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

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Department of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECC&E)

Technological Educational Institute (T.E.I.) of Epirus (Ioannina)

April 2014



European Union
European Social Fund



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

Co-financed by Greece and the European Union



TABLE OF CONTENTS

The External Evaluation Committee

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- Brief account of documents examined, of the Site Visit, meetings and facilities visited.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

- Comments on the quality and completeness of the documentation provided and on the overall acceptance of and participation in the Quality Assurance procedures by the Department.

A. Curriculum

APPROACH

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

IMPLEMENTATION

- Rationality, functionality, effectiveness of the Curriculum.

RESULTS

- Maximizing success and dealing with potential inhibiting factors.

IMPROVEMENT

- Planned improvements.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

- Pedagogic policy and methodology, means and resources.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Quality and evaluation of teaching procedures, teaching materials and resources, mobility.

RESULTS

- Efficacy of teaching, understanding of positive or negative results.

IMPROVEMENT

- Proposed methods for improvement.

C. Research

APPROACH

- Research policy and main objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Research promotion and assessment, quality of support and infrastructure.

RESULTS

- Research projects and collaborations, scientific publications and applied results.

IMPROVEMENT

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH

- Quality and effectiveness of services provided by the Department.

IMPLEMENTATION

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

RESULTS

- Adequateness and functionality of administrative and other services.

IMPROVEMENTS

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

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

- Short-, medium- and long-term goals and plans of action proposed by the Department.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- The development and present situation of the Department, good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process, recommendations for improvement.

External Evaluation Committee

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECC&E) of the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus (TEI-Epirus) in Ioannina consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

- 1. Dr Ageliki Nicolopoulou**, Professor, Department of Psychology, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA. (Coordinator)
- 2. Dr Mary Andrianopoulos**, Associate Professor, Department of Communication Disorders, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA.
- 3. Dr Helen Phtiaka**, Associate Professor, Department of Education, University of Cyprus, Cyprus.
- 4. Dr George Philippou**, Professor Emeritus, University of Cyprus and University of Nicosia, 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

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) welcomed the opportunity to participate in this evaluation by the Greek Ministry of Education for the Department of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECC&E) of the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus (TEI-Epirus) in Ioannina. The President of TEI-Epirus (Ioannina), the two (2) Vice Presidents, the Dean, a member of the Quality Assessment Unit, and the ECC&E faculty and staff contributed whole-heartedly to the evaluation process with professionalism, honesty, and enthusiasm. The sections that follow discuss the unanimous conclusions reached by the EEC.

Brief description of the ECC&E Department. The Department resides within the School of Health and Social Welfare, which is comprised of three (3) departments: ECC&E, Nursing, and Speech & Language Therapy.

As of September 2013, the academic personnel of the ECC&E Department is comprised of two (2) Professors, one (1) Assistant Professor, two (2) lecturers, six (6) contracted faculty members, and three (3) members of administrative staff. During the 2012-2013 academic year, the faculty and staff of the ECC&E Department were comprised of 28 people. The Department accepted approximately 120 students into its undergraduate program during the 2013-2014 academic year. As of September 2013, the total undergraduate student body in the Department consists of approximately 1000 students, among whom 829 (84%) are currently within the four-year normal term of study and 158 (16%) have exceeded the four-year period of study. The number of students who graduated during the past three academic years is as follows: 213 (2012-2013); 165 (2011-2012) and 121 (2010-2011).

Brief outline of the site visit. The site visit of the EEC took place during March 31 to April 2, 2014. On March 31, the EEC visited the ECC&E Department's headquarters on the TEI-Epirus Ioannina campus for a meeting with the member of the local evaluation unit as well as all five members of the department:

- Professor Papadopoulos, Member of the Quality Assessment Unit, Professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics;
- Professor Mantziou, Dean of the School in Health and Social Welfare & Professor of Developmental Psychology;
- Dr. Vrionis, M.D. Professor of Pediatrics;

- Assistant Professor Gitonas, Chair of the ECC&E Department;
- and Lecturers of ECC&E, Ms. Kainourgiou and Karavida.

The second day and half of the third day, the EEC met with these same individuals as well as others as detailed below.

The EEC visited the following facilities:

- The main campus of the ECC&E Department;
- the ECC&E laboratories and workshops;
- the administrative offices;
- the gymnasium and health facilities;
- the on-campus preschool center;
- a theatre room, an auditorium, and several lecture rooms;
- the TEI-Epirus Health Science and Social Welfare library.

The EEC was provided the following documents for their review:

- The orienting documents provided to us by HQA;
- the *Internal Evaluation Report* (IER) of the ECC&E for the academic years 2012-2013, which included a sample of the course evaluation form provided to the students; this report was accompanied by several Appendices with an extensive set of tables along with course syllabi for the entire curriculum and a list of publications by the ECC&E faculty for the last five year (2008-2013);
- the 2012-2013 Revised Program of Study document in accordance with the MD E5/46350; the ADIP ECC&E School Profile document, curriculum vitae (CV) of the ECC&E faculty;
- a sample of student theses and course paper projects;
- a flash drive with the PowerPoint presentation that took place during the second day of the site visit; some handouts, protocols for practicum, a demonstration of the digital program that is been developed to track the student body with respect to practicum placements, completion of assignments as well as faculty supervision and evaluation;
- a sample of published books written or translated by a few of the ECC&E faculty, including some course textbooks.

