



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
HELLENIC REPUBLIC



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Accreditation Report for the Undergraduate Study Programme of:

Early Childhood Education

Institution: University of Ioannina

Date: 23 November 2020

Report of the Panel appointed by the HAHE to undertake the review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Early Childhood Education** of the **University of Ioannina** for the purposes of granting accreditation

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PART A: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

I. The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

The Panel responsible for the Accreditation Review of the Undergraduate Study Programme of **Early Childhood Education** of the **University of Ioannina** comprised the following three (3) members, drawn from the HAHE Register, in accordance with Laws 4009/2011 & 4653/2020:

- 1. Professor John Spiridakis (Chair),** St. John's University, United States of America

- 2. Professor Mary Koutselini,** University of Cyprus, Cyprus

- 3. Clinical Associate Professor Joanna Katsanis,** University of Arizona, United States of America

II. Review Procedure and Documentation

The External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) used Zoom teleconferencing to conduct online interviews and virtual site meetings with the Department of Early Childhood Education (DEC) Undergraduate Programme of the University of Ioannina (UI), from 18-23 of November 2020. Prior to the visit, the EEAP was provided detailed material of the DEC, including the prior External Evaluation Report conducted in 2013 and other evaluation material.

HAHE, via Zoom teleconferencing, gave the EEAP an online orientation and directions for the online site visit. In their briefing, HAHE presented information on HAHE mission, standards and guidelines of the QA accreditation process, and the national framework of HEIs.

During the Accreditation process EEAP met with:

- The Vice-Rector/President of MODIP & the Head of the DEC. The latter provided a short overview of the Undergraduate Programme, including history, academic profile, current status, strengths, and possible areas of concern.
- The OMEA & MODIP representatives and discussed the degree of compliance of the Undergraduate Program to the Quality Standards for Accreditation. Also, reviewed student assignments, theses, exam papers & examination material.
- The teaching staff and addressed professional development opportunities, mobility, workload, student evaluations; competence and adequacy of the teaching staff to ensure learning outcomes; the link between teaching and research; teaching staff's involvement in applied research, projects and research activities directly related to the programme; possible areas of weakness.
- Students and addressed student-satisfaction from their study experience and Department/Institution facilities; student input in quality assurance; priority issues concerning student life and welfare.
- Programme graduates and learned of their experience of studying at the DEC and their career path.
- The employers, social partners and discussed relations of the DEC with external stakeholders from the private and the public sector.

In addition to the informative meetings with the aforementioned groups of individuals, EEAP was given a link to a You Tube video that included a tour of the classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, and other facilities. The goal of the video was to evaluate facilities and learning resources and to ascertain whether the learning materials, equipment and facilities are adequate for a successful provision of the programme. At the end of the review, the EEAP met with OMEA and MODIP members and staff to discuss any issues needed clarification.

The EEAP conferred via Teleconferencing and email to discuss their observations, assessment, and conclusions regarding the DEC and the programme.

III. Study Programme Profile

The UI was founded in 1964 with the Department of Philosophy. In 1987-88 the DEC program of study was created. The faculty members then revamped the curriculum in 2008-9 to comport with research, pedagogy and practice in early childhood as well as economic, social and political changes in Greece and in Europe. The DEC program of study emphasized developing program-wide and course specific objectives and “learning outcomes” that provided students the tools for becoming competent and caring early childhood educators. The DEC also empowered students to provide feedback to improve coursework as well as the entire undergraduate program of study.

In 2014 -15 the DEC faculty with the support of the UI administration immediately took steps to respond to the Hellenic Quality Assurance (HQA) External Evaluation (2013). Highlights of the DEC’s full-throttled response to the vivid recommendations of the 2013 HQA Report is elaborated throughout this report of the EEAC and especially in sections 9 & 10.

In 2018-19 and up to the current date of this report, the conceptual framework of theory, pedagogy, research and practice became more part and parcel of each specialization area within the DEC. The DEC’s roots or starting point of cross-fertilization of ideas, interdisciplinary and internationalization initiatives in course work, research, grants, publications, conferences and multi-national partnerships grew exponentially over the years. The Master’s level programs were developed (although not reviewed here) and the undergraduate program was continually modified to reflect current socioeconomic and political phenomena at the local, national and international spaces. The DEC successfully reformed its program to embed greater research-based, data-driven and digitally literate instructional practices. In addition, the DEC created a four-year program of study replete with specialized coursework reflecting the highest standards of early childhood pedagogy and practice as well as being responsive to shifting socioeconomic/political landscape. The DEC’s fidelity to core evaluative practice including listening to all the voices in the room, including students, has helped strengthen and expand faculty-student engagement, greater infusion of research-based practices. Practica and field experiences of students and critical support through mentoring, a variety of effective communication channels and a high level of professional preparation have helped ensure enhanced career mobility and advancement of students according to the EEAP’s review of pertinent documents and interviews.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Academic Unit Policy for Quality Assurance

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD APPLY A QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AS PART OF THEIR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. THIS POLICY SHOULD EXPAND AND BE AIMED (WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS) AT ALL INSTITUTION'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY, AND PARTICULARLY AT THE FULFILMENT OF QUALITY REQUIREMENTS OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES. THIS POLICY SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit is in line with the Institutional policy on quality, and is included in a published statement that is implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special objectives related to the quality assurance of study programmes offered by the academic unit.

