate of great uncertainty strategic planning becomes difficult. Nevertheless, the completion of the IER from the Department could serve as a first step towards a more systematic strategic planning effort. In particular, the FECE faculty should continue to re-examine the opportunities, challenges and possible drawbacks of the new academic structures (e.g., the merging of FECE with the Faculty of Primary Education in the newly developed School of Education). The FECE faculty has certainly expressed concerns over the fact that their perspectives were not taken into account during the restructuring process and noted shared

interests with the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences.

Inhibiting Factors

- One Faculty Per Discipline. A key inhibiting factor identified is the number of faculty in each discipline. Specifically, at the present time there is only one faculty in mathematics education, physical sciences, literacy etc. thereby limiting opportunities for critical exchange of ideas and collaborative initiatives among individuals with shared instructional and research interests. This also limits students' opportunities to engage with different perspectives within each discipline - all required and elective courses within a particular discipline are offered by the same faculty. This leads students to follow specific "faculty" rather than areas of interest. This is true for postgraduate students as well.
- Lack of funding for teaching and research assistants (postgraduate students who attend on a full time basis).
- Lack of funding for qualified personnel who can supervise students during practicum experiences in preschool settings.
- Erratic funding opportunities at the local level.
- Insufficient dissemination of funding opportunities and support for reliable proposal preparation and submission.
- Large number of students admitted outside the National Entrance Examination.
- Centralized decision-making process over budget and other legislative issues which limit the Department's autonomy only to decisions related to curriculum (study guide).
- Prospect of further reductions in faculty with the approaching retirement of at least 4 members. This could threaten the viability of the programs of study unless additional faculty hires are approved.
- Insufficient teaching/laboratory classrooms and instructional resources.

Goals

In the short term, the Department noted that it has secured two central University buildings located in a privileged location in the Center of Athens, which will allow them to relocate a number of offices and laboratories and create more favourable infrastructure facilities.

In terms of other short and long-term goals the Department expressed interest in increasing their research output in international outlets and securing collaborative funded projects with other European Universities. The University of Athens and the Ministry of Education should encourage and support such collaborations in a tangible way by providing resources, support and incentives such as greater return of overhead costs back to the Department.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- the development of the Department to this date and its present situation, including explicit comments on good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process and recommendations for improvement
- the Department's readiness and capability to change/improve
- the Department's quality assurance.

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

Despite the above challenging conditions, the EEC would like to express its gratitude to the FECE faculty for their cooperation, honesty, professionalism and hospitality. The evaluation was conducted within a climate of outmost respect and collegiality.

Curriculum Recommendations

To the Department

- The EEC has identified needs for curriculum revisions in the areas of language teaching and history, as well as courses related to Technology and Mathematics. With recent and upcoming retirements in these areas, STEM will be in further jeopardy. For example, the recent retirement of a faculty teaching a course on new technologies in conjunction with the elimination of adjunct faculty at all levels and disciplines, makes it impossible to continue offering such a course at a time when new technologies are revolutionizing the way children learn and play.
- Streamline the list of courses offered every year in line with available resources. Consider instituting a greater number of required courses to avoid having students who graduate without getting introduced to key concepts in the field such as educational psychology, methods of teaching mathematics, and cognitive theories of learning.
- Although a list of pre-requisites exists for program completion, it is not strictly enforced because of logistical issues. This policy should be monitored more carefully to avoid having students going into practicum experiences without having been successful in key courses.
- In the face of limited resources, consider streamlining the list of electives offered every year and instituting a greater number of required courses. This practice can help create multiple sections of the same course (as already done in some instances) with a smaller number of students and reduce time spent on course preparation. In turn, this will free up time for other scholarly activities.