The EEC met and interviewed the following individuals during the site visit:

- The TEI President, the Vice President of Academics, the Vice President of Finance, ECC&E faculty and staff, and one member of the Quality Assessment Unit;

- A group of 14 (11 females, 3 males) off-campus supervisors, 90% of whom were alumni of the ECC&E program;
- A group of current ECC&E students (more than 40; all female);
- Seven alumni from the ECC&E program in its various configurations going as far back as 1984;
- Five off-campus affiliates:
 - three of them were affiliates from the University of Ioannina: Dr. Haliasos (Associate Professor of Pediatrics); Dr. Giotsa (Assistant Professor of Social Psychology); and Dr. Sianou (Professor of Sociology of Education).
 - Professor Geotaky from the Department of Nursing at TEI-Epirus (Ioannina)
 - Ms. Fotini Dinou, the Director of the Early Childhood and Infant Centers for Ioannina.
- Members of the administrative and secretarial staff;
- One library staff and one library administrator;
- Teachers, staff, students, administrators and a host of children attending the on-campus preschool

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The EEC believes that the IER, the supplemental and all the other materials listed above that were reviewed prior to and during the site visit, including the on-site interviews and observations during the site visit, were appropriate and adequate for the EEC to conduct its external evaluation process of the ECC&E Department. The EEC believes that it succeeded in meeting its objectives for this internal evaluation.

The EEC wants to thank the faculty and staff of ECC&E Department for its hospitality and supportive nature during the entire site visit.

A. Curriculum

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

APPROACH

According to the IER, the Department 's mission/goal is:

- to promote the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge and applied practices in early childhood care and education;
- to provide their students with the necessary skills to ensure excellent training for scientific and professional careers in ECC&E; and
- to offer a curriculum that is structured properly so that it can provide all the required knowledge and skills regarding the development and care of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Specifically, the goals and objectives of the curriculum, as reported in the IER, are as follows:

- To provide education and care for preschool-age children from 2 months up to entry in primary education (or whatever period is dictated by the state);
- To be able to establish and manage infancy or preschool centers;
- To partake in various professional activities that arise mainly as a result of the changing profession in terms of the expanding field of study as well as socio-economic and political forces;
- To navigate the exercise of the profession in light of various changes at the state and national level;
- To be able to engage in research as team members according to their specialization.

The Bachelor's program in the Department of ECC&E is comprised of eight (8) semesters of theoretical and practical study. The Department currently does not offer any graduate masters or doctoral (Ph.D.) programs. Thus, the present report refers to the bachelor's program offered by the ECC&E Department.

While the goals and objectives the Department are materialized through the program of study, exactly how they dovetail with the curriculum was not made clear.

To graduate, a student must complete a total of 40 courses comprising 240 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) units, including a practicum training course (20 ECTS) and a (mandatory) senior thesis (10 ECTS). Thus, of the total number of courses required

for graduation, 36 are mandatory and 4 are electives.

The program of studies for ECC&E aims to accord with the rules and regulations of the Bologna initiative that aim to guide the European and Greek higher education institutions. The curriculum also aims to accord with guidelines for the international associations for Infant Mental Health and with the National Association for the Education of Young Children. But again, how and in which way it does so, was left rather vague.

The ECC&E has adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The EEC observed, though, that the courses reflected variability in terms of such credits, but the rationale for this variability was not clearly explained or justified.

It was reported in the IER that the faculty review the curriculum and revise their courses on a regular basis, but the exact procedure and the aims for such a review were left rather vague.

IMPLEMENTATION

There is some degree of alignment between the predefined goals and objectives of the curriculum and its implementation. The curriculum is implemented through an organization of five categories, which seem to correspond--though not fully--to the ordering of courses over the four years of studies:

1. General background courses (5 mandatory courses; 20% of the total required courses)
2. Courses for the implementation of the profession (4 courses: 2 mandatory & 2 electives; 10% of total courses)
3. Specialized background courses (14 courses: 12 mandatory and 2 electives; 34% of total courses)
4. Specialization courses (16 courses: 14 mandatory courses and 2 electives; 36% of total courses)

(It should be noted that, although we mention here 6 elective courses altogether, the students have to take only 4 of them.)

The structure of the curriculum seems intuitively organized with a delineation of core and specialized courses as well as prerequisites. Some degree of specialization is also apparent, but not well defined.

It is clear to the EEC that, despite the huge efforts of the current five (5) highly motivated and committed faculty members, the greatest limitation in curriculum implementation appears to be the large student/instructor ratio. This is particularly exacerbated by the large cuts in temporary faculty resulting in unusually large number of students in

laboratory courses (40 to 50 instead of 20). Since lab courses and hands-on educational experience is the hallmark of TEI, these cuts, if further prolonged, will come to affect the core of the infant and early child professionals that the ECC&E produces.