The quality policy statement of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the programme, its purpose and field of study; it will realise the programme's strategic goals and it will determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will implement the appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

In particular, in order to carry out this policy, the academic unit commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate:

- a) the suitability of the structure and organization of the curriculum;*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education;*
- c) the promotion of the quality and effectiveness of teaching;*
- d) the appropriateness of the qualifications of the teaching staff;*
- e) the enhancement of the quality and quantity of the research output among faculty members of the academic unit;*
- f) ways for linking teaching and research;*
- g) the level of demand for qualifications acquired by graduates, in the labour market;*
- h) the quality of support services such as the administrative services, the Library, and the student welfare office;*
- i) the conduct of an annual review and an internal audit of the quality assurance system of the undergraduate programme(s) offered, as well as the collaboration of the Internal Evaluation Group (IEG) with the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).*

Study Programme Compliance

The quality assurance policy of the Institution is aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines. The strategic management of MODIP (QAY - the institutional Quality Assurance Unit) adequately supported the DEC's Internal Quality Committee OMEA (IEG) to carry on the annual and continuous internal evaluation of the program. It is acknowledged by the institutional Unit

and EEAP that progress has been achieved since the last external evaluation of the DEC and that rigorous work has been done by the Faculty of the DEC based on the suggestions of the previous report. Not only has the DEC complied with the recommendations concerning the program review, the enrichment of research activities, and students' participation and support, but it has also succeeded in providing one of the most challenging programs in early childhood education. The program remains current and consistent with developments in society (labor market, digital technologies, etc.) and practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.

The curriculum is in line with the European Course Credits System (ECTS) and the overall aim of the program is to prepare early childhood educators who understand the complexity of educational phenomena and are ready to apply the science of learning in formal and informal settings. Clear, accurate, up-to date and readily accessible information is published in the website of the DEC. Adequate and readily accessible teaching and learning resources (teaching and learning environments, materials, aids and equipment) are provided to students and support the achievement of objectives in the study program.

The outward-looking vision of the DEC has established a productive collaboration with the periphery and stakeholders and satisfied the students' need for quick placement in the workplace where graduates are welcomed because of their qualifications and professionalism. During the interviews with EEAP, students and graduates expressed their gratitude to the DEC's mentoring and the guidance to seize the opportunities offered by the European Program Erasmus plus to have their Practicum in European countries where they gain practical experience. Some of them are employed at schools abroad. Furthermore, students, graduates and collaborators commented favorably on their participation in research and conferences organized by the DEC which upholds their connection and affiliation with the DEC.

A process of program, faculty, teaching material and teaching evaluation is in effect through electronic questionnaires given to students at the end of each course and requiring feedback in a variety of dimensions. The analysis of students' responses indicates that the majority of the student body is satisfied and finds both courses and teaching fruitful and effective.

The EEAP verified that the DEC's research and activities have been considerably increased and are supported by external grants. It is noteworthy that the newly established interdepartmental collaboration with the Departments of Medicine and Biology opened new perspectives for applied research that can produce new knowledge in early childhood education and further enrich curricula and teaching.

Overall, the EEAP applauds the DEC for its rigorous and worthwhile work achieved over the last seven years and verifies compliance with the principles of Quality Assurance.

Recommendations on specific issues follow in the sections below.

Panel Judgement

Principle 1: Institution Policy for Quality Assurance	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING A DEFINED WRITTEN PROCESS WHICH WILL INVOLVE THE PARTICIPANTS, INFORMATION SOURCES AND THE APPROVAL COMMITTEES FOR THE PROGRAMME. THE OBJECTIVES, THE EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES, THE INTENDED PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND THE WAYS TO ACHIEVE THEM ARE SET OUT IN THE PROGRAMME DESIGN. THE ABOVE DETAILS AS WELL AS INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME'S STRUCTURE ARE PUBLISHED IN THE STUDENT GUIDE.