Recommendations for Teaching

To the University

- Although this recommendation requires significant support, faculty who are charged with administrative responsibilities (e.g., Department Head) should be released from their teaching obligations at all, if possible, and at the very minimum be provided with one or two course reductions. This is common practice internationally.
- The University of Athens should allow faculty members who attract funding to “buy out” themselves of teaching. Project funding can be used to compensate adjunct instructors to teach those courses. This is common practice internationally for faculty who are successful in attracting external funding. A reduced teaching load will allow these faculty members to devote more time on funded activities, which can result in a greater number of scholarly publications.
- The University of Athens must reconsider its teaching workload policy. Strict austerity measures that include non-replacement of retiring faculty members and hiring of new faculty (there is only 1 Lecturer in the Department) result in

unreasonable teaching and administrative work loads for faculty. At the moment, the teaching load of the FECE faculty exceeds what is common practice internationally. The increased teaching load, number of students served and administrative responsibilities in conjunction with lack of resources and support (e.g., teaching assistants) does not help faculty balance teaching and research, inhibits its ability to attract new talent, and upgrade its profile.

- In order to reduce faculty's teaching workload, a number of postgraduate students should receive fellowships or teaching assistantships that would allow them to focus on their studies full time while fully participating in both teaching and research activities. Such decision, however, must come from the University of Athens and the Ministry of Education.

To the Department

- The EEC recommends that course evaluations are centrally analysed. Currently, there are different practices for analysing course evaluations. Paper copy surveys are returned to the course instructor for analysis while electronic copies are analysed by the Department Head. In our view, the instructor should not have direct access to post-course evaluations to allow students to express their views without concern for their grade. A common strategy in the analysis of course evaluations should also be adopted.

Recommendations for Research

To the University and the Ministry

- The University of Athens and the Ministry should pay their financial dues to online databases on time to avoid access interruptions to scholarly works. These interruptions greatly disrupt faculty's and postgraduate students' research productivity. Towards this goal, access to a central and comprehensive library is also needed.
- Increase the amount of funding available for travel to European and International Conferences. Noticeably absent, for example, was the participation of faculty in leading international conferences organized in the U.S, even when such invitations exist, due to funding constraints.
- Measures must be taken by the University to streamline bureaucratic procedures (e.g., to allow the flow of money from funded projects back into the Department on a timely manner).
- A central office must be created at the University and ideally at the School of Education level to help faculty with grant proposal preparation.
- The committee recommends that a central office be created at the University level that will provide editorial assistance to faculty interested in publishing in well-respected journals where the primary language is English. As some FECE faculty noted, some journals require enormous fees for editorial services that make publishing in those outlets non-affordable.

To the Department

- Some FECE faculty have already accumulated extensive experience attracting and leading large-scale funded projects. The EEC recommends that the Department uses those prior research experiences productively to launch new initiatives and large-scale projects, reaching out to other European partners as well. Along the same lines, the EEC recommends that FECE faculty continue working on inter-disciplinary research projects.
- The EEC strongly encourages the FECE faculty to pursue publications in a greater number of international journals.
- The EEC strongly encourages the FECE faculty to continue applying for funding, particularly as coordinators in large-scale projects.

Other

To the University and the Ministry

- Better maintenance of facilities is needed for a Greek flagship university like the University of Athens. The conditions and spaces that some faculty have to endure are demoralizing and in some cases pose safety concerns.
- Automate application and monitoring of postgraduate students through electronic means. Currently all of these are done via traditional means (hard copy materials).
- Institute a Center for the continuous professional development and technical support of faculty, which will create opportunities for sharing best practices and learning about new technologies in support of teaching.
- A communication specialist can help promote the scholarly work of faculty to the public and practitioners through newspapers and other trade publications, Internet outlets, and the Department's website. This will again upgrade the visibility of the Department while freeing faculty time to write for more scientific outlets.

To the Department

- The Department can benefit from a more organized Alumni Association. The graduates of the program we met spoke very highly of their experiences. They can serve as ambassadors for the program helping raise its standing and profile.
- The Department can do more to track the careers of its graduates, particularly those receiving advanced degrees (Master's and Ph.D.).

The Members of the Committee

	Name and Surname	Signature
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____