RESULTS

Overall, the structure and organization of the curriculum to a large degree corresponds with the basic goals and objectives that the ECC&E Department has articulated. It appears to adequately prepare the students to work as early care and education professionals in public or private settings. It also provides them with good practical experience due to the various lab-based courses, the practicum work that they are required to do every semester after their second year, culminating with the practicum course at their final year. Overall, these practical experiences prepare the students well for their future profession, and the faculty reported that some of their graduates were able to get jobs easily in other European countries. The graduates we met told us that they did not have much difficulty obtaining jobs, working in either public or private centers, but the number we met was rather small and all of them are still in contact with the Department as they welcome students for practicum exercises into their classrooms. Unfortunately, the institution does not seem to keep records where their graduates end up.

Furthermore, the hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm of the permanent and temporary faculty members to serve the students and help them graduate on time, under difficult conditions, were patently evident.

IMPROVEMENT

The procedure for revising the curriculum rests with the faculty, as mentioned in the IER report with respect to the 2011 revision of the curriculum. A committee of three faculty members (Profs. Vrionis, Mantziou, and now retired Karavidas) were responsible for revising the Program of Studies. They reported that the goals for this revision were twofold: (a) to revise the curriculum according to the newer scientific knowledge regarding the development, care, and education of infants and toddlers; and (b) to apply new methods of teaching. However, how and in which way the program of studies was revised was left rather vague, except for the fact that one new course was added (First Aid for Young Children) and the addition of a lab component in Developmental Psychology.

The EEC believes that greater articulation in how the curriculum dovetails with the goals and objectives of the profession in an evolving society and how the courses aim to accomplish these goals should be undertaken by the entire ECC&E faculty and not just a subcommittee. A culture of continuous course revision can be achieved as the faculty are

themselves not only teachers but also researchers who become deeply familiar with current programs of research as they themselves contribute to this knowledge base.

The EEC recommends further articulation of how the courses dovetail with the goals and objectives of the curriculum and makes the following specific recommendations:

- The course on *Greek Language*, which only 19% of the students seem to pass, should be replaced with a course that would be more appropriate and useful for the students. It should be replaced with a course in *Language Development* that considers the mechanisms and contexts that language develops and also familiarizes the students in how best to promote oral language and communication in young children. Such a course should also aim to familiarize the students with the acquisition of the Greek language among young children so that early childhood educators are familiar with the challenges and difficulties that young children learning the Greek language encounter, including monolingual and bilingual children.
- The course on *Special Education* should not be an elective, but a required course for all the students. In today's educational systems that emphasize inclusion, all educators must be familiar with the needs of special education students.
- The separation of *Developmental Psychology* into two semesters with the first one focusing on cognition and the second on socio-emotional development of infants and young children seems to be at odds with current practices in early childhood education that emphasize the continuous interplay of cognitive and socio-emotional development. Thus, we recommend that the first semester focuses on *Infancy*, where currently there is an enormous amount of research taking place in brain development, cognitive, and socio-emotional development, and that the second semester focuses on *Childhood or Early Childhood*.
- A lecture-based course that surveys historical and current approaches to Early Childhood Education and Care seems to be lacking.
- The single research methods course offered during the first semester of the second year seems to be a good but basic introduction to principles of research and familiarization in reading scientific articles. A second research methods course that includes more advanced research design issues may be highly desirable to further prepare the students in evaluating the accumulating educational and psychological research as well as in writing their senior (required) thesis.

C. Teaching

APPROACH

The EEC observed that the faculty members appear to be devoted to teaching--despite a heavy teaching load, the large numbers of students in classes and laboratories, and the inadequate space in classrooms. Communication with students is facilitated through delegated office hours and electronic correspondence.

The same devotion appears to characterize the temporary faculty and staff whom the EEC had the opportunity to meet. Part-time contracted instructors appear to have a strong relationship with the Department and the students; they are mindful of their responsibilities towards them, including contact hours outside the classroom and/or electronic correspondence and guidance.

The statistics provided to the EEC for the academic year 2012-2013 show that the majority of students who joined the Department had listed it as their second or third choice in the entrance exams. Even so, the students entering the Department were of fairly high averages (14.5 out of 20). This unavoidably creates some pressure on the teaching staff as the students have clear and high expectations from the program.

The ECC&E's curriculum consists of a total of 42 courses including elective courses; 19 of these courses (45%) include a laboratory component to reinforce course content and provide practical experience. In addition, the Department provides for a practicum (training) equivalent to 20 ECTS, and a thesis equivalent to 10 ECTS. Indeed the eighth semester is intended for practicum and a senior thesis.

The EEC realizes that the Department is significantly lacking in full-time faculty to educate and meet the demands of a student body comprised of approximately 1,000 students; and that basic infrastructure (e.g., adequate classroom space) and resources is needed for the Department to function effectively. During the site visit, faculty and students reported that there are not enough seats in lecture classrooms to accommodate the number of students enrolled in required courses; this encourages students not to attend classes. Currently, the Department has available two classrooms that hold 100 students and two others that hold 60 students, and only one amphitheatre that can hold up to 266 students. However, in many courses the number of enrolled students ranges from 100 to as high as 200.

The situation is somewhat better with laboratory courses. This is the case because large lecture groups are split into three or four smaller groups for convenience, while placing

greater demands on the teaching staff. Also attendance for lab courses is mandatory.