Academic units develop their programmes following a well-defined procedure. The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the objectives, the subject areas, the structure and organisation, the expected learning outcomes and the intended professional qualifications according to the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education are described at this stage. The approval or revision process for programmes includes a check of compliance with the basic requirements described in the Standards, on behalf of the Institution's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Furthermore, the programme design should take into consideration the following:

- *the Institutional strategy*
- *the active participation of students*
- *the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market*
- *the smooth progression of students throughout the stages of the programme*
- *the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
- *the option to provide work experience to the students*
- *the linking of teaching and research*
- *the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the programme by the Institution*

Study Programme Compliance

The program of Early Childhood Education at the University of Ioannina is well structured and conforms with the European Standards and Guidelines and the student workload is in compliance with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

The progress made since the last evaluation in 2013 is impressive. Its design is innovative and according to the principles of high-quality early childhood programs which are characterized by flexibility geared towards a student – centered curriculum. Flexible paths that allow students to choose their future orientation in the labor market alter the strict attachment of students to core and obligatory courses and give opportunities for personal life choices. Without leaving science-episteme behind, the program has been designed so as to satisfy different career orientations and allow different students' minds to work in the field from different posts.

Tracking choices in the curricula ensures they are fit for purpose and can orient students towards different types of work and life-style choices. Attention should be given on balancing the mandatory and elective (obligatory electives and free) courses so that the chosen paths ensure that all students have a strong background for teaching all the subjects and actually meet the expected learning outcomes of the program. The DEC offers 123 courses and 57 of them are

necessary for graduation. The distribution of courses in the Diploma Supplement contains 22 mandatory courses, 16 obligatory electives, 17 free electives and 2 allocated to a foreign language. The gradual augmentation of the free electives in the students' personal program may become too risky for students acquiring the necessary qualifications in order to work in public schools.

The program is also skill-oriented and supports students to invent themselves and to learn by doing and practicing theories in the laboratories and the real work environment not only during the period of their practical field experience, but also during their course participation. The courses are well assigned to faculty allowing all to have at least one obligatory core course and one elective, an arrangement that facilitates the track design of the curriculum. It is notable that the DEC also supports the development of the learners' general competencies including digital literacy, foreign language skills and entrepreneurship.

The DEC's Committees provide continuous feedback on the quality and operation of the program and the internal evaluation Committee (OMEA) is in a rewarding collaboration with the Institutional Committee of Quality (MODIP). Laboratories and resources in all the fields of the curriculum give students the opportunity to exercise their skills, explore the scientific and art world and extend their inquiries and creativity.

Practical field experience starts in the second year of studies focusing on Systematic Observation of phenomena occurring in the classroom and at local kindergartens. Analysis of the observations is enlightened by the program's courses and mentoring. It is noteworthy that students have rich mentoring and teaching experiences not only due to the interaction of the DEC and various stakeholders, but also of the willingness of schools and centers in the community to collaborate with the DEC. The school experience is enhanced in the third year of study where students combine observations and teaching, and it is completed in the fourth year when students are required to teach one classroom's entire program for four weeks. A number of students have the opportunity to participate in the competitive program "Ameivomeni Praktiki Askisi" (= Paid Work Experience) and be paid monthly for their services.

The feedback from students and graduates of the study program on their employment and further studies is considerable favorable. The DEC tries to promote a supportive and friendly culture emphasizing working together and taking student, employers' and stakeholders' feedback into account.

Panel Judgement

Principle 2: Design and Approval of Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The DEC should pay closer attention to the balance between mandatory, obligatory electives and free elective courses.
- Some mandatory courses should be delivered in both Greek and English so that the DEC can attract visiting professors from the international academic community and encourage foreign students to study at the DEC through the Erasmus program.
- The social and academic criteria that are used to qualify students for Paid Work need to be spelled out.

Principle 3: Student- centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES ARE DELIVERED IN A WAY THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CREATING THE LEARNING PROCESS. THE ASSESSMENT METHODS SHOULD REFLECT THIS APPROACH.

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. The above entail continuous consideration of the programme's delivery and the assessment of the related outcomes.

The student-centred learning and teaching process

- *respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;*
- *considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;*
- *flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;*
- *regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods aiming at improvement;*
- *regularly evaluates the quality and effectiveness of teaching, as documented especially through student surveys;*
- *reinforces the student's sense of autonomy, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teaching staff;*
- *promotes mutual respect in the student - teacher relationship;*
- *applies appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.*

In addition :

- *the academic staff are familiar with the existing examination system and methods and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;*
- *the assessment criteria and methods are published in advance;*
- *the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary is linked to advice on the learning process;*
- *student assessment is conducted by more than one examiner, where possible;*
- *the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;*
- *assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;*
- *a formal procedure for student appeals is in place.*

Study Programme Compliance

The DEC favors student-centered teaching, learning, and assessment, due to the pedagogical background of the faculty and the structure of the courses. The paths that tailor the program to students' needs are made possible with the variety of electives that are offered in different scientific fields, i.e., Math, Language, Music, Art. Individualized and cooperative learning - which is a necessary condition of class organization for student centered - teaching during the classroom and laboratory meetings - facilitates differentiation of teaching and learning. Meetings and work in the laboratories can provide further assistance to all students and

individualized support to those who need it. Moreover, students are given feedback and advice on the learning process and have the opportunity to meet the personnel.