The student practicum experience is no doubt the strong point of the ECC&E Department. It starts early on, with students having hands-on experience from their second semester, giving them (among others things) the opportunity to decide whether they have made the right choice about their studies. It is run by experienced people who are dedicated to the Department and to the students. And, especially during the last semester of practicum experience, it is flexible enough to allow the students to find their own placement, irrespective of geographical location, which increases commitment and motivation.

Another important characteristic of the practicum is that it is run by a newly-created electronic managing system, which greatly facilitates the coordination of students and supervising faculty. This system allows the Department to keep a close track of its students, while also supporting and advising them in their activities, no matter the geographical location of their practicum. The EEC was told that this system is unique in the TEIs and in the country, and its creation and maintenance is supported by the TEI-Epirus administration and external funding.

There is a minimal use of electronic course management system, such as Moodle, e-Class, and e-Learning. Very few of the ECC&E teaching faculty use technology for teaching purposes to post lectures, assignments, and readings; other faculty members indicated their willingness to move forward with e-Class and e-Learning digital instruction.

The EEC recommends that the ECC&E should move towards using digital technologies to facilitate learning and accommodate a student body (and a society) that has moved into the digital age. In-service training could be periodically provided to faculty and staff as needed to orient them in the use of these technologies.

On the whole, the students were satisfied with the support they received from their teachers during the school practice, special projects, and the thesis. Course work (lecture or mixed type) is evaluated through a final exam (100%), or in case the student chooses this option through a final exam (70%) and a course paper (30%).

The ECC&E has an online system where students have the opportunity to evaluate their courses. Some students complained that this electronic system runs inefficiently, generating a major disincentive for completing the questionnaire. The EEC observed that only about one third of the 43 students we met completed the online course evaluation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The IER indicates a comprehensive awareness of teaching methods with a variety of methods used in theoretical and practical courses including lectures, discussions,

interactive workshops, and skills acquisition.

While students fill out voluntary online course evaluation forms for each course towards the end of the semester, the faculty reported during the site visit (and also in the IER) that they have neither synthesized the outcomes of these course evaluations nor implemented any changes into their courses and/or curriculum to date based on these evaluations. During the site visit, the faculty reported that this is one of their future goals.

The curriculum and course syllabi, including some teaching materials, are provided to the students via the e-Learning system. The faculty provided to the EEC electronic access to their e-Learning system and electronic copies of syllabi for review. A description of the quality of these materials is provided in the Curriculum Section.

Samples of course materials (e.g., syllabi, lectures, and assignments) were made available to the EEC for review during the site visit. Specifically, the EEC reviewed samples of student theses and laboratory work, and formed the opinion that the quality of these materials is quite satisfactory. It is evident that some faculty are providing the students with rich training and experiences in their area of expertise.

Due to lack of real research culture in the Department, links of teaching and research relies on the content of teaching textbooks and voluntary individual student readings.

The IER provides information about the ECC&E participation in the ERASMUS Program; participation in this program by faculty and students of the ECC&E is minimal. However, considering the general condition in the Department this is not unexpected.

RESULTS

The EEC believes that the teaching of the ECC&E faculty is effective. This was documented statistically in the IER-based evaluative surveys of courses and was partly confirmed by students during the interviews. (It should be noted, however, that it was unclear in the IER, on which courses and for which year, the percentages provided in the tables [pp. 44-55] reporting student evaluations were based on.)

The faculty reported that they plan to take steps to integrate course evaluations and student feedback to course and curricula changes. The EEC recommends that a student and faculty feedback system be developed using a more standardized system. This will allow for students, alumni, and off-campus practicum supervisors to have input into course content and curriculum. The evaluation and feedback system could also be extended to include and involve administrative staff.

According to Table 12.2 of the IER (Appendices), approximately two thirds (2/3) of the students pass (overall) the final exams. However, the range of success varies significantly

among different courses. For example, the success rate in *Greek Language* was 70 out of 376 (19%), in *Health Education* 121 out of 194 (62%), and in *Introduction to Psychology* 201 out of 207 (97%). Since the students have raised questions about the course in *Greek Language*, the ECC&E must examine the content of this course and monitor the quality and effectiveness of teaching, including its usefulness for the students, in order to locate the reasons for this low rate and act accordingly.

According to information provided in the IRE (Table 7 in Appendices), the majority of the students (about 75% in the recent two years) graduate in four or five years, while a considerable proportion (almost 20%) do not really graduate. Considering the requirements of the program and the general situation in the country, this seems rather natural. Some students need more time to complete the program, given the program's demand and the economic and social obstacles encountered by students, while others may decide to change their field of study. Better monitoring of inactive students may be necessary to provide more accurate numbers.

The ECC&E faculty, including students and graduates, provided the EEC feedback on the strength and weaknesses of the program's teaching. They feel proud about the effectiveness of the practicum, but sorry about the lack of permanent academic staff and the means to employ more part-time teaching personnel.

IMPROVEMENT

It is the opinion of the EEC that both the permanent and the part-time teaching personnel are working at maximum capacity given the student/faculty ratio, the demands of teaching, and related responsibilities (e.g., practicum supervision and thesis advising). The five (5) full-time ECC&E faculty and part-time adjuncts are aware of these challenges and propose practical methods for improvement.

The EEC agrees with the ECC&E faculty and recommends that the TEI should either increase significantly the number of full-time faculty members or reduce the number of students appropriately so that the load is manageable and the level of education provided to students is high quality.

The EEC noted that the number of students accepted in the Department has, during the academic year 2013-2014, dropped to 120 from 250 in the previous year. Provided that this trend continues, the total number of students will drop to about 500. This would allow the teaching faculty to interact with the students regarding academic advising and research. This would also allow on- and off-campus practicum placements to become more manageable and more effective in supervision.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

According to the IER and our discussions with the Department representatives, the faculty members are eager to pursue research grants. They believe that the academic personnel need to be active in research. They complained, however, that their duties due to the overall work conditions make their efforts to undertake research difficult. They do not feel that they are adequately supported, as they have no research labs, can hardly form work groups to develop research proposals in their areas of interest, and most importantly they are overloaded with teaching and other work such as guiding students to develop their (mandatory) senior theses, including at times administrative duties.

The IER refers to the Department's desire to establish a graduate (master's) program, which the faculty believe it would open the way to research opportunities and would increase student involvement in research. But the IER also commented that a real research culture neither exists nor is promoted at the TEI institutional level.

The EEC does not believe this is a viable option for the Department in its current operational state. It commends, however, the high level of effort put by some faculty members to form research partnerships in developing (successful or not) grant proposals.

Since there is no significant research work at the ECC&E no internal standards for assessing research have been applied or developed in the Department.

IMPLEMENTATION

The ECC&E encourages faculty to undertake research and to develop research grant proposals in collaboration with researchers from other universities in Greece and abroad.

The ECC&E faculty receives some financial support to participate in national or international conferences when they present a paper or poster, and some of them seem to do so. The ECC&E faculty should be further encouraged to participate in national, and especially, international conferences.

The EEC believes that presently the department does not have the human resources in the faculty to undertake teaching so many students, advice so many (mandatory) senior theses, and, at the same time, do research.

The EEC realizes that during the last few years, members of the ECC&E faculty have participated in groups and developed grant proposals at the national and European level. Specifically, some of the grant proposals that were successful were: Archimedes II, and III, Interaction of doctor-patient relationships during therapy services and estimation of their satisfaction (EPEAEK), Pythagoras I and Pythagoras II.

RESULTS

From the list of research projects provided in the IER, faculty members participate in the development of a substantial number of grant proposals, even though most of them were not successful.

The IER provided a list of research projects and publications of the ECC&E faculty members during the past few years. According to this list, during the last 2 academic years, the faculty members of ECC&E have published 7 books/monographs and 12 papers in conference-proceedings with a referee system. This provides an indication of the ECC&E research productivity. Some of the conference publications involve collaboration among faculty members. Some information about citations of the faculty publications was also provided.

The EEC observed that almost all publications are in Greek, while there is no publication in any refereed journal. The EEC strongly recommends that publications in international journals with a peer review system should be given high priority, as this will contribute to the establishment of international collaborations and enhance the standing and reputation of the Department.

The EEC recommends that greater emphasis be given to applied research that focuses on the age group covered by the Department. For example, the research and lab activity currently initiated by Professor Mantziou may be developed into a promising program of research, serving the goals of the Department. But it still needs further articulation of its research goals and objectives as well as encouragement and support from the TEI.

IMPROVEMENT

The design, implementation, and evaluation theme that characterizes ECC&E programs presents a challenge to initiate a program of empirical research that is much needed in the preschool educational community. Starting with its own program and course offerings, the Department could pioneer research that empirically identifies significant learning goals and studies the factors that contribute to the attainment of learning outcomes associated with those goals for early childhood.

The EEC recommends that the TEI Institution and the Ministry of Education provide the

Department with adequate faculty personnel and encourage them to apply for research grants as well as turn their attention to specific targets such as doing applied research in their field and publish in high impact international journals.

In this respect, the research office of the TEI needs to increase the support that already provides to the Department faculty. We believe that the enthusiasm expressed by some of the ECC&E Department faculty presents an investment opportunity worth of support by the research office of the TEI.

In general, the EEC believes that it is about time to decide about the future and quality of the TEI Institutions. If the decision is to encourage them to develop as research institutions, then they would need adequate support in terms of academic personnel, research labs, and other necessary facilities.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

The ECC&E faculty are actively involved in fulfilling the Department's role as a higher education institution, which in turn has in place a variety of services to assist students, permanent or temporary faculty, and supervisors.

The Department's approach is to process procedures electronically for efficient administration and evaluation of students' academic performance. The Department has a webpage dedicated to providing basic information, program requirements, and registration of courses; and many student-related procedures are electronically-managed and files are increasingly computerized.

Regarding facilities, the ECC&E Department is housed in a building on the TEI campus, which includes the classrooms where the courses are taught. It also includes a number of laboratories (e.g., art gallery, infant lab, psychological labs) that seem adequate for the needs of the Department.