Although the follow-up of teaching in small groups in the DEC’s laboratories is an effective practice, lessons in the amphitheatres with very big audiences should be avoided as they do not comply with student-centered learning. Lectures and Power point presentations limit the activation of learning and undermine student-centered learning opportunities.

Student-centered learning is also supported by the use of multiple teaching aids and multiple teaching methods that range from traditional lectures to individual or group work (written or oral), experiential methods, and laboratory approaches. Students and instructors share a relationship of cooperation and mutual respect and any student complaints are addressed and resolved.

Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students, carried out in accordance with the stated procedures and supports the development of students. Students’ different abilities, learning needs and learning opportunities are taken into consideration when conducting educational and assessment activities. The Office of Disability Support Services provides differentiated support to students with disabilities.

Starting in their first year of study, all students are assigned a faculty advisor. However, it is difficult to understand how the limited number of staff can manage 2000 – 4000 students that are enrolled in the program each year. Interviews with students and graduates did not shed light on this matter. The present students that EEAP met with spoke of their personal experiences, which were rewarding.

The DEC emphasizes students’ wellbeing and promotes a supportive and encouraging learning environment. Students’ participation in the DEC’s extra-curricular activities are a good reflection of the staff concern for both education and personal, mental wellbeing.

Panel Judgement

Principle 3: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The student – teacher ratio should be improved. The present situation is fragile and increasing the staff number must be considered.
- Students’ profile in each year of study should be analyzed according to pre-defined dimensions and factors (i.e. regularity of attendance; participation in extra-curricular activities; number of mentoring meetings; failure and extra support in specific areas of the curriculum) that may affect their studies.

- The limited number of staff does not allow faculty to fully address the DEC's vision.

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD DEVELOP AND APPLY PUBLISHED REGULATIONS COVERING ALL ASPECTS AND PHASES OF STUDIES (ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION).

Institutions and academic units need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, manage and act on information regarding student progression.

Procedures concerning the award and recognition of higher education degrees, the duration of studies, rules ensuring students progression, terms and conditions for student mobility should be based on the institutional study regulations. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition of credits among various European academic departments and Institutions, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Graduation represents the culmination of the students' study period. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed (Diploma Supplement).

Study Programme Compliance

Incoming students are supported in having a smooth transmission from high school to higher education through several sources. For example, the DEC's website clearly lists information about course requirements, how to navigate academic life and how to reach support, if needed. In addition, new students are provided via email and telephonically support and information. Furthermore, students are informed about the structure and stages of their studies from a variety of sources: from the course outlines, study guide, the University's Website and the DEC's Regulations. Finally, the professors also assist students with information of how to use available resources to optimize learning, how to write papers and how to meet course expectations.

Students indicated being supported by faculty and being able to form close collaborations with them. They feel that they are being assisted in their careers and academic pursuits. The University of Ioannina has procured the Microsoft Office program and has made available free of charge to all students thus facilitating their academic work.

The DEC's study regulations describe the requirements for awarding a degree. These are updated as needed and made available for review on the DEC's website. Students are very satisfied with the feedback they have been receiving regarding their progress.

The DEC has the necessary facilities large rooms for academic learning and amphitheater where students can attend classes. These rooms are equipped with adequate computers, and audio-visual devices for power point and video presentations.

The DEC maintains good records of student attendance and participation in classes, mainly through the university registry. They are governed by clear regulations related to student admission, duration of studies, student progression, and student mobility.

The DEC has a diverse curriculum of practical training that starts during the 2nd year of study. Students are well prepared and look forward to their participation in this aspect of their training. They value practical training and feel that the connection between the teaching and practice they receive prepares them well for this. The students interviewed indicated that they are confident and optimistic about their future employment.

Panel Judgement

Principle 4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 5: Teaching Staff

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ASSURE THEMSELVES OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCE OF THE TEACHING STAFF. THEY SHOULD APPLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING STAFF.

The Institutions and their academic units have a major responsibility as to the standard of their teaching staff providing them with a supportive environment that promotes the advancement of their scientific work. In particular, the academic unit should:

- *set up and follow clear, transparent and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff and offer them conditions of employment that recognize the importance of teaching and research;*
- *offer opportunities and promote the professional development of the teaching staff;*
- *encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;*
- *encourage innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies;*
- *promote the increase of the volume and quality of the research output within the academic unit;*
- *follow quality assurance processes for all staff members (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training etc.);*
- *develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff.*

Study Programme Compliance

There are 18 faculty in the DEC (lectures, assistant professors, associate professors and professors), the majority of them in the rank of Associate and Full Professor. There are also 14 non-permanent staff members (5 special scientific teaching staff members - 2 of them PhD holders, 1 Special teaching member of personnel and 1 Special technological member, 5 contracted staff members, 2 seconded teachers, and a number of postgraduate students as teaching and laboratory assistants). Taking into account that every year the DEC receives approximately 300 students, the faculty to student ratio is very high and it puts at risk effective teaching and interaction between the permanent staff and students.

There is a balance among faculty with general pedagogical knowledge and those with specific pedagogical content knowledge in a variety of fields. All staff is highly motivated and work hard to fulfil the aims and objectives of the program, to carry out research and ensure a high publication profile.

Allocation of responsibilities to post-graduate students reduced the teaching workload of faculty in the graduate program, but the establishment of master and doctoral programs that demand a thesis and dissertation, along with the new research activities of the staff, has increased the workload of the staff. New hires in the DEC are necessary. Given the current trend towards internationalization in education and research, it is highly recommended to increase faculty recruitment and/or visiting professors with experience in the international academic community.

All faculty are active scholars in their respective fields. Faculty publish mainly in conference proceedings and peer-reviewed Greek journals. The participation of the DEC in the international

research Capacity Building for Higher Education, being a leader in Packages of the project, is valuable and it will contribute to the development of a research orientation and international collaborations and publications.

It is notable that members of the faculty participate as presidents in international scientific unions such as ISCAR, EAWC and as members in international networks (UCEN-UNIANDRION) and voluntarily support the newly established department of the Department of Psychology. In general, faculty is active in national and international unions, committees and networks.

Overall, the DEC has a vision to create an environment and culture that advocates working together and integrating students into the community.

Panel Judgement

Principle 5: Teaching Staff	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- Hires permanent academic staff so that the DEC is able to realize its vision for education of high quality.
- Increase of publications in international refereed journals.
- Invitation of visiting professors of the international community to teach and collaborate in research with the DEC's staff.
- Development of policies to attract highly qualified academic staff from the international academic community.

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO COVER TEACHING AND LEARNING NEEDS. THEY SHOULD –ON THE ONE HAND– PROVIDE SATISFACTORY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT AND –ON THE OTHER HAND– FACILITATE DIRECT ACCESS TO THEM BY ESTABLISHING INTERNAL RULES TO THIS END (E.G. LECTURE ROOMS, LABORATORIES, LIBRARIES, NETWORKS, BOARDING, CAREER AND SOCIAL POLICY SERVICES ETC.).

Institutions and their academic units must have sufficient funding and means to support learning and academic activity in general, so that they can offer to students the best possible level of studies. The above means could include facilities such as libraries, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, information and communications services, support or counselling services.

When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students must be taken into consideration (e.g. whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities) and the shift towards student-centred learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are appropriate, adequate, and accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP was unable to inspect the facilities in person due to the pandemic. A You Tube video was made available for review where the buildings, laboratories, lecture halls and administrative offices were shown. In addition, faculty's laboratory facilities were viewed through the faculty's individual power point presentations.

The DEC has sufficient resources that support learning and academic activity. It demonstrates a commitment to high quality research and the provision of critical opportunities to its students. Overall, the DEC has adequate IT infrastructure in place for teaching and distance learning.

Faculty believe that they have adequate administrative and technical support which facilitate their teaching and research. Students indicated that the faculty are readily available to provide guidance and support, as well as assistance with career orientation. Faculty was described as friendly and readily accessible.

The DEC offers diverse areas of interest; however, it seems they need additional permanent teaching positions that would allow the continuation of the programs from one year to the next. Currently, there seems to be a lot of uncertainty on how a program would be implemented the following year due to a lack of available permanent faculty. Ideally two professors should be active per area of interest.

Students reported having a great variety of practical experience. They feel that their coursework makes good connections between theory and practice and prepares them well for career

possibilities. They find the curriculum to be diverse making it possible for them to consider a variety of options to pursue for future specialization.

The DEC through coursework, practical experiences and faculty guidance provides excellent direction and encouragement to students to pursue postgraduate studies.

There is administrative staff that provide adequate student support both in terms of assistance and access. They are well qualified and dedicated in catering to students' needs.

The DEC's website is updated regularly and contains useful and relevant information needed by the students including course requirements, announcements and opportunities.

The DEC has excellent relations with external stakeholders in the community. These stakeholders find that the students are well trained and an asset for their respective organizations. On the same note students feel that they have an adequate variety of great practicum training experiences. Many students are being hired by their training placements indicating that the student training is strong.

The pandemic has introduced a set of difficulties as it pertains to practical training. Some students expressed concern of how competitive they would be in the job force with limited practical experience due to the pandemic. Creative solutions need to be explored and considered; can additional practical experiences be developed via teleconferencing?

Panel Judgement

Principle 6: Learning Resources and Student Support	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

- The EEAP believes that for the continuing excellent delivery of education, additional permanent faculty positions need to be considered in the future.
- Problem solving creative solutions so that students that have limited practical experiences due to the pandemic engage in new ways via teleconferencing to further develop their teaching skills.