The EEC also visited the affiliated **Merimna Early Childhood Center**. An important feature of the ECC&E Department is its on-campus collaboration with the Merimna Early Childhood Center. It enrolls approximately 120 children between the ages of 18 months to 6 years of age and it was staffed by 30 teachers. Students in the Department complete on-campus practicum experiences in this facility. The EEC believes that the Merimna Early Childhood Center is a strong asset to TEI Epirus (Ioannina) for the training the ECC&E student body.

The EEC visited a few classes in the Center and had the opportunity to observe the close cooperation between staff and the children. The number of children in each class appeared reasonable; the children were happy and engaged, and the environment was conducive to learning. With respect to the materials and resources, the toys, books, and equipment seemed adequate, and there was plenty of space indoors and outdoors for the children to play.

The EEC was informed that there were a small number of students with special needs enrolled. Inclusion of students with special needs in educational settings with typically developing students is essential to better integrate children with special needs into the society. However, the four (4) students with special needs were placed in the same classroom and not distributed among classrooms. The EEC was also

informed that there was a special educator at the Center; however, it was not clear whether this educator was formally trained in Special Education.

In addition, the EEC believes that the cameras placed in each classroom offer a great opportunity to link teaching and research to practice. However, the staff informed the EEC that many of the cameras were broken and thus not functioning.

Students' presence on campus. The Department does not have a formal policy to increase student presence on campus. However, students have created a cafeteria in the building in which the Department is housed that serves as a location for students to socialize. In addition, many students live nearby and eat at the school cafeteria.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department is organized in an efficient manner relative to its available resources. It has a centralized office staffed by three (3) administrators, and the EEC met with two (2) of them as the third was out sick. The staff seemed responsible; their tasks included, among other things, updating the department's dedicated web page, processing students' courses registration, and many other student-related policies and procedures as well as faculty-related issues. The three administrative staff take pride in the number of students who successfully complete the ECC&E program.

Academic advising. The Department does not have a strong culture of academic advising for its student body. Such academic advising is designated to one person, currently the Dean of the School of Health and Social Welfare, even though the number of incoming and active students is extremely large. It appears that the three administrative staff provide the bulk of advising, which may explain some of the complaints from the students given the large number of students.

The EEC believes that the faculty (and maybe the staff) think that academic advising is not a high priority since there are only a minimal number of courses that students are not required to take while the rest of them are mandatory. However, especially as resources become scarce, creating a list of course offerings that are announced several months in advance that is online and easily accessible to students may be a good first step; an electronic student handbook will also help to introduce the students to the Department course structure and familiarize them with all the requirements.

Library. The School of Health and Social Welfare at the TEI Epirus (Ioannina) has

a library that contains an adequate collection of books, course textbooks, books authored, co-authored, or translated into Greek by some of the faculty at TEI Epirus, including some of the ECC&E faculty. Sections of the library earmarked for the ECC&E Department were adequately stocked with new books and printed (but older) journals, and some other recent materials. There are a large number of electronic journals available for the needs of the students; however, many periodicals have not been updated due to lack of resources. The library also has a large selection of old theses available to students who are now preparing their own theses. It also contains ten (10) computer terminals and offers access to the internet as well as inter-library loan.

According to the EEC, one disadvantage of the library is the limited reading space, which cannot effectively accommodate the student body in the three Departments. A larger and more up to date facility, with a more current library collection, and an electronic system to access current journals on and off campus would be desirable.

Professional Development. Most noteworthy and commendable was the availability of a dedicated person who provides professional development services to the 3,000 students attending the School of Health and Social Welfare, which includes the ECC&E Department. This person is responsible in supporting the professional development of students, organizes seminars regarding work opportunities, curriculum vitae preparation, and provides information regarding the local job market and other academic opportunities (e.g., postgraduate studies in Greece and abroad). This staff member also collaborates with external agencies (e.g., The British Council) and organizes off-campus special placements on a voluntary basis as desired by the students (e.g., certain populations, such adults or children with special needs).

Student Counseling. A second person, who is a clinical or counseling psychologist, in this same administrative office, is available to students. This person is responsible for advising the students on one-to-one basis regarding personal matters that affect a student's academic studies and/or mental health.

It is important to note that the majority of the students were neither aware of the psychologist nor the services available to them nor the location of the psychologist's office. The EEC believes that better dissemination of the information regarding both professional and student counseling services is advisable.

Learning Disabilities. With respect to academic and support services available to students with learning and other disabilities, neither a Learning Disabilities office

nor services for students with special needs exist on the TEI-Epirus (Ioannina) campus.

Students also reported that the Department does not have a formal policy in place for students with disabilities (i.e., dyslexia and other disabilities) with respect to accommodations (i.e., alternate forms of testing, more time on examinations, etc.). This lack seems to have led to an unfortunate incident between a student and a teaching staff.

Athletics. The ECC&E Department offers courses in physical education. There is an athletic work-out room and a basketball gymnasium available to students for formal instruction, and recreationally--but only during business hours.

RESULTS

The ECC&E Department's administrative offices were clean, bright, and nicely furnished. The ECC&E faculty reported that the administrative staff were minimally adequate in serving the needs of a study body consisting of close to 1,000 active and inactive students.