Principle 7: Information Management

INSTITUTIONS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING INFORMATION, AIMED AT THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY AND RELATED ACTIVITIES, IN AN INTEGRATED, EFFECTIVE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE WAY.

Institutions are expected to establish and operate an information system for the management and monitoring of data concerning students, teaching staff, course structure and organisation, teaching and provision of services to students as well as to the academic community.

Reliable data is essential for accurate information and for decision making, as well as for identifying areas of smooth operation and areas for improvement. Effective procedures for collecting and analysing information on study programmes and other activities feed data into the internal system of quality assurance.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the Institution. The following are of interest:

- *key performance indicators*
- *student population profile*
- *student progression, success and drop-out rates*
- *student satisfaction with their programme(s)*
- *availability of learning resources and student support*
- *career paths of graduates*

A number of methods may be used for collecting information. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analyzing information and planning follow-up activities.

Study Programme Compliance

The EEAP has determined that the DEC has established procedures and collects adequate data concerning students, faculty, course organization and structure. However, they do not seem to be collecting data on student employability and the career path of graduates. This is helpful data regarding the DEC ability to position its graduates, and also to foster future connections and collaborations.

Internal evaluations take place and students are asked to provide feedback of their courses and teaching staff. The information provided is considered and changes are made in the various course elements accordingly. Also, confidential feedback is being given to the faculty regarding their teaching etc. Students believe that any feedback they have provided has been heard and taken into account when changes were implemented.

Overall, the EEAP believe that the frequency of satisfaction surveys and the decisions being made following the analysis of these data is sufficient.

The student gave feedback to the EEAP committee indicating that they value and rate all courses highly. They feel the courses prepare them well for the job force and provide a good connection between practice and research. In addition, the students believe that they are well prepared to

engage in research by not only receiving theoretical instruction, but also applied instruction via their active participation in research.

Alumni feel connected with the DEC and are welcomed to participate in educational opportunities (e.g. symposia, conferences, Science Fest). This is important since it increases the bond among students, as well as faculty and graduates. This increases potential for future collaborations, teaching opportunities and availability of practical experiences.

Panel Judgement

Principle 7: Information Management	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

The DEC should consider collecting data on student employability and the career path of its graduates. This data can foster future connections and collaborations.

Principle 8: Public Information

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD PUBLISH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR TEACHING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES WHICH IS CLEAR, ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, UP-TO-DATE AND READILY ACCESSIBLE.

Information on Institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions and their academic units provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications awarded, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students, as well as graduate employment information.

Study Programme Compliance

It is apparent that the UI and DEC have put in place a comprehensive public information system as we deduced through interviews with the Associate Rector, Dean, Chair, members of MODIP, OMEA, faculty, secretarial staff, students, our review of the University and DEC related web pages and documents published online and in reports submitted. The EEAP examined materials provided that exhibited evidence of critical information sharing with students, faculty members, external partners and the community at large. Faculty and students reiterated that the DEC courses, goals, activities and expectations are clearly delineated and available to all students. The DEC fully elaborates the program curriculum including sequence of courses, required courses and electives, and their attendant ECTS credits. The coursework and activities required to attain a degree and certification is clearly stated. The practical training component that spans three years is clearly defined crucial to the smooth functioning of the DEC. All important information regarding completion of course work, ERASMUS and other internship opportunities is readily available online and also through faculty mentoring activities and DEC conferences. The following areas are some examples of critical information available online: Study Guide with specific curricula, list of courses, information on ECTS credits to complete, etc. Also published online are all courses with objectives, syllabi, and textbooks.

There is an electronic registry that informs students about scores, ETS credits, etc. The DEC's research activities, opportunities for public and private sector funding, lectures, conferences and community activities are publicized on the site.

There is also a Facebook site and you tube videos and links that provide up-to-date postings to faculty, staff, current students, alumni, external stakeholders, the community and other university personnel and students. Information about internships, scholarships, lectures, seminars, conferences and community activities sponsored by DEC faculty and students.

Notably, there is an important link that concerning the DEC's partnership with the UI Career Services Center. The DEC has developed a dynamic mentoring approach that subsumes the background, aspirations and needs of DEC students and prospective graduates' in order to support their career mobility and advancement.

Mentoring Program pairs an experienced professional with a student to help the prospective graduate identify further professional development avenues and to explore promising employment opportunities.

Panel Judgement

Principle 8: Public Information	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes

INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR THE AUDIT AND ANNUAL INTERNAL REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRAMMES, SO AS TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET FOR THEM, THROUGH MONITORING AND AMENDMENTS, WITH A VIEW TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. ANY ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED.

Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to maintain the level of educational provision and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.

The above comprise the evaluation of:

- *the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;*
- *the changing needs of society;*
- *the students' workload, progression and completion;*
- *the effectiveness of the procedures for the assessment of students;*
- *the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;*
- *the learning environment, support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme*

Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.

Study Programme Compliance

The DEC has in place a strategic development plan. A core component of that plan is a system of self-evaluation and review of key program structures that reflects a fidelity to the HAHE (and HQA before that) EU “quality assurance guidelines” for institutions of higher education. The DEC exhibits a dynamic “culture of collaboration”. As part of the system of compliance with required guidelines, every four years the DEC re-examines its program objectives, curricula and activities to assure they are in accordance with the UI ad DEC’s strategic goals and mission. A re-alignment of goals or preparation of new courses occurs as warranted by input with strategic external partners interviewed and societal changes and demands (e.g., ongoing refugee conditions).

The DEC committees also review annually critical elements of coursework and the program in general in light of current research in DEC disciplines or major subjects, student evaluations both of individual coursework (all students) and of the entire program (4rth year students), feedback from external partners and current societal needs and demands. For example, changes were made to the curriculum courses to include topics and approaches addressing violence and bullying, international phenomena. Courses reflecting new instructional design elements and resources were recently added to the curriculum; a sequence of coursework specializing in digital competence and digital literacy pedagogy that clearly respond to new social realities notwithstanding the axiomatic educational imperatives of a pandemic. UI administrators and DEC faculty clearly value collegiality and collaboration within their specialization areas as well as with key external local, national and international partners. the process of internal evaluation highly productive.

There is continuous monitoring and assessment of the programs, student progress, faculty achievements, etc. The quality assurance measures put into place emanate from the mission of UI and its Strategic Plan, national regulations, international standards and the Strategic Plan/guidelines set forth by the DEC. The regular meetings of faculty “steering committees” effectuate the collection and review of data such as that generated by the elaborate student surveys. This data informs the decision-making and action steps taken to modify the program curriculum. The ongoing internationalization and global reach initiatives and collaboration of the DEC faculty members has also yielded increased productivity in areas of publications, international conferences, grants and international research.

The quality assurance system has resulted in revised pedagogy emphases and expanded clinical and field experiences of the students. Our interviews with the faculty, students, alumni especially made clear that there was a very high degree of satisfaction with the program as implemented, but also with the faculty-student involvement and the rich “clinical experiences” the students were offered through the DEC’s work with ERASMUS internships and local scholarship/internship programs. More recently, the DEC program has integrated practical experiences/internships through ESPA and ERASMUS as electives.

Faculty members, including Research laboratory faculty, have continued collaborating with external global university partners and providing teaching practice opportunities at local and global agencies, including agency community programs for refugees.

The research breadth of faculty, student involvement and updated course “research to practice” focus of many courses appears to have enhanced student satisfaction as well as career options of graduates.

The student evaluations are also a major part of the monitoring and the results are collected and analyzed and shared with, and discussed as appropriate among, DEC faculty members.

The DEC’s collaboration with and input from external stakeholders such as local pre-schools and school placement agencies, has resulted in providing students with relevant field experiences during their critical third and fourth years of their program. Notably, the external cooperating agency and school heads noted the rich symbiotic relationship enjoyed by the field school sites that offered “real-life” classroom experiences and at the same time benefitted from the creative pedagogy and technology DEC students brought to their internship classrooms. It is worth further noting the DEC and partners had to drastically modify the planned field experiences this past year due to the pandemic.

Panel Judgement

Principle 9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Internal Review of Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes

PROGRAMMES SHOULD REGULARLY UNDERGO EVALUATION BY COMMITTEES OF EXTERNAL EXPERTS SET BY HAHE, AIMING AT ACCREDITATION. THE TERM OF VALIDITY OF THE ACCREDITATION IS DETERMINED BY HAHE.

HAHE is responsible for administrating the programme accreditation process which is realised as an external evaluation procedure, and implemented by a committee of independent experts. HAHE grants accreditation of programmes, with a specific term of validity, following to which revision is required. The accreditation of the quality of the programmes acts as a means of verification of the compliance of the programme with the template's requirements, and as a catalyst for improvement, while opening new perspectives towards the international standing of the awarded degrees.

Both academic units and institutions participate in the regular external quality assurance process, while respecting the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate.

The quality assurance, in this case the accreditation, is an on-going process that does not end with the external feedback, or report or its follow-up process within the Institution. Therefore, Institutions and their academic units ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Study Programme Compliance

Great strides have been made in the critical aspects of the DEC's curriculum and operation since its 2013 external evaluation. A review of the documents submitted to the EEAP and the interviews of the administrators, faculty, secretaries, students, graduates and external partners revealed that the recommendations made in the 2013 report were addressed by the DEC and vital changes were made to improve the quality of the DEC Program. For example, the DEC revised the curriculum offerings by refining specialization sequences, revamping and clarifying required and elective course offerings, bolstering practical experiences and strengthening connections between theory, pedagogy and practice. Fewer compulsory courses and expanded lab course choices emerged in response to student voices. Consequently, the DEC re-aligned its ECTS, e.g., creating one required course per required subject specializations. Our interviews with the faculty, students and alumni who had obtained employment locally and abroad demonstrated that the program has become more successful in the professional preparation of its students. The revision of compulsory/elective courses continued as did the introduction of complex social issues such as school violence, bullying and bias situations. Current students and graduates expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with the program. The graduates maintained that the theoretical and practical aspects of the courses and pedagogy provided them the tools to master teaching in the variety of classroom environments they work in. Faculty mentoring and involvement and the DEC's community awareness and involvement has also instilled in students and graduates a sense of social awareness and ability to respond effectively to the new social realities and community demographics.