The Department is operating with minimal resources, staff, faculty and infrastructure. The significant and drastic downsizing at the start of the academic year in September 2013 significantly compromised the Department's ability to function. Nonetheless, the remaining administrators and faculty in the ECC&E Department needed to devise an emergency plan to function during the 2013-2014 academic year.

IMPROVEMENTS

The Department devised a back-up plan to operate with minimal faculty and staff. However, there were complaints raised by the students, especially about the staff, and the level of clear and efficient communication that the students receive from them.

It was evident to the EEC that there was a significant breakdown in communication during the tumultuous period at the start of the 2013-2014 academic year. The EEC surmised that this was mainly due to the high uncertainty of staffing and course offerings based on a significant cut in resources. However, students-at-large felt that better communication and dissemination of information between staff, faculty, and students could have alleviated the significant confusion and frustration at the start of the academic year. Moreover, students indicated that an electronic mechanism to disseminate information regarding courses, cancellations, curriculum, and other

issues can be achieved via email and by updating the Department's website daily and on a long-term basis.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Faculty in the ECC&E Department are engaged in several interdisciplinary collaborations with other departments in the School of Health and Social Welfare as well as related departments at the University of Ioannina, alumni, off-campus supervisors, and members of the local municipality. The students, alumni and on- and off-campus adjunct faculty and supervisors expressed satisfaction with the ECC&E program and the education that many of them have received.

During our visit, the EEC met with five (5) off-campus affiliates. Three of them were from the University of Ioannina (Dr. Haliasos, Associate Professor of Pediatrics; Dr. Giotsa, Assistant Professor of Social Psychology; and Dr. Sianou, Professor of Sociology of Education), one was from the Department of Nursing at TEI-Epirus (Professor Geotaky), and one was the Director of the Early Childhood and Infant Centers for Ioannina.

The collaborations between the faculty at the University of Ioannina have developed over time into full-scale teaching and some research collaboration. Some research proposals and conference organization as well as conference presentations have been the fruitful outcome of these relationships. The EEC believes that these interdisciplinary collaborations are beneficial and highly commendable.

Administrators and faculty in the ECC&E Department indicated that they would like to explore stronger links and greater collaborations with related departments and faculty at the University of Ioannina.

However, the EEC believes that ECC&E faculty should further and more vigorously explore collaborations with the larger community that participates in the education and care of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The Department should take the initiative to disseminate current knowledge by organizing seminars, workshops, and/or public lectures for public, private, and special institutions. At the same time, this collaboration will be mutually beneficial in listening to the needs of the professionals and in adjusting its curriculum accordingly.

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.

Short-term and long-term strategic planning seems to be currently lacking and should be an important activity of the Department. Specifically, the Department faculty should develop a vision that will guide the activities of its members in the next few years. Specific short term (5 years) and long term (10 years) goals and objectives designed to reach this vision need to be developed. These objectives should incorporate curriculum, potential future hires, as well as identifying areas that need to be strengthened. The EEC believes that only after the department has been able to strengthen its curriculum and research activities, it may want to think about exploring a master's level program.

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

Recommendations to the State

The ECC&E Department of the TEI-Epirus at Ioannina has a long teaching history that creates some ambiguities as to its mission and operation. It was established back in 1994, but it evolved from the School of Preschool Education (ΠΙΚΠΑ) that was in operation at Ioannina from 1955 to 1984. During the academic year of 1984-1985, the then Department of Infancy and Preschool Education at Ioannina was initially placed under the auspices of the TEI-Mesologiou, and from 1994 under the auspices of the TEI-Epirus. While up to this point, it was mainly a teaching institution for infancy and early childhood professionals, in 2001 all the TEI were incorporated as part of the higher education- technical domain, which in turn created further ambiguities regarding the mission of the Department as teaching and/or research institution.

The EEC believes that remnants of this history are reflected in the make-up of the current ECC&E faculty, in its curriculum, and in the age range that the department prepares its students to serve. Further complications are introduced by recent decisions from the Greek government as to the name of the Department (and similar ones in the country) and the age range they are supposed to serve. During our visit, we were informed that the name of the department was changed at the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year into “Preschool or Early Childhood Education” (that is, the term “infancy” was dropped), while the age range they were asked to cover was restricted from 0-3 years (instead of 0-5). A further complicating factor is that, while preschool education (3-5) is covered at the University level and it would seem logical that the care and education of the 0-3 years be covered by the ECC&E Departments; however, the care and education of young children does not end by the age of 3, but continues throughout the preschool years. Thus, creating such a division may be artificial and harmful to the care and education of young children.

In short, these are crucial issues that concern the very identity of the Department, whose solutions rest neither with the Department, nor with the TEI, but with critical decisions at the state level. We recommend to the state that such decisions be taken soon while adequate attention is paid to the full set of implications that these decisions are going to have.

The ECC&E Department experienced a significant hardship at the start of the 2013-14 academic year due to the drastic downsizing of faculty and staff to accommodate a student body of approximately 800-1000 students enrolled in this major. It is challenging to operate an academic program at this level of funding and not to experience a decline in the quality and efficiency of services provided to the students. The ECC&E Department lacks the necessary resources it needs to operate at its fullest potential.

Strengths of the Department

Overall, the EEC was impressed by the quality and care with which the Department conducted the Internal Self-Evaluation and the site visit. This allowed the EEC to thoroughly assess the program.

The EEC was also impressed with the high commitment of the entire permanent and temporary faculty to teaching and to the needs of the students, especially under difficult conditions. We were particularly impressed with the combination of conceptual and practical work that the Department provided for its students and to its commitment for practical and hands-on experiences.

We commend the department faculty for its efforts, under difficult conditions, to be involved in research, and we hope they continue to do so successfully.

And finally we commend the administration of the TEI-Epirus for supporting the efforts of the School of Health and Social Welfare in creating an innovative electronic system to monitor and guide the students' progress during their final practicum work.

Recommendations to the Department

Curriculum. Given that the early care and education of infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children is a rapidly evolving field, the EEC encourages the Department to modify its curriculum to better meet the Department's goals and objectives.

While we recognize that there is some ambiguity, as stated above, as to the age range that the Department deals with, still the Department should articulate its curriculum with a clear aim to address the needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. There is continuity in the care and education of infants and preschool children, and the department should embrace it. This must cover both theory and practice, as the Department is currently doing. And without abandoning its current strength, which is its excellent practical orientation, it must also articulate a clear theoretical basis for its curriculum so that the students can obtain a deeper understanding of their

profession.

The EEC recommends that the Department should further improve its curriculum by providing to the students familiarity with current conceptual frameworks as well as pedagogical practices available for the early care and education of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. We believe that, while currently the students have good practical experience of the field, the curriculum does not appear to provide them with a rich and informed perspective of early childhood care and education curricula currently available that can strongly inform and guide their practice. The EEC recognizes that the emphasis of the current curriculum seems to be particularly hampered by the very small number of permanent faculty members as well as faculty formally trained in the field of early education and care.

Some specific recommendations include:

- The curriculum seems to lack clearly articulated pedagogical or didactical approach(es). That is, what are the objectives that an early care and education professional has based on particular pedagogical approaches, what are the strategies to achieve them, and the ways to evaluate whether one has achieved them or not.
- In depth knowledge of various pedagogical perspectives or curricular approaches: that is, their strengths, benefits, or gaps/weaknesses. (Some examples include: historical or current play-based curricula [Tools of the Mind]; Montessori; Piagetian constructivist approaches; oral language & literacy-based curricula; inquiry-based approaches that include numeracy and science, and so on).
- A more sustained focus on child-based approaches: that is, to present the specific task or issue at hand from the child's perspective--and not only from the adult's perspective (e.g., the teaching of art, music, or drama from an informed perspective of how the child perceives the world through these representational media and comes to master them.)
- Further familiarity with early care and education evidence-based practices (and thus a greater familiarity with research methodology).
- Greater emphasis on language and literacy practices as well as ways to promote richer communication among teachers and children.
- Greater emphasis on special needs children with a focus on early identification of symptoms for cognitive, language, and/or other disorders.

Teaching. Although the teaching is the strong point of the Department, the EEC also has some recommendations here.

-The Department can make better use of its students, either on a paid or on a voluntary basis, for curriculum, teaching, or research purposes. In terms of curriculum and teaching, they can participate in the decision-making process, offering feedback and suggestions. In terms of research, there may be better ways to utilize the considerable effort placed on supervising senior theses so that some of the stronger students will be able to participate in research endeavors led by the faculty. This will benefit both the students and the faculty.

-The new technology regarding monitoring the practicum experience of the students should be further utilized to train students on how to create daily lesson plans that utilize clear goals and objectives as well as ways of evaluating them.

-Greater use of electronic and digital technologies to enhance learning using Moodle, e-Class or e-Learning.

Research. While research was not a required activity for the TEI Departments early on, recently things have changed. Many TEI departments rival their sister University departments in research outcomes. Most critically, the field of early childhood education is new in Greece and there is a need for high quality developmental research with Greek infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as well as in monitoring the development of the profession and the need and access of these services for various segments of the population.

Professional activities. Following recommendations mentioned to the EEC by the Department faculty, we encourage them to become leaders at the local and national level so that they can set guidelines for the implementation and accreditation of centers, both state and private, for the early care and education of infants and toddlers. They also need to create institutionally-internal research boards (probably in collaboration with the university) that have the authority to approve research projects that involve children and will also be recognized by the umbrella institution that preschools and school institutions fall under.

Recommendations to TEI administration

The ECC&E Department has been struggling in recent years with unacceptably low numbers of teaching staff and a serious lack of funding. The Department needs to be supported if it is to fulfill its function as an academic and training program to educate the future workforce of infants and early care professionals.

The EEC also believes that, with recent and upcoming retirements, it is a unique opportunity for the Department to invigorate itself. We hope that the new slots can be filled with faculty educated more directly in the early childhood profession that is research-based. In this respect, the department can take its place in higher education that puts more emphasis on research than just teaching. And it can more fully and more effectively disseminate and educate its students in current scientific knowledge and evidence-based early childhood practices as they are rapidly accumulating.

The Members of the Committee

1. **Dr. Ageliki Nicolopoulou** (Coordinator) _____
2. **Dr. Mary Andrianopoulos** _____
3. **Dr. Helen Phtiaka** _____
4. **Dr. George Philippou** _____