Other notable responses to the 2013 report recommendations included the expansion of Greek literacy and linguistics for Greek as a second or new language. Further curriculum revisions sought to strengthen STEM coursework. New technology for the classroom was taken up in the

creation of a new sequence of courses. The arts specialization was expanded and strengthened in the form of more interdisciplinary offerings, e.g., STEAM/science and math via arts and movement instruction and research. The DEC also strengthened the curriculum offerings to increase and improve teaching practice opportunities during the second through fourth year of study. DEC faculty made the changes based on the on feedback it collected as well as the external report findings. Since the 2013 report, “research laboratory” faculty or mentors also made improvements to their services in response to the need to enhance “hands-on” materials and techniques for the target subjects. The approach of “Teacher as Researcher” was promulgated on a larger scale alongside other highlighted and effective pedagogy “Learning by Design.”

The improved and expanded interdisciplinary and global research agenda of faculty members has resulted in courses, conferences, grants and internship opportunities for students and new noteworthy areas of interdisciplinary faculty research. The system of improving the DEC’s work in these areas has evidently resulted, according to the student course/program evaluations and our interviews, in a feeling of “preparedness” and confidence for the majority of current students and graduate. The DEC program of study has also enhanced the all-important career mobility of graduates according to the same sources. Graduates expressed their appreciation and satisfaction during our interviews for the efficacy of the program curriculum, resources and activities. This overall satisfaction by a majority of students and graduates was also borne out in the student program survey results.

Panel Judgement

Principle 10: Regular External Evaluation of Undergraduate Programmes	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

Panel Recommendations

None

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

I. Features of Good Practice

The DEC Program has applied exemplary internal evaluation mechanisms and modified its curriculum offerings to subsume current research and international standards for early childhood education. There is an increased interdisciplinary emphasis in coursework and increase in research collaborations including those leading to meritorious international grant awards. The DEC has improved the balance of compulsory and elective courses in order to help students achieve more relevant learning outcomes that are responsive to research findings, trends and societal needs. Graduates are exposed to a variety of resources such as mentoring programs, internships, conferences and seminars that provide information and experiences that enhance career options and further post-graduate study.

II. Areas of Weakness

The practical experience of DEC students has been expanded and refined to include several weeks of clinical work in diverse early childhood educational settings beginning in the second year of study. Although EEAP interviews of graduates and student surveys indicated a widespread satisfaction with the overall program of study and especially “career-readiness” and confidence in teaching, a small number of students in their program surveys indicated that the *one month* of Practicum allocated in the final year of study was insufficient for their professional preparation.

III. Recommendations for Follow-up Actions.

- DEC review may be warranted of possibly extending the practical training period if feasible in the fourth year of study and assuring more intensive instructional time for students to apply research-based pedagogy and practice and to obtain more extensive and elaborate feedback.
- Continue effective monitoring of the balance of required and elective coursework and specializations to reflect new, shifting educational paradigms and student needs.
- Consider delivery of mandatory courses in Greek and English to attract professors from the international academic community as well as to attract more foreign students to study at DEC through the ERASMUS program.

- Hire required faculty members needed to fulfil its mission of high-quality education. The student-teacher ratio should be improved as well.
- Analyze student profiles according to pre-defined activities i.e., attendance; participation in extra-curricular activities; number of mentoring meetings and curriculum area strengths and weaknesses that may impact achievement.
- Consider collecting data on student employability and the career path of graduates. This data can foster future connections and collaborations and inform DEC reforms.
- Invite visiting international professors to teach and collaborate on research. Develop policies to recruit highly qualified faculty members from the international community.
- Clearly define social and academic criteria for DEC students' eligibility to apply for Paid Work Experiences.

IV. Summary & Overall Assessment

The Principles where full compliance has been achieved are: **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10**

The Principles where substantial compliance has been achieved are: **None**

The Principles where partial compliance has been achieved are: **None**

The Principles where failure of compliance was identified are: **None**

Overall Judgement	
Fully compliant	X
Substantially compliant	
Partially compliant	
Non-compliant	

The members of the External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel

Name and Surname

Signature

- 1. Professor John Spiridakis (Chair),** St. John's University, United States of America
- 2. Professor Mary Koutselini,** University of Cyprus, Cyprus
- 3. Clinical Associate Professor Joanna Katsanis,** University of Arizona, United States